

# Forces Manor







Opening Forces Manor June 2023



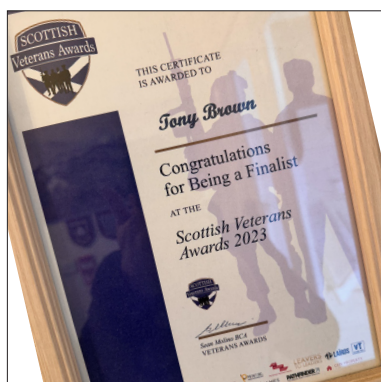
Direct recognition by Prince William



Support by the Scottish Parliament



A veterans home for a year at Forces Manor



## Forces Manor Two Years On (2023–2025)

A Chronicle of Support, Recovery and Recognition

Opened June/July 2023 — Total Guests to June 2025: **8,595**

### Establishment and First Year of Operation – 2023

Even before Forces Manor officially opened its doors, support for the project came from the highest places. I received written acknowledgements on two occasions from His Royal Highness Prince William, and the Scottish Parliament passed a full motion in support. I was also deeply honoured to gain the backing of Lieutenant General Sir Alistair Irwin, whose endorsement lent both encouragement and credibility at a pivotal time.

Forces Manor officially opened at the end June 2023. In our first twelve months, we welcomed thousands of guests—from Cadets to Royal Marines. The mission was clear from the outset: to provide a holiday location, training base and place of respite, and recovery in a dignified and welcoming environment for members of the Armed Forces and the veteran community and others.

Among our earliest and most significant guests was a homeless veteran suffering from severe PTSD. He lived in his van on-site for nine months, using the Manor's facilities and contributing through small maintenance tasks. His quiet presence affirmed the purpose of Forces Manor—to serve as a place of refuge, no matter how informal or unconventional the need.

After a request from the Army Foundation College, we welcomed a 16-year-old Junior Soldier who was unable to return home on leave due to homelessness and a lack of family support. His situation resonated deeply with me, echoing my own experiences as a young soldier. I readily agreed to host him. After returning to barracks, he stayed in touch and returned six months later. During 2023, six more Junior Soldiers in similar circumstances were referred to Forces Manor via official Army channels.

### Recognition and Awards – 2023

- Gold Award – Scottish Veterans Awards
- Bronze Award – Armed Forces Covenant

One particularly remarkable guest was a former Royal Marine who had endured long periods of homelessness and significant hardship. He stayed with us while participating in a BBC military television production. His recovery journey—bolstered by repeated visits to



Junior Soldier Travis on his first visit



Me receiving the Scottish Veterans award



Supporting Blake, a Royal Marine veteran



Darren Blanks' visually impaired veteran



Hosting 14 Squadron Royal Signals

the Manor—culminated in him receiving our Cool Blue Award. In tribute to him and the Royal Marines, our planned new garden gym will be dedicated in their honour.

Others left their mark in equally profound ways. Anthony, a troubled teenager once lost and neglected in the care system, became Forces Manor's first official employee. His transformation earned him the Cool Blue Award, alongside Angels Services, whose generous donation made a lasting difference to the Manor's mission.

## 2024 – Consolidation and Expansion

2024 marked the beginning of a brilliant relationship with FDX, a sponsored Army Reserve unit entrusted with tank transport duties on behalf of the MOD. Thanks to the steadfast support of Colin and Steve Loughton, FDX has made a truly transformative impact at Forces Manor. From brickwork to brushwork, they've rolled up their sleeves and completed a host of building and renovation projects—each task carried out with military precision and generous spirit.

Their presence hasn't just improved the infrastructure—it's strengthened the very foundations of what we stand for.

In 2024, a fellow veteran, Mark Bradley, made a powerful impact. Following a leukaemia diagnosis, Mark embarked on an extraordinary 600-mile cycle ride to raise funds for Forces Manor. His courage, determination and spirit were recognised with the Cool Blue Award.

Throughout the year, Forces Manor remained a vital sanctuary for vulnerable service personnel and veterans in need of a safe harbour. We continued to host homeless Junior Soldiers, all referred directly by the Army, each arrival a reminder of the unseen battles many still face long after discharge. One such guest was a 23-year-old former Rifleman, rough sleeping on the cold streets of Aberdeen. He reached out in sheer desperation—and I didn't hesitate. Forces Manor welcomed him in, no questions asked.

Within just one week, surrounded by stability, and a sense of belonging, he'd regained enough confidence for us to help him secure both employment and accommodation in Inverness—a remarkable turnaround born of compassion and trust.

