



*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 2015-16

Presented to the A.G.M. Monday 7th November 2016

Held at Crosskeys RFC

This report forms part of the official Minutes of the meeting - comments in RED were added to this report at the meeting

I said at last year's AGM that the previous achievements were going to be a hard act to follow but that was just the pessimist in me talking. We may not be doing a great deal of the physical work ourselves but as a society we continue to influence the powers-that-be.

Our closer working relationship with the Commoners Association has enabled our voice to be heard in any decision making for works provided by the councils across Mynydd Twmbarlwm, Mynydd Henllys and Mynydd Maen.

Also in the past year, what you may call, our sister organisation, Friends of Cwmcarn Forest Drive (again founded by our original founder Rob Southall) has campaigned tirelessly for clarity on the felling operation centred on Cwmcarn and the re-opening of the Forest Drive – and the Twmbarlwm Society has been part of all discussions with NRW and the councils concerned.

At the AGM last year we lost one Trustee, Andrew George, and gained three: Les Murphy, Sam Southall and Martyn Vaughan.

At the first meeting of the Trustees I, Terry Evans, was voted in as Chairman for the fourth year, Sue Evans as Secretary and Maggie Thomas as Treasurer and Membership Secretary – later in the year Martyn Vaughan offered to take on the duties of Treasurer - an offer which we are still in the process of finalising .

So it was with this group of ten plus Norman Liversuch as co-opted advisor that we set about continuing the society's work – which I will now summarise for you...

FELLING OPERATIONS

At the time of the last AGM the felling of the forestry due to the disease of the Japanese Larch all around Twmbarlwm had only just begun and the impact on the mountainside was visually miserable. The forest on the right of the common below the Tump was the first to go – quickly followed by the forest on the southern slopes of the Tump.

This seemed to give us immediate problems because when gates were removed by NRW to gain access to the woods that provided a new area for fly-tippers to dump their illegal loads.

We constantly complained to NRW to replace the gate they had removed (down to Cwrt yr Henllys) which they eventually did in June of this year and they cleared up much of the fly-tip accumulated there.

In April the Society was invited to take part in talks with NRW and other stakeholders on the future of the Forest Drive and we were taken on a tour of the areas already felled.

I won't go into the details of that meeting here other than to say that although there were many positive things discussed we, (CTS and FoCFD) left with confused messages from NRW and CCBC but with assurances that we will continue to be part of future discussions.

TIDY TWMP

We have continued with our Volunteer Workdays and Litter Pick on the last Sunday of every month. It is usually the same half a dozen people who always turn up and I wish we could persuade a few more people to turn up, because we always manage to get a good bit of work done and it's always a good opportunity to meet up with the members of the public who turn up to walk the mountainside – you'd be surprised how many people get up there on a weekend.

Every Volunteer workday we collect at least eight bags of rubbish and leave any fly-tip in an orderly fashion for the council to collect.

Other work has included:

- repairing many rotten fence posts;
- we installed a new stone path at the kissing gate on the east side of the tump;
- we have repaired the stone path leading to the tump on the west side;
- we have started to fill in the eroded slopes with dead bracken to encourage new growth;
- and we planted another 60 saplings in between the original fences we installed two years ago.

As I said last year, 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. We started to lobby the council and councillors to revise this policy because of the negative effect it has on our work – despite a few replies of support the council refuse to change the rules.

However, after a period of a great number of burnt out cars – at one time there were five burnt out cars on the mountain in a three week period – and some serious fly-tipping offences.

Rhiannon Passmore AM was contacted as part of our campaign and she agreed to meet with us on Twmbarlwm in July with the local Police Inspector, Jason White, and sergeant and Simon James, Wildlife Crimes Officer, to show them the problems we face on Twmbarlwm with the burnt out cars etc. – this meeting resulted in Rhiannon organising a multi-agency forum in Cwmcarn Visitor in September.

