

Steeped in Stories and Spirit:

Afternoon tea with the pioneers of Highland Business Women

by Iris Thompson-Burton



On a warm afternoon in Inverness, the clink of teacups gave way to laughter, storytelling, and a kind of quiet awe. Some of the Board of Highland Business Women gathered for afternoon tea in the sumptuous Adams room at the Kingsmills hotel – not in the spirit of networking, but nostalgia. Joining some of HBW's pioneering founding members, we leaned into a moment that felt less like an event and more like a legacy unfolding.

The founders didn't arrive with fanfare, but with humility and grace. Over pots of tea and delicate scones, they shared their journey that sparked Highland Business Women into being. The earliest meetings, they recalled, were born from a hunger to connect, to uplift, and to create a space where business didn't mean leaving empathy at the door. "We were carving something out of the Highlands, a place where women could lead, learn, and be loudly themselves." Said Betty Lambie, the first ever president of HBW.

And while the landscape of business in the region has evolved, their ethos remains our compass: generosity, collaboration, and purpose.

That spirit remains 30 years on – not just in our day-to-day interactions, but in the moments we come together to celebrate one another. This year's HBW Awards will be a living tribute to that. More than just recognition, the awards are a platform for storytelling, visibility, and amplification. Our finalists span industries, skill sets, and journeys – but what binds them is impact. At the awards, members will not only hear success stories, but also gain a deeper understanding of HBW's commitment to women in business in the Highlands and our philanthropic endeavours.

After all at HBW, giving is never an afterthought.

Over the past six years and beyond, Highland Business Women has steadily built a legacy of giving, raising more than £35,000 for charities that anchor our communities. Our annual charity partnership, chosen by the membership, sees us commit time, creativity, and compassion to causes that need visibility and support. And this year, that cause is RASASH – Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland.

RASASH provides trauma-informed care, advocacy, and support to survivors of rape and sexual violence.



Their work is deeply sensitive, absolutely vital, and often shrouded in silence. By partnering with RASASH, HBW members have chosen to stand with survivors, break stigma, and foster dialogue that heals.

And we're not just walking the talk – we're running it.

Some HBW board members are lacing up for the Loch Ness Marathon 5K, a significant fundraiser of the RASASH partnership. Their participation invites the entire network to run, sponsor, or cheer them on. Whether it's donating through the JustGiving link <https://www.justgiving.com/team/hbwrunning4rasash> sharing the cause, or joining the dash in person, this is an opportunity to help RASASH extend its reach across the Highlands.

But our history of fundraising isn't limited to marathon miles. HBW members have embraced cold water swim challenges, walked & trekked miles, cycled the length of the UK in a symbolic Lands' End to John o' Groats challenge, and hosted raffles, auctions, and bake sales with gusto. These endeavours reflect the same

boldness and resilience that the founders showed – the same spirit we drank in over tea.

Sitting with our founders reminded us that HBW was never just about professional development. It was – and still is – about the courage to care, the freedom to give, and the power of shared purpose.

As we turn toward the awards night and the RASASH dash, we invite every member to carry that legacy forward. Because no matter how far we've come, we are still those women who gathered with a spark and a vision – only now, we run toward our goals, together as a supportive tribe!



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