

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a grey long-sleeved top, is looking at a large, colorful quilted tapestry displayed in a museum. The tapestry features various scenes, including a ship, a landscape, and a figure. The text "EXPLORE THE" is in blue, "Borders" is in large red letters, and "Magazine" is in blue.

EXPLORE THE Borders Magazine

Your gateway to the brilliant borderlands

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February - March
2024



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EXPLORE THE Borders Magazine

Explore the Borders Magazine is produced bi-monthly with the twin objectives of promoting the tourism offer in the brilliant borderlands of Scotland and Northumberland - and the all important task of helping you plan ahead for your visit.

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Explore the Borders Magazine is free of charge and e-mailed to desktops everywhere.

You can make sure of a regular copy by getting in touch at the editor's e-mail below.

And if you have a story you would like to tell or an event coming up we would love to hear from you.

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Photograph: Phil Wilkinson

Welcome to the brilliant borderlands

Spring is in the air ... and there's never been a better time to visit the south of Scotland's brilliant borderlands.

We are celebrating national success for some of our tourism hot-spots after south of Scotland nominees turned in a record breaking win at Visit Scotland's annual Thistle Awards.

In this issue we are flagging up special events including the Borders Crafts Fair and a monumental cycling journey by the Selkirk Souters in aid of charity.

A new annual event from the Tweed Foundation celebrates fishing on the River Tweed is also featured together with some great places to visit.

All in all there's a warm welcome waiting for those setting the sat-nav for the south of Scotland this year.

David Pike
Editor

The magazine that helps you plan ahead

Coming Up

12-13 Borders Arts Fair

Scotland's friendliest art fair is all set to return to the borders featuring work from more than 70 artists and galleries.



24-25 On the road again....this time to Rome

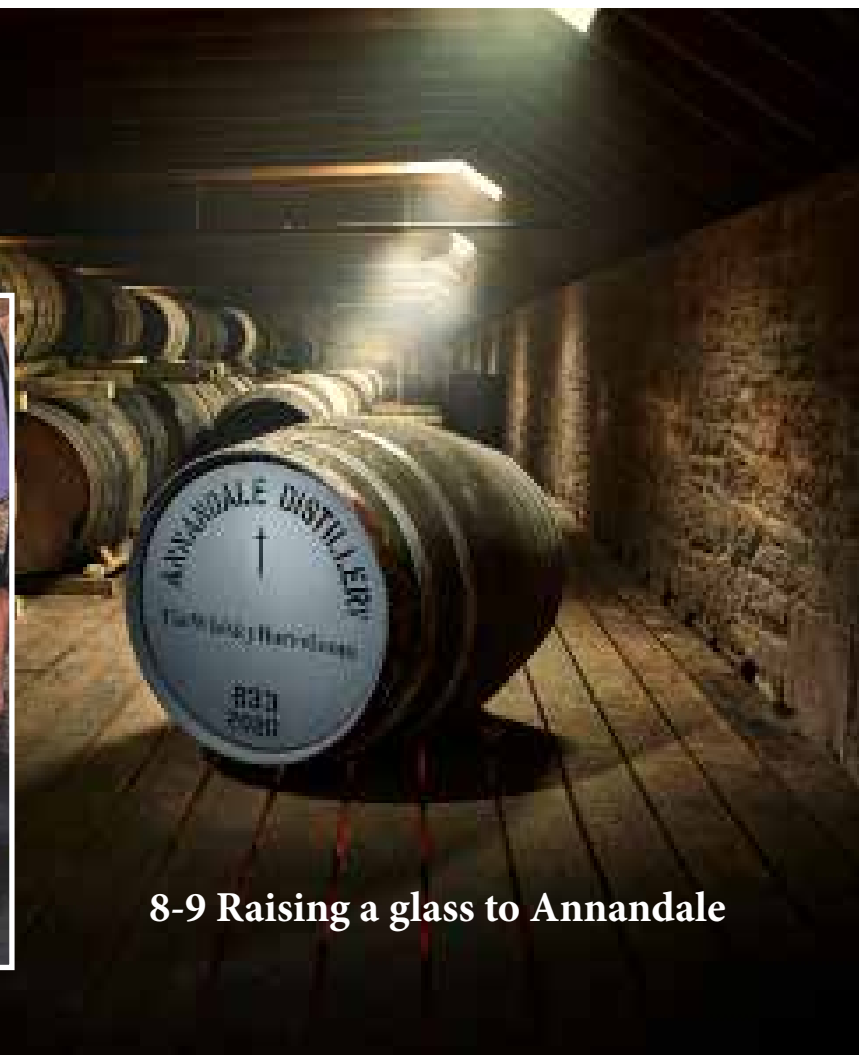
Selkirk's Cycling Souters are back on the charity trail, this time riding to Rome in aid of the My Name's Doddie Foundation to raise cash for research into Motor Neurone Disease.



Special Features



8-9 Raising a glass to Annandale



20-21 Stitches in time

The Great Tapestry of Scotland in Galashiels is attracting thousands of visitors to the borders.

We take a look at this spectacular display.



18-19 Six of the best



Regional winners from south of Scotland swept to further successes in the Visit Scotland national Thistle awards.

Your perfect travel companion

Whether its a day trip, a weekend break or an extended stay - it's essential to plan ahead.

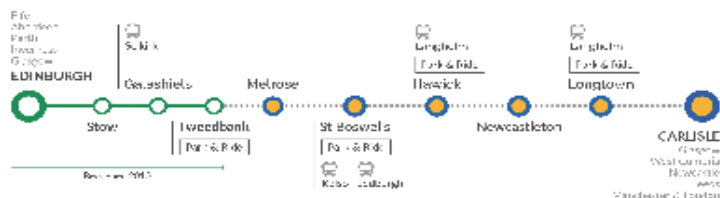
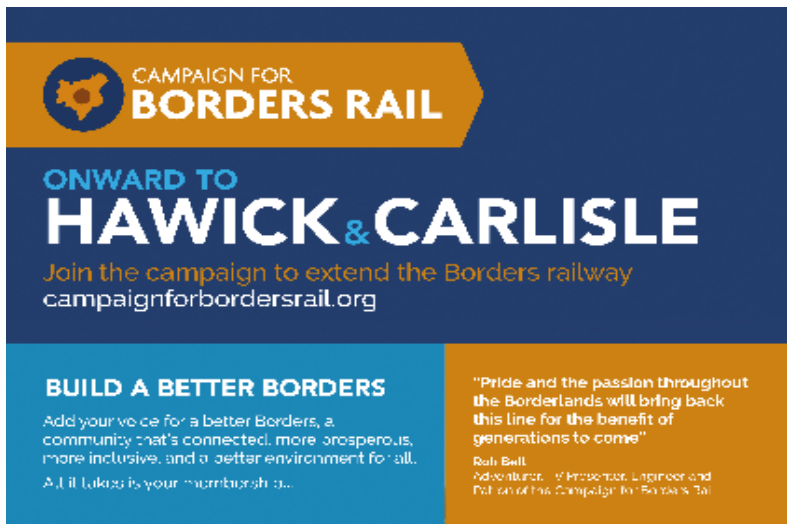
And the borderlands of south Scotland offers something for everyone.

