

Charity registration number NIC107546  
Companies registration number NI656025

**BLUE COAT SCHOOL HERITAGE CENTRE  
ANNUAL REPORT AND UNAUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022**

## BLUE COAT SCHOOL HERITAGE CENTRE

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**BLUE COAT SCHOOL HERITAGE CENTRE  
LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

Trustees	Rev C Jones Mr S McLorn Mrs G Mellon
Secretary	Mr J Cowan
Charity Number	NIC 107546
Company Number	NI656025
Registered Office	Offices of First Derry Presbyterian Church Upper Magazine Street Londonderry BT48 6PH
Independent Examiner	McCorkell & Co 41a Clooney Terrace Londonderry BT47 6AP
Bankers	Danske Bank Donegal Square West Belfast PO Box 183

## BLUE COAT SCHOOL HERITAGE CENTRE

### TRUSTEES' REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 2022

The trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies and comply with the charity's governing document, the Companies Act 2006 and SORP applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the FRS 102.

#### Objectives and activities

##### Objectives

The company became a charity on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020.

The Charity's objectives are specifically restricted to the following:-

To tell the story of First Derry Presbyterian Church and the contribution the Presbyterian community has made to the city and region since First Presbyterian Meeting House was established on the present site in 1690.

To explain:-

The arrival of Presbyterians in North West Ulster in the 17<sup>th</sup> century

The challenges they faced over successive centuries until the present day

The role they are continuing to play in the life of the community in Londonderry and the North West

To tell the story of the closure of the Church in 2002, the major refurbishment works and the re-opening ceremony in 2011

To work in conjunction with Tourism N.I., Derry City and Strabane District Council and other statutory bodies to maximise the potential benefits of cultural heritage for the whole community of the North West.

To demonstrate through this work how the story of Presbyterianism can contribute to promoting peaceful relationships and building reconciliation in a divided society.

##### Activities

Blue Coat School Heritage Centre became a registered charity on 21st September, 2020. The operation and management of the Heritage Centre is supported by a team of 12 volunteers who provide personal guided tours to local and international visitors every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday between May to September. Volunteers also open the premises on request outside these times.

## Achievements and performance

Blue Coat School Heritage Centre re-opened for visitors in May, 2022 after a two year closure due to the impact of the Covid19 pandemic. We were uncertain at that stage as to how quickly the tourism industry and visitor numbers would recover from lockdown. Prior to Covid in 2019 our seasonal footfall was just over 8000 visitors. By the end of 2022 our recovery figures amounted to 5530 which we felt was encouraging. We look forward, however, to significant increases for 2023 and beyond. In June Rev Colin Jones was appointed Chairperson of Blue Coat School Heritage Centre following the retirement of Rev.Dr.Latimer. The Bluecoat Team looks forward to working under Colin's leadership as we move onwards to strengthen and sustain our unique Presbyterian Heritage Centre as one of the City's leading cultural venues. We also wish to record our thanks and appreciation to Dr.Latimer for his unwavering support and constant encouragement throughout his four year tenure of office. Our efforts to ensure the longer -term sustainability of Blue Coat School Heritage Centre received a significant boost in August when Derry City and Strabane District Council announced a new initiative aimed at strengthening collaborative working between 10 of the District's heritage venues. The August announcement confirmed the appointment of Consultants to work closely with personnel in each venue to create an overall and coherent visitor experience for the City and District. Since then Blue Coat School representatives have attended monthly discussions with City Council officers, consultants and representatives from 9 other heritage venues. The City Council's collaborative working initiative will be a key element in promoting and marketing the District as a significant and diverse cultural heritage destination. In parallel with this, however, it will be essential for long-term sustainability to evaluate constantly how our visitor offer compares with other organisations. Increasing emphasis is being placed on digitalisation by cultural heritage venues worldwide. Blue Coat School has now taken a step down this road. In August a small working group was created to tackle the daunting task of sorting, cataloguing and computerising boxes of Church and Blue Coat School records. It is hoped that the first results from this significant document archiving project will start to become accessible on the company website next year. In December BlueCoat School agreed to collaborate with Derry City and Strabane District Council on the creation of digital and audio-guided tours for cultural organisations. On completion of this project a link will be available on the Blue Coat School website to provide visitors with a virtual reality tour of the premises which includes a narrative about the attractions and accessibility of the heritage centre. We hope that this will be a useful additional marketing tool which will contribute to additional footfall within our venue.

