



*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*

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## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2021-22**

*Presented to the A.G.M. Monday 14th November 2022*

*Held at the Philanthropic Inn, Pontywaun. NP11 7DU*



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*(This report forms part of the official minutes of the AGM held on 14th November 2022  
which is supplied as a separate document)*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome everyone to this the Annual General Meeting of Cymdeithas Twmbarlwm Society.

Thankfully, after a couple of years of disruption due to the Covid lockdown we have had a full and busy year.

The Twmbarlwm Society is over 12 years old now and as usual when I look back at my photographs and reports of the Society's work over the years I'm just amazed at how much we manage to achieve. I am pleased to say that we are still recognised by the local county councils Caerphilly and Torfaen, Cadw, NRW and other official bodies, as a major influencer in environmental, community and historical issues of the area.

Our constitution stipulates that the Trustees should meet at least three times a year yet we have had six full Trustees' meetings since the last AGM – and of course, many more meetings with other parties with whom we work on the various projects.

Paid-up Members are kept informed of the Society's work through our monthly e-newsletter (JQN) and should members want more detail of the Society's projects and decisions then Agenda and Minutes of all Trustees' meetings can be seen and downloaded from our website.

The following "end of year report" will give a brief overview of everything that the society has been involved with over the past year and I hope it will illustrate the volume of work needed to achieve the Society's aims and objectives - and thus encourage more members to come forward and help us continue to research, restore and protect Mynydd Twmbarlwm.

At this stage I would like to thank my fellow Trustees for the amount of work they put into our projects.

There's Norman - our Vice Chair - who has become my reliable and trusted wingman. He makes sure projects keep rolling along when I have forgotten to answer an email or contact someone. In particular Norman has led the way on the Sward Management project and his knowledge of the machinations of councils and bureaucracy has been invaluable.

Then there's Sue - our Secretary - she tries to keep my feet on the ground and makes sure our records are kept in some sort of order. Earlier this year Sue (ably assisted by new Trustee Sally Davies) made sure our Jubilee Beacon Event went off smoothly while I was tied up with archaeology work.

Another important cog in the CTS wheel is Martyn Vaughan - our Treasurer - who has kept an eye on our money for the past 7 (or is it 8) years – he has browbeat and badgered Members - in the nicest possible way - to pay up their annual subs. He has also had to wrestle with the ever-changing Ts & Cs of dealing with our bank. Unfortunately, Martyn is retiring from the post at this AGM and at the moment he has not been replaced, I must admit, he will be sorely missed.

All other Trustees have done their part in supporting our various activities - and I sincerely thank them all for their input and knowledge and simply for being there when needed.

## 2. TRUSTEES

Last year all existing Trustees were voted back in en-bloc to serve another year - and I'm pleased to say that Rob and Sam Southall decided to rejoin the list of Trustees after a year out due to other commitments. I would also like to welcome Sally Davies to our ranks of Trustees. For those of you who don't know Sally, she is a councillor on the Risca Town Council, she has been a member of CTS and of FoCFD for a few years and she also worked with us on the last Beacon lighting event we did on Twmbarlwm for the Queen's 90th birthday.

So the new list of Trustees is:

- Terry Evans (Chair)
- Norman Liversuch (Vice-Chair)
- Sue Evans (Secretary)
- Martyn Vaughan (Treasurer and Membership Secretary)
- Bill Fearnley-Whittingstall
- Rob Southall

- Sam Southall
- Charles Ferris
- Howard Vicary
- Les Murphy

- Sally Davies
- Maggie Thomas was co-opted as advisor on RoW issues and she continues to organise our monthly litter pick.

### 3. FINANCE and MEMBERSHIP

Martyn Vaughan, Treasurer, will be providing his report separately.

Membership suffered greatly during the Pandemic but now stands at approx 70 - boosted by the fact we decided to give a free year's membership to the 29 archaeology volunteers who actually gave time to help on the dig.

We now have over 1,100 followers on Facebook – despite messages on our Facebook page many of these followers see themselves as “members of the society” but in reality they are not “paid-up members” – we should make some effort to convert some of those “followers” into paid up members.

