



EXPLORE THE  
**Borders**  
Magazine

*Your gateway to the brilliant borderlands*

Issue 4  
December - January  
2023/24



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.

Conservation

Education

Smolt Tracking Study

TweedStart

Guardians of the Tweed

Go Wild For Fish

Tweed Foundation, Drygrange Steading, Melrose, Roxburghshire, TD6 9DJ

# 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.

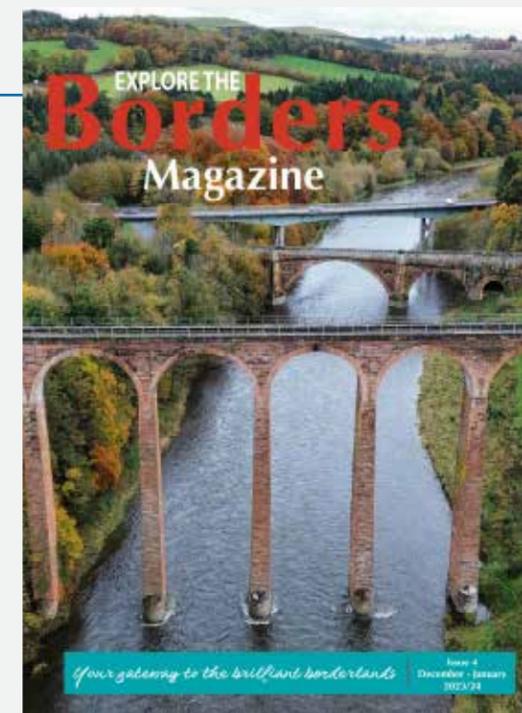
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Photograph: Steven Somerville

## Welcome to the brilliant borderlands

We are in celebratory mood in this issue - and not just because Christmas and the New Year is on the horizon.

Our December-January issue carries a special supplement marking the inaugural South of Scotland Thistle Awards, rewarding the best that's happening in the region's tourism industry.

The finalists who took part in the Thistle Awards event in Dumfries provide a superb showcase of what's on offer for visitors to the region.

We wish our finalists the very best of luck at the national finals in Glasgow.

And the top awards theme, underlining the borderlands all round visitor appeal, is continued with a look at what's happening at the Peebles Hydro.

The Explore team hope you enjoy this issue and send best wishes for the festive season and the New Year.

Editor

The magazine that helps you plan ahead

Coming Up



**11-28 Thistle Awards**

The inaugural South of Scotland Thistle Awards this autumn celebrated all that's great about the region's tourism appeal.

As the winners now head to Glasgow for the national finals we wish them every success.



**26 A date for the diary at Monteviot**



The Monteviot winter light show promises to be a spectacular event and organisers have made it extra special by joining up with local charity *Meeting of Minds* to help raise funds for its work in local communities.

Special Features



**8 Mary Queen of Scots - a study in sadness**

**10 Support our National Park campaign**



**28 Bill McLaren - the voice of rugby**

**34 Winter wonderland**



**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.

# Monteviot lighting

Monteviot Lights, the enchanting winter light festival set to debut soon will deliver a festive windfall for a local charity.

The event will partner Meeting of Minds to extend a helping hand to the local community and support the vital work the charity undertakes

The selection process for a charity partner was made through a public vote.

To be eligible for consideration, nominees were required to be registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and possess a valid charity number.

All importantly, the charity was to be actively engaged in supporting and enriching the lives of communities within the Scottish Borders.

Meeting of Minds will receive a generous donation of 250 tickets for Monteviot Lights, valued at approximately £4,500. These tickets can be distributed among the people the charity serves or used to raise funds through auctions.

Meeting of Minds was formed in 2015 by a small group of like-minded and passionate mothers raising children with additional and complex needs.

The charity's reputation for dedication and hard work has gone from strength to strength every year in the local area. Those involved have created and nurtured a much-needed support network for families and carers.

Michael, the 13th Marquis of Lothian, expressed his enthusiasm for the partnership search, stating, "We not only want Monteviot Lights to be a fantastic event for families, but also want the event to be a force for good in supporting communities across the Scottish Borders.

"We are delighted to partner with Meeting of Minds, who we can work with and support. As we hope this event will be staged annually, we also hope to be able to support other worthwhile causes each year across the Borders."

Monteviot Lights, set against the natural backdrop of Monteviot Gardens promises to be a captivating spectacle for families and visitors.

The light trail starts at Harestanes Visitor Centre and takes a 1.5km route through gardens and woods where creative lighting installed by experts NL Productions promises an evening of wonder and enchantment.



## MONTEVIOT LIGHTS

### Event details

Nov 30 to Dec 3

Dec 6 to Dec 10

**Time:** 16.30 to 19.30

**Tickets sold in 15-minute time slots**

### Location

Monteviot House & Gardens

### Parking

Harestanes Visitor Centre  
All facilities will be open for visitors to enjoy on the night.

# Wedale - Step inside a bookshop of adventurous choices

by Maggie Elliot

The first thing that strikes you about Wedale Bookshop in Stow is that it literally hugs you as you walk in the door and within moments you realise that it hosts a selection of books that are not only fascinatingly eclectic but entirely brave.

For 34 years Gordon MacDougall Stewart had been 'banging on' about opening a bookshop and as he nudged the half century in Spring the dream was finally achieved in partnership with Tom Parnell.

This wonderful bookshop in Stow was born and as Gordon and Tom celebrated their half year anniversary of the opening many people flooded in through the door.

So they felt then that the inspiration to transform the former architect's office into a bookshop was along the right lines.

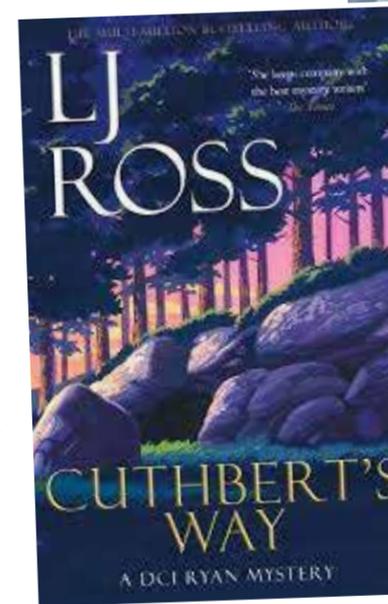
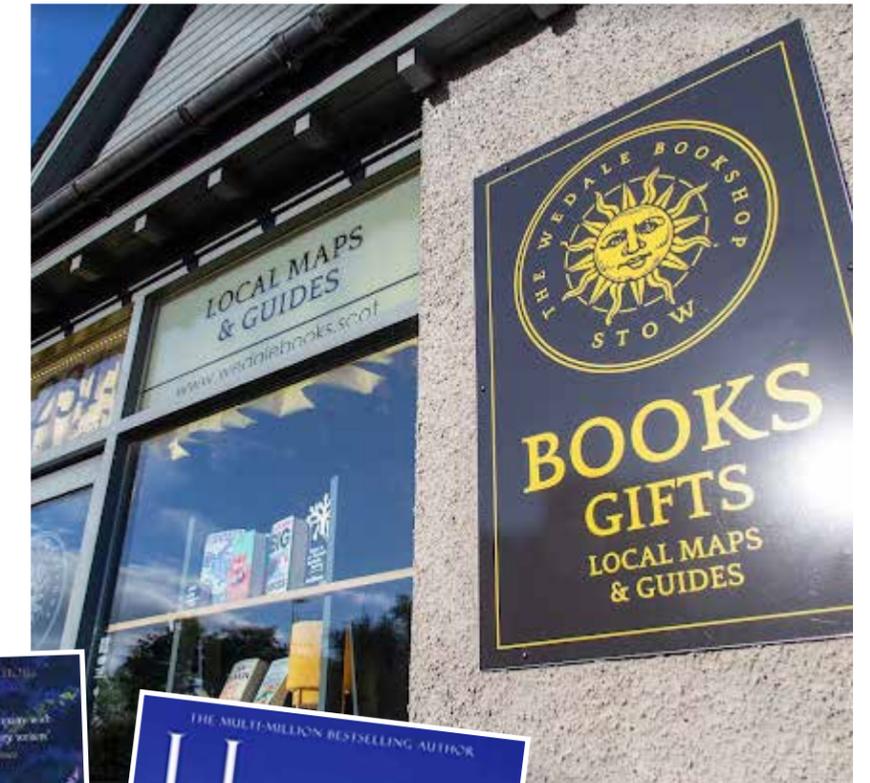
Apart from stocking a wide selection of crime novels from established authors Gordon is striving to introduce the reader to some lesser-known writers such as the Northumbrian L J Ross. The Mrs. Bradley Mysteries by Gladys Mitchell break from the norm with a hero who is the anti Mrs. Marple, 'cackling and vulture like' and this is something he joyfully wants to share.