Explore the Borders is your perfect companion for information on places of interest, activities, where to stay and where to get a decent meal.

The promotional package is delivered by experienced journalists, writers and photographers, drawing from the key themes of :-

- Historic Borders
- Border towns
- Romans and Reivers
- Borderlines - News
- Active Borders
- Trips and Trails
- Homes and Gardens
- Arts and Crafts
- Stay in the Borders
- Good food guide

Explore the Borders Magazine also keeps you up-to-date with events and entertainments coming up for the two months ahead.



www.exploretheborders.com

www.exploretheborders.com



Annandale Distillery - a tribute to great taste

by David Pike

It was the playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton, back in 1839, who bequeathed us the philosophical saying - *"the pen is mightier than the sword."*

Nearly 200 years down the line it remains a moot point, particularly for those who have found themselves victim to one or the other.

At the award winning Annandale Distillery in Dumfries and Galloway, historic links to Robert the Bruce and Rabbie Burns, natural assets incorporated into a marketing master plan, the two sides share equal status.

Fronting the company's superb whisky brands, Man O' Words and Man O' Sword they stand should-to-shoulder; exceptional ambassadors for one of the region's popular visitor attractions.

The distillery occupies land that was once the ancestral home of the family of Robert the Bruce (7th Lord of Annandale) and the stamping ground of Burns in his capacity as an excise-man.

It dates back to 1830 when a syndicate headed by local excise-man George Donald turned the idea into reality and the first spirits were produced six years later.

Taken over by Johnnie Walker and Sons in 1893 the distillery closed in 1918, a business casualty of war and changing times that saw a rise in temperance campaigns and abolition.

In 2007 its fortunes were revived when Professor David Thomson and Teresa Church rescued the site from dereliction and laid the foundations for an exciting £10.5m project to revive whisky production.

The couple head an internationally successful company, MMR, where sensory food science combines with creative research to deliver commercial success - the height of good taste you might say.

Their extensive business experience was further enhanced by the addition of an important third member of the team; chemist, biologist and expert on single malt whisky, Dr Jim Swan, better known in the drinks sector as the 'Einstein of Whiskey.'

This year celebrates the 10th anniversary of relaunching whisky production at Annandale. "We milled our first barley and fired up the stills in November 2014.

"Our passion was to revive whisky production in the south of Scotland. Through the style of our whiskies and our brands we pay homage to the Bruce and Burns, two genuine Scottish icons," said David who grew up and went to school in Dumfries.

Little did he know he would grow up to become a custodian of historic legacy sites in his home patch.

He and Teresa have also taken over The Globe Inn public house in Dumfries - the favourite haunt of Rabbie Burns - and, more recently, the 15th-century Comlongon Castle estate.

It's an A-list tourism portfolio that delivers in style for visitors and locals alike.

Teresa, who shares David's passion for history and has a particular interest in restoring old buildings, said: "The distillery was totally dilapidated when we took it over and it's been a wonderful experience bringing the site back to life.

"It has opened the door to all sorts of interesting local history and our Annandale logo pays due respects to the clipper ships that were once built at Annan, including the famous tea clipper the Elizabeth Nicholson.

It achieved one of the fastest runs from China to London - 92 days - in 1868."

Annandale Distillery is a five-star Scottish Tourism Board attraction offering guided tours and a superb food and refreshments stop at the Maltings Coffee Shop.

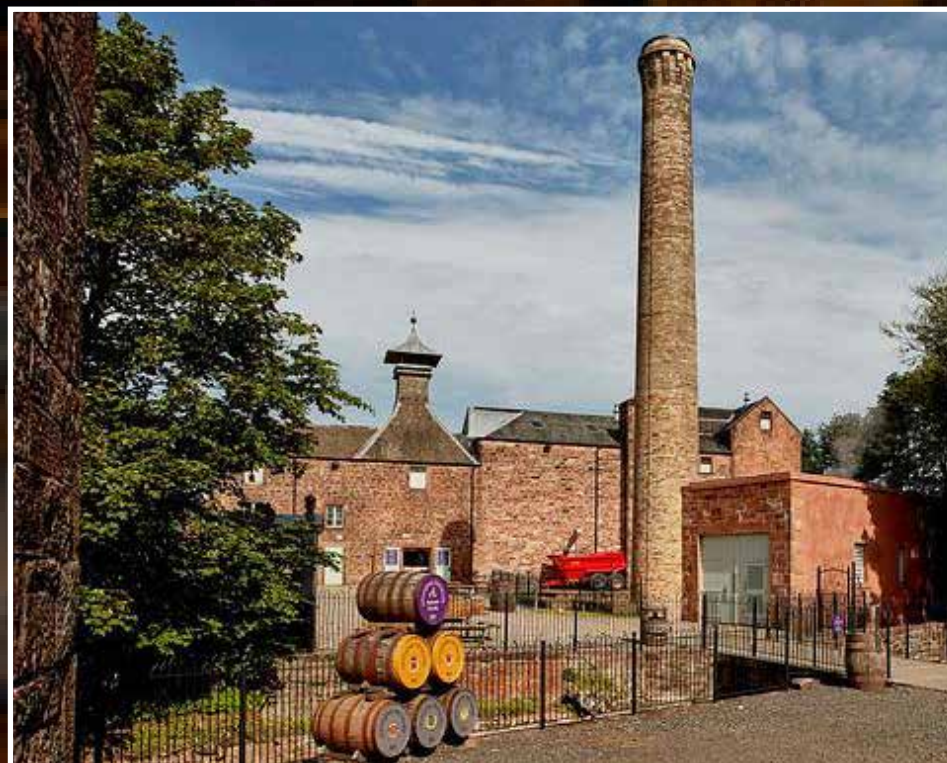


Distinctively different

Annandale Distillery is one of the few that offer cask ownership opportunities.

The peated and unpeated Single Malts are matured in hand picked oak casks - and ownership is becoming an increasingly popular option as families and groups plan for special occasions.

Find out more by getting in touch at info@annandaledistillery.com



ANNANDALE DISTILLERY

Tours

10am-4pm everyday except Christmas day, Boxing day and New Year day.

