

# Staycation ideas – Belmont Trust celebrates 25th anniversary of rescuing Shetland house

## Historic Mansion House on Unst, Shetland thanks its funders, supporters and customers as it looks ahead to post pandemic recovery

The historic Belmont House on Unst, Shetland, now run as a commercial self catering business, is celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its rescue by five volunteers whose connections to, and love of the island, inspired them to step in to save the crumbling building.

The House, built in 1775 by Thomas Mouat, has the kudos of being the most ambitious, least altered classical Georgian ensemble in the north of Scotland. The restoration project cost, in the end, £1.2m. “We had to stop twice,” said Mike Finnie, Belmont Trust chairman, “so as to find money for the next bit”. He added: “all along, we had the support of Historic Scotland, who backed us from the beginning on the proviso that the restoration was faithful to the house’s 18<sup>th</sup> century date. No plasterboard! We used only contemporary materials and techniques”.



Since restoration, Belmont House has welcomed over 1400 guests

and hosted memorable family gatherings, celebrations and weddings. Visitors contribute to the local economy, using the Unst shops and supporting local tourist attractions. The rental income generated is reinvested into maintaining the house and developing the gardens, which are open to the general public.

Belmont attracts people worldwide to Unst. "Our visitors are mostly from the UK, with the remainder literally from all over the world, including Australia, Belgium, Germany, USA, UAE, Austria," said Wendy Scott. "Our guests consistently praise the elegance and comfort that Belmont offers; there have been some memorable family reunions."

"Some visitors look for family connections," said Trustee Wendy Scott. "Belmont's history is well documented and contains many Unst family names."



Steve Matheson, VisitScotland Development Manager, commented; "The Belmont House of today is a great testament to the will and vision of a few like-minded individuals who overcame great odds to bring a dilapidated dwelling back to its former glory. Giving visitors to the UK's most northerly isle the opportunity to stay in such grand surroundings makes this four-star country house a magnificent addition to Shetland's tourism offering and I look forward to seeing it fully utilised once more when the current Covid-19 restrictions are eased".

Historic Environment Scotland, (HES), were also keen to congratulate the Belmont Trust, with Donella Steel, Director of Finance saying: "We have been pleased to support the efforts of the Belmont Trust to rescue and restore this unique piece of Shetland's built heritage through our Historic Environment Repair Grant scheme, and would like to congratulate the Trust on marking this significant milestone."

Mike Finnie finished by saying: "The Trust hopes to host a function this autumn for our funders and supporters, without whom this project would not have happened."

The funders are: Friends of the Belmont Trust; John G Blanche; The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Shetland; The Gardie Trust; The Garfield Weston Foundation; Historic Environment Scotland (formerly Historic Scotland); Harry Jamieson; The Leche Trust; The Manifold Trust; The Monument Trust; The Pilgrim Trust; Dorota Rychlik; The Sandison Trust; Shetland Amenity Trust; Shetland Development Trust; Shetland Islands Council; The Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust; The Tay Charitable Trust and the Wolfson Foundation.

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