Wedale is the only offline stockist of crime novels by Ed James who anchors his work in the Scottish Borders. His novels are escalating in popularity for good reason and a local event held recently by Wedale to promote his work was a huge success.

Gordon has chosen subjects which have fascinated him for many years in the intriguing witchcraft and mythology section and you can sit in one of the comfy armchairs to peruse well-chosen non fiction works featuring nature, environment and climate emergency.

Gordon studied history and ethnology at university 'way back' and clearly this has

[www.exploretheborders.com](http://www.exploretheborders.com)



where many older books such as The Plague by Camus offer a good read. And there are Sci Fi choices away from the norm such as Gravity's Rainbow and, importantly, travel books in the shop guide the reader to places that can be reached in a sustainable way.

Countless other books are waiting to be pounced upon and the favourite armchair slouched in for perusal appears to be the one by the window overlooking the Pennywhigham Burn.

For the younger readers Gordon revealed that many of the children and young adult choices have been recommended by customers and the couple are always open to new ideas and suggestions.

There's a moreish selection of carefully chosen gifts: ethical, sustainable and local. Many of those sourced internationally provide work to lift people out of poverty. This certainly adds to the feel good vibe about Wedale and its almost irresistible contents.

So finally - Has this reaction to a midlife crisis been worthwhile?

"Yes" is the resounding answer from Gordon. "The positive reaction makes it all worthwhile and we are looking forward to the next chapter of our bookshop adventure".

Check online for events and timings at Wedale Bookshop at [www.wedalebooks.scot](http://www.wedalebooks.scot)

influenced his choice in the intriguing history section. But he has made it clear that he prefers to focus on the local area because it is often overlooked and there is so much to tell.

There is so much to explore in this bookshop

# Mary Queen of Scots - a study in sadness

by David Pike

“*Would that I had died in Jedburgh.*”

The utter despair of a life in captivity was thus summed up by Mary Queen of Scots as she awaited her fate at Fotheringhay Castle in Northamptonshire.

She was reflecting on a short but memorable visit to the Scottish Borders town in October 1566, where, as Queen, she was to preside and administer justice at local courts. In the event she fell victim to a fever and nearly died.

Her illness had been brought on after an arduous ride to visit her lover and future husband the Earl of Bothwell at Hermitage Castle. Mary, among other things, always had a fateful capacity to live life on the edge.

She was, literally, a pawn in a game of power politics that played out in Scotland, France and Tudor England; ruthless times indeed.

Awaiting the final chapter at Fotheringhay in 1587, her wistful expression, captured on a wonderful mural by Nottingham artist Jennifer Bell (right), as she watches the grim reaper arriving on a white horse, is an eerie link to her memories of Jedburgh and the famous quote.

The mural graces the restaurant at the exceptional and much recommended Talbot Hotel in Oundle, three miles south of Fotheringhay. The historic coaching inn lays claim to many more links to the ill-fated Mary, including the oak staircase Mary is said to have walked down to her execution ... <https://talbothotel.co.uk/>

Her brief but eventful stay at Jedburgh, however, served to give this borders town another A-list tourist attraction. The house where she is said to have lodged, a short walk from the Abbey, is now the much visited Mary Queen of Scots Visitor Centre.

The impressive 16-century building belonged to the Kerr family, who lived in nearby Ferniehirst Castle. The house itself has an interesting feature, a left-handed staircase built for the Kerrs in the 16th century, to enable them, as left-

handers, to wield their swords more easily.

Its rooms contain tapestries, oil paintings, furniture, arms and armour and some of Mary's personal possessions. They map out her life from childhood in France, her return to Scotland to reign as Queen, her captivity in England and eventual execution at Fotheringhay.

The Jedburgh display includes a lock of her hair and an unusual painted death mask of Mary.

It was common practice to make a mask from the severed head as soon as possible after death. This example was found by the late Dr Charles Hepburn of Glasgow, in Peterborough where Mary was first buried.

The memorabilia also includes jewellery, documents and a

watch that she lost on her way to see Bothwell; amazingly, retrieved from a hole in the ground some 250 years later.

The painted panel (right) typifies the turbulence that followed Mary through life. It depicts Mary, Lord Darnley her second (murdered) husband, Lord Bothwell (later her third husband) and David Rizzio, her (also murdered) secretary.

Interest in Mary, Queen of Scots has never waned and the centre, opened in 1987 on the 400th anniversary of her death, is rated as one of Scotland's top visitor attractions.



## Mary Queen of Scots House

Queen Street, Jedburgh

### OPENING TIMES

Mary Queen of Scots House is in open from March to November, daily, from 10am-5pm.

### MORE

[www.liveborders.org.uk](http://www.liveborders.org.uk)



# Time to fly the flag!

by Marion Livingston

The countdown begins: can the Scottish Borders become Scotland's next National Park?

Communities and organisations across Scotland are being invited to submit their proposals to become the country's next National Park (NP) – and amongst the first off the mark is the Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park (CSBNP).

CSBNP already has an independent feasibility study under its belt. The study states – unequivocally – that NP designation has the potential to spark a Borders-wide revival, and how uniting the region's agriculture, tourism, forestry, food and drink, leisure and sporting industries with local communities behind a powerful, internationally recognised brand could transform the region's economy. It would also promote a deeper appreciation of the Scottish Borders' outstanding natural and cultural heritage amongst visitors and local residents alike.

CSBNP has since drawn on the study, and many different stakeholders', feedback to refine a clear vision of how a slimline National Park Authority in the Borders could work in practice – see [www.scottishbordersnationalpark.com](http://www.scottishbordersnationalpark.com) for our updated proposal, and also CSBNP's review of best practice on visitor management, How to Keep (almost) Everyone in the Countryside Happy.

The Scottish Government (SG) has committed to designating at least one new National Park in Scotland by the end of this parliamentary session in 2026, provided that relevant legal conditions can be met. To meet the criteria, groups must be able to demonstrate:

- Outstanding national importance due to natural or culture heritage
- A distinctive character and coherent identity
- How National Park status would meet the specific needs of the area
- Evidence of local support for the proposal

Last month, the SG issued detailed guidance for applicants. Now, the CSBNP team is in discussion with SG-appointed communications consultants Lateral North, whose remit is to support any groups interested in applying for NP designation for their area. Time is tight: the deadline for submissions is 29 February 2024. Meantime, the Scottish Borders proposal continues to evolve.



The Scottish Borders offers an unbeatable combination of natural and cultural heritage: rivers, rolling hills, and deep valleys steeped in legend and history, dark skies and awesome vantage points to marvel at our galaxy of stars, ancient woods teeming with wildlife, once-glorious abbeys, hill forts and towers, magnificent great houses, and the unique traditions of the Border reivers, whose ride-outs of hundreds of horsemen are a world class spectacle.



"Last but by no means least, the Scottish Borders has the space to offer what more and more people crave: tranquillity."

Scotland's two existing National Parks were set up in 2002-3: Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and Cairngorms. As Cairngorms National Park Authority's Sandy Bremner said at the NP application launch: "This is a great opportunity for communities in Scotland to join the family of National Parks to tackle some of the biggest challenges around nature loss, climate change and community development."

"National Park status can bring enormous benefits to a region. It offers a heightened focus on the protection and enhancement of the area's natural and cultural heritage. It can attract vital support to hard-pressed communities, and bring people together to achieve inspirational change."

"This is a once in a lifetime chance for the Scottish Borders to gain the recognition it deserves to secure the future for generations to come. Please do get in touch with us via our website or Facebook page and let us have YOUR thoughts."

Malcolm Dickson



## Go South Scotland





NITHBANK COUNTRY ESTATE - THORNHILL

# AWARD-WINNING WELCOMES START HERE

From luxury experiences to idyllic escapes, savouring quality local food or connecting with our friendly communities, the South of Scotland Thistle Awards celebrate the very best of what we have to offer.

Experience it all for yourself on your next visit by exploring our Thistle Awards Winners on Scotland Starts Here.

@DISCOVERSOUTHSCOTLAND | #SCOTLANDSTARTSHERE | SCOTLANDSTARTSHERE.COM



# Tops for tourism

## What a night.

The inaugural South of Scotland Thistle Awards celebrated all that's great about the region's tourism appeal.

Tourism providers gathered at the Cairndale Hotel in Dumfries for the awards night on October 5 - and they weren't disappointed.

