



*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

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2016-17

Presented to the A.G.M. Monday 6th November 2017

Held at Crosskeys RFC

Well, where has that year gone? Time flies when you are busy and that is certainly the case for the past year.

Shortly after last year's AGM Sue and I were due to move house, so at the December Trustees meeting we announced that we would need to scale down our commitment to CTS. To that end it was agreed that the Trustees meetings would be held quarterly instead of monthly - and that other Trustees would take up responsibility for various projects.

For example Maggie has organised our monthly litter picks, Norman has maintained contact with Cadw and the Council, Rob has organised various walks and talks and Les has liaised with different authorities to get various landscape management works done - more on each of these later.

Cutting the frequency of the meetings has hardly affected the running of the society but I must say that communication via email could be improved upon, because some topics tend to stall until the next scheduled meeting.

At last year's AGM it became clear that we were becoming more reliant on the Commoners Association to be guided on the nature of work required in managing the landscape of Twmbarlwm. The combined councils of Caerphilly and Torfaen had a budget to spend on landscape management - responsibility for that budget was led by CCBC's Gethin Bowes, and the society played a vital part with him and the commoners in recommending where the budget was best spent.

As a result the society and its volunteers have not done a great deal of the physical work but we continue to influence the decision making of the "powers-that-be" across all the commons of Mynydd Twmbarlwm, Mynydd Henllys and Mynydd Maen.

TRUSTEES

At the AGM last year all existing Trustees were re-elected and we gained one Trustee in Charles Ferris. At the subsequent meeting of the Trustees I, Terry Evans, was voted in as Chairman for the fifth year, Sue Evans as Secretary and Martyn Vaughan as Treasurer and Membership Secretary.

NORMAN LIVERSUCH offered to act as Vice Chairman and to attend any meetings to which CTS were invited and that Terry could not attend - this happened on a couple of occasions. He also took on responsibility for a couple of projects on which he will give us an update later.

Norman took on board responsibility for the Trig Point project which is still ongoing but which floundered a little in the summer with the lack of response from Cadw - there will be a site meeting with Cadw towards the end of November. (For those who don't know about this project - we have proposed to "adopt" the Trig-point and to construct a decorative floating path around it in the form of a compass, we have the necessary permissions from the OS, the land-owners and the council but not approval from Cadw).

Norman is also working on a project to get the army involved in helping us to repair the eroded slopes.

ROB SOUTHALL took on responsibility to organise events such as lectures and walks which are always good fund raisers and help raise awareness of the society. He continues to campaign for the re-opening of the Cwmcarn Forest Drive and we consider the Friends of CFD to be a sister organisation - perhaps he will give us an update on the campaign.

MARTYN VAUGHAN was acting Treasurer and Membership Secretary before last year's AGM but then took on the job full time - it took us few months to sort out the online banking between us but we got there in the end.

TIDY TWMP

Maggie Thomas agreed to organise our monthly litter picks. These have been well attended throughout the year with 10 to 15 volunteers each month and sometimes in the most atrocious conditions. Many bags of rubbish are collected each time and, of course Maggie has provided the tea, coffee and biscuits - which are always welcome at the end of the day.

Towards the end of last year we were told by the council to leave any collected rubbish at the end of Mill Street - we did this on a few occasions but felt it became too much of an imposition to load the rubbish into our personal vehicles and then suffer quizzing from local residents at Mill Street. So, now we rely on informing the council (CCBC) after each litter pick - they generally collect it fairly promptly but there has been occasions when it's been left several days resulting in what we collect being set fire to or re-distributed around the mountain by vandals or animals..

The monthly litter pick is a major part of our "Tidy Twmp" objectives which have been in place since our Welsh Government grant some five years ago.

Before last year's AGM there was a spate of burnt out cars and fly tipping, after a campaign of letter writing, Rhianon Passmore organised meetings with the police, councils etc. from which there were assurances that a forum would be set up to help find solutions - we have not been invited to any such forum since.

To illustrate the scale of the problem we still have, the following is a brief list of what was found at our litter picks in the past year.