Maltings Coffee Shop

Open 10am-5pm everyday except Christmas day, Boxing day and New Year day.

More

w www.annandaledistillery.com

e info@annandaledistillery.com

t +44 (0) 1461 207817

Annandale Distillery, Annan, DG12 5LL

National Park bid ready for Leap Year deadline

by Marion Livingston

Scotland's many brilliant but often costly marketing campaigns to attract more visitors have not been matched with national or local investment in the tourism infrastructure required to cope with many extra visitors; nor the inspirational education and guidance needed to help visitors and local people enjoy and explore the countryside and its wealth of natural and cultural heritage without damaging it.

Says Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park (CSBNP) spokesman Malcolm Dickson: "A new National Park (NP) in the Southern Borders would provide the permanent marketing boost the region needs to attract more people, who spend more and stay longer (and maybe even bring their families here to live).

"It would also provide the impetus to change how some essential but currently underfunded – or non-existent – public facilities and services are provided."

"As local authority support is not a prerequisite for applying for National Park designation, CSBNP has been finalising its bid to meet the Scottish Government's 29 February 2024 deadline." (*Scottish Borders Council declined to back CSBNP's proposal but officials are not averse to a grander scheme that takes in a bigger area.*)

A new National Park in the Southern Borders has no need to reinvent the wheel: there are many examples of practical solutions that can be adopted or adapted to meet local conditions.

What is vital is that all stakeholders (especially businesses, land-owners, foresters, housing developers etc) have the inspiration, confidence, proven solutions and imagination to make the most of the short, medium and long term opportunities that operating within or close to a National Park can bring.

These opportunities would:

- Support and enable rural businesses to thrive
- Protect and enhance the quality and diversity of the countryside's ecosystems
- Enhance visitors' experience of our natural and cultural heritage
- Improve local residents' quality of life (and reduce any negative impact – now and in the future – of more visitors)
- Boost the socio-economic future of the Scottish Borders.



Better infrastructure and business opportunities

A priority for the new National Park Authority would be to identify, budget for and promote more and better facilities and services for visitors. Crucially, these would also improve the physical and mental well-being of local people.

Some relatively quick, low-cost wins include:

- Setting up the framework for a PAN Scottish Borders rangers service - rangers are the boots-on-the-ground, eyes and ears of a National Park. Most people want to do the right thing but just need a nudge in the right direction by a friendly, knowledgeable person. Stronger enforcement of existing laws, the provision of more facilities, and more education on responsible access can go a long way in tackling any anti-social behaviour involving visitors – or local residents.
- Development of a comprehensive information dissemination programme using real-time apps.
- Making more and longer laybys/extending existing ones, and ensuring car parks, waste bins and WCs are well maintained throughout the year.
- Identify more and better sites for bicycle facilities.
- Work with site owners to review existing provision for camping and caravans.
- Signage with clear consistent messages that include respecting the NP's natural working environment (harvesting, bird nesting etc).

Inspiring the next generation

Engaging with and motivating young people – especially those living in towns – to take more than a passing interest in our natural and cultural heritage is a challenge.

The National Park Authority (NPA) would tackle this head-on, initiating local partnerships with eg Northumberland National Park and Kielder Observatory, where people of all ages can connect with nature and be taught the importance of an updated Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

In the more remote areas especially, the NPA could help to initiate and coordinate long-term sustainable tourism, large-scale habitat restoration and educational projects with local communities, clubs and schools, and national organisations.

CSBNP is already doing this with the 12 Towers Heritage project and the 50-mile long Cheviot Circular walk).

'Slow adventure' tourism like 'champing' (camping overnight in historic churches) could help visitors to immerse themselves in wild places and engage with local people, stories and food throughout the year.



Time (and temper) saving technology

Using proven technology and new solutions devised with partners such as Borders College would be key to easing pressure on congested, narrow and/or multi-user routes, and at visitor attractions.

These could include geofencing (using location-based services to eg confirm car park space availability etc); application programming interface (to provide real-time updates on campsite – or other accommodation – availability); and smart cards to provide access to different services/facilities.



The Borders Arts Fair - you're invited

Scotland's friendliest art fair is all set to return to the borders and open the door to springtime.

More than 70 artists and galleries, from across the Borders and as far apart as Aberdeenshire and Devon, will be taking part in the 2024 McInroy & Wood Borders Art Fair (BAF) at Kelso.

They will be setting up stands and exhibitions in Kelso's Springwood Park over the weekend of March 15-17.

Within an hour's drive of Edinburgh and Newcastle, the annual event has built up a strong following.

More than 4,000 visitors are expected to meet participating painters, print makers, sculptors, illustrators and other contemporary artists and makers.

The work on display includes landscape, wildlife and portrait painting through to animal sculptures, ceramics and stone carvings.

BAF is family-friendly and features workshops and demonstrations. Visitors can relax and refuel at the indoor food village, where there will be food vans packed with all sorts of tempting treats.

Frances Fergusson, Director of the Borders Art Fair, said: "We've become known as 'Scotland's friendliest art fair' – a place to see wonderful work and meet the artists and makers who create it.

"You can even see some of them at work, or have a go at creating your own art.

"It's the biggest and best showcase of work by artists based in the Borders, and really reflects the immense creativity of our region, but it also increasingly attracts exhibitors from all over Scotland and the rest of the UK.

"BAF is the perfect excuse to spend some time exploring the Borders, so we'd love to invite you to come and explore.

"Of course, we are totally biased, but we think it's an undiscovered gem, with a vibrant and friendly community, beautiful scenery and cultural treasures."

BAF takes place at the Borders Event Centre at Springwood Park and starts at 10am each day,

ending at 4pm on Friday and Sunday and 5pm on Saturday.

Visitors are asked to pay what they can afford in order to support next year's event.

Kelso, as host town, offers a variety of restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars, all in walking distance from The Borders Events Centre.

There are also plenty of hotels, guest houses, B&Bs and country cottages to rent for those planing an extended stay.



The Borders region has something for everyone - everything from picturesque beaches and coastlines, seaside villages and dramatic headlands in the east, to stately homes and mountain bike trails.



WHERE

Borders Events Centre, Springwood Park, Kelso

WHEN

March 15-17. From 10am to 4pm on Friday and Sunday and Saturday from 10am to 5pm

Details of exhibitors at www.bordersartfair.com

Hawick recognises anti-slavery tour

by Yvonne Ridley

No-platforming may have become a regular 21st-century phenomenon, but it's not entirely new to the Scottish Borders as one of the most influential African Americans discovered during a historic visit here almost 200 years ago.