An inspiring range of businesses were nominated - *all of which are included in this special supplement* - and they joined together to send out a simple message to potential visitors ... set your sat-nav for the south of Scotland.

And who could argue with that sentiment.

Together they served to showcase the outstanding and diverse tourism offer that is available throughout the south of Scotland, from Portpatrick in the west to Eyemouth looking out over the North Sea.

The awards served to remind us all that whether its a day trip, a weekend break or an extended stay - the south of Scotland has something for everyone.

A short-list of 32 nominees taking part in the awards ceremony helped to underline that universal appeal.

South of Scotland Thistle trophies were awarded in 13 categories representing everything from where to stay, good food and what to see ... and what to put in the diary.

Top performance went to Melanie Allen (above) with husband John who run the Nithbank Country Estate north of Dumfries.

Melanie picked up three Thistle Awards, for Best B&B or Guest House Experience, Climate Action Award and Tourism Individual of the Year.

The evening was hosted by former ITV Border's reporter Lori Carnochan and entertainment provided by *Smith and McClennan*, husband and wife duo Emily Smith and John McClennan.

The winners now travel to the Hilton in Glasgow on December 1 to take part in the national Scottish Thistle Awards organised by VisitScotland.

We wish them well.



## Good luck

**The inaugural South of Scotland Thistle Awards were a great success, celebrating the very best tourism businesses in our region.**

They allowed us to show the fantastic quality, excellence and sustainability which exists right across the South of Scotland.

The event was hosted by the amazing Cairndale Hotel and it wouldn't have been possible without our event sponsor Caledonia Park Designer Outlet and our category sponsors: Borders Distillery, Fishers, the Scottish Licensed Trade Association, Johnstons of Elgin and SW Audio.

By bringing together and honouring our region's leading lights in tourism and hospitality, it truly was a celebration of the South of Scotland, by the South of Scotland.



We are enormously proud of all our regional finalists and winners, and we wish those going on to the national finals all the very best of luck as they fly the flag for the South of Scotland at the national finals on 1st December.

**David Hope-Jones OBE**  
Chief Executive Officer  
South of Scotland Destination Alliance

The 2023 South of Scotland Thistle Awards in association with Caledonia Park Design Outlet

Best Visitor Attraction

# Trimontium Museum

“What an honour to win this award. “We were delighted to have been shortlisted for the South of Scotland Thistle Awards and are privileged to be a winner.

“It is our amazing volunteers and staff who have made this possible.

“We look forward to continuing to share the story of the Roman Iron Age with our visitors, whether local, national or international.”

*Volunteer & Visitor Experience Manager  
Frances Mann*



**TRIMONTIUM MUSEUM**

Market Square, Melrose

**MORE**

For opening times, events and more information  
e [info@trimontium.co.uk](mailto:info@trimontium.co.uk) w [www.trimontium.co.uk](http://www.trimontium.co.uk)

Best Hotel Experience

# Cringletie, Peebles

“To be a regional finalist in the Thistles is fabulous, but to be named as winner of Best Hotel Experience, and in such prestigious company, is a great honour.

This recognizes the hard work of the whole team and we are extremely proud to be bringing this award home to Peebles.

*Owner  
Bill Cross*



**GET IN TOUCH**

Edinburgh Road, Peebles, EH45 8PL  
Tel: 01721 725750 e [enquiries@cringletie.com](mailto:enquiries@cringletie.com)  
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*This category supported by Fishers*

# The Devil's Porridge Museum



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Tel: 01461 700021 e [info@devilsporridge.org.uk](mailto:info@devilsporridge.org.uk)  
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# Dalscone Farm



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w [www.dalsconefarmfun.co.uk](http://www.dalsconefarmfun.co.uk)

# Cairndale Hotel, Dumfries



**GET IN TOUCH**

132-136 English Street, Dumfries, DG1 2DF  
Tel: 01387 254111 e [info@cairndalehotel.co.uk](mailto:info@cairndalehotel.co.uk)  
w [www.cairndalehotel.co.uk](http://www.cairndalehotel.co.uk)

# The Selkirk Arms Hotel, Kirkcudbright



**GET IN TOUCH**

High Street, Kirkcudbright, DG6 4JG  
Tel: 01557 330402  
e [reception@selkirkarmshotel.co.uk](mailto:reception@selkirkarmshotel.co.uk)  
w [www.selkirkarmshotel.co.uk](http://www.selkirkarmshotel.co.uk)

**Best B&B or Guest House Experience**



# Nithbank Country Estate

“We are honoured and delighted to win this prestigious award.

“The Thistle Awards are the pinnacle of success for tourism in Scotland and showcase a commitment to providing consistency through authentic and quality guest experiences.

“The great tourism product we are able to offer is only made possible through working with some amazing local businesses and our wider community.

“It is definitely a collaborative effort that goes towards creating unique and memorable moments for guests here at Nithbank.

**Owner  
Melanie Allen**



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**Best Eating Experience**



# Allanton Inn

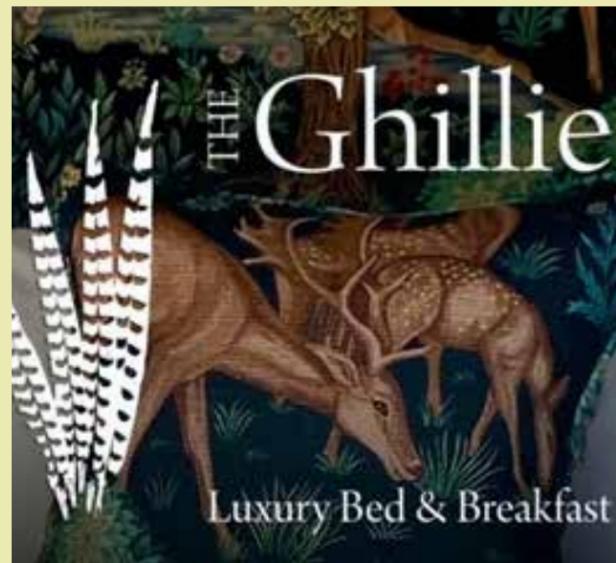


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Tel: 01890 818260 e [info@allantoninn.co.uk](mailto:info@allantoninn.co.uk)  
w [www.allantoninn.co.uk](http://www.allantoninn.co.uk)

“We were over the moon that the Allanton Inn was shortlisted for Best Eating Experience, but to win this prestigious award for the South of Scotland is humbling recognition for our community and our hard working team, who always strive to passionately showcase all things local and the best our region has to offer.”

**Proprietor  
Katrina Reynolds**

# The Ghillie BnB



**GET IN TOUCH**  
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w [www.theghilliebnp.com](http://www.theghilliebnp.com)

# Queensberry House



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e [stay@queensburyhouse.com](mailto:stay@queensburyhouse.com)  
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# Laggan



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# Out-there Artisan



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Harestanes, Ancrum, Jedburgh, TD8 6UQ  
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w [www.out-thereartisan.co.uk](http://www.out-thereartisan.co.uk)



**South of Scotland Thistle Awards  
2023**

*Innovation in Tourism – Dalscone Farm*  
*Best B&B or Guesthouse Experience – Nithbank Country Estate*  
*Best Self-Catering Accommodation Experience – Arden Holiday Cottage*  
*Best Bar or Pub – The Cross Keys Inn Ettrickbridge*  
*Best Hotel Experience – Cringletie*  
*Best Eating Experience – Allanton Inn*  
*Outstanding Cultural Event or Festival – Borders Book Festival*  
*Climate Action Award – Nithbank Country Estate*  
*Celebrating Thriving Communities Award – The Devil's Porridge Museum*  
*Best Visitor Attraction – Trimontium Museum*  
*Best Outdoor or Adventure Experience – Kitchen Coos and Ewes*  
*Tourism and Hospitality Employer of the Year – The Beagle Country Pub and Barend Holiday Lodges*  
*Tourism Individual of the Year – Melanie Allen (Nithbank Country Estate)*



Photographs - Phil Wilkinson

**Best Bar or Pub**

Winner

# The Cross Keys Inn - Ettrickbridge



"Bringing the Cross Keys Inn back to life has been a hugely rewarding experience and we are thrilled to be recognised in this way."

This Thistle Award is testament to the passion and enthusiasm of our team who work brilliantly to keep the pub at the heart of the community."

**Owner  
Rory Steel**



**GET IN TOUCH**

Main Street, Ettrickbridge, Selkirk, TD7 5JN

Tel: 44 (0) 1750 52224

w [www.crosskeysinnettrickbridge.com](http://www.crosskeysinnettrickbridge.com)

*This category supported by the  
Scottish Licensed Trade Association*

**Climate Action Award**

Winner

# Nithbank Country Estate

"For Nithbank to be recognised as a Thistle Award winner in this category is a huge accolade and in doing so we recognise our amazing Biosphere and Scottish Community Tourism (SCOTO) networks."

