

## **WATSON BIRDS: ANNUAL REPORT TO GCAT 01/09/2013-31/08/2014**

The project is now in its fourth year and good progress has been made on both the capital and events elements.

### **Watson Bird Centre at Barone**

Following successful work behind the scenes by the Cathy Agnew, Viscount Gough donated £100k, together with a further 25% in gift aid, to secure the purchase of part of Barone, the Watson's family home. The remainder of the house was purchased by the Pamela Young Trust for conversion into two social rent flats. GCAT will have access to most of the garden partly through ownership and partly through an agreement to be concluded with the PYT, given the importance of the site in Donald Watson's painting career and the potential to engage with Dalry School and others in creating an outdoor art studio and trails.

The state of the house has been continuously monitored given the poor state of the heating system, and some water ingress in the PYT section. Outline plans have been prepared by John Murray, architect, for the first phase of conversion to the Watson Bird Centre and a business plan drawn by consultants and refined during the year to take into account new information from comparable developments. Just after the year end we heard that the bid for stage 1 funding and later refurbishment funding from the HLF was not successful due to concerns about remoteness of location and lack of availability of balancing support. As a result, the steering group will not challenge the decision, and has decided to further reduce the scope of the initial development and to commission Andrew Ward of the Creetown Initiative, supported by Cathy Agnew and a new assistant development officer to apply for funds. In the meantime, we plan to safely store the archives in another part of the house on the advice of specialists, to tidy up the interior, to remove the external derelict garages and to erect a sign and notice board.

We have received a donation of £5,000 from a deceased member of the Watson family and will discuss a possible contribution from Jeff Watson's family shortly.

We will review the storage of the archival material to ensure that there is no further deterioration in quality.

### **Celebration events and activities**

During the year we added considerably to our collection of Watson paintings and books through loan and donation. By far the most important is the permanent loan, while the project lasts, of all of the material in Barone comprising paintings and sketches completed and unfinished, note books, diaries and sketch books, and an extensive book collection. We were donated 9 of Donald's paintings by the daughter of former Dalry resident Major-General Jock Holden, along with some bird books. These paintings, along with others bought at the sale of Holden's collection held at the Wildlife Art Gallery and owned by local supporters of the project in Dalry, were the subject of a month long exhibition at the CatStrand just after the end of the reporting year. We also received on long loan from the Forestry Commission their collection of twelve of Donald's paintings from Clatteringshaws Visitor Centre following its

refurbishment. This brings our ownership to 26 paintings. We also have accumulated high resolution images of around 180 of Donald's paintings which we have the family's permission to use in our literature. I am extremely grateful to Alan Smith for safely storing all of the paintings for us.

We held our third Watson Bird Festival in September 2013 with Aaron Edgar as the project officer. We had a more extensive programme than usual and included events at The CatStrand to improve the linkage between two GCAT projects. Other innovations were guided walks and tours, a photography master class and an exhibition of children's art from the Dalry Schools. As a result of a grant from the Dumfries and Galloway Stewartry Area Committee, we were able to lessen the deficit on the event with the balance being paid out of the Watson Birds Feathers Funds (see below). Numbers were less than the previous year and interest from the local community was particularly disappointing.

We gained some limited additional resources for this programme of events through donations to the Feathers fund.

During the year we finally concluded the contract and payments from LEADER for the project. This was a substantial sum of support, plus support also from SNH and the Big Lottery. But the bureaucracy of LEADER and the inflexibility of its administration created too many unnecessary problems and ultimately a shortfall in their funding despite the fact that we delivered on all of the agreed targets.

We prepared two self-guided leaflets on Donald Watson's paintings locations and these were printed using a grant from the Co-Op charity and have been widely distributed in the area. Louise Watson, Chris Rollie and myself did the preparation work and the leaflets were published in time for the 2013 festival. Chris led the guided walk around Dalry and the bus tour around 9 locations in The Glenkens which were favourite paintings spots of Donald.

I am particularly grateful for the support from the GCAT board, scarily Andrew Mellor and Alan Smith and from GCAT staff, scarily Sean Paul O'Hare, Brian Edgar and Lindsey Smith.

Roger Crofts

Watson Birds project director

October 2014