



Beltane Fire Society

Chair's Report for July 2023 - July 2024



Beltane Fire Society is a charity registered in Scotland

Charity Number: SC040137

Company Number SC341753

Registered address: 16 East Cromwell Street, Edinburgh, EH6 6HD

To learn more about Beltane Fire Society please visit www.beltane.org

Chair's Report for July 2023 - July 2024

As reported to the BFS Membership at the 2024 AGM

The Board of Trustees for July 2023 - July 2024

The current board of trustees were elected by the membership at the last AGM in July 2023, and then went on to assign the following roles among themselves:

- Sammi Searle - Chair
- Sophie McCarthy - Vice Chair and Company Secretary
- C'tri Peter Goudie - Treasurer
- Mailis Marty - Festival Secretary
- Stew Wilson - System Administrator

During the tenure of this term, we also co-opted an additional board member:

- Brad McArthur - Trustee
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I would like to extend my heartfelt respect and appreciation to all the Trustees who have helped form such a great team for this term. Your hard work, dedication and insight has been invaluable as you have guided the BFS through this past year, met challenges with positive spirits and tenaciously pushed forward with creating better infrastructure.

This year the Board of Trustees utilized two different mechanisms to enlist the support of BFS volunteers to help them carry out their duties, which as a relatively small Board team, was very greatly appreciated.

Trustee Assistants for July 2023 - July 2024

During this tenure the Board of Trustees were assisted with various Board administration activities, to which we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks:

- Andy Tucker
- Jenny Glover

Festival Committee and general Good Eggs for July 2023 - July 2024

During this tenure the Board of Trustees were assisted with various festival-related activities and other much needed tasks, to who we would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks:

- Tamsyn Ball
- Clara Koenig
- Zoe-Tara Sanderson
- Seraphina Tarrant
- Kat Bradley
- Bob Ball
- Andy McCleod

AGM 2024 Timeline

It was originally decided that holding the Annual General Meeting in June 2024 would enable the smoothest transition and handover from retiring Trustees to the new Trustee team, allowing more time for new Trustees to settle into their roles and more preparation for the next Samhuinn Festival.

However due to a lack of applications the AGM was postponed to July 2024, giving enough suitable time for applications to be received and notice to be given to the membership. The Board also used this as an opportunity to investigate possible restructure options to avoid similar situations for the future, which is to be discussed later in this report.

This AGM taking place in July means that almost 12 months to the day will have elapsed between Annual Membership Meetings.



What does the Board do?

The board are legally responsible for BFS (the charity) with three key areas of focus:

- 1. GOVERNANCE:** Meeting legal requirements for BFS and thinking strategically to safeguard its future
- 2. OPERATIONS:** Enabling key BFS activities to meet charitable objectives
- 3. COMMUNITY:** Engaging with BFS membership.

Following the traditional Chair Report format, I'll now talk about each of those areas in turn.



Governance

Governance Review Status

The last couple of years has seen a pause to ongoing Governance Reviews due to the availability of time with the number of trustees on the Board. For this tenure the Trustees experienced a similar situation, where the burden of both Operational and Community Issues overtook much of our time and therefore Governance Reviews were - for the most part - put on pause.

I took on the role as Chair under the understanding that I had little experience or expertise with Governance, which luckily was balanced out by other Trustees on the team. Together we worked on collating and triaging existing policies and procedures, creating a roadmap for the future for governance-focussed trustees or trustee assistants to work with.

At the end of this report there will be a handover to Brad and Sophie who can walk us through the policies and procedures that did get reviewed and other updates in terms of the Articles of Association.

Transparency

As a personal project to expand upon the work done by previous Trustees to improve transparency between the Board and the BFS membership I undertook to create the Trustee Newsletter, sent directly to members, with updates on what the Trustees have been working on and different challenges and achievements we'd experienced over our tenure. We did this as we believe that the principles of transparency are an essential part of the Governance structures within the BFS.



Photo (c) Clarissa Gurd for the Beltane Fire Society

Operations

Festivals

This year the Beltane Fire Society has continued to deliver world renowned festivals that capture the imaginations and hearts of those who attend, both locally and internationally.

It's my belief that our festivals are a living, breathing entity *and* community that brings together both natural cycles and the human experience, uniting them in this often troubling modern world. This is no small feat and I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and pride to the multitude of talented and creative individuals that make up this community, lending their time, passion, skills and love into bringing these festivals into being and giving them to the world - we've never needed it more. We all eagerly await what the next cycle of festivals will be bringing.

