

Appendix 1 - Annual Report of the Board

This Directors' report covers the period from December 2020, when the last AGM was held, to the present day.

Protective Gates

Our major project has been the installation of protective gates on site.

A consultation process with the local community and other stakeholders demonstrated overwhelming levels of support for measures which would protect areas of the site overnight whilst leaving visitors free to explore and appreciate the heritage at other times.

At the end of 2020, we were granted funding of £1,200 from Historic Environment Scotland (HES) to commission architects' plans. These plans were used for successful applications to the HES Repair Grant scheme (£30,000) and Fife Environmental Trust (£40,000) for the costs of fabrication and installation. SWACS may be required to contribute £2,000 of our own funds.

Invitation to tender went out May 2021 and final approval from the funders was gained in April 2022. It is hoped that work will be carried out by our contractor Legge Steel early this summer.

As part of the funding applications, we took advice from a retired mining surveyor to consider structural issues relating to Court Cave and Jonathan's Cave ahead of grille installation. The survey found no structural movement since the 1990 Survey conducted by Ove Arup but measuring points are to be established and inspection of these incorporated into SWACS' regular monitoring activities.

Site improvements

In November 2021 we installed a new accessible path into Court Cave suitable for users of mobility scooters and wheelchairs. This was funded by a grant of £1,400 from Paths for All. The opening day saw around 25 members of Forth and Tay Disabled Ramblers taking advantage of the new path to see the carvings that were previously inaccessible to those with restricted mobility.

The funding also allowed for the removal of the old 'danger' signs and provision of new signage with more helpful advice on the risks of entering the caves.

We have continued to conduct our annual monitoring survey of the caves, paths and coastline. For future drone surveys we will be able to use permanent ground control points at known GPS coordinates that have been installed across the site.

We are grateful to The Wemyss Improvement Group (TWIG) who donated an impressive model of MacDuff Castle which is situated alongside the coastal path.

Improvements are still required to the Jonathan's Road path and a site meeting has taken place with Fife Coast and Countryside Trust (FCCT) to assess how drainage might be improved.

An investigation of the site above Doo Cave was undertaken in preparation for a proposed excavation of the gun platform known to have stood there. Following consultation with NatureScot, vegetation clearance has taken place and a path established to the area from Macduff Castle. Once the excavation has been carried out, it is our intention to mark the outline of the gun platform and possibly provide a picnic table there.

Discussions are continuing with the Wemyss Estate over a long-term lease of the land. In principle, this is something we would like to do but a major obstacle is being able to obtain, and pay for, the necessary insurance to cover the liabilities that would be taken on.

Guided Tours

Tours restarted in May 2021 with greatly restricted numbers due to COVID. This had an inevitable effect on our finances, although donations per head noticeably increased which mitigated the loss of income to some degree. We continue to operate two tours every Sunday between April and October, with bespoke tours available on request. One week each month will be set aside for shortened tours specifically aimed at visitors with restricted mobility.

In October 2021 we held a Well Cave Open Day, following a risk assessment and putting into place of appropriate safety measures. This proved very popular and we hope to repeat it again this year.

One area in which we hope to increase income is through the organised tour market and a paid tour will take place in June for a specialist group.

Schools and outreach

We are continuing to increase our engagement with local schools and other organisations. Our specially arranged tours and visits have included:

- Pupils taking part in East Wemyss Primary School Heritage Angels project
- Fife Young Carers
- Hillside School, Aberdour
- Masters students from Stirling University studying Heritage Management
- Moderator of Fife Presbytery and colleagues
- Tours for approximately 60 home-schoolers
- Local Studies students from the Supported Learning Department at Fife College

It is hoped that many of these visits will be repeated annually and that further collaborations will follow.

Film, TV and radio

The site continues to be a popular location both for Pictish-related programmes and as a backdrop for other content. Location fees are waived by the Estate, who instead encourage donations to SWACS which provides an additional source of income. Filming over the last 18 months has included:

- [*Slighe Chladach Fìobha \(Fife Coastal Path\)*](#) for BBC Alba
- [*The Supernatural Shore*](#) for The Big Scottish Story Ripple
- [*Wemyss Caves Tour*](#) for SWACS
- [*Val McDermid interviewed*](#) about her latest book
- [*Down the Lane with...*](#) podcast for the Linton Lane Centre
- *Ancient Murder Mysteries* – forthcoming documentary on the killing of the Pictish ‘Rosemarkie man’
- Forthcoming documentary on female spirituality, storytelling and Scottish folk beliefs

