



*Dedicated to research, restore and protect  
Mynydd Twmbarlwm - Gwent's most iconic landmark*

*Ymroddedig i ymchwilio, adfer a gwarchod  
Mynydd Twmbarlwm - tirnod mwyaf eiconig Gwent*

**www.twmbarlwm.co.uk**

e-mail: [twmbarlwmsociety@gmail.com](mailto:twmbarlwmsociety@gmail.com)

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2014-15**

*Presented to the A.G.M. Monday 2nd November 2015*

*Held at Crosskeys RFC*

What we achieved in 2013 – 2014 was always going to be a difficult act to follow.

We had had the grant from the Welsh Government and we had installed new fences and gates and planted the hedgerow to stop the incursion of off-roaders onto the Scheduled Ancient Monument itself. With that work completed many of our members seemed to think that was all the work done – but, as I said at last year's AGM that was only the start of the work, the maintaining of the mountainside and restoration of the landscape was still priorities of the Society.

So it was with this background that the new group of Trustees set to work. After the last AGM we had lost 3 Trustees and gained one new in Alun Booth who despite being one of our oldest members, is probably one of our most enthusiastic. Norman Liversuch was also co-opted as an advisor with his in-depth knowledge of the workings of local councils.

At the first meeting of the nine Trustees, Terry Evans was voted in as Chairman for the third year, Sue Evans as Secretary and Maggie Thomas as Treasurer and Membership Secretary.

When I started to prepare this report I was worrying that I would have very little to tell you about – but let me summarise our year and you can make your own judgement on that.

### **TIDY TWMP**

Before the last AGM we had already agreed that the last Sunday of every month was going to be a Volunteer Workday and Litter Pick and this has proved to be reasonably successful. It is usually the same half a dozen people who always turn up but we have had a few months when the volunteer numbers have reached double figures.

Getting rid of the rubbish after the litter picking events has become problematical since the council's policy of no vans or pickups at their recycling facilities. So in recent weeks we have started to lobby the council and councillors to revise this policy because of the negative effect it has on our work and indeed other volunteer groups in the borough.

The more physical work we have completed on these days include:

- **October** – we planted some saplings we had left over from the grant work in the fenced off triangle near the car park; and repaired the kissing gate (on the east of the Twmp) that had been damaged by the cattle gathering there.
- **November** – The stock gate at the top was moved 50 yards away from the kissing gate so that the cattle would not gather there, breaking up the ground and worrying walkers; We installed 2 new finger-posts to indicate the best routes to the top.
- **February** – 15 people attended. We replaced one fingerpost that had been torn out of the ground and burned in the middle of the car park. There had also been a major fly-tip on the forestry road entrance that we bagged up and reported to the council to collect.
- **March** – The saplings we had planted in October had been removed (stolen?) just a couple of weeks after we'd planted them – so we replanted them again this month only to find that they disappeared again after only two days; Another fly-tip of garden rubbish cleared up. We replaced several rotting fence posts and knocked back the bracken encroaching the main path from the car park.

- **May to September** litter picks were hampered by very bad weather but the usual gang always turned out and continued planting and fence repairing as needed. On one occasion Rob was the only one there but he still managed to collect three bags of rubbish and started work on cleaning the graffiti off our stone cairn. Another time Dave and Howard repaired a deliberately vandalised fence in a howling gale and hail storm. Great respect and many thanks to them.

In the last couple of months the floating path around the kissing gate has been completed and more rotting fence posts have been replaced.

And so the work continues on our workdays – I'm very grateful to all those who turn out for these days but would like to urge a few more to come and join us – if nothing else, we always enjoy a good chat and cup of tea and biccies.

## **OTHER EVENTS**

We continue to organise events to help raise funds and maintain the public's interest in the Society – in the past year these have included:

November – Quiz Night. This was the second time we held this event and it proved very successful with over 40 people attending and raising more than £100. We will be doing the same again this year on Monday 23rd November.

December – Maggie Thomas led a walk for us the Sunday after Christmas to walk off the Xmas Excesses – 14 humans and 5 dogs came along and we enjoyed a cup of mulled wine and mince pies at the top served up by Sue. And yes, we'll be doing it again this year on the 27th December.

March - The Hot Cross Bun Walk – I regard this as our main event of the year even though it's not strictly "Our" event. We simply promote this local tradition of climbing to the top of the mountain on Good Friday. This year we had organised groups starting from Pontymister, Cwmcarn, Cwmbran and Blaen Bran who brought over 20 people each – but there were also another couple of hundred people visiting throughout the day. As usual we gave out a load of hot-x-buns that had been donated by Greggs and raised over £35. We ran out of buns early on and could have distributed many more – maybe next year with a few more volunteers.

July – Rob Southall led a walk for us to The Chapel at Llanderfal. Archaeologist Dave Standing joined us and pointed out some interesting archaeological sites on the way giving us an insight into the history of the monastic grange which once existed on this hillside.

Rob also led a walk later in the month to explore the sites of some of the lost farmsteads on the Cwmcarn side of the mountain. In September he also gave a talk on the History of Twmbarlwm and the Society – this was part of our campaign to introduce more members to the Society.

My thanks goes out to Rob for all his efforts in arranging these events – they really help to keep the Society in the public eye.

October – saw the return of Professor Maddy Grey to present a talk to us on her work on the Cistercian Way project (again arranged by Rob). This was another successful evening that was well attended and raised nearly £90 for the society.

## **OTHER ORGANISATIONS**

Another topic which came out of last year's AGM was the need for The Twmbarlwm Society to forge stronger links with other like-minded, local organisations.