- JANUARY - two burnt out cars - one on the car park, one on the water course by entry to car park. A large fly tip set alight against the pile of rocks on Cwrt Henllys lane.
- FEBRUARY - One of last month's cars was removed but another one appeared in its place. The kissing gate on ridgeway side of tump was vandalised. Two large fly-tips on the forestry road included household and building waste and two fridges.
- MARCH - Another two burnt out cars. A fly tip just up from the cattle grid - included what looked like asbestos.
- APRIL - Stone wall and fence at entrance to ORPA vandalised. Some saplings in our planted area deliberately cut.
- Litter pick attended by 18 people and we left many rubbish bags and piles of tyres ready for collection - they all got set fire to by vandals overnight.
- JULY - The newly installed steps were vandalised - knocked about and attempted to set alight. Repaired almost immediately by Gethin and his crew.
- SEPTEMBER - Burnt out car and two fly tips reported - one had evidence of an address among the debris. The car was collected quite promptly but the fly tips remained for several weeks and in fact were added to

- OCTOBER - 12 people attended litter pick and collected over 20 tyres apart from usual bags of rubbish. Due to letter to council and councillors about lack of response to fly tips - these got collected by the following Tuesday.

Lobbying the council, councillors and other authorities to find a better solution to this problem remains an on-going issue.

OTHER TASKS - we have completed on our Volunteer Workdays include:

- We (mostly Rob) have been terracing the centre eroded trench and infilling with undergrowth to encourage new growth (we have been promised some bales of cut bracken to use as infill).
- Cleared the undergrowth from around the plaque on the side of the Twmp
- Re-hung the kissing gate on the ridgeway side of the Tump
- Dug out the silt from the gate on the left of the slope which was preventing the gate from closing
- Replaced stones in the dry stone wall on the couple of occasions it was vandalised.
- Bashed bracken flat in the planted areas around the car park.
- Replaced several rotten posts in the original fencing.
- In March, Bill and Antoinette Fearnley-Whittingstal donated a few dozen whips (hawthorns, blackthorns, hazel and dogwood) for us to plant in areas that hadn't prospered from our first planting. We had a special volunteer day to plant these whips - and I would like to thank Bill and Antoinette for their generous donation.

And so the work continues on our Volunteer Workdays and Litter picks – I'm very grateful to all those who turn out for these days and I'm glad that numbers have increased but I would still like to urge a few more to come and join us. Apart from the work it can be fun meeting other visitors to the mountain who come from far and wide - only last week I chatted to groups of people from Bristol, Cardiff and London who were all very complimentary about the mountain and the views, but more importantly about the good work that we appear to be doing up there.

I would like to add here that although the council (CCBC) are often criticised for their tardiness in responding to litter and fly-tip problems I do appreciate that they must prioritise their environmental budget to locations other than Twmbarlwm. But by and large the council officers to whom we report the rubbish and littering, on almost a weekly basis, do a reasonable job in ensuring our mountainside is looked after - for which I am very grateful.

OTHER WORKS

As I said above, the majority of the Landscape Management of Twmbarlwm and Mynydd Maen is led by the Commoners Association and the physical work by Gethin Bowes with the budget provided jointly by CCBC and Torfaen BC. The Society is called upon to advise and comment on any proposals put forward.

I haven't got a full list of works carried out in the past year (I'm sure Les and/or Gethin will supply a full summary) but they include:

- Steps from car park constructed (and subsequently repaired after being vandalised).
- The portion of the dry stone wall which had been demolished was re-instated.
- Improvement added to the ORPA gate to ensure it would close by itself.
- Bracken spraying and gorse removal on Penyrheol side of the mountain.
- Rocks supplied for target hardening
- Sheep scrapes on the Twmp itself were infilled and covered with seeded matting (funded by Cadw)
- Area around trig-point was also covered with seeded matting
- Self seeded conifers on the side of the Twmp were removed

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 – Annual Quiz Night. This was the fourth 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 27th November.

DECEMBER – Maggie Thomas led a walk for us after Christmas on the 29th to walk off the Xmas Excesses. We'll be doing it again this year on the 27th with Maggie leading a group from Cardiff Ramblers and any interested CTS members.

MAY – Les Murphy led us on a walk around “The Scourings of Penyrheol” and gave us a fascinating insight into the history of the area.

APRIL - The Hot Cross Bun Walk – This is seen 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 – as usual we estimate there was a couple of hundred people visiting throughout the day. We gave out a load of hot-x-buns that had been donated by Tesco's and raised over £70.