Another veteran, once a proud Guardsman, was referred to us in a moment of crisis. He too needed shelter, and more than that—a space to breathe, to recalibrate, to begin again. We opened our doors without a second thought. Since then, he's returned to the Manor several times, not in distress, but in strength. He is now firmly back at the helm of his own story.





Hosting the CO of the Coldstream Guards

In April 2024, we proudly sponsored the Royal Marines Band Scotland's performance in Aviemore.

During the summer holidays, Forces Manor hosted 40 young people attending a week-long charity Gaelic music festival held across three local venues.

We also welcomed 15 members of the Royal Signals Regiment during their cycle from John O'Groats to Land's End—not once, but twice!



Hosting Col Gupta of the Indian Army

One of the most inspiring guests of the year was a former Royal Marine, going blind due to a brain tumour, who had nonetheless undertaken a 700-mile run across the UK to raise funds for a charity supporting blind veterans. It was our honour to host him on his remarkable journey.

### Distinguished Military Guests – 2024

- CO – Coldstream Guards
- Brigadier from the Royal Marines
- CO 2nd Battalion Royal Regiment of Scotland
- Austrian Military Attaché
- Hundreds of representatives from all branches of the British Armed Forces and all ranks
- A French Paratrooper
- An Indian Army Colonel



Colonel Foster opening the Veterans lounge

In the summer of 2024 Colonel Ben Foster formally opened the Veterans Lounge at Forces Manor. The event drew over 100 serving personnel, including the Air Commodore of RAF Lossiemouth and Brigadier Muddiman. Logistics and catering were expertly managed by the 164 Squadron of the Royal Logistic Corps under the command of Major Verity Foster.

The Veterans Club hosted one of their monthly breakfast clubs with us as did various other groups.



Gained bronze at the Scottish Veterans award

### Recognition – 2024

- Third Place – Veterans Business of the Year, Scottish Veterans Awards

### 2025 – Growing Stronger with New Ideas

Between January and June 2025, Forces Manor hosted a wide array of high-profile military units, veterans' organisations, and service families from across the UK.

A number of RAF Mountain Rescue Teams stayed consecutively for four weeks. We also welcomed Royal Marines Charity personnel



RAF Mountain Rescue



Royal Marines Band Scotland

undertaking mountain leadership training and 30 members of the Loch Lomond Mountain Rescue Team.

In March, 70 members of the Parachute Regiment stayed for four days and immediately rebooked for 2026.

April saw us once again sponsor the Royal Marines Band Scotland in Aviemore. That same month, FDX, the Army sponsored Reserve unit who had played a keen role in our development, generously donated a minibus, now used for military and youth excursions, bike collection, and outdoor training support. Additional donations of mountain bikes came from serving and former Royal Marines, as well as civilian supporters, that has extended to canoes and other water sports equipment.



Being presented with a van by the army

In May, Forces Manor was formally appointed Scotland's only official respite centre for the Royal Logistic Corps, funded by the Army Benevolent Fund. This new programme enables service members and their families to access week-long stays for rest and recovery. The RLC has committed to a ten-week annual block booking.



Veteran Paras

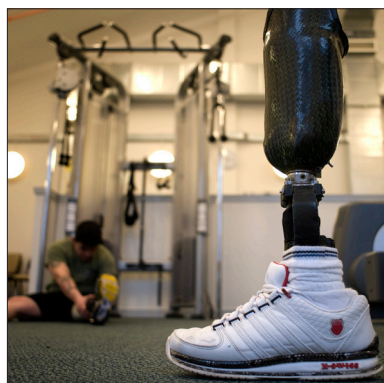
April brought with it the honour of hosting a military recovery unit from Edinburgh—(PRU) courageous personnel on the long road of healing, each one navigating the twin burdens of physical and psychological injury. For a time, Forces Manor became not just a place to stay, but a place to breathe, to recover, and to rebuild. The strength they carried in silence met the quiet comfort of our sanctuary. Their visit left a lasting impression—and we're proud to say they'll be returning in October 2025 and again in April 2026. The door, as always, remains open.



Appointed the RLC's respite centre

A two-week Royal Marines adventure training exercise took place in May, with winter 2025 and summer 2026 bookings on the cards.

In June, a private veterans' gathering for tank transporters marked the launch of the UK's first Veterans for Fishing boat on Loch Insh—a national first. Regulates such as Spy, Lou and Benny all who I had served with, joined fellow veterans for a great celebration of our time.