This year the Society appointed a professional accountant to audit the Society's accounts – Martyn provided her with the Society's books and all necessary records and they have all been approved and signed off.

Note that there are two versions of accounts presented this is because while the CTS archaeology project is so heavily funded by Cadw, we believe that a version of the accounts without the Cadw input shows the financial health of the society more clearly.

	Without Cadw Grant	With Cadw Grant
Opening Balance	<b>£8,685.76</b>	<b>£30,858.16</b>
Closing Balance	<b>£8,810.60</b>	<b>£8,810.60</b>

Please refer to the balance sheets presented separately by the Treasurer.

### 4. PROJECTS

Each of our projects and campaigns is reported in detail, with many accompanying photographs, on our website or through the e-Newsletter *JQN*. How they are managed and progress is also fully covered in the minutes of our meetings. So the following accounts are brief overviews to illustrate the scope of the Society's activities over the past year.

#### 4. (a) – ARCHAEOLOGY

The Society's first season of archaeological investigations took place from 2nd to 20th August 2021 and was fully reported at last year's AGM. Under the guidance of Cadw, CTS commissioned the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) to undertake the investigation. Cadw funded the project to the tune of £32,000.

We then had to wait for the official report of the dig to arrive before we could start to plan for the next stage of investigation. In February the results of carbon dating of samples arrived (175-26 BC for one and 3,000 BC for another) – which allowed the report to be completed. Hence in March 2022 discussions started with Cadw and CPAT whether we would continue with the investigation and it was decided that there was enough evidence to warrant further studies.

So again the procedure of application for funding, getting permissions, organising volunteers was underway. By the end of July a funding budget of £38,000 was agreed by Cadw and the dig, again led by CPAT, was arranged to start on 8th August for three weeks.

After our call for volunteers in July, we received over 90 enquiries from people wanting to take part – from that list 48 actually registered to attend the dig. When their time was allocated it appeared we had between

10 and 17 volunteers per day – of course, eventually some people didn't turn up, for whatever reason, yet we still had at least 6 volunteers for every day of the dig.

At the end of the dig we calculated that 29 volunteers had taken part (not taking into account any of the Trustees' involvement) – which amounted to approximately 640 hours work. For those who don't know – when applying for funding, volunteer input must be given a value and our little army of volunteers represents about £8,500 in that calculation.

The dig took place in the usual range of weather from the hottest days on record to torrential rain and fog. And we did a lot more work than originally planned which was mainly down to the hard work of the volunteers. Six trenches were dug all together plus auger samples taken on the motte itself.

There were no remarkable finds in the way of ancient artefacts but, I must say, we weren't really expecting any. But the archaeologists found a lot of evidence that maybe asks more questions that may persuade them to come back for more exploration next year (funding permitting).

Details of the dig were recorded in a daily blog on our website [www.twmbarlwm.co.uk](http://www.twmbarlwm.co.uk) – and the official archaeologist's report will be published as soon as possible.

All together, it proved to be an excellent project and we were very grateful to the team of volunteers who turned up in rain or shine and put in a lot of physical effort in search of Twmbarlwm's past. They shifted tons of material down to depths of nearly 2m – in the first week the work was in temperatures up to 36° – we even had to cancel two planned 'open days' and suspend work in the trenches because it was "officially" too hot.

On a personal note, it was very frustrating for me because I was there on site most days acting as registration secretary but I could not climb the hill (due to a bad leg) to help with the physical work – however, I'm very grateful to Norman, Sue and Bill who were there and were able to welcome a couple of groups of VIPs to guide them around the trenches.

Also, we would like to thank Cadw and its officers Will Davies and Amelia Pannett for all their help and advice and, of course, the CPAT team (Will Logan, Richard Hankinson, Sophie Cooledge, Chris Matthews and Jack Rowe) for their hard work and undoubted expertise.

## **4. (b) – SWARD MANAGEMENT PLAN**

On the same day as last year's AGM we had a meeting on the mountain with Cadw and the Gwent Wildlife Trust to discuss how to implement that Sward Management Plan. This follows the archaeology project nicely as one of the initial aims of the archaeological investigations was to assess the damage to the underlying archaeology caused by the wild fires that struck the Scheduled Monument in 2018.