JULY – Rob Southall led a walk for us to Pwll Tra (The Pool of Avarice) - this is the third time he's done this walk and it was as popular as ever.

Rob arranged two talks for us in September and October - the speaker failed to turn up for the first one but Rob stepped into the breach and we still made approx. £40 from the raffle and entry fee.

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.

CALENDAR

ALSO - in December last year we published our first Twmbarlwm Calendar, designed and produced by Terry and Sue. They were sold in a local shop, the Cwmcarn visitor centre, online sales and by each Trustee - including an afternoon sales stint in the foyer of Risca Tesco's. They were very well received and we sold 120 copies which netted us over £115 profit.

A calendar has been produced again for 2018 and is now available - this time the calendar is bigger and better - being A4 size. They are £8.50 each and hopefully all Trustees and members will try to sell a few for us and make them more successful than last year.

BEER

Another exciting endeavour we are currently promoting is the brewing of our own beer. Tudor Brewery of Llanhilleth have a range of beers named after local mountains, so we proposed to them that they should have a beer named Twmbarlwm. They agreed and it is now in production - it is a ruby bitter ale with a hint of honey gathered from bees that graze on our hillside. The ale will soon be available in kegs in local pubs and in bottles from their online shop.

We will be hosting a launch event, here in Crosskeys RFC, to coincide with our annual Christmas Quiz on Monday 27th November. Twmbarlwm Honey Ale will be on draught on the night and hopefully gift packs for you to purchase and enjoy at home (get your pre-orders in now). Proceeds from the sale of the beer will be shared with the society.

POLICING

In March Simon James – Wildlife Crime Officer – attended our Trustee meeting to give us some information regarding the “Uplands Report” meeting, involving several AMs, Senior Police and councillors.

He said that the problem of off road activity and landscape crime is being taken more seriously, originally there was only one officer assigned – him – and the terrain posed serious difficulties for policing, seeing as the perpetrators were on off road bikes, and he was not allowed to pursue etc. However, there is talk of using drone cameras to monitor areas, enabling more joint operations.

Caerphilly/Torfaen/BGwent will meet twice a year and CTS will be invited. There is more interest from higher Police ranks, and there is a need for offering designated off road areas.

I'm afraid I can't offer any update on those statements (*unless Simon is at the meeting to make a report - Simon was at meeting and his remarks are in the minutes*) but must say that CTS has not been invited to any such forum and yet the off-road 4x4 cars and bikes remain a problem on Twmbarlwm.

Practically every Volunteer day we encounter bikes entering onto the Common at the car park - only last weekend we witnessed a group of eight who shouted obscenities at us as they went through the gate.

We also had a disturbing encounter in March of this year, when a group of us were planting the whips with Bill and Antoinette - a group of 12 men arrived in 3 transit vans with half a dozen bikes and four quads on board. They were quite abusive to us and the local farmers who also arrived on the scene - eventually they all rode off to the top of the ridgeway. The police were called to the scene and they waited there for the off-roaders to return. We spoke to some walkers coming down off the mountain who also encountered this group and they said they too had been abused by the bikers who also showered the walkers with dirt as they went by. We all left the area quite shaken up and despite promises from the police, we were not informed what the outcome was of that event.

The police's response on this occasion was reasonably prompt considering it was reported on their 101 line which shows that the area is on the local police's radar.

As I say in practically every communication from the Society I must stress the importance of reporting any incidents that concern us on the 101 non-emergency service – every burnt out car every fly-tip every anti-social act should be reported – the police may not be able to act on every incident immediately but it must be logged to ensure future action.

FINANCE and MEMBERSHIP

Membership remains at the 40 - 50 mark with nearly 450 followers on Facebook.

- Opening Balance was £6,805.61
- Closing Balance was £6,881.61

Please note that the final balance still includes £5,000 which was originally intended for interpretation signs and way-marking – the trustees will decide how to proceed with this in due course.

SUMMING UP

I can only sum up with the same words as my previous reports:

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

- There are still areas of our original mission statement we have not yet addressed – for instance we are yet to progress any notable research into the history and archaeology of Twmbarlwm.
- To achieve our 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 few 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 Cymdeithas Twmbarlwm Society

(This report forms part of the official minutes of the AGM)