Hosting the special forces recover unit

We have also welcomed a representative from a Northern Ireland charity supporting veterans and former police officers suffering from PTSD. Plans are in place for a long-term partnership and a regular rotation of visits.





The veterans for fishing boat being launched



The 4th battalion Royal Scots



The together garden



Forces Manor Active



The flag of the Royal Regiment of Scotland

## June 2025 Highlights

We hosted members of the 4th Battalion, Royal Regiment of Scotland, taking part in a mountain running event. Under the control of their Platoon sergeant and OC, the group were warmly welcomed and it was a pleasure to host them.

We have now established our military library and as of July we have had over 1500 books donated by veterans, serving personnel and family members of deceased veterans.

## Planned Developments for 2025–2026

**The Together Garden:** A new memorial garden, tenderly rooted in remembrance, honouring all veterans and serving members of the Armed Forces who are battling, or have bravely battled, cancer. It stands not only as a place of reflection, but as a living tribute—a sanctuary of strength where every bloom tells a story of courage, every stone holds a name, and every breeze carries the whispers of those who stood tall in the face of both war and illness. This is where silence speaks volumes, and unity grows eternal.

**Forces Manor Active:** A purpose-built adventure training facility designed to ignite spirit and test mettle. It will be equipped for water and winter sports along with mountain bikes. It will also feature a dedicated drying room, secure storage, and a well-stocked workshop to support visiting units.

**A Flag Flown in Honour:** As a gesture of welcome and respect, and in proud partnership with the community council, we raise the flag of each visiting military unit or associated organisation when they arrive at Kincaig and Forces Manor. It's a simple act, yet deeply symbolic—an acknowledgement of service, identity, and belonging. This simple act has been met with heartfelt appreciation, reminding all who pass through our gates that here, they are not just guests—they are warmly welcomed by the Manor and the community.

## Conclusion and Reflection

The past two years have been a whirlwind—an emotional kaleidoscope of challenges, triumphs, and tireless service. Through it all, my daughter Cara has been my anchor, keeping me grounded and focused when the wind threatened to blow us off course. And then came Koda.

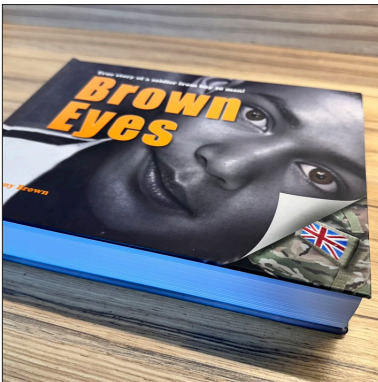
It was Cara who introduced us to this wonderful four-legged friend—a golden retriever with a heart as big as his paws. Recently



Lance Corporal Koda



Forces Manor dining room



Brown Eyes

promoted to Large Corporal (a title he wears with great pride and absolutely no discipline), Koda has become a beloved fixture at Forces Manor.

Whether he's offering quiet comfort or causing gentle chaos with a cheeky tail wag and a nose where it doesn't belong, Koda has brought joy, warmth, and a fair bit of muddy mischief to us all. He's more than a mascot—he's family.

The impact of Forces Manor does not rest on bricks and mortar, but on the timeless values of duty, dignity, and solidarity. Every guest welcomed, every life stabilised, and every young person inspired reflects my unwavering commitment to serve. What began as a personal response to past pain has grown into a national resource. This sixteen-bed facility operates not for profit, but from a place of lived experience—of being a child in care, a young soldier, and now, a veteran determined to make things better for those who come after. Two years on, I am both proud and humbled. I've achieved so much, but the need remains vast.

Beyond Forces Manor, I've written a not-for-profit book titled *Brown Eyes*, chronicling my journey from childhood in care to life as a soldier in the modern British Army. At over 600 pages, it is both memoir and mission—a raw, heartfelt account filled with photographs and memories. It tells of neglect, grief, and isolation, but also of survival, strength, and hope.

*Brown Eyes* is more than a story. It's a call to feel. A reason to care. An original song, performed by professional musicians and a featured vocalist, accompanies the book and will be released nationally to connect readers with its emotional core through music.

All in all, two years on, Forces Manor has been a storm and a sanctuary — at times painful, lonely, and dramatic; at others, joyful, rewarding, liberating, and soul-stirring. And truth be told, I wouldn't trade the journey for anything. I'm profoundly glad I took that leap. I look forward to what the next two years will bring.