

Sell Scotland to a material world

ADVERTISING FEATURE

An opportunity to champion the national dress globally as Director of The Scottish Tartans Authority serves to protect its legacy, says **Ken Mann**

INJECTING the assurance of a completely credible knowledge base into the subject of Scottish Tartans and Highland attire etiquette is more than an engaging cultural nicety – it's a national economic expedient.

With a title that lends a deliberate sense of gravitas, The Scottish Tartans Authority (STA) is quick to underline its credentials as both an organisation that adds true value to the commercial legacy aspect of appreciating Scotland's national dress, while exposing its evolution and preserving the authenticity of its heritage.

Chairman John McLeish explains: "The founders were required to justify the use of the word Authority, which they did by listing amongst the founder members the world's leading experts on the subject, and the world's leading producers of tartan. The charitable and not-for-profit status consolidated that claim."

"The STA was founded and registered as a charity in 1995 as a successor organisation to the Scottish Tartans Society.

"Its role has always been to protect, preserve, promote and explain the culture and traditions of Scottish Tartans and Highland dress. Education on matters such as origins, manufacture, use and history is at the forefront of what the organisation stands for. The original trustees represented a cross-section of both the academic and tartan industry sectors. But there is a much wider remit."

McLeish is eluding to its impact on global markets, driving opportunities for trade and ultimately protecting and enhancing jobs in the worldwide heritage market. It's a challenge that a new Director, STA's sole payroll member, will take on from its base in Crieff, Perthshire, when an appropriately knowledgeable candidate is selected from a search now being conducted.

"It's the only organisation in existence that has the knowledge, the medium and enthusiasm to lobby on behalf of the sector's academic and wider commercial interests not only in tartan, per se, but in any relevant products and services connected with Highland dress," he insists.

"Our educational and promotional remit extends to delivering presentations to Scottish schools, inward missions, special interest groups and overseas store groups in the USA and Japan.

"While not core to what we do, our new tartan design commissions for national and global organisations have hugely increased awareness of the value of tartan as a 'brand' and has generated a huge volume of publicity in press, radio and TV. Multi-sector benefits flow from such work."

Examples of commissioned tartans include Chinese Scottish, Falkland Islands, and bespoke examples for renowned New York stores Brooks Brothers in Madison Avenue and Saks, Fifth Avenue. Japanese department store Isetan Tokyo is another recipient.

Promoted as the single point of contact for written, telephone and email enquiries on tartan from around the globe – from public, commercial, press and broadcast sources – its website alone receives up to 2000 unique visitors per day.

"For many years the STA promoted the concept of an official national tartan register and was a leading partner in advising the Scottish Government on the subsequent Tartan Register Act of 2008," adds McLeish.

"Since that date, the STA has provided a major part of the content of The Scottish Register of Tartans and we continue to work closely with National Archives of Scotland (NAS) in upgrading and fine-tuning this excellent resource.

"The STA works in partnership



TARTAN'S SPECIAL: Scottish Tartans Authority Chairman John McLeish is searching for a candidate who is not only appropriately knowledgeable on the subject of tartan, but passionate about preserving and promoting its heritage.

with government agencies and established bodies such as NAS and National Museums of Scotland in fulfilling its ambitions in promoting, protecting and preserving our national and iconic fabric – tartan.

Only one person has been employed in the life of the Authority, its previous Director and now Consultant Brian Wilton MBE – who received his Queen's Honour for Services to the Tartan Industry in Scotland.

His successor will focus on developing the membership base while ensuring that key projects are on track and that the day-to-day operations of the STA are running smoothly, in line with governance

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standards. Membership comprises a mix of individuals and businesses. Various benefits are offered, naturally including access to a wealth of knowledge on tartan and its origins.

Present membership sits in the low hundreds and a major expansion of membership and benefits is now underway with ambitious targets in the thousands.

Key markets have been identified at home and overseas – primarily the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

There is no doubt that the STA is entering a new dynamic phase in its development.

The creation of a National Tartan Centre, one of its original goals, has now returned to the agenda with a feasibility study about to commence.

Tartan may be centuries old but this most flexible of textiles remains capable of many contemporary twists, always informed by its history.

"We're looking for someone who is highly organised and who will bring both commercial and political acumen to the position," the chairman indicates. "The successful candidate will also be comfortable in building strong relationships with a wide stakeholder base – they will be an accomplished communicator and are likely to have previous experience in supporting a Board of Directors/Trustees."

Ordinarily, labelling the Home page of the STA web site 'Home' might seem unnecessarily self-aware or defensive of a proud identity.

In this application, though, it's easily accepted as emblematic of a down to earth and perhaps rustic quality redolent of old Scottish society, deserving of measured celebration instead of embarrassed cringe.

Of greater importance, it's authentic.