



All visuals O'DonnellBrown / White Arkitekter and Axson Office

# THE LAUNDRY

## A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

Briefing paper | March 2024

---

# THE CONCEPT

---



THE LAUNDRY WILL BE  
A PLACE OF LEARNING,  
REFLECTION, AND ACTIVITY

---

---

## TELLING THE UNTOLD STORY OF SCOTLAND'S WOMEN

---

In an exciting new development, Scottish Women's Institutes (SWI) and The Crichton Trust are undertaking a landmark collaborative partnership which will create a centre of learning, reflection, and activity on The Crichton Estate near Dumfries.

A 1960s laundry building which served the psychiatric hospital The Crichton takes its name from will be innovatively redeveloped by the architect team O'DonnellBrown and White Arkitekter. The £15 million transformation will create a public venue which will house nationally important archives and artifacts of the SWI and The Crichton.

Viewed together, the collections contrast the lives of rural women with developments in institutional care and explore the synergies in wellbeing. Extraordinary stories reveal many shared touch points: rural life and its challenges and opportunities, and health and wellbeing, all from unheard women's voices.

Alongside exhibition galleries reflecting historical lives The Laundry will offer contemporary education, workshop, meeting and study spaces, cake café and shop, archive rooms and research facilities. It will also become the SWI's national office as the organisation relocates from the Central Belt.

The Laundry will showcase rural heritage, help us understand the present and inspire the future, becoming a beacon for the study of some of Scotland's most under-represented voices.



The exhibition and archives will be housed in a repurposed building on The Crichton Estate on the outskirts of Dumfries.

---

---

# THE COLLECTIONS

---



UNHEARD VOICES AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING LIE AT THE HEART OF BOTH STORIES

---

---

## THE LAUNDRY WILL OFFER A UNIQUE INSIGHT INTO WOMEN'S LIVES FROM 1900 TO TODAY

---

More than a century of Scotland's history is contained in the objects, photographs, official documents, and handmade artefacts The Crichton and the SWI hold in their care. Extraordinary items and compelling stories offer shared touch points revealing the unheard voices of rural women in Scotland.

Through its exhibition spaces and extensive archive, The Laundry will become a recognised resource to explore, discuss and discover the role of how women shaped and continue to shape rural Scotland, the opportunities and barriers they faced, how the power of agency is gained, demanded, and developed through collective action and participation in wellbeing activities.

The SWI also holds a significant collection of art and crafts including many gifted by the Needlework Development Scheme (NDS) which are part of a wider collection held by the V&A and Glasgow School of Art and thought to be lost. Hundreds of patients' artwork in The Crichton archives and records of pioneering work into arts and health and wellbeing are of international significance for researchers.



Boxes of exemplary crafts collated for the Needlework Development Scheme were loaned to SWI members across the country.

---

---

# THE LOCATION

---



AN UNLOVED BUILDING WILL BE INNOVATIVELY REPURPOSED IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY

---

---

## SOCIO ECONOMIC BENEFIT, NEIGHBOURS, UNESCO SITE ETC

---

A 1960s utilitarian structure called the Merrick building has been chosen as a site for the collections. Situated on the 85-acre Crichton Estate near Dumfries, it once served the Crichton Royal Institution, a pioneering asylum, as an NHS laundry facility.

Now it will undergo a £15 million transformation to become The Laundry, a dynamic hub showcasing and offering public access to a unique historical tapestry and contemporary workshops, events, and educational experiences.

The proposal to locate the SWI's new physical home outside the Central Belt is strategically aligned with contributing to a more balanced and inclusive Scotland. The membership body will join more than 100 businesses already on the Crichton Estate, including education providers such as The University of Glasgow, the University of the West of Scotland, and Dumfries and Galloway College.

It will become part of an on-going project of national importance as a model for both the re-purposing of a significant historic site and for the delivery of education, training, enterprise, and knowledge exchange.



The 85-acre Crichton Estate is home to more than 100 businesses and academic institutions, and its parkland provides leisure opportunities.

---

---

## THE TEAM

---



INNOVATIVE ARCHITECTS  
WILL ENABLE THE VISION  
TO BE REALISED

---

---

## THERE ARE TWO MAJOR SCOTTISH CHARITIES BEHIND THE PROJECT

---

The SWI and The Crichton are both Scottish charities and are dedicated to the preservation of the nation's rich heritage.

The SWI was founded in 1917 to advance the lives of rural women in Scotland. It is now Scotland's leading member-led organisation with 10,000 members in 500 communities across the country who benefit from its core values of education, health and wellbeing and skills development. A national programme of activities and member-led get togethers tackle social isolation and bring women together to learn and socialise.

The Crichton Trust promotes, regenerates and cares for The Crichton, a former asylum, and other buildings of historic interest throughout Dumfries and Galloway. It was formed in the 1980s when the value of a large psychiatric hospital was being questioned and, despite its international reputation, the Crichton Royal Hospital was considered surplus to requirements. However, the local community ensured that such a magnificent estate remained in public ownership.

Essential to the success of the project are the architects bringing the building back to life. O'DonnellBrown, in collaboration with White Arkitekter were selected as winners of an open international design competition organised by the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland to lead on this ground-breaking redevelopment.



Trustees from the SWI and The Crichton Trust (l-r): Mary Burney, Anne Kerr, Tricia Hunter, May Tosh, Linda McTurk, Joan Hutchison, David Hall, Linda Riddell, Susie Finlayson, Karen Johnson, Sybil Stuart, and Jane Hogg.



---

## ACADEMIC INTEREST

---



THE LAUNDRY WILL OFFER ACADEMICS A WEALTH OF EXTRAORDINARY STORIES

---

---

## FOSTERING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF SCOTLAND'S UNDER-REPRESENTED VOICES

---

This collaboration has sparked significant academic interest, and early indications show that The Laundry will make a significant contribution to understanding of women, health, and wellbeing.

The SWI archive documents the rise of a women's movement which fosters decision making, opportunities outside the home, skills development, and health benefits of community activities. Collaborations with government, deep Royal connections, and a change in attitudes are all evidenced. The archive also holds a art and crafts gifted by the Needlework Development Scheme.

The Crichton archive is of international significance for research, particularly into arts and health and wellbeing. It demonstrates the Crichton Royal Institution's significance as the first UK asylum to use a holistic system of creative therapy. They include several 'firsts' in theory and practice and form an accurate record of pioneering work in a reforming asylum with the direct precursors of modern psychiatrists. For these reasons, the documents are nationally and globally important.

The extraordinary parallel stories have shared touch points which help to tell Scotland's under-represented stories.

Together we can add the missing chapters and create a world leading home for a shared national heritage.



Lindy Richardson, Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, with part of the Needlework Development Scheme collection which was thought to be lost.



All visuals O'DonnellBrown / White Arkitekter and Axson Office

# THE LAUNDRY

## A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

### CONTACT DETAILS

The SWI: Diane Cooper, CEO, the SWI | 0131 225 1724 | [diane.cooper@theswi.org.uk](mailto:diane.cooper@theswi.org.uk)

The Crichton: Gwilym Gibbons, CEO, The Crichton | 01387 247544 | [g.gibbons@crichton.co.uk](mailto:g.gibbons@crichton.co.uk)