"Taking action to be both a luxury and responsible, community focussed business is important to us and sits at the heart of everything we do."

"It's not always the easy choice but it's the right choice, and, through advocacy and collaboration, we continue on that journey; to innovate and create a guest experience that evidences the provenance of Nithbank and the south of Scotland as a destination."

"We hope to inspire more visitors and grow our reputation, combining 'world-class excellence' in a world-class environment."

**Owner  
Melanie Allen**



**GET IN TOUCH**

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w [www.nithbank.co.uk](http://www.nithbank.co.uk)

**Innovation in Tourism**

Winner

# Dalscone Farm

"It's a tremendous honour to win the Innovation in Tourism Award."

"We work incredibly hard every day to create content and grow our social media presence."

"We are proud to be able to contribute to the local tourism industry and bring visitors from not only the UK, but all over the world to Dumfries and Galloway."

**Owner  
Ben Best**

**CONTACT US**

Dalscone Farm Fun & Toy Shop

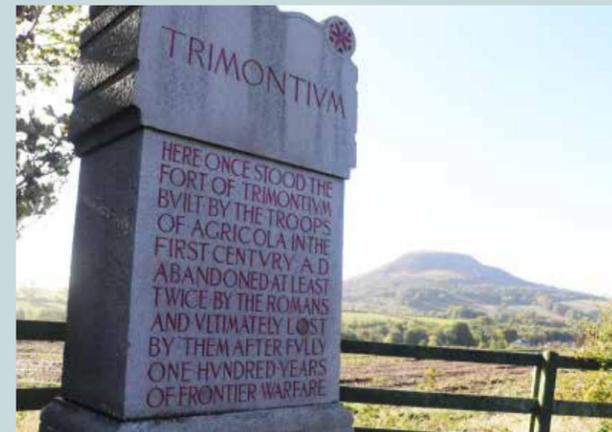
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# Trimontium Museum



**TRIMONTIUM MUSEUM**

Market Square, Melrose

MORE

For opening times, events and more information

e [info@trimontium.co.uk](mailto:info@trimontium.co.uk) w [www.trimontium.co.uk](http://www.trimontium.co.uk)

# Congratulations

Huge congratulations to all the finalists and winners in the first South of Scotland Thistle Awards; recognition of their hard work attracting and accommodating visitors to our wonderful region.

To have a dedicated awards evening for the tourism and hospitality sector in the South highlights the commitment of SOSE, SSDA, Visit Scotland and both councils to the local industry.

All the partners are also committed to the new South of Scotland Tourism Responsible Strategy that aims to deliver the best for our visitors, our businesses, our people, communities and the environment.



**Prof Russel Griggs  
Chair, South of Scotland Enterprise**

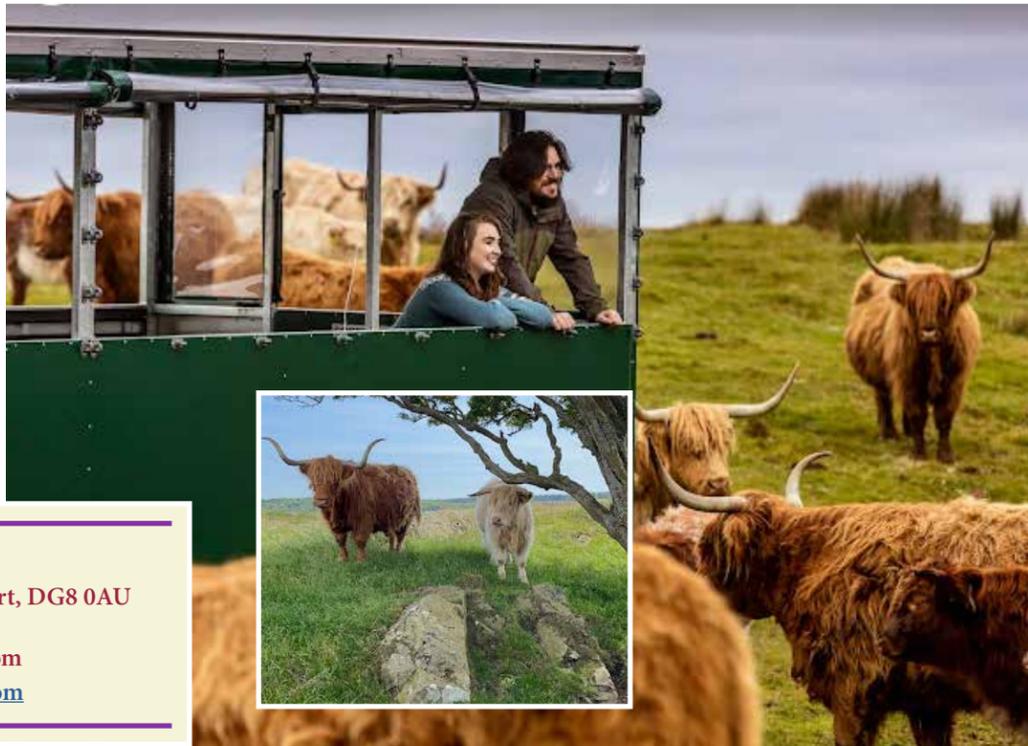
Best Outdoor or Adventure Experience



# Kitchen Coos and Ewes

“We are absolutely thrilled to have won this prestigious award. When we started to create our Highland Coo experiences all we had was a germ of an idea and a herd of coos in a field of dreams. Along with our fantastic wee team we built it and the people came.”

**Owner**  
*Neale McQuistin*



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High Arrioland, Newton Stewart, DG8 0AU  
Tel: 07944 850823  
e [info@kitchencoosandewes.com](mailto:info@kitchencoosandewes.com)  
w [www.kitchencoosandewes.com](http://www.kitchencoosandewes.com)

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**Owner**  
*Hester Binge*



**GET IN TOUCH**

Arden Holiday Cottage, Irongray,  
Dumfries DG2 9SQ, UK  
Tel: 07896101106 e [hester@ardenholidaycottage.co.uk](mailto:hester@ardenholidaycottage.co.uk)  
w [www.ardenholidaycottage.co.uk](http://www.ardenholidaycottage.co.uk)

# Beirhope Alpacas



**GET IN TOUCH**

Beirhope Farm, Hownam, Kelso, TD5 8AP  
Tel: 01573 440631 e [hello@beirhope.co.uk](mailto:hello@beirhope.co.uk)  
w [www.beirhope.co.uk](http://www.beirhope.co.uk)

# Ridelines, Innerleithen



**GET IN TOUCH**

18 High Street, Innerleithen, EH44 6HF  
Tel: 07817 792544  
w [www.ridelines.co.uk](http://www.ridelines.co.uk)

# Loch Ken Eco Bothies



**GET IN TOUCH**

Loch Ken Eco Bothies, Parton,  
Castle Douglas DG7 3NQ  
Tel: 01556 502 011 e [info@lochkenecobothies.co.uk](mailto:info@lochkenecobothies.co.uk)  
w [www.lochkenecobothies.co.uk](http://www.lochkenecobothies.co.uk)

# Tiny Home Borders



**GET IN TOUCH**

Hallrule Farms, Bonchester Bridge, Hawick, TD9 8JF  
Tel: 07813 708674 e [Claire@tinyhomeborders.co.uk](mailto:Claire@tinyhomeborders.co.uk)  
w [tinyhomeborders.co.uk](http://tinyhomeborders.co.uk)



# The Devil's Porridge Museum

"The Devil's Porridge Museum is highly pleased to receive this prestigious award, which recognises the outstanding work we do in our local community with both young and older people.

Our Climate Change project is especially exemplary.

The Thistle Awards are recognised as a benchmark for excellence in the tourism sector and our team is proud as punch to be recognised for the efforts they put in to give visitors a warm welcome when they come to our great area of Scotland."

**Chair**  
**Richard Brodie**



**CONTACT US**

Stanfield, Annan Road, Eastriggs, DG12 6TF  
Tel: 01461 700021 e info@devilsporridge.org.uk  
w [www.devilsporridge.org.uk](http://www.devilsporridge.org.uk)

*This category supported by Johnstons of Elgin*

## Go Wild Scotland



**GET IN TOUCH**

Go Wild Scotland, Raebank, Chapel St,  
Selkirk TD7 4LB  
Tel: 07525 006350 e explore@gowildscotland.com  
w [www.gowildscotland.com](http://www.gowildscotland.com)

## KTP Development Trust



**GET IN TOUCH**

Main Street, Penpont, Thirnhill, Dumfries and Galloway  
Tel: 01848 331435  
e info.ktpdt@gmail.com

@KTP Development Trust



# Barend Holiday Lodges & the Beagle Country Pub



It's an honour to win the award for best hospitality employer.