## Public benefit

The charity meets the public benefit requirement through contributing to improving community relationships and building reconciliation in a divided society.

Our purposes have the potential to make a significant contribution to improving community relationships and building reconciliation in a divided society. The direct contact between Blue Coat School Volunteers and visitors facilitates one to one dialogue and discussion which together with the contents and exhibits on view throughout the Heritage Centre buildings provide information, education, illustration and increased understanding for visitors about the legacy left by the Planters in shaping today's society. The explanation of our culture and heritage, as part of a guided tour process, provides informal and relaxed opportunities for social interaction with all communities, opens up dialogue, helps build a path to greater understanding, promotes good will and contributes to the lowering of barriers. We also re-inforce the commitment of the Presbyterian community to peace building by promoting the Church not only as a place of worship but as a shared space accessible to all. A written notice in the Church vestibule emphasises our commitment to a shared society. One of our specific objects at paragraph 4(3) of the Company's Memorandum and Articles of Association is to tell about the reopening of the Church after 9 years' closure due to an infestation of dry rot. The rededication service included a large attendance of Church, Community and Political representatives from all communities. Volunteers use photographs and written reports of this inter denominational service to illustrate to local and international visitors our enduring efforts of engagement to lower community tensions and underpin peace building. 3. There is direct positive feedback from verbal and written comments left by visitors, not only in the Heritage Centre Visitor book but also on social media and other online platforms. Our work contributes to Central and Local Government policy objectives which encourage unlocking of the potential of cultural heritage tourism as a means of addressing difficult or contested histories... Museums, heritage sites and their collections are perceived as offering vital tools for these purposes. Blue Coat School Heritage Centre is a member of City Council's Heritage Venues Group which, prior to Covid, met monthly as a team to devise programmes which can contribute constructively to these objectives. 4. No known harm has arisen from direct implementation of our purposes. As the general public has access to our buildings we take account of health and safety considerations for all users. A risk assessment which identifies physical hazards and potential risks has been carried out and circulated to all volunteers who maintain constant vigilance and encourage visitors to mind steps and use handrails. The Charity's buildings and displays are open to everyone so the beneficiaries are the local community, the regional, national and international communities who will receive information, education and have the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the Blue Coat School volunteers about the history and heritage of Presbyterian community in the context of the 17th.Century Plantation of Londonderry. 5. Wider public benefits flow from our activities which entail purchasing leaflets, documents, display materials, audio-visual facilities and creating a website .This generates income for suppliers of goods and services. To the extent that we contribute to increased visitor numbers in the City we are also generating income for accommodation providers and retail outlets. 6. Throughout 2022 we continued to build upon this framework in an effort to maximise our contributions to the public benefit. Our interrelationships with Derry City and Strabane District Council and the enlarged Heritage Venues Group which followed the Council's August initiative have widened considerably our cross-community relationships within the Council area and will make a significant contribution to building increasing trust and reconciliation in a divided

## Financial review

The trustees consider the charity's financial performance to be satisfactory due to tourism only returning after Covid.

## Trustees

The trustees who served during the year are:-

Rev. C. Jones

Mr S McLorn

Mrs G Mellon

In this year Rev Dr D Latimer resigned as a trustee and Rev C Jones was appointed.

The Trustee's report was approved by the Board of Trustees



Mr S McLorn

Trustee

27<sup>th</sup> September 2023