Frederick Douglass, an abolitionist who rose from slavery to the highest levels of American society delivered an anti-slavery speech in Hawick's West End Chapel in 1846.

A year earlier he had penned his autobiography, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, in which he described his time as in slavery. It was one of five autobiographies he wrote, along with dozens of noteworthy speeches, despite receiving a minimal formal education.

One of those speeches was made on November 2 1846 when he – and James Robertson, the Secretary of the Scottish Anti-Slavery Society – travelled to Hawick to address a meeting.

Sadly the church they had planned to speak at was closed to them forcing organisers to set up a hastily convened meeting elsewhere after the Deacons of the Relief Church inexplicably rescinded the invitation.

The day was saved by the more enlightened United Secession minister Andrew Rodgie who gladly offered his West-End Chapel as a last-minute alternative.

The event made headlines but soon became just a footnote in the Borders' history and could easily have slipped into oblivion had it not been for local Hawick lawyer Rory Bannerman.

Bannerman said Douglass made his controversial speech "to make sure people knew of the horrors involved with slavery. He spoke with a fire and passion that made people listen.

"And those people who listened would ensure that change would eventually come - and slavery would be a thing of the past."

A plaque has been placed in Bright Street to mark the event; a ceremony attended by community leaders and the US Consul General, Jack Hillmeyer as well as Bannerman and his fellow organisers.

Of course, it wasn't just the good folk of Hawick who rebelled against slavery, one of the campaigners who visited Dryburgh Abbey where famous local literary legend Walter Scott was buried, noted a "glorious motto" over the abbey entrance which stated: "No American to be allowed to enter here, if he is a slaveholder."



Artist gains a shop window to the world

by Maggie Elliot

So what happens when you have a self-imposed rule never to write about family or friends but you are surrounded by inspiring people and some quite serious talent?

For once you want to follow the fiction writers' rule about writing about what you know.

Meet my drinking, eating, laughing and sometimes crying friend Lynn Rodgie.

Lynn is one of the most inspirational people I know. Mother of three 'boys' now grown and wife of talented support act Ken, Lynn has catapulted herself from strength to strength and national to international recognition in the 25 or so years I have known her.

The artist's working from home status changed significantly for Lynn when a bright and generous retail space recently became available in her home village of St. Boswells.

As demand for her paintings grew and Lynn's desire to be more out there as a painter coincided with the interest and involvement of an internationally renowned agent a move from her domestic studio became essential.

"Now at last I can embrace sharing my art," said Lynn with genuine enthusiasm.

"Many people come to look and often the unexpected buy. I am just so delighted that we found this space on our doorstep which functions as a platform to a much larger area than the Scottish Borders".

Lynn trained as a graphic designer at Grey's School of Art in Aberdeen and while studying there she met commercial photographer Ken.

The couple shared a fascination for not only art but marketing and being creatively malleable.

At last Lynn was able to fulfil her desire to paint full time while Ken provided promotional and marketing expertise to form a successful creative partnership.

As you enter the gallery you realise how prolific a painter Lynn really is.

It is crammed full of bright, adventurous art in a painterly style, often vibrant and always impressive. Her art often features the countryside, the coast with stunning bleached beaches or characterful paint-weathered boats.

In reference to her connection with three renowned Edinburgh galleries there are many paintings of the capital's properties and landmarks.

Recognisable examples of these are central building facades, a bright festive market scene and for lovers of vintage the evergreen Armstrongs of The Grassmarket.

The Lynn Rodgie Gallery complements the well-established bookshop Mainstreet and Deli a few hops across the street in St Boswells and another intriguing string to this creative bow is soon to follow.

Watch this space!



The Lynn Rodgie Gallery

WHERE

Main Street, St. Boswells

GET IN TOUCH

Lynn: 07716 822238

Ken: 07980 638542

OPEN

Friday to Saturday from 11.00am to 4.40pm or by appointment

Celebrating a new season for fishing

The River Tweed Salmon Season's opening on February 1, 2024, promises an exceptional addition this year – the inaugural River Tweed Film Festival at Ednam House Hotel.

The festival will span two days and feature a captivating selection of hand-picked films curated by Fishing TV, a renowned global film hub for angling enthusiasts.

The film Festival line-up includes titles such as "Paul Young Hooked on Fishing," "Our Wild Salmon" from Fisheries Management Scotland, and the much-anticipated premiere of the "Mending the Line."

The latter boasts an outstanding cast, led by Golden Globe winner Brian Cox (Succession, Troy) and Sinqua Walls (Nanny, White Men Can't Jump), delivering powerful performances that bring to life a compelling narrative about universal themes of trauma, resilience, and finding purpose.

Director Joshua Caldwell and Mending the Line author Stephen Camelio expressed their enthusiasm, stating, "the film speaks to universal themes of trauma, resilience, and finding something to live for, and strikes a chord with audiences from all walks of life."

We are incredibly excited to bring this film to audiences on the river Tweed, Scotland."

Jamie Stewart, Clerk to the River Tweed Commission, emphasised the importance of celebrating the Tweed's fishing heritage while recognising the need for ongoing efforts to protect this valuable resource.

The Tweed, renowned globally and boasting a fishing tradition

dating back centuries, is the most productive salmon river in the UK*, contributing approximately £24 million annually to the local economy and supporting over 500 jobs.

The Tweed Film Festival aims to unite angling enthusiasts, film lovers, and the local community in a celebration of both the river's rich fishing history and the artistry of cinema.

Attendees can expect an experience that combines the thrill of the salmon season opening with the magic of storytelling.

* Source <https://sac.jncc.gov.uk/species/S1106/>



Catching attention

The River Tweed's most prestigious prize, the Bemersyde Trophy, was won by David Harris from Cheltenham, fishing the Carham beat.

Harris, below, being presented with his trophy by Lady Haig, secured the coveted award with the safe catch and release of an impressive 40-inch October salmon.



In the junior category, the Bemersyde Junior Trophy was jointly won by 13-year-old Jacob Ellis and his brother Finlay aged 8, above with Lady Haig.

"We are delighted to witness the Bemersyde Trophy continue to celebrate the passion and skill of anglers on the River Tweed. It is a testament to the enduring spirit of the sport and the beauty of the river. Our congratulations to all the winners, and our heartfelt appreciation to everyone who contributes to making this annual event a highlight in the Bemersyde calendar." – *Earl and Lady Haig.*

The Bemersyde Trophy, initiated in 2012, grew out of Lord and Lady Haig's dedication to promoting fishing on the River Tweed. The popularity of the event led to the introduction of the Junior trophy in 2015.



Didn't they do well!

CORKS were popping across the South of Scotland as the region celebrated a sensational performance at the national Scottish Thistle Awards for the tourism and hospitality sector.