We are keen to run a business that treats employees how we wish to be treated ourselves and it's wonderful to have that recognised.

Thanks you to our great team for their hard work.

**Director**  
**Sarah Gell**

**GET IN TOUCH**

Barend Holiday Village, Sandyhills, Dalbeattie,  
Dumfries & Galloway, DG5 4NU  
Tel: 01387 780663 e info@barendholidaylodges.uk  
w [www.barendholidaylodges.uk](http://www.barendholidaylodges.uk)



**GET IN TOUCH**

The Beagle Country Pub  
Barend Holiday Village  
Tel: 01387 733632

## Congratulations and good luck



Congratulations to all the winners at the very first South of Scotland Thistle Awards.

The Scottish Thistle Awards shine a spotlight on the very best of Scotland's tourism and events industry, celebrating the businesses and individuals who work hard to create the fantastic destination and visitor experiences that Scotland is famous for.

I wish the regional winners the very best of luck as they continue through to the Scottish Thistle Awards national final in December.

**Steven Walker**  
**Visit Scotland Board member**  
**Chair of the Scottish Thistle Awards industry panel**

Outstanding Cultural Event or Festival

# Borders Book Festival, Melrose



“Borders Book Festival is delighted to have won this prestigious award. We really value such a positive endorsement of our work and our enhanced programme in 2022, celebrating Scotland’s Year of Stories.

“None of it would have been possible without the support of our community, our volunteers and our small but passionate team.”

**Festival Director  
Paula Gilvie**



**CONTACT US**

Harmony House St Mary’s Road Melrose TD6 9LJ

Tel: 01896 822644

w [www.bordersbookfestival.org](http://www.bordersbookfestival.org)

*This category supported by The Borders Distillery*

# Spring Fling Open Studios



**GET IN TOUCH**

Gracefield Arts Centre, 28 Edinburgh Road,

Dumfries, Scotland, DG1 1JQ

Tel: 07871201473 & 07787299487 e [hello@weareupland.com](mailto:hello@weareupland.com)

w [www.weareupland.com](http://www.weareupland.com)



# Newton Stewart and Minnigaff Traditional Music and Dance Festival



**GET IN TOUCH**

The Vault Arts Centre, 40 Victoria Street, Newton Stewart, Wigtownshire, DG8 6BT

Tel: 01671 404 924 and 07970 359 557

e [festival@tradmusic.com](mailto:festival@tradmusic.com) w [www.tradmusic.com](http://www.tradmusic.com)

# Tourism Individual of the Year



“I am absolutely thrilled to be recognised as Tourism Individual of the Year on such a special occasion, the inaugural South of Scotland Thistle Awards.

“Winning this award is such a wonderful accolade, and one that I dedicate to all the individuals who are part of my journey.

“Success in tourism is always at its best when it is achieved in collaboration with other like-minded people, who work with a shared vision.

“Through these cherished relationships, I hope the passion and ambition I have for this region continues to be contagious with both businesses, visitors and communities.

Wishing massive congratulations to all the award winners and finalists celebrating this evening and making a difference to tourism in the South of Scotland.

**Melanie Allen  
Owner - Nithbank Country Estate**

**Chair - Galloway and Southern UNESCO Biosphere  
Board Director, Scottish Community Tourism (SCOTO)  
Scottish Tourism & Hospitality Industry Leadership  
Group**

**“Working together there are no boundaries to what we can achieve.”**

# Stranraer Oyster Festival



**GET IN TOUCH**

Stranraer Development Trust, Clock Tower, Market Street, Stranraer, DG9 7RF

w [www.stranraeroysterfestival.com](http://www.stranraeroysterfestival.com)

# The home of a global sporting favourite...

Exactly when and where Ned Haig experienced his 'eureka' moment and came up with the idea of seven-a-side rugby seems forever destined to remain lost in the mists of time.

But one thing is certain, the flash of inspiration from the Borders lad working as a butcher's apprentice in Melrose has earned him a seat at the top table of sporting history and a special place in local folklore.

It has also bequeathed a lasting legacy, to Melrose Rugby Football Club, the town and the region, of a magnitude that no one, least of all Ned and his pals, could have dared imagine.

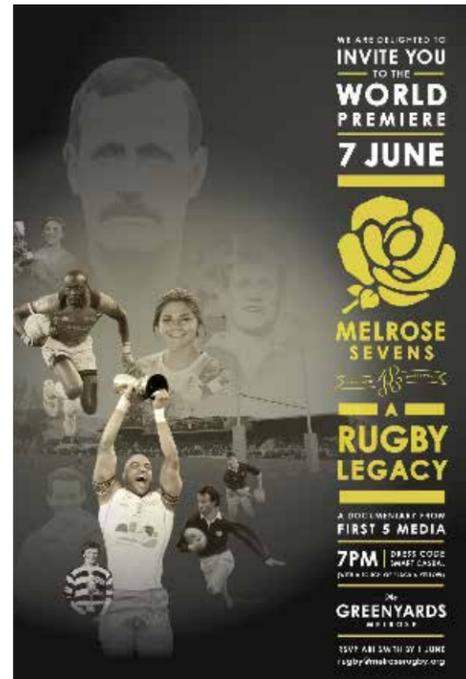
Six years after its inception in 1877 the club found itself somewhat strapped for cash and in desperate need of a decent idea to raise funds. Players and members "for want of money racked their brains" – and, necessity being the mother of invention, along came Ned's brainwave for a sevens rugby tournament.

Reflecting on the first 25 years of sevens success in an article entitled 'An old Melrose Player's Recollections,' written a hundred years ago, Ned explained: "The idea struck me that a (rugby) football tournament might prove attractive but as it was hopeless to think of having several games on one afternoon with 15 players on each side the teams were reduced to seven."

Simple but absolutely brilliant. Before long sevens rugby had spread far and wide, destined to become an essential and hugely popular part of the game.

The fact that sevens rugby today is played internationally and has its own world cup – teams compete for the Melrose Cup of course – puts Ned shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Charles Alcock, William Lynn and Geo Lefevre whose efforts gave the world the sporting classics of the FA Cup, the Grand National and the Tour de France respectively.

Every April since 1883, with enforced exceptions brought about by war (and more recently Corona virus), the flags have fluttered enthusiastically at Melrose RFC's Greenyards ground to celebrate the original and most respected sevens tournament in the world of rugby.



## ...and a local hero forever the "voice of rugby"



[www.exploretheborders.com](http://www.exploretheborders.com)

I can still hear Bill McLaren's voice now, commentating on one of the internationals (the Five Nations in those days) letting us know that a player was off on a "mazy run."

A finer ambassador for the game of rugby you couldn't hope to meet - and in this, his centenary year, the subject of a special film and exhibition.

Staged at Hawick Museum the commemorative exhibition traced Bill's life from his schooldays in Hawick, a courageous fight to overcome tuberculosis to his time as a PE teacher in Hawick and then a glittering career as a journalist, writer and broadcaster.

The exhibition recreates the organised chaos of Bill's study and his last recorded interview, sharing his ways to prepare for big match commentaries.

Essentially, this honorable "Terie" - a *native of the borders town of Hawick* - was successful by simply being himself.

And if you missed the exhibition the first time round don't worry; it reopens in March 2024 alongside a new Hawick Rugby Football Club celebration to mark its 150th anniversary. (We'll preview with full details in our February - March issue).

The Bill McLaren exhibition has been made possible by a partnership between the Bill McLaren Foundation, Hawick Rugby Club and Live Borders with support from SSE Renewables and Scottish Borders Council.

[www.exploretheborders.com](http://www.exploretheborders.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](http://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](mailto:editor@exploretheborders.com)



# Talking TOURISM



with  
Rachael Hamilton MSP  
for Ettrick, Roxburghshire  
and Berwickshire



## A region that's home to inspirational museums

We're lucky to have so many fantastic museums across the Borders.

They're brilliant for young people, families and anyone interested in our wonderful local history.

Recently, I've had the chance to visit just a few of the first-class museums right on our doorstep.

One of those has been the Eyemouth Museum, which I visited to commemorate and learn about the historic Eyemouth fishing disaster when 189 fishermen drowned in a severe windstorm off the South-East coast of Scotland.