Notes on that meeting are on record and available online - the main points are as follows:

- i. Baseline ecological study needed
- ii. Evaluation of re-seeding
- iii. Establish grazing needs with commoners and the estate
- iv. Address erosion of paths
- v. Outreach to involve community
- vi. Another season of archaeology
- vii. Costs

Norman took the lead on this project so I will call on him to update you on it as well as the progress of the Adventure Triangle which has cross-over elements with the Sward Management. Please refer to Norman's report that is included in the meeting's minutes.

I would also like to mention here, as a further illustration of the admin work we get embroiled in, when in March we heard that a large portion of the Adventure Triangle work involving Torfaen was no longer going ahead, thereby releasing some funds that we could possibly use for the Sward Management scheme. So once

more we were thrown into a frenzy of paperwork to prepare an application for funding. Norman took on the not insignificant task and unfortunately the request was rejected just a week later.

This refusal meant we still needed to find further funding and TE and NL made applications to a fund operated by Viridor - which was eventually refused. We also started enquiries through the Caerphilly Council Community Empowerment fund which is still on-going.

At this point, a date had been set for a Bio-Blitz on the mountain organised by Gwent Wildlife Trust, which was needed as the first element of the Sward Management scheme - so it was decided that the Society would fund this part of the scheme ourselves up to the value of £1,800.

**THE BIO BLITZ** was set for the 11th September. The day consisted of two walks guided by Andy Karan of Gwent Wildlife Trust and Amelia of Cadw - and we also organised for a fossil expert and a glass bottle historian to be on hand to answer attendees questions.

Fifteen people turned up for the event and Andy managed to record over 120 different species of flora and fauna - his full report will be available soon.

## 4. (c) - THE ADVENTURE TRIANGLE

The joint enterprise between Caerphilly and Torfaen councils that is known as the **Adventure Triangle** - has been in progress for a few years and the physical work is still ongoing.

Work done so far includes:

- The old double line of stock fencing from the car park, over the ridgeway and down to the forest drive (650m x 2) - has been renewed - and new hedging planted in between.
- The rough eroded slopes have been dug out and flattened (further work required).
- New gate and corral system across the track behind the car-park
- Re-dressing of bund around car park

Still in progress

- Repair and extension of floating paths leading to Twmp
- Repair / replace fire damaged steps and knee rails on the Twmp
- New stone pavement around the Trig Point.
- Interpretation signage

I stress that the Society has not physically done the work on this project - CTS has neither the authority nor workforce to undertake any major works and the majority of the landscape management of Twmbarlwm and Mynydd Maen is led by the Commoners Association and the landowners Llanover Estates and Pontypool Estate.

But the Society is often called upon to play an active role in advising and commenting on any proposals put forward. It must be said that the council's Countryside and Landscape Department have done nothing without consulting the commoners or ourselves first.

Two of our Trustees, Les Murphy and Howard Vicary are also representatives of the commoners and they have consulted the Society and kept us up to date with news of work associated with the Adventure Triangle.

## 5. QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE BEACON

We were contacted by CCBC in January 2022 to ask if we had any plans to light a Beacon on Twmbarlwm to mark the Queen's platinum Jubilee. We had already started making enquiries with the official website and it was at the next Trustees meeting that Sue and Sally agreed to lead on this project.

Having had the experience of lighting a beacon on the top of Twmbarlwm on two previous occasions we were well placed to do it again. CCBC supplied us with a new gas beacon designed especially for the occasion and Risca Town Council joined us as a joint venture in inviting attendees - including Chris Evans MP who gave a speech and read the proclamation before the lighting of the Beacon

The event involved the cooperation of various local groups and we are particularly grateful to:

- Abercarn 1st Scouts – who helped guide all attendees to the top of the mountain - and more importantly back down again in the dark
- Risca Fire Service – who supplied a vehicle and the personnel to transport the heavy equipment to the mountain top
- Risca Branch of St John's Ambulance – whose team were on hand in case of any accidents

The event went off without an hitch with over 120 attendees getting up and down the mountain safely. We later learned that our Beacon could be seen from miles around and the Society was later presented with a certificate from the Queen's Pageantmaster to commemorate our involvement and we in turn presented the same certificate to our partners who helped us out on the day.

