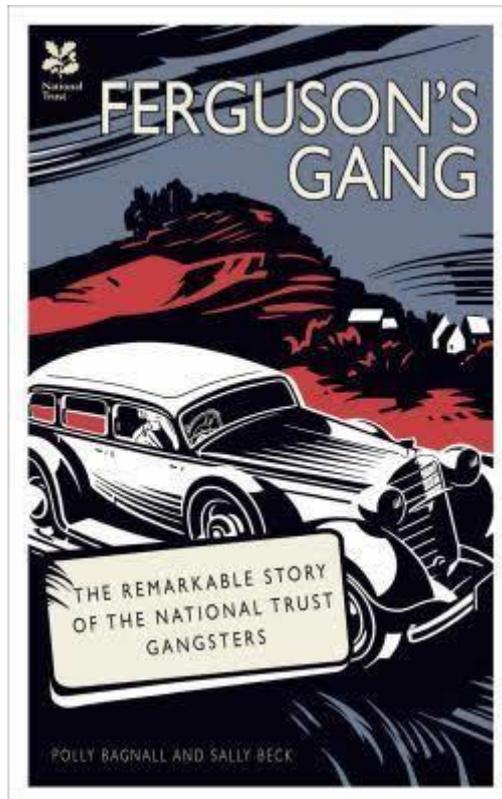


## Ferguson's Gang



### Preface

Ninety years ago, a mysterious group of eccentric masked women philanthropists called Ferguson's Gang and with bizarre pseudonyms such as Red Biddy, Bill Stickers, The Bludy Beershop and Sister Agatha saved and donated buildings and places of historic importance to the National Trust and made conservation popular during the 1920s and 30s.

The identities of these women and how they raised huge sums which they delivered in a strange way are revealed in a book, co-authored by Polly Bagnall, the, and Sally Beck.

*Ferguson's Gang, the Remarkable Story of the National Trust Gangsters available on Amazon.*

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In the early 1920s the absence of strict planning laws meant that many of the country's heritage assets were under threat from the urbanisation.

The Ferguson's Gang wearing masks used to turn up at National Trust-owned buildings unannounced with donations, sometimes in unusual ways such as cash hidden in a fake pineapple, notes stuffed into a cigar and £500 handed in with a bottle of homemade sloe gin.

Their stunts were avidly reported in the press, and when they made a national appeal for the Trust, the response is overwhelming.

Ferguson's Gang was instrumental in saving places from Cornwall to the Lake District, a legacy of incalculable value. Yet somehow these women stayed anonymous, hiding behind masks and bizarre pseudonyms such as Bill Stickers, Red Biddy, the Bludy Beershop, and Sister Agatha.

They carefully recorded their exploits, their rituals, even their elaborate picnics, but they took their real names to the grave. Now Sally Beck and Polly Bagnall have revealed the identities of these unlikely national heroes and tell the stories of their fascinating and often unconventional lives.

Polly Bagnall, granddaughter of the Gang's architect whose pseudonym was The Artichoke, said: "I knew my grandfather was involved but didn't realise he was very significant in the conservation world and in forming some of the value we have about conserving.

"The women who were in this group of 25-year-olds were interested in the rural conservation of old buildings – we wouldn't think that would be the thing they got together on and particularly that they were very varied in themselves. Apart from the gang's leader, Peggy, the others didn't have jobs or work that involved conservation or rural issues.

"They all had a social conscience. They were people who didn't have big egos, not necessarily trying to further their own wealth or position in society, so quite happy to work under the cover of anonymity and never wanted their real identities disclosed in their lifetime.

"They were modest in a way but were all about action. They mainly lived to a ripe old age. It was a combination of being fun-loving and action-orientated. About changing the world, they were living in to make a difference – that was a united front between the members of the gang and my grandfather."

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