The museum tells the story of Eyemouth through the years, highlighting important milestones including the building of Eyemouth Fort in 1547 and the creation of the lifeboat station in 1876.

I found it fascinating to hear about how the local area originated.

Another museum I visited recently only opened this year in Coldstream, the Admiral Ramsay Museum.

It has been established in memory of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, who commanded the Dunkirk evacuation and D-Day landings.

Set up by Admiral Ramsay's grandson, Will, it is a great educational experience about what he achieved during World War Two.

These are just two of the huge diversity of outstanding museums we're blessed with in the Borders.

There's also the Trimontium Museum near Melrose, a brilliant resource of Roman artefacts. I was delighted to see the UK Government recently award it with £57,861 to provide the newly refurbished activity space at the museum with virtual reality and digital equipment.

For people more interested in sports, the Jim Clark Motorsport Museum is also well worth a visit. It marks the life of the world champion racing driver who grew up near Duns.

Learning experiences like these museums are great days out for people of all ages.

They can help to inspire children, bring families together to engage in fun activities, and give adults a better understanding of our local area.

I hope you consider coming to the Borders to make your own memories at our museums soon.

**Rachael Hamilton MSP**  
Member of the Scottish Parliament for Ettrick,  
Roxburgh and Berwickshire constituency

The Scottish Parliament  
Parliament na h-Alba

If there are any issues that I can help you with,  
please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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📘 /Rachael2Win

The cost of this publication has been met from parliamentary resources.  
The SPCB is not responsible for the content of other internet sites.

## Galashiels Gigs at MacArts

by Aline Varty

Nestled just behind the Great Tapestry of Scotland in Galashiels you can find MacArts, the Scottish Borders' only independent performance venue.

A beautiful hosting venue for theatre and the arts, MacArts boasts a huge array of artists and performers to have walked through their doors.

Showcasing both national and international touring artists MacArts provides a space primarily for local and Scottish emerging talent.

The venue itself, an early English gothic church with stained glass windows, creates a wonderfully intimate experience with exceptional acoustics due to its high vaulted ceilings.

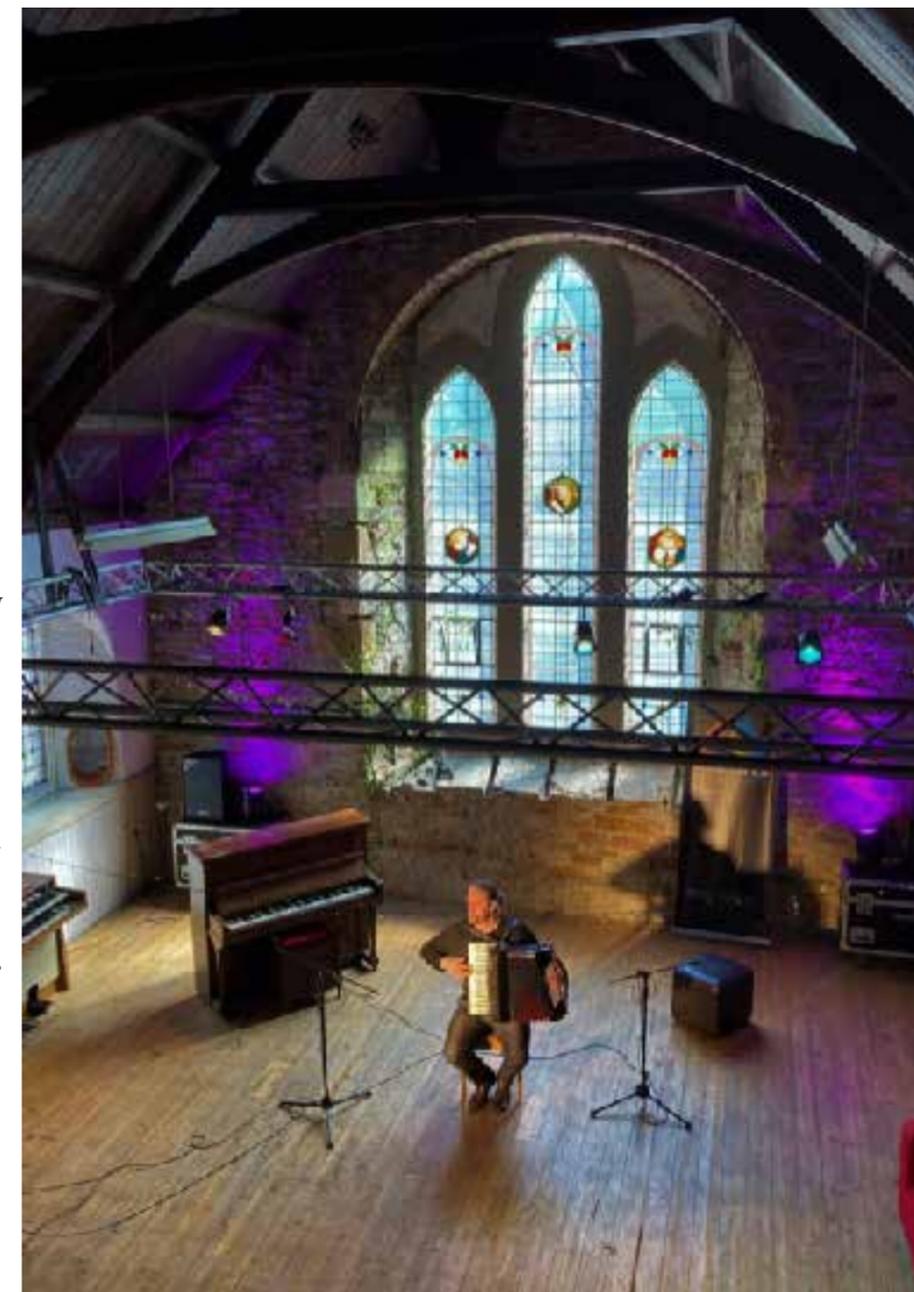
With a capacity for up to 300 people, bands such as Scouting for Girls to our very own local Patterson have performed here.

Additionally, a separately secluded platform at the back of the venue offers space for individuals who experience any issues from sensory overload to claustrophobia, making these performances accessible to everybody.

As a charity run venue, MacArts relies on both community donations and government subsidies, yet still manages to engage local projects.

Having worked with organisations such as the Harris Trust to aid learning in neurodivergent young people or providing songwriting workshops for young local musicians, MacArts provides a fabulous and much needed cultural centre for the Scottish Borders.

Whether you are looking for a night of music, dance, comedy, spoken word or even a creative workshop be sure to check out <http://www.macarts.scot> for current events!



## Up and coming events

### Arab Strap

Described by The Guardian as 'a union between Sleaford Mods and Leonard Cohen consummated in a Glasgow public toilet', this Scottish indie rock band combine sordid, honest lyrics with a large spoonful of humour in an experience for all the senses.

Thursday 7th December: £27.50

### Gun + The Godfathers

Hailing from Glasgow, Gun blends elements of glam, pop rock and metal into a heavy but accessible sound. Celebrating their 2022 album 'Calton Songs' the group affectionately reflect on the wild and hazy days of their adolescence that ultimately formed their core values.

Friday 8th December: £29.50

### Killer Instinct

The Killer's biggest tribute band is coming to the Borders for an evening of nostalgia and party!

Saturday 16th December: £12.50



MacArts  
Bridge Street, Galashiels  
TD1 1SP

Tel: 01896 756852  
w macarts.scot

# An award winning wedding venue...

**P**eebles Hydro Hotel and Spa has built a reputation over the years as a superb location to mark that special occasion.

No surprises then to see the centre up for a trio of top awards on the wedding day front.

Peebles Hydro has been selected as a finalist for the celebrated Venue of the Year award in the Scottish Wedding Awards 2024.

The hotel has also been short-listed as a finalist for the same category in the Nations Wedding Awards after winning the Scottish Wedding Awards Venue of the Year Award 2023.

In addition, the Peebles Hydro has been named as a finalist for the Best Wedding Package category in the prestigious Confetti Magazine Awards 2023.

The Scottish Wedding Awards aim to recognise and reward those who have demonstrated excellence in the wedding industry.

In addition, the Peebles Hydro has been named as a finalist for the Best Wedding Package category in the Confetti Magazine Awards 2023.

The National Wedding Awards will take place on March 6, 2024 in Glasgow, where top specialists and venues that have gone above and beyond in the sector will gather to celebrate their achievements.

Caroline Raeburn, Peebles Hydro Hotel Manager said: "We're absolutely thrilled to have these recognitions which are testament to our commitment, meticulous attention to detail, creativity and passion in helping couples bring their vision of a dream wedding day to life here at Peebles."