Businesses from Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders scooped six national awards at the ceremony in Glasgow, smashing the previous regional record of three and making the South of Scotland the most successful region on the night.

The six winning businesses' achievements are now set to be recognised by the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA) with guest of honour status at their next annual conference, to be held in Dumfries on March 20, 2024.

The South of Scotland triumphed in the following categories at the Scottish Thistle Awards 2023:

Cream o' Galloway ice cream founders Wilma and David Finlay, who are partners in family run Rainton Farm in Dumfries and Galloway, home of The Ethical Dairy, won the prestigious Silver Thistle Award, which recognises an individual or individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to tourism over many years.

VisitScotland Chair Lord Thurso, who presented their award, said: "Congratulations to Wilma and David Finlay on receiving this year's Silver Thistle Award. This is a well-deserved award that recognises the outstanding contribution they have made to tourism in Scotland."

"Described as pioneers in their industry, they have demonstrated the principles of responsible tourism throughout their career and continue to inspire and encourage others to follow in their footsteps."

"They have not only made a huge impact on their local community in Dumfries & Galloway, but their pioneering work has had a lasting effect on farming, agritourism and responsible tourism in Scotland as a whole."

Tourism Individual of the Year award was won by Melanie Allen, recognising her as an influential leader and ambassador and the positive impact she has made on the visitor experience at regional and national level.

"I am absolutely honoured and delighted to be recognised as Tourism Individual of the Year at the Scottish National Thistle Awards particularly being alongside so many talented finalists."

"Winning this prestigious award is such a wonderful accolade that I dedicate to all the inspiring people I have had the pleasure to work with. Success in tourism is always at its best when it's achieved in collaboration with other like-minded people who

work with a shared vision to be 'world leaders in 21st Century Tourism'.

"Through these cherished relationships, I hope the passion and ambition I have for destination Scotland continues to be contagious with both businesses, community and visitors. Wishing massive congratulations to all the award winners and finalists celebrating this evening and making a difference to tourism in Scotland, she said."

Melanie along with husband John, also scooped the Scottish Thistle Award for Best B&B or Guest House Experience for their Nithbank Country Estate luxury B&B in Thornhill, Dumfries & Galloway.

The couple operate an exclusive B&B in this historic country house set in an 11-acre estate and were commended for their focus on local first and responsible tourism.

Best Self-Catering Accommodation Experience went to Arden Holiday Cottage in Dumfries and Galloway, a rural self-catering cottage with an 'outside the box' approach, helping provide a different kind of experience for guests looking to switch off from their everyday lives and social media.

Owner Hester Binge said: "Arden Holiday Cottage are absolutely delighted to receive this prestigious award."

"We are just one of many self-catering cottages who go that extra mile to ensure the experiences we offer are memorable and unique. Our Escape Room is based on local folklore which celebrates the rich tapestry of Dumfries & Galloway encouraging guests to explore all our beautiful region has to offer."

"This award means we can highlight Dumfries & Galloway and bring more guests to our often-overlooked region benefitting all tourism providers," she said.

Scottish Borders luxury self-catering specialist Airhouses landed the Best Luxury Experience award, with judges praising their community engagement and fair employment, which will 'help to inspire other businesses in the Scottish tourism industry.'

Elisabeth and Damian Kelly, partners in Airhouses, said: "We are delighted that our team's hard-work and dedication to customer service, excellent cleanliness and providing each guest with a unique and bespoke experience, has been recognised by this award."

"We would like to thank our wonderful team and our fantastic guests for making Airhouses such a special place."



Thistle winners (clockwise from above)...Melanie Allen, the Ethical Dairy, Arden Holiday Cottage, Cross Keys Inn and Airhouses.



Finally, Best Bar or Pub was won by The Cross Keys Inn, Ettrickbridge, which reopened in early 2023 after a painstaking refurbishment by new owners Rory and Vicki Steel.

Judges hailed the Inn for its comprehensive programme of engagement with local groups and the Ettrickbridge community.

Rory and Vicki Steel, owners of The Cross Keys Inn, said: "We were absolutely thrilled to win this award in our region and we're honoured to fly the flag for the South of Scotland in the Thistle Awards National Final."

"To win again this evening really is the best end to our first year of operating. We can't thank our whole team and our local community in Ettrickbridge enough for all their support and we're looking forward to building on this success throughout 2024!"



Success for south Scotland

"I'm absolutely thrilled to see so many South of Scotland businesses receive national recognition at the Thistles."

It demonstrates just how brilliantly our tourism and hospitality sector does what it does, with a real devotion to excellence, quality and responsible tourism.

"The scale of the South's success (beating all other regions and doubling our best ever result in the 30-year history of the Thistles) is hugely inspiring."

It's not just these six brilliant businesses that are celebrating, it's all of the South of Scotland. As a destination, we are finding our voice, building confidence and establishing our global reputation.

David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA)



Get ready...

The first ever dedicated South of Scotland Thistle Awards were held at Dumfries's Cairndale Hotel in October, organised by the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA) and South of Scotland Enterprise, supported by VisitScotland and with headline sponsor Caledonia Park Designer Outlet.

Planning is already under way for the next South of Scotland Thistle Awards in 2024, with entries due to go live in the spring.

A special free session aimed at helping businesses craft a successful application - How to be a Scottish Thistle Award Winner - is scheduled on March 7, 2024 as part of the SSDA's ongoing Winter Webinar series, available to all tourism businesses in the region.

The South of Scotland Thistle Awards 2023 ceremony was sponsored by Caledonia Park Designer Outlet, The Borders Distillery, Fishers, the Scottish Licensed Trade Association, Johnstons of Elgin and SW Audio. Any businesses or organisations keen to find out more about sponsoring the awards in 2024 are invited to contact the SSDA via info@ssdalliance.com at their earliest convenience.

Stitchers create a timeless work of art

by Aline Varty

After a visit to see the Prestonpans Tapestry inspiration came calling for author Alexander McCall Smith.

He teamed up with historian Alistair Moffat and artist Andrew Crummy to create arguably the most impressive artistic depiction of Scottish history - The Great Tapestry of Scotland.

Now taking centre stage in an impressive new museum in the High Street at Galashiels, this awe-inspiring exhibit weaves a visual and tactile journey through Scotland's rich history.

It stands as one of the largest community art projects ever undertaken - anywhere in the world.

Comprised of 160 hand stitched panels and spanning an astonishing 143 metres, the display tells of major events, natural disasters, extraordinary individuals and, most importantly, traces the lives down the centuries of ordinary Scottish people.