Samhuinn Fire Festival 2023

The Samhuinn Festival 2023 - held on October 31st - was set once more against the magnificent landscape of Holyrood Park. From an organisational point of view, one of the focuses for this festival was exploring how best to use this space, as we continue to experiment with new homes and formats for this darker and more enigmatic event. The other main focus was on energy expenditure and scope creep; aiming to protect all our volunteers from burnout by using simpler layouts and designs from the very beginning of the planning stages. However this did not impact on the spirit of the festival that was delivered, which was a sweeping herald of winter and an atmospheric spectacle exploring themes of death, rebirth and the magic that awaits in the dark Scottish nights!



Samhuinn 2023 stands as a testament to the society's commitment to honoring tradition while continuing to seek ways to improve things for the future and hold its community's best interests at heart.

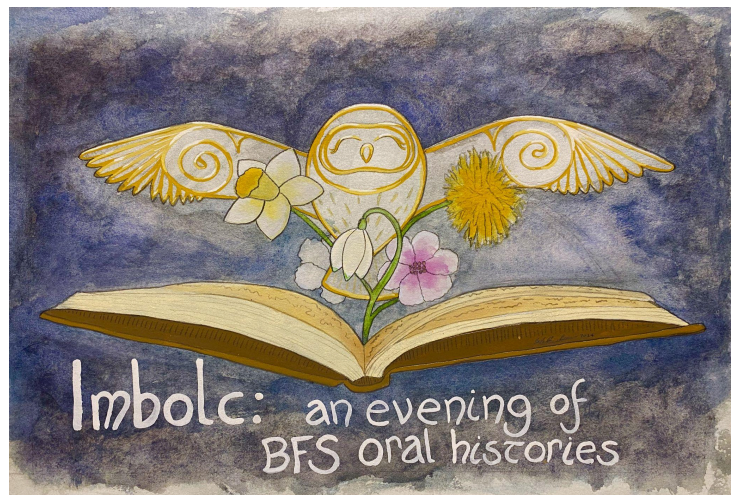
Yule 2023

Yule, organized by a small (but mighty) committee of volunteers was again a delightful potluck and performance gathering, which brought warmth and merriment to all who attended. Held on the midwinter solstice, this intimate shindig celebrated the winter solstice, the longest night being a perfect time to coorie down with friends and welcome the rebirth of the newborn sun.

We'd like to thank everyone who helped make the evening so magical, from the decorating two-highs, to the captivating entertainment, to the absolute *feast* people contributed. It was a beautiful and heartwarming night and we're so grateful that it came together the way it did.

Imbolc 2024

To mark the Celtic holiday of Imbolc the BFS held a storytelling event at the Scottish Storytelling centre in February 2024. This was a fantastic idea contributed by our May Queen, Alix Prybyla, who wanted to bring the society together to share stories from the community with its members to mark the Imbolc season. The day featured public craft workshops run by BFS members for the local community, sharing tales and folklore about Imbolc, before moving on to an evening of members-only storytelling from Beltane Fire Society elders and the wider membership.



Imbolc event artwork created by Sarah Barr!