"Peebles Hydro is a much sought-after wedding choice, thanks to our iconic venue and location with stunning views across the Tweed Valley.

"Our team has a unique, warm synergy and go the extra mile every time to deliver the 'stand out' elements of a wedding that create an unforgettable lifetime memory."

"I'd like to say a huge thank you to the Peebles Hydro team and the couples who choose Peebles Hydro as their wedding venue. We look forward to the awards ceremony in March and wish all the finalists the best of luck."

A Spokesperson for The Scottish Wedding Awards 2024 said: "This year marks the 11th anniversary of The Scottish Wedding Awards and we are delighted to be celebrating not only the finalists but how far the industry has come in the past decade.

Couples who would like to find out more about having their wedding at Peebles Hydro can visit [www.peebleshydro.co.uk](http://www.peebleshydro.co.uk)



## ...and home to a top distillery

Renowned Scottish gin maker 1881 Distillery has been recognised at one of the industry's most prestigious awards ceremonies, winning two honours at The Gin Guide Awards 2023.

The brand's navy strength gin, Honours, was crowned a winner in the High ABV category and overall highest scorer for Scotland, while 1881's Tiffin Gin received a highly commended accolade in the Spiced Gin category.

The awards celebrate the very best gins the industry has to offer, with an expert panel of judges examining the appearance, aroma, taste and overall appeal of each tippel from hundreds of entrants globally.

The 1881 distillery - is located at Peebles Hydro Resort in the Scottish Borders - is named after the year the iconic venue was founded, with many of its gins drawing inspiration from its rich history, surroundings and culinary excellence.

The hotel served as a military hospital during the second World War, with 1881 Honours Navy Strength Gin paying homage to those injured during the conflict.

Meanwhile Tiffin Gin was expertly crafted in collaboration with Peebles Hydro's cheffing team, originally as an accompaniment to an Indian concept menu offered at the hotel.

Charlie Leckie, brand manager for 1881 Distillery, said: "It's

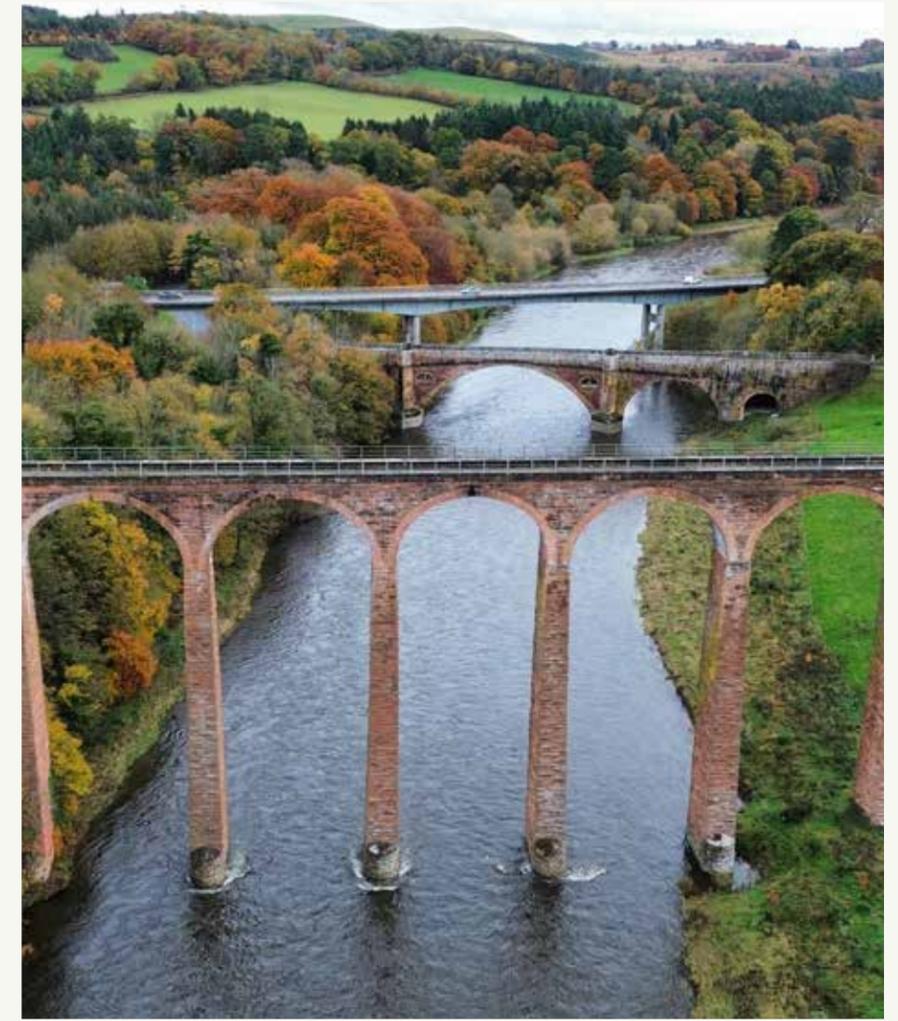
a real honour to be recognised in The Gin Guide Awards for yet another year. We pride ourselves on creating exciting, delicious gins which celebrate Peebles Hydro's rich heritage and the people the hotel has welcomed over the years.

"This could not have been possible without the hard-work and dedication from our fantastic team. The enthusiasm and energy they bring is unmatched, and it's that edge which I believe gives our gins the true gold standard."

To find out more about 1881 Distillery, or to book a tasting, visit: [www.1881distillery.com](http://www.1881distillery.com)



## Your front cover picture ...



This spectacular shot by Explore's Steven Somerville captures a fascinating chapter of transport history in the Scottish Borders.

In the foreground is the spectacular Leaderfoot Viaduct built in 1865 and one of two major railway viaducts (the other is at Berwick) serving the region. The line was formally closed in 1965.

In the centre we have the Drygrange Old Bridge - a major north-south river crossing built in 1778-80.

At the top is the modern A68 and the major road route north through the borders to Edinburgh.

For those wanting to take a closer look there's a signed turn-off (northbound) that takes you down to a parking area.

It's just off the Drygrange Old Bridge and well worth the stop.

## Dont miss an issue

Explore the Borders Magazine is delivered free of charge to desktops everywhere.

To make sure of your regular delivery just drop us a line and we'll put you on the mailing list.

Get in touch at ...

[editor@exploretheborders.com](mailto:editor@exploretheborders.com)

# Bountiful borderlands



with  
David Hope-Jones OBE  
CEO of South of Scotland Destination Alliance

Stunning starcapes, learning to curl, bracing frosty walks (with or without alpacas!) or following in the Bard's footsteps – the South of Scotland really is a magical place in the wintertime, with a smörgåsbord of things for visitors of all ages to do, see and discover.

As part of our 'Scotland Starts Here' campaign, we're proud to have launched our latest strand, 'Endless Adventures All Year Round', highlighting just how much our region has to offer during the cooler months.

Throughout our meetings and discussions with tourism and hospitality businesses these past few months, our paramount objective – and that of our partners - has been to really listen to and engage with the sector, and to make sure our focus is directly informed by their feedback and ideas.

This is a collective and collaborative effort: working together to show the very best of our region.

With this in mind, we've created a handy [winter 'bucket list'](#) highlighting attractions businesses and communities told us they want to see prioritised at this time of year.

It captures the enduring charm and beauty of the South of Scotland during the traditionally more challenging 'shoulder months' of the tourist season.

From jaw-dropping dark skies and unforgettable Burns landmarks to wintry wonderlands and sumptuous Scottish food and drink, this carefully curated shortlist of 'don't miss' experiences is designed to inspire residents and visitors alike to make the most of the South of Scotland now the temperatures are dropping.

The Winter Bucket List is part of an ongoing seasonally-themed campaign to showcase how our amazing region comes alive in different ways throughout the year.

We're rolling out a digital marketing campaign to drive awareness in target markets, and businesses will have access to campaign materials, such as social media graphics, so they can share the message to their own audiences.

This is a first step towards creating a vibrant, year-round visitor offering for the region and aligns with the South of Scotland



Destination Alliance's focus on sustainable tourism development; encouraging longer stays, out of season travel and experiencing local communities and culture.

The South of Scotland is beautiful in every season. By working together, with pride and energy, to attract visitors right through the

year we can have a visitor economy which powers community prosperity.

Photographs with thanks to  
Beirhope Alpacas and Explore's  
Dennis Laing.

**SOUTH OF SCOTLAND**  
SCOTLAND STARTS HERE

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# Stow Cycle Hub gaining momentum

The Stow Cycle Hub is a perfect example of how a Community Interest Company (CIC) can succeed and thrive.