The exhibit is unique in its ability to cater for all ages and appeals as much to the passing tourist as a passionate historian.

In the era of digital media and short form, condensed content, this display champions the importance of slow, meticulous creation.

With each panel averaging about 500 hours of stitching time, the communal effort is distinctly communicated to visitors to the Tapestry.

Different stylistic choices in threads, patterns and designs add a tangible element that speak of the creators of each panel arguably more than the events themselves; this layered experience lets the art come alive.

Additionally, like any good modern exhibit, there is also a free audio guide available to accompany your visit.

Arguably the most striking part of the exhibit is the personality threaded into each panel. The right hand

bottom corner was reserved for the stitchers working on their respective panels to embroider a personal signature.

This has led to a huge range of autographs, coats of arms and little ditties which imbue each panel with community spirit and act as a reminder to the thousands of individuals that brought the Tapestry to life.

The Tapestry brought together volunteers of all ages and backgrounds, from skilled artisans to enthusiastic beginners to contribute to this colossal project. In doing so it has made the Tapestry an incredibly genuine representation of the nation's collective spirit.

Aside from the community-driven creation, it is also one of the rare exhibits almost entirely crafted by women.

The Tapestry stands in its completion in the first floor of the purpose built gallery, sharing rooms on the ground floor that host travelling exhibitions.

Late March till July this year will see a collaboration between the Tapestry and students at Heriot Watt in 'A Passion for Paisley', detailing the legacy of Edinburgh's vibrant weaving industry.

A range of talks and events will also accompany this special exhibition. Further additions to the Tapestry include a 'Have a go - Learn to sew!' initiative, which, in collaboration with the government Multiply programme, offers a course to achieve an adult numeracy qualification through stitching.

If you are looking to enrich your knowledge of Scottish History, the Great Tapestry is the place to go.

Additionally, it also works beautifully as a complimentary exhibit to Edinburgh's portrait gallery which depicts important portraits through the ages.

On your visit through history be sure to also pop into the lovely cafe for excellent coffee and scones!



Signature touch: Each panel in the Tapestry display carries a signature representing the stitchers.



Above: Callum Black, Marketing and Events Officer at the The Great Tapestry of Scotland takes Explore the Borders writer Aline Varty on a guided tour of the museum.

Examples from the 160 panels on show.



The Great Tapestry of Scotland

14-20 High St, Galashiels TD1 1SD

The Great Tapestry of Scotland visitor centre is open 09.30-17.00, Tuesday – Saturday.

Tapestry Gallery is open 09.30-16.30. Last ticket is at 3.30pm
Adult entry £10.50. Opening times will vary on a seasonal basis.

More at www.greatapestryofscotland.com

Conservation champions

Aborders estate has earned prestigious international accreditation in recognition of their efforts in wildlife management and conservation.

Torwoodlee Estate, near Galashiels in the Scottish Borders has been awarded Wildlife Estates Scotland (WES) accreditation. It was presented by Lorna Slater MSP, Scottish Government Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity.

WES is a national version of the Wildlife Estates (WE) initiative and is endorsed by the European Commission's Directorate-General Environment, whose objective is to protect, preserve and improve the environment for present and future generations.

Torwoodlee Estate is a mixed operation with farming, forestry, shooting and deer management comprising their core activities.

Over the last five years, the estate has continued its longstanding collaboration with Butterfly Conservation to utilise their native Luing Herd to conservation graze crucial habitat which supports the rare Northern Brown Argus butterfly and countless other species.

Their species list of butterflies and moths stretches to an impressive 251 species currently, including some species which have recently returned to the area, including the Green Hairstreak and they have also been busy working with the British Trust for Ornithology to monitor black grouse which returned to the estate in 2022.

In other projects, the estate has restored a lowland meadow which barn owls are taking full advantage of for hunting and they have planted 500 saplings to connect fragmented habitat.

Alongside biodiversity enhancements, the estate is working hard on reducing carbon emissions by utilising ground source and air source heat pumps, and two solar arrays, one with battery storage support. They are also being careful to baseline their carbon footprint so that they have a benchmark from which they can demonstrate improvement.

All types of landholdings, farms and estates can apply for accreditation and Scotland currently sits second in the league table of Wildlife Estates accredited land on 1.25 million acres, with only Spain ahead on approximately 1.6 million acres. Between them, WES accredited landholdings have stewardship of 97 nationally protected sites (SSSI, NNR) and 79 internationally designated sites (SAC, SPA, Ramsar etc).

Caroline Pringle, Project Manager at Wildlife Estates Scotland, said: "Achieving Wildlife Estates Scotland accreditation is a challenging process that asks farms and estates to demonstrate they are following the very best practice in wildlife and habitat management.

"Congratulations to Torwoodlee for their outstanding achievements and the crucial role they are playing in benefiting our environment and biodiversity," she said.

James Pringle from Torwoodlee Estate said: "We've been really pleased with how our wildlife and habitat management has progressed so far and we are now looking towards plans to retain more water on the land to benefit biodiversity, our farming operation and also build resilience against climate change.

We have already established one sizeable pond this year and are currently looking at other options including restoration of our Old Mill Pond. Wildlife Estates Scotland provides a great platform for both gaining and sharing



knowledge and best practice and we are delighted to have received this accreditation once again."

* Torwoodlee has been in the ancestral home of the Pringle Family since 1501 and covers 3,000 acres of beautiful Scottish Borders countryside.

The Estate comprises two agricultural farms, Torwoodlee Mains and Buckholm Farm, grass parks, about half of Torwoodlee Golf Course which is leased to the Club of the same name (the Club owns the other half).

It also offers twelve letting cottages on long-term affordable lets, salmon fishing on both Tweed and the Gala Water as well as trout fishing let to the local angling association.

Top: James and Alice Pringle (centre) receive their WES award from Jurgen Tack, Secretary General for the European Landowners Organisation and Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, the Circular Economy and Biodiversity.

Above: Conservation stars the Green Hairstreak and the Northern Brown Argus.

More on Torwoodlee is available at: www.torwoodlee.com

Playing a trump card for Borders tourism

Explore the Borders has one key objective - to promote the brilliant borderlands and, in doing so, enhance its destination appeal.

The Explore project - led by a team of experienced writers, journalists and photographers - is delivered to a regional, national and international audience, through the Explore the Borders Magazine and its sister website www.exploretheborders.com.