Also please refer to Sue's report that is included in the meeting's minutes.

## 6. TIDY TWMP

The monthly Litter Pick and Volunteer Day remains a major part of our "Tidy Twmp" objectives which have been in place since the Welsh Government incentive of some twelve years ago. I'm sure our efforts have helped reduce the number of major incidents but the area is still prone to casual littering, fly-tipping, vandalism and the occasional burnt-out car.

Maggie Thomas continued to organise our monthly litter picks and we usually get at least 12 volunteers turn out each month. We regularly collect several bags of rubbish which CCBC generally collect fairly promptly a day or so later after we report it to them – and I would like to thank Tudor Lewis and his team at CCBC for responding as quickly as they do.

THE LITTER – We separate out what we can for recycling and take away drink cans to raise money for other local charities.

Following is a list of the major occurrences over the past year:

- NOV 21 – Wall vandalised
- DEC 21 – Large burnt out fly tip
- JAN 22 – Another large fly tip containing an address that we reported
- FEB – Last month's fly tip had been added to - yet we bagged it all up
- MAY – Burnt out car on car park - had been removed but we cleared up the debris left behind
- AUG – Crashed car at top of ORPA
- OCT – Large fly tip - containing evidence of an address - now under investigation.

As always I'm very grateful to all those who turn out for these days – it's about the only occasion we have for members to get together regularly. But I would still like to urge a few more to come and join us, after all there's a cup of tea on offer after the hard work. Apart from the work it can be fun meeting other visitors to the mountain who come from far and wide.

## 7. OTHER EVENTS and ACTIVITIES

**HOT-CROSS-BUN WALK** on Good Friday 15th April 2022 – We hadn't been able to promote this tradition for the past couple of years due to the Covid lockdown - so this year was a welcome return of the event. We had £20 worth of Buns from Tesco but on the day we only made about £18 in the collecting buckets. We organised

a walk from the stony bridge in Pontymister as usual which fewer than 20 people turned up for, and Rob organised a walk from Cwmcarn which over 30 people attended. Abercarn 1st Scouts attended in good numbers and helped us distribute the buns at the top.

Apart from our groups there were plenty of people walking up the mountain - but I fear not as many as we have seen in previous years - I suppose it will be a slow process recovering from the Covid years.

**ILLUSTRATED TALKS** – Only in recent months have we started to organise talks:

- the first held in September was on the *History of Newport Castle* by Will Davies of Cadw which was well attended by over 40 people and netted us about £70 including a few new memberships.
- Last week we had a talk on the *History of Father Christmas* by Roger Morgan which was attended by under 20 people and netted us about £40.
- There are more talks and events arranged, to be held at Crosskeys RFC, in the new year

**SOUTH WALES DIRECTORIES** - We continue to supply an article to the local advertising publication “The South Wales Directory” - it’s produced 10 times a year and is distributed to 25,000 households across 7 different areas – it is a fabulous way of getting our message out to the local community.

**MYNYDD MAEN WIND FARM** – Some of our Trustees met with the company (RES-Group) to learn about the implications this development will have for Twmbarlwm.

The plans propose the development of a wind farm on the Penyrheol end of the Mynydd Maen ridgeway - this will consist at least 15 x 150m tall wind turbines. They will be very visible from the top of Twmbarlwm and other locations from miles around. It’s yet to go through planning and will take a few years before any work starts but the Society will keep a watching brief on the project and will keep you aware of progress.

## 8. SUMMING UP

My summing up message is virtually the same that it has been for the past 12 years:

- The Twmp still needs our diligence to protect it from those who do not respect our environment and to improve it for the community and future generations.
- 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 in the past twelve years – off-roaders and other anti-social behaviour still present us and the landscape with major problems.
- Yet there are more visitors than ever – partly due to the popularity of the Cwmcarn Forest Drive and I always love to hear their positive comments.
- I still think there is a great deal more work to be done and we must continue with our work for Twmbarlwm to remain the Iconic Landmark of Gwent.

Thank you

TERRY EVANS  
Chairman Cymdeithas Twmbarlwm Society

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