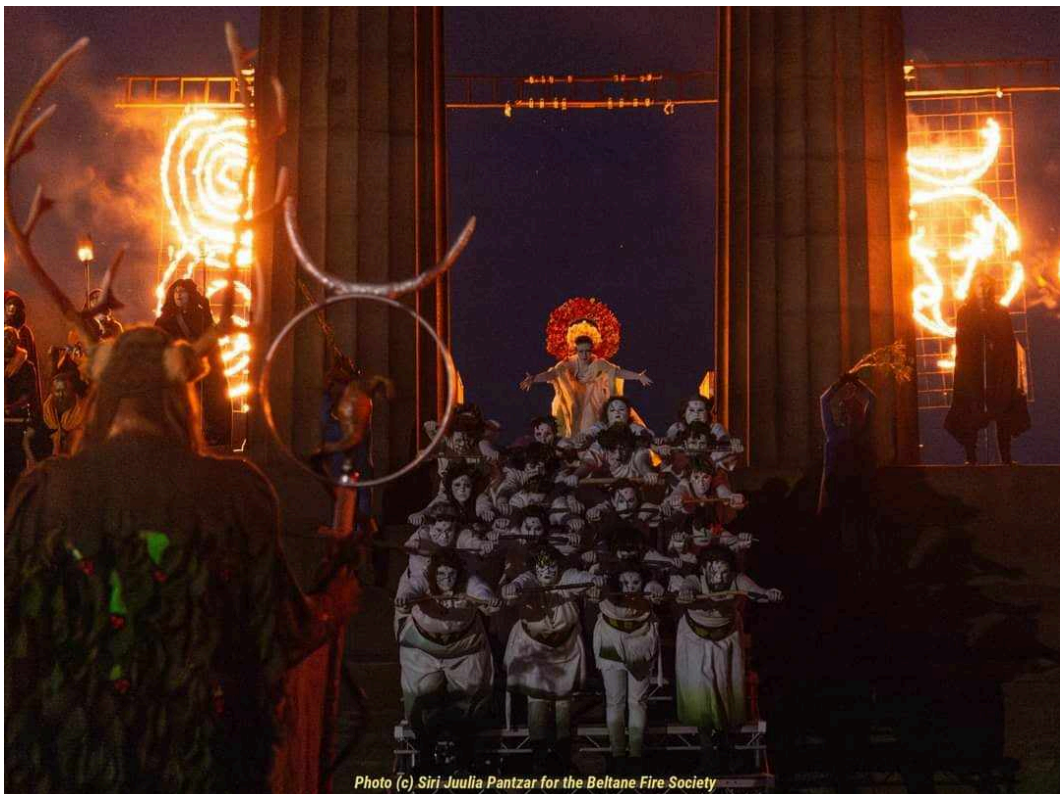
This was organised and brought together collaboratively, with Alix, Trustees, Blues, contractors and members volunteering their time, skills and connections to bring people together for traditional Imbolc crafting and sharing tales of festivals past. It was a beautiful, powerful event and we'd like to thank everyone who got involved and everyone who attended. Holding space for the society's shared history feels vital and important and it was a fantastic way to bring the spark of the new year to life!



Photo (c) Ross Cameron for the Beltane Fire Society

Beltane 2024

Our flagship event, the Beltane Fire Festival, took place on 30th of April 2024. Despite being a Tuesday night, we had a really impressive turnout, with over eight thousand people attending. This year's celebration was focussed on acknowledging the climate crisis and how it has already impacted seasonal cycles and natural rhythms, with an invitation to imagine how we can come together as a community to realign those cycles and step into the future with unity and positivity. The festival featured the usual BFS magic, combining powerful ritual, otherworldly characters, collaborative storytelling, evocative music and of course, FIRE(!) to stir the soul and welcome summer! This festival truly is a spectacular combination and celebration of months of creativity and planning from everyone involved and many thanks go to all those who bring forth such a magical happening to the hill once more!



Blethers

Blethers are gatherings open to all members of the society to come and share their views and ideas on a single, or small collection, of topics. They're often used for complex or important problems that we'd like society-wide suggestions, and feedback on.

Production Blether

At the beginning of 2024 we had an official blether event focussed around some of the production elements of our festivals and ways in which we could work to improve them for volunteers in future events. Boardies took care to write up all the information and feedback gathered over the day and fed this back to contractors so we could collectively implement some changes for Beltane and beyond. One of the main developments from this was the marvellous experiment of Goblin Tek, a performance project for members of tech that combined tech duties with elements of character performance and was a wonderful success in helping to boost the numbers of such an essential team!



Photo (c) Siri Juulia Pantzar for the Beltane Fire Society

The Emergency not-Blether Blether

This was a very last minute use of the original AGM booking but I want to include it in the Chair report as it was an important discussion that was open to all members. The focus of this was to come together and discuss the ongoing issue of what happens when the Society doesn't have enough members stand at AGMs to be Trustees. We explored topics such as organisational structure and Trustee sustainability. The outcomes of these discussions are being written up for use by the future Board, as well as forming a proposed resolution which is to come later in the agenda!