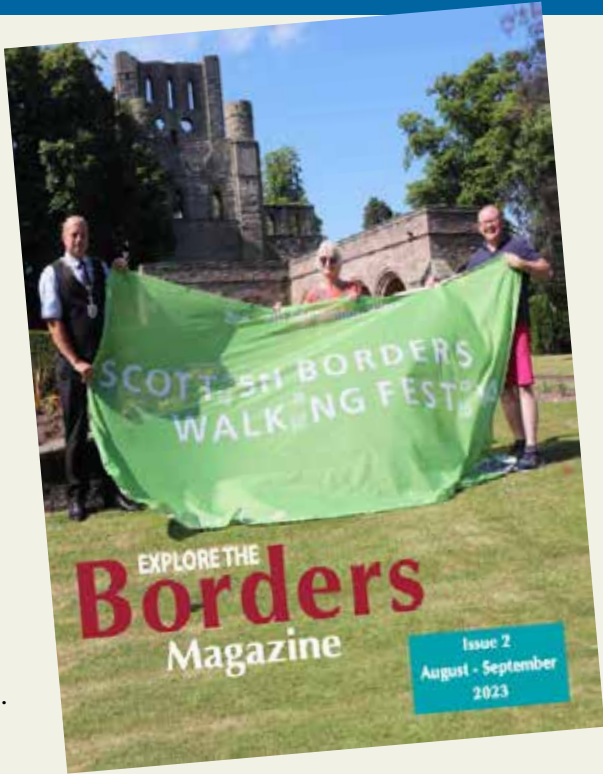
Together they are establishing a leading digital platform to share a moveable feast of information designed to inform, inspire and help visitors plan ahead.

We believe this is best achieved as a team effort - working closely with established strategic tourism organisations and the tourism sector at large.

If you have a story to tell, an announcement to make or would like more information about how you can join the Explore project we would love to hear from you.

You can get in touch at...

editor@exploretheborders.com



Mama mia, here we go again!

Riding high after a super successful charity ride to Cardiff, the Cycling Souters from Selkirk are preparing to get back on the road again.

Having raised over £20,000 in 2022 for the MND charity My Name's Doddie Foundation, riding from BT Murrayfield to Cardiff's Principality Stadium in 48 hours to deliver the Wales v. Scotland rugby ball, they have signed up for an even bigger charity challenge.

This time the 11-strong cycling team plan to ride to Rome (a total of 1,500 miles) to help ex-Scotland skipper Rob Wainwright deliver the match ball for Italy's Six Nations fixture against Scotland in the Stadio Olimpico on March 9.

"We will be cycling in relay teams," said Cycling Souters' team captain Gordon Hunter, himself a member of Scotland's 1984 Grand Slam-winning side.

"We were overwhelmed by the fantastic support we received from sponsors and members of the public for our Cardiff ride, and we're hoping everyone will again get behind the boys for what's going to be an even tougher challenge.

"For the 2024 Rome ride we're aiming to surpass the £20,000 total we raised two years ago – a tough ask, but one which all our riders are happy to take on."

The Cycling Souters will leave Selkirk's Market Place at 7am on Sunday, March 3, 2024, cycling 90 miles to Newcastle to catch the overnight ferry to Amsterdam.

The group - supported by a back-up crew in camper vans - will then travel through Holland, Belgium, France and Italy, finally arriving in the Piazza Navona, Rome, on Friday, March 8.

Ex-Selkirk rugby player Allen Jamieson, who planned the route, added: "We'll cycle an average of 280 miles per day in Europe - the equivalent of cycling from Selkirk to Birmingham every day... a decent shift!

"En route we will meet up with other teams of like-minded charity cyclists, who will be setting off from multiple start points across the UK."

The overriding goal of the Rome challenge is to raise as much money as possible for the My Name's Doddie Foundation, which is working towards a world free of MND by funding vital research into the disease.

Rob Wainwright, the brains behind the 2024 venture and a former team-mate of Doddie's, commented: "The My Name's Doddie Foundation was established by the late Doddie Weir and the trustees in response to the Scotland and British Lion's frustration at the lack of options given to MND sufferers – no effective treatment, no access to meaningful clinical trials and therefore no hope.

"The Foundation has already donated millions of pounds for targeted MND research projects, and is committed to continuing to invest in the most promising research to help find new treatments, gain improved knowledge and ultimately find a cure."

The Cycling Souters want to help in whatever way they can, and aim to cover all the costs of the trip before they set off. This means that 100 per cent of the funds raised will go direct to the charity.

The group has set up a JustGiving Page at <https://www.justgiving.com/team/cyclingsouters>. Please do make a donation if you possibly can.

* Souters is Scottish for cobblers/shoemakers and a local term for those from Selkirk where shoemaking was a thriving industry at one time



Above: Special delivery as the Cycling Souters deliver the Wales V Scotland rugby ball - and get a warm welcome from rugby legend Gavin Hastings.

Below: The team prepare for a local training run.



MY
NAME'S
DODDIE
foundation

Doddie Weir OBE was one of rugby's most recognisable personalities.

He earned 61 caps for Scotland during a successful playing career, represented the British and Irish Lions on their successful tour to South Africa in 1997, and won championships with his two club sides, Melrose and Newcastle Falcons.

A talented, committed and athletic lock forward, Doddie then faced his biggest challenge.

In June 2017 the Scot revealed he was suffering from Motor Neuron Disease.

From the outset, Doddie was driven to help fellow sufferers and seek ways to further research into this, as yet, incurable disease.

Doddie died in November 2022 but his inspirational lead has helped raise £millions for research into finding a cure for Motor Neurone Disease.

Abbotsford - it's a real bestseller

by David Pike

The word is that Sir Walter Scott is enjoying a revival and his novels and poetry are back in popular demand.

In his beloved Scottish Borders Scott's star has never waned, his presence shines as brightly today as it did in his heyday almost 200 years ago.

Those who would discover more can follow a dozen tourist trails taking in Scott's favourite border haunts. From Scott's View, the Eildon Hills, wrapped in local myths and magic, dominate breathtaking countryside. In Selkirk, there's Scott's courthouse, now a museum, where he sat as the royal borough's Sheriff Depute and dispensed justice.

But to understand more about the man, all roads must surely lead to Abbotsford, his "conundrum castle" home tucked away amid 100 acres between Melrose and Selkirk.

Here he assembled a treasure trove that reflects the enlightened times in which he lived: a massive collection of books, artefacts, porcelain and paintings. They also confirm an insatiable curiosity for the world at large but especially Scotland.

The Scottish nation's most memorable names from history are all resident in this magnificent house.

Here you will find Rob Roy's broadsword, dirk, sporran purse and gun on display; knives belonging to Charles I; Montrose's sword; a lock of Bonnie Prince Charlie's hair and Bonnie Dundee's pistols.

In the library, the ceiling copies elements of Rosslyn Chapel; predictably arousing much excitement among Da Vinci Code addicts.