### **The Commoners**

To that end we invited Les Murphy chairman of the Commoners' Association along to some of our Trustees meeting. We learned from him that in October/November of 2014 their application for Glastir funding was severely affected (in simple terms a Government scheme to help Commoners manage the commons effectively). CTS offered to support them wherever we could in any other applications or projects they pursued.

This resulted in some of the Trustees being given a guided tour of the Pen-y-Rheol and Cwm Lickey side of the mountain where the Commoners and the Landowners, Pontypool Estates, are working with Cadw on the target hardening of the "Scourings". This area is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument and has similar problems to Twmbarlwm with illegal off-

roaders destroying the landscape. Consequently we have attended a few meetings with the Commoners, the Landowners and Caerphilly Council regarding funding to install barriers, cut and spray bracken etc. and they have kept us informed as their work progresses.

The Risca side of the mountain benefits from this relationship with boulders being placed at strategic points, the cut bracken and felled feral trees will be used to infill the eroded slopes and vehicular entry onto the ridgeway further restricted. Some of you might have seen that the cattle grid on Mountain Road below the Tump is in the process of being renewed – this is a direct result of our talks with the Commoners and CCBC.

Remember that all the work of CTS takes place on common land and by and large our aims are the same to help protect this historical landscape from those who appear to have no respect for our landscape and environment.

### **Friends of Cwmcarn Forest Drive**

Prior to last year's AGM Rob Southall had started to campaign for the re-opening of the Forest Drive after the harvesting of the diseased trees has been completed. CTS, obviously, agreed to support this campaign and has attended most of its meetings including the workshops held in conjunction with NRW.

The felling of the trees impacts greatly on Twmbarlwm and already the landscape around the mountain is changing on a daily basis. With the "Friends" we monitor the work going on in the forests and try to keep members informed of diversions and parts of the forest that become closed to public access. There is still a great deal of uncertainty in the future of the Forest Drive and this remains an issue that CTS will have to work hard on in the coming months.

### **Gwent Wildlife Trust**

Another area we were keen to develop was to explore the biodiversity of Twmbarlwm. We invited Andy Karran of Gwent Wildlife Trust to come and look at "our mountain" and we gave him a guided tour in November of last year.

On seeing it, he was keen to organise a bio-blitz of the area – whereby a team of ecologists would explore the area and record their findings. His views were handed over to SEWBReC (South East Wales Bio-Diversity Recorders Office) who again came for a guided tour in May 2015. Eventually they decided to hold an official "Recorders' Day" in August.

On the day, several members of CTS helped a team of specialists to explore the area – due to the weather conditions and availability of experts, it was not as well attended as we'd hoped but the experts who did turn up (mostly entomologists) thoroughly enjoyed their day and discovered a few insects which they were not expecting to find in this environment.

At least the area is now on the Trust's radar and we can hopefully look forward to a few more days like this on a seasonal basis.

### **FOURTEEN LOCKS VISITOR CENTRE**

I should mention here too that we are developing a close relationship with the Fourteen Locks Visitor Centre – they invited us to attend their heritage day in September. We erected our marquee and put up our display showing the history and aims of the Society – and ran our "Roll-a-Coin" game for the visitors.

We raised over £50 on the day and again raised the public awareness of the society. We hope to get them to take part in some of our future events too.

### **POLICING**

Some of you will know that one of our early successes was lobbying the councils and Gwent police to provide our own personal "PC Tump" in PC Simon James.

We continue to work closely with Simon even though his role has changed slightly over the past year or so. With the re-organising of police budgets his area of operation as "Wildlife and Landscape Crime Officer" now covers all of Caerphilly and Torfaen – but he has a personal fondness for Twmbarlwm so it still figures largely in his operations.

He has organised a few "special-operations" with other agencies like NRW, the Fire Service, Forgotten Landscapes and, of course, the Councils where teams of helpers take to the hillsides and set up "pinch-points" to stop motorbike scramblers and off-roaders from entering the Commons – and to arrest or serve Section 59s on illegal vehicles.

On one such operation CTS volunteers helped by keeping an eye on the gate to the ridgeway at the car park. There were at least 30 others involved in the operation and on the day I believe two bikes were seized and three Section 59s issued.

I would like to thank Simon for all his efforts in trying to rid the mountain of illegal off-roaders and sincerely hope that he's still with us in a year's time.

CTS also met with the new inspector, Carl Williams, at Risca police station – together with local farmers. We gave him a guided tour of the mountainside which raised his awareness of speeding in the lanes approaching Twmbarlwm, Fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour.

Although he promised that the area was firmly on the local police's radar he stressed the importance of reporting any incidents that concerned us on their 101 non-emergency service.

## **FINANCE**

Opening Balance was £6,173.98

Closing Balance was £6,423.01

The Treasurer will present a full breakdown of income in due course.

Please note that the final balance includes £5,000 which is earmarked for interpretation signs and waymarking – these items are still in preparation.

## **SUMMING UP**

In summing up I could repeat much of what I said last year:

The Twmp still needs our diligence to protect it from those who do not respect our environment and improve it for future generations.

There are still areas of our original mission statement we have not yet addressed – for instance we have still not progressed any research into the history and archaeology of Twmbarlwm.

But to achieve these aims we need the support of the membership. The Trustees do what they can and I personally thank everyone for their personal input - but we are all very busy people and without further help the work progresses very slowly – or is in danger of grinding to a standstill.

I'm proud of what we have achieved so far – there are fewer off-roaders than a couple years ago and I'm sure there are more visitors and I always love to hear their positive comments. But I still think there is a great deal more work to be done and we must continue with our work for Twmbarlwm to become once more the Iconic Landmark of Gwent.

Thank you

TERRY EVANS  
Chairman