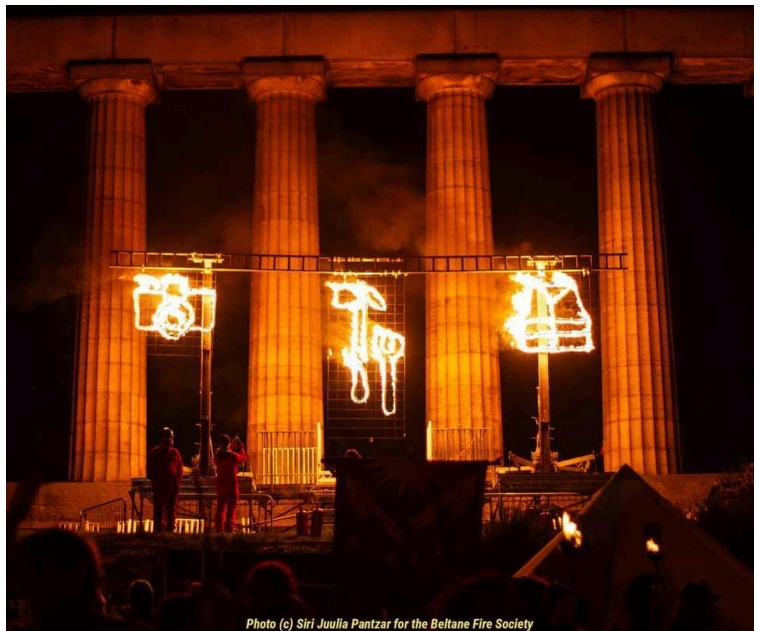


Photo (c) Siri Juulia Pantzar for the Beltane Fire Society

Community

Hiring a Safeguarding and Resolutions Officer

One of the main focuses for Trustees this year has been recruiting and creating appropriate infrastructure for a new paid coordinator role; the Safeguarding and Resolutions Officer. This role is dedicated to taking the lead on handling all complaints and community issues that arise within the membership, providing a trained and neutral authority in these matters, as well as eventually moving to provide guidance on future safeguarding policies and structures.

We made this a priority as we were aware that a large percentage of Trustee resignations and burnouts are due to the emotional stress and impact of handling community issues.

Therefore between other operational duties and challenges, we wrote job specifications and contracts, advertised the role and spent hours combing through applications before moving to interviews. Once we selected a candidate we then created induction materials and took the new S&R Officer through a lengthy onboarding process, including taking part in the GO training weekend for Beltane and seeing the festival itself.

With this being the first time the BFS has attempted to create such a role within the society, it took up a lot of Trustee time and was a standout undertaking for this year's team. Trustees who had volunteered to work on Community Issues co-worked with the S&R Officer on a lot of complicated administrative issues, as well as working on new safeguarding cases and a considerable backlog of older cases.

Having a dedicated and trained S&R Officer has had a profound impact on the Trustee experience, alleviating much of the strain and freeing up Board hours and has been met with broad approval from members of the Society.

Unfortunately our current S&R Officer has recently had to step away from the role - for personal reasons unrelated to the BFS. We'd like to thank Lisa for her hard work, especially in taking the time to help wrap up our most serious cases before stepping away fully.

Going Forwards

In the coming year this is what we have put in place and what we as a current set of Trustees recommend to the next team:

- We recommend that the next set of trustees look to recruit a new Safeguarding and Resolutions Officer as soon as possible. Trustees who are stepping down at this AGM are happy to assist with this and believe the process should be much easier now the systems, admin and structures are already in place.
- We have another summer event for your calendars, in the shape of Lughnasagh, in collaboration with Fringe by the Sea, this was spearheaded by our Development Manager Tom Watton alongside Sophie, and they will be able to give more details on this after the report, but in short, it's a torchlit procession, including BFS performers and is with a wonderful way to celebrate high summer.
- As we move from summer into autumn, the wonderful Mailis Marty has personally undertaken to prepare as much of the Board-related Samhuinn 2024 fixtures as possible, which shall hopefully give the next set of Trustees a more comfortable window of time to bed into their new roles.

Conclusion/Reflections

Overall we believe that whilst this year has seen some challenges and stressful periods for those volunteering in the organisational structures of the BFS, it has been a year of positive strides and healthy growth. We'd like to extend our deep and heartfelt thanks to everyone who has guided and supported us as a Trustee team throughout our tenure, including our wonderful Blues who truly go above and beyond for the Society and our talented Coordinators who bring so much to their roles and help make the BFS so incredible to govern as Trustees.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all of my fellow Trustees who have made Chairing for the first time possible, and for bringing themselves to this amazing team day after day.

This year has been a truly wild ride and vastly different from the support role I had initially signed up for. It's been a year of learning and personal development too and whilst at times it's been a lot, it's also been incredibly rewarding. I can only hope that I've done my best.

I'm looking forward to taking a break from being a Trustee but I don't intend to disappear, and will stick around to help and assist the next set of Trustees and personally want to take part in exploring restructures that could potentially benefit and safeguard the BFS in future, and possibly stepping up again in the future, if this is welcome.

The Beltane Fire Society in general continues to be an astounding creature that brings together a love of Celtic tradition, modern folklore, a love of natural cycles and most importantly a beautiful, diverse and deeply creative community of people and I am so grateful that I have had this opportunity to be of service to this Society and a community that means so much to me.

And with that, I'm ending the Chair report for 2024.

Big, big love,

Sammi