Elsewhere, items of furniture and oak panelled walls have been fashioned from timbers rescued from the Auld Kirk at Dunfermline; a stone fireplace is modelled on the stalls at Melrose Abbey, and the entrance is copied from Linlithgow Palace.

Another of Scott's historic recycling initiatives is the Robroyston chair made of wood from the House of Robroyston where Sir William Wallace was "done to death by felon hand for guarding well his father's land."

If it were Scott's intention that the heart of Scotland would forever beat at Abbotsford he can rest easy.

A super-celebrity in his day, wealthy on the revenues that accrued from bestseller after bestseller, Scott scoured Scotland, England and the Continent for acquisitions.

He was also an avid collector of popular publications, the penny dreadfuls of their day, that sold from door-to-door and speculated on sensational subjects such as witchcraft and the supernatural.

As a pioneer in popular culture, his modern-day equivalent could be Indiana Jones and J K Rowling rolled into one.

At Abbotsford, fact lines up neatly alongside fiction; much of it interleaved with Scott's best-known novels that took form at the writing desk in his wonderfully preserved study.

In the library there are 9,000 priceless tomes, including a 15th-century Middle English manuscript, poems and songs handwritten by Robert Burns, together with pamphlets from the times of Jacobites and Covenanters.

Wandering around this incredible time capsule of a building – much the same as it was when Scott lived here – it is easy to imagine that it could still have some, as yet undiscovered, secrets to share.

That being the case the Abbotsford Executive Trust is doing all it can to extend the welcome. Abbotsford has undergone a £14m development project that has allowed restoration, refurbishment and the building of an excellent visitor interpretation centre and restaurant.



Abbotsford

Melrose

Full details of tickets for
Abbotsford and opening
times at:-

www.scottsassbotsford.com

Pay once and visit free
all year

t +44 (0)1896 752043

www.exploretheborders.com

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Bringing borders history back to life

An exceptionally rare piece of Roman armour from National Museums Scotland's collection has been painstakingly reconstructed from dozens of fragments.

Dating from the middle of the second century, the brass arm guard will be seen in its entirety for the first time in almost 2000 years when it goes on loan to the British Museum for the major exhibition Legion: life in the Roman army that opened this month.

Conservators in Edinburgh spent weeks rebuilding the arm guard, which is the most intact example of its kind and one of only three known from the whole Roman Empire.

The armour was discovered in over 100 pieces at the site of the Trimontium fort near Melrose in 1906, in remarkably good condition, with remnants of leather straps still attached to the metal.

The fragments have been in National Museums Scotland's collection for over a century.

The upper section has been on display in the National Museum of Scotland for 25 years, with the lower section loaned to the Trimontium Museum and dozens of fragments stored at the National Museums Collection Centre.

They have now been brought together and assembled for the first time, offering a glimpse into the life of a legionary in Roman Scotland.

Following the exhibition at the British Museum, the arm guard will go on permanent display at the National Museum of Scotland.

Dr Fraser Hunter, Principal Curator of Prehistoric & Roman Archaeology at National Museums Scotland, said: "This is an incredibly rare object, and it's great that this exhibition gave us the opportunity to rebuild it. The transformation is striking. Now that it's been reconstructed, you can picture the legionary who once wore it. It was both protection and status symbol – brass was expensive and would



have gleamed like gold on his sword arm. It offers a vivid connection to this important period when Scotland sat on the Roman Empire's northern frontier."

Bethan Bryan, Assistant Artefact Conservator at National Museums Scotland, (at work above) said: "It's been

a privilege to work on such an extraordinary piece of Scotland's history.

"Approaching this ancient jigsaw puzzle required careful consideration and it was important to make sure we could display the piece in a manner as near as possible to how it would have looked 2000 years ago.

"I'm thrilled that it can now be seen by audiences in a new light and has been preserved



for generations to enjoy."

The arm guard stretches down from the shoulder and ends in a thin square of metal that would have protected the wearer's hand, a design that may have been inspired by the equipment worn by gladiators fighting in the arena.

** Through loans and touring exhibitions, National Museums Scotland is committed to bringing the National Collection to new audiences across Scotland, the UK and internationally, engaging those around the world with Scotland's story.*

TRIMONTIUM MUSEUM
Market Square, Melrose

For opening times, events and more information...

e info@trimontium.co.uk
w www.trimontium.co.uk

Jedburgh's popular new cultural hub

by Meriem Yahiaoui

Since its opening in April 2023, Heron and Willow- Jedburgh's new independent bookshop and vinyl store in the centre of town, has quickly become part of the cultural fabric of the old Border town.

Introducing the Festival of Stories throughout the summer months helped quench the Borders' love for books and all things literary; and the regular book talks featuring established and very knowledgeable authors, offered an exciting intellectual dimension to otherwise quiet summer evenings in the sun.

The shop is also a creative hub offering numerous workshops, projects and free activities for all to partake in, as well as boasting two book clubs and a writing club for all abilities.

You can also purchase brand-new vinyl LPs, stationery, greetings cards and gift vouchers.

This literary and creative venture is the brainchild of founder, Dean Freeman, who has combined his love of books with his success working in the music industry.

As director of Long Division Festival he established a creative outlet teaching kids to showcase their own gigs.

Heron and Willow, Dean explains, is more than just a book shop. His ambition is to make a positive change to the community through all the associations a bookshop and creative hub can bring to the Borders.

"The power of events as social tools to affect positive change on a community cannot be underestimated," he said.

Browsing through its carefully curated selection of books Heron and Willow, is a relaxed, modern and spacious oasis for all book lovers and seekers.

For many of us, few pleasures compare to sitting down with a brand-new book and opening it for the first time.

Flicking through the crisp pages and admiring the words and illustrations, transports the reader to a new world and can alter their whole attitude to life in a positive way.

Monthly author events will start again soon. For current and future events, as well as purchasing online, please visit the website: www.heronandwillow.scot



Heron & Willow

WHERE

4 Canongate, Jedburgh, United Kingdom

w www.heronandwillow@gmail.com

t 07780 857138

COMING UP

Feb 16 - live music and discussion with Arcadian Meadows - £5
March 22 - In conversation with explorer and author James Ogilvie - Free
April 25 - In conversation with author Margaret Skea - Free

All events takes place at the shop. More information on our website where you can sign up for free tickets.



FOR THE GOOD OF THE RIVER TWEED

The Tweed Foundation is a charitable trust working to protect, improve and enhance the stocks of all native freshwater fish species within the River Tweed system. We are at the forefront in bringing a professional, scientific approach to fisheries management and are engaged in an extensive programme of biological monitoring, habitat enhancement and education.

RIVER  TWEED

www.rivertweed.org.uk