Talks and presentations

- *The Wemyss Caves in Context – What recent discoveries and rediscoveries can tell us about “Pictish” Fife* for the Pictish Arts Society
- [Warriors, beasts and boats: a re-examination of some of the carvings at the Wemyss Caves](#) for the conference of the Tayside and Fife Archaeological Committee
- [Auld Handsel Monday: Old and New Year Traditions](#)
- *Saving the Wemyss Caves* for Scotland’s Community Heritage Conversation

Membership

Following the 2020 AGM, membership stood at 40 individuals or family. This has risen to over 50, including one organisational membership. Much of this is down to the membership secretary proactively encouraging renewals but also includes a number of new members, including some who have become active volunteers.

Constitution

We took the opportunity during lockdown to streamline our accounting procedures and develop a new set of Articles of Association (constitution) to resolve contradictions and anomalies. This was a very involved and lengthy process and the new Articles were finally approved in January 2022.

We have appointed a new independent examiner and, with his help, overhauled and enhanced our accounting procedures. The additional capabilities will help with future budget setting exercises.

Terras Hall

The Museum and Visitor Centre remains in need of maintenance, improvement and refurbishment. To this end we made an application of £20,000 to the Museums and Galleries Scotland Capital Resilience Fund. Unfortunately this was a very competitive fund and we were unsuccessful, but we continue to look for alternative funding sources for this work.

We were successful in an application to Fife Council for from the local community planning budget for the installation of a lockable shed in the grounds behind the hall. This will securely house the cleaning equipment for on-site graffiti removal and also serves as a store, relieving some of the pressure on space.

New shop displays were created from unwanted furniture from St Andrews University which have greatly improved the merchandise area in the Visitor Centre.

We have begun a project to establish a “Pictish garden” at the Terras Hall which will include plants and other natural resources which would have been available locally for use as food, pigments and medicines.

Problems over parking arrangements for visitors were reported by one local resident which have now been resolved with new signage discouraging parking in The Haugh.

Collections

The purchase of a scanner and bequest of a PC has allowed us to start a photograph and document digitisation project, which we hope ultimately to make available as an important online resource. Alongside this, all our book collection is being catalogued.

Preparations continue for a book and exhibition on George Moodie, local resident and captain of the Cutty Sark. The book will be published in collaboration with an external author and the exhibition will take place at Kirkcaldy Galleries in May 2023.

Collaborations

We took part in the 2021 STEP Project run by St Andrews University. The project places teams of students to work with local organisations on areas of mutual benefit. Our teams examined education and income generation as well as sustainability. The work produced by the students was very impressive, particularly the educational materials, and the project is to be repeated annually.

Merchandise

Online and in-person sales continue to be an important source of income and we have expanded our range of products and outlets.

The acquisition of a card reader has allowed us to take in-person credit card payments and has proved highly successful in increasing income from visitors who do not carry cash.

We took a stall at Leven Artisan market for a couple of events. Footfall was low, but sales allowed us to at least recoup our costs and it proved a useful exercise in terms of local visibility. We now also sell a limited range of products at the Falkland Stables.

We have purchased badgemaking equipment which will allow us to sell badges, key rings and fridge magnets. Designs for these are being prepared.

A volunteer has very kindly made us another bear to help with fundraising. We will sell raffle tickets over the course of the season

Publications

Our guidebook is being rewritten with new drawings by John Borland, formerly of HES. We are exploring the possibility of extending this work to produce a larger “coffee table” book incorporating John’s drawings.

Recognition

Local MP Peter Grant and MSP David Torrance tabled motions in the UK and Scottish Parliaments to recognise the work done by SWACS and partners to improve accessibility.

Looking forward

The installation of the gates will not only protect important areas of the site but give us the necessary platform to improve interpretation and further expand the number of visitors as we emerge from the pandemic.

Together with the other site improvements we have made this is a great opportunity to raise our activities to another level but will also pose significant challenges for SWACS’ volunteer base. Accordingly, we have agreed to seek substantial funding to allow us to employ a development officer and/or administrative assistance. Our objectives align well with the £10 million Levenmouth Reconnected project and we are preparing an application should another funding round be announced. A new development plan is being prepared to support this and any other applications for funding.

Covid has been a very difficult time for organisations like ours but we are coming out of it financially stable, with an increased volunteer base, and having made significant improvements to safety, security and accessibility on site. There is great potential over the next few years to enhance our ability to protect and promote this invaluable heritage for future generations.