And making this happen is bike enthusiast Stephen Riddell and a band of volunteers based in Stow and nearby Fountainhall.

Stephen inspired the community workshop for all things cycling and with support from Stow Community Trust and the supply of a spacious room at the back of the beautifully renovated Stow Railway House the project is growing from strength to strength.

The main part of the handsome Victorian building, threatened with demolition after its decline since the railway closed in 1969, is now a café eatery welcoming locals and passengers from the re-opened Edinburgh to Tweedbank Waverley line.

“Cyclists can come along and repair a bike previously ready for the skip and have it in perfect working order within a few weeks”, said Stephen.

This goes a step further with pupils from Jedburgh Grammar attending workshops in cycle repair which could ultimately gain them Nat 3 or 4 qualifications.

It’s possible to hire conventional or e-bikes there for an hour, a day, a week or longer if you want to take one or two on holiday.

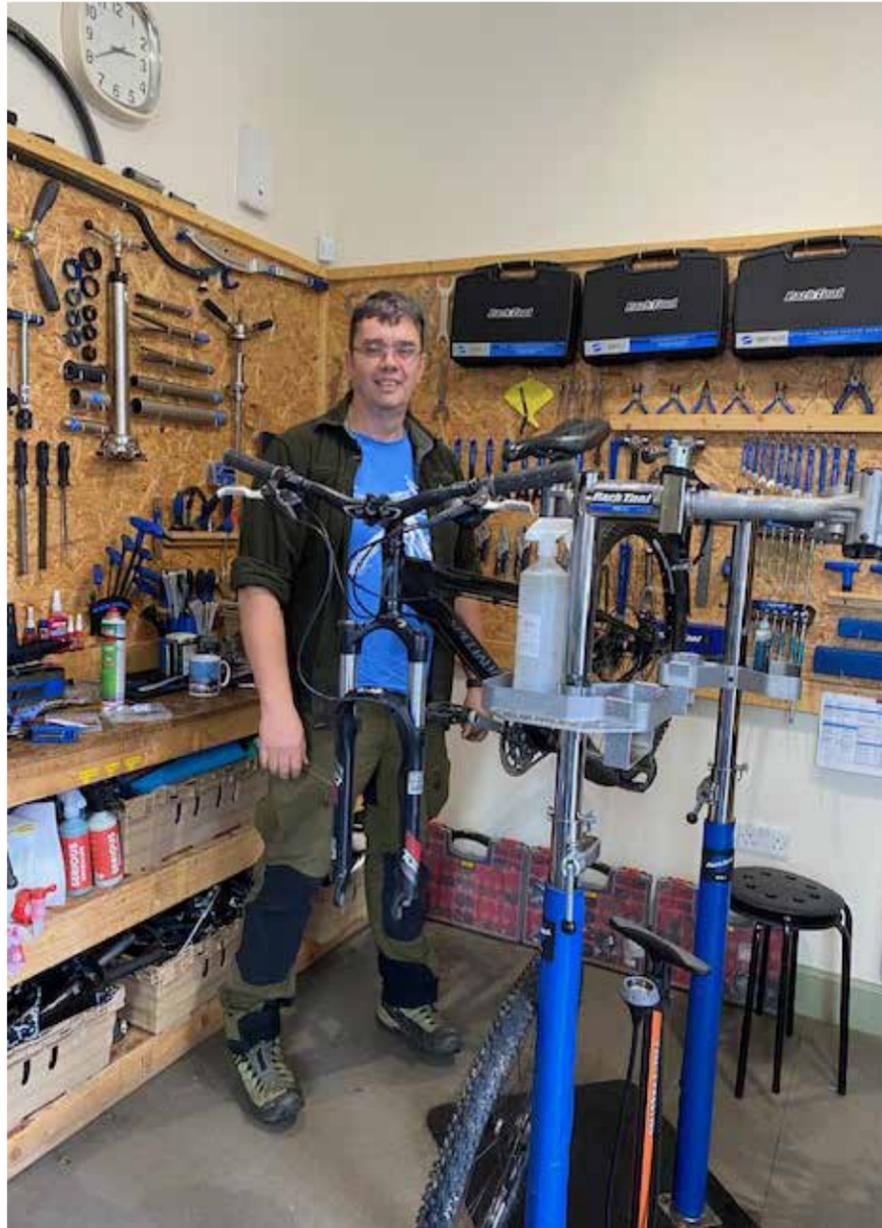
And for details of whether you are eligible for e-bike loan check the Cycle Hub web site.

The Cycle to Health from the Hub on Wednesday mornings is an inspiration as it’s literally a prescription for those recovering from illness or surgery.

So what does our enthusiastic spokesman do on his precious days off?

“I tinker around with my acoustic bikes in my home workshop of course ... then I go for a ride around the Glentress area,” said Stephen (right) in his workshop at The Cycle Hub.

Check out The Stow Cycle Hub Face book page or The Stow and Fountainhall Community Hub for more information and you could be exploring the beautiful Wedale Valley on one of the bikes ... for some it will be electrifying!



## Borders home for national biking hub

A MUCH-ANTICIPATED mountain bike hub at the site of a former Peeblesshire mill will open in 2025.

The innovation centre, with a bike park and trail lab, will be built at Innerleithen’s Caerlee Mill, near Glentress.

Richard Lochhead – Scottish Government minister for small business, innovation and trade – made the announcement at the formal launch of ‘Strategy for Scottish Mountain Biking 2023-2025.’

“Scotland is benefitting from a growing reputation as an ideal location for mountain biking, with visitors and locals alike enjoying our amazing outdoors. Mountain biking can attract participants and spectators from around the world, drive domestic interest in the sport and encourage our entrepreneurs to develop innovative products to meet increased demand.

“The world’s first innovation centre for mountain biking can help make Scotland one of the most innovative small countries in the world,” he added.

### Stow Cycle Hub

More information

Mob: 07934 375817

w [www.stowcyclehub.com](http://www.stowcyclehub.com)



We offer an eclectic range of gifting ideas with a focus on locally-sourced and Scottish collections, including:

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We also have a range of Harris Tweed bags, purses, wallets and caps. Pop in and we’ll be delighted to help you find the perfect gift.

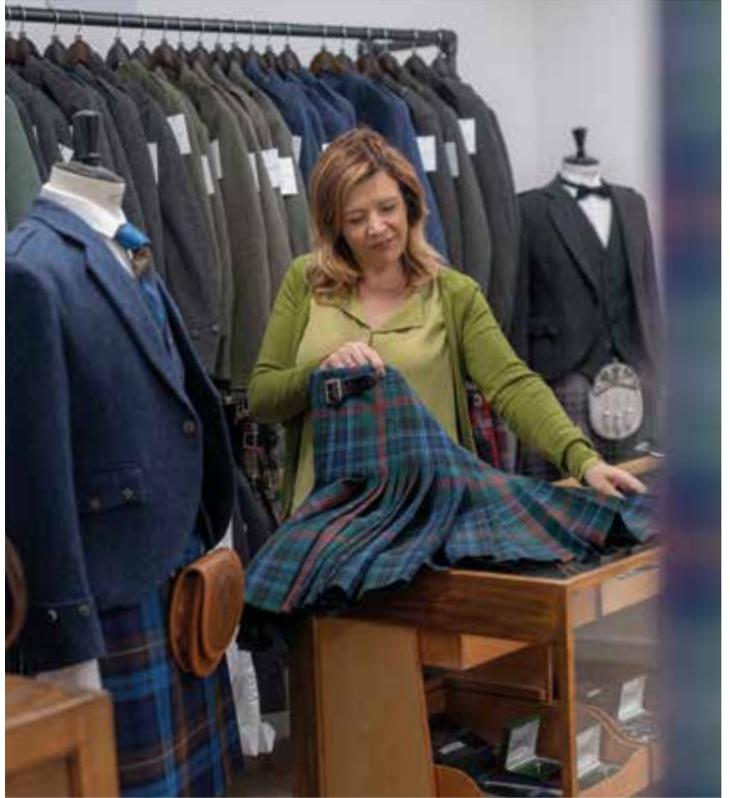
Our knowledgeable, friendly team can also provide you with information and advice to help you make the most of your time here. We can tell you about inspiring places to visit, the best places to eat and offer detailed maps and guidebooks to help you explore a bit further.

Look out for news about our Christmas Shopping event.

Find us at **Murray’s Green, Jedburgh, TD8 6BE**

For opening times please check [visitscotland.com/icentre](http://visitscotland.com/icentre)





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