There were council officials from both Caerphilly and Torfaen, the police, the fire service and others – it was a very constructive meeting and is due to convene again in the new year to discuss how to implement new steps in tackling the problem.

The council (CCBC) are often criticised for their tardiness in responding to litter and fly-tip problems and we have been frustrated many times this year when burnt out cars and fly-tips have remained on the mountain for some weeks before being removed. I would like to point out that the

council officers I report littering to on almost a weekly basis do a reasonable job in ensuring our mountainside is looked after - for which I am very grateful.

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 WORKS

IN JANUARY – after discussions with the Commoners Association and talks they'd been having with the councils we had a meeting with Gethin Bowes of CCBC who had been given a budget (jointly from CCBC and Torfaen BC) to spend on various landscape improvements around Twmbarlwm and Mynydd Maen.

We met on Twmbarlwm and walked the area to decide upon a “shopping-list” of what we would like to achieve on the mountain. A report was made in the Society's minutes for January 2016 – but briefly what was decided at that meeting has largely been completed throughout the year.

Works included:

- A new dry stone wall and stock gate at the entrance to the ORPA near the car park.
- Similar walls at Hafodyrynys and Penyrheol
- 25 large rocks placed at “pinch points” on various tracks to stop 4x4 and scrambler incursions
- A similar number at Hafodyrynys and Penyrheol
- Self seeded conifers on the ridgeway were removed
- 50m of Fencing materials supplied to repair existing fencing
- Stones and chippings supplied to repair existing paths
- Ballast and chippings were supplied to repair the track close to the masts on the eastern end of the ridgeway.
- The spraying of 200 acres of bracken was approved with the cost of £4k being shared by CCBC and Pontypool Park Estates
- Up to 70 stones were supplied by Cadw for target hardening
- Cadw approved up to £4k for the manual cutting of gorse

There is further work earmarked from this budget including signage and possible refurbishment of the trig point all of which has not yet been finalised.

The area covered by these improvements show that the area covered by CTS's influence has grown since our inception and it is a reflection of how our ties with the commoners is benefitting our aims for Twmbarlwm.

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 third 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 28th November.

December – Maggie Thomas led a walk for us after Christmas to walk off the Xmas Excesses – 10 humans and 4 dogs came along in pretty miserable weather and we enjoyed a cup of mulled wine and mince pies at the top served up by Terry. And yes, we'll be doing it again this year date to be arranged.

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

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 Tescos and Greggs and raised over £70.

April – Rob Southall led a walk for us in search of the “Lost Farms of Twmbarlwm” and again in June on a similar theme to find the “Lost Farms of the Rhyswg”.

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.

March – also saw the return of local author Chris Barber who gave us an interesting illustrated talk of his wanderings around “Gwent with his Camera”

APRIL – In conjunction with the Risca Community Council we helped organise the lighting of a Beacon on top of Twmbarlwm to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday. The weather was horrendous with wind and driving rain but it didn't dampen the spirits of the 20 or so people who trekked to the top of the mountain with local MP Chris Evans.

MAY – Les Murphy gave us an informative talk on the “History and Rights of Common Land”

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, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent – but he has a personal fondness for Twmbarlwm so it still figures largely in his operations.

As I said previously we have met with the new Inspector at Risca, Jason White, on a couple of occasions and he has promised that the area was firmly on the local police's radar however, he has stressed the importance of reporting any incidents that concerned us on their 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

Opening Balance was £6,423.08

Closing Balance was £6,805.61

The Treasurer and Chairman have been unable to get together to prepare a full breakdown of income but it will be made available in due course.

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

SUMMING UP

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.

On a personal note I want to inform you all that Sue and I will soon be moving house and it could be outside the area. Therefore, although I'm willing to remain a Trustee I will be unable to continue all my duties as Chairman – so come the next Trustees meeting we will need to decide how the society should proceed.

Thank you

TERRY EVANS
Chairman