

SECRETARIES' REPORT

MARCH 2020 – MARCH 2021

To say it has been an unusual year would be an understatement. The last time we were all together was the AGM this time last year. Since then, unfortunately, not much club caving has happened although there have been some highlights namely the UBSS Ireland Expedition and the Hut Wood Chopping weekend.

Socials

Although we have not been able to meet in the pub, the UBSS socials, held over Zoom, became a regular occurrence with Megan rallying everyone to have a go at being a quiz master. These are still going strong and will continue to do so until we are able to get back to where we all want to be, namely sitting in the pub.

Caving and other activities

Thankfully, in the summer, restrictions eased allowing a group to enjoy a much-needed hut getaway where everyone chipped in to replenish the hut's dwindling wood supply. Special thanks to all who attended especially Chris Pepper and Andrew Atkinson who brought their chainsaws and made everyone's job a little easier. Several members were also involved in helping with David Richards' monitoring work in St Vincent's Spring in the Avon Gorge.

Ireland:

In September, a group of mainly first year students travelled to County Clare to continue surveying the Coolagh River Cave. The trip was an all-round great success with 1377 m of cave surveyed by a group many of whom were surveying for the first time. As well as surveying there was also a lot of opportunity for sport caving most notably an almost successful through trip of Marble Arch show cave where one party got locked in and was forced to go for a swim in the cave's icy waters. Massive thanks are due to Ashley Gregg for organising such an enjoyable two weeks we are sure many of us will be back in County Clare soon.

Freshers

Although covid made new recruitment especially difficult we were still able to hold a host of events such as a Give it a Go session on the Downs where freshers could come and learn about caving while enjoying some beers in the sun. We also were able to take anyone who was keen on some classic Mendip fresher trips and even hosted a six-person weekend. Hopefully, once covid restrictions relax this spring we will be able to get lots more freshers involved in the society.

Newsletter

This year also saw the major revival of the UBSS newsletter thanks to lots of effort from Linda Wilson and Mia Jacobs who made sure a wide range of articles were featured written by various members of the society. This has been a great record of all the caving people have been doing and has also given much exposure to parts of the society history that was previously not widely known. We have now produced an email newsletter every month for just over two years since embarking on this new venture at the start of our centenary year.

Hut Restoration

The hut was also treated to a makeover this year with a new chimney being installed in July and new wood for the shutters and sill. Thanks are due to Haydon Saunders for all the effort he has put in to keeping the hut habitable.

Even though the past year has been very tough on everyone and we have not been able to do as much caving as we would have liked, the swell of community support that has grown within UBSS has made the gloom seem less gloomy and the doom seem less doomy. We know everyone is looking forward to a much more exciting year to come.

Merryn Matthews, Hon Student President
Sam Bowers, Hon Secretary

MUSEUM REPORT – 2021

The past year has been a strange one for the museum. Almost immediately after the installation of our wonderful new staircase, the country went into its first lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, bringing all work in the museum, including our planned redecoration, to an abrupt halt.

When lockdown ended, we were able to re-establish very limited use of the Stables subject to strict safety protocols limiting the number of people in the building. We had hoped to work on the redecoration once lockdown lifted, but in practice it wasn't long before restrictions were imposed again and as a result, the redecoration still has not happened and we have been unable to host any researchers for the past year and so no physical work has been carried out in the collection other than building maintenance.

Our main event on the maintenance front has been the removal of the old gas heaters and their replacement by a new thermostatically controlled electric heating system. This work was completed just before Christmas, in time for a very cold, damp period. We are very grateful to the Estates department who funded and arranged for this work and to all the outside contractors who worked tirelessly and with good humour to meet our needs. I spent a considerable amount of time both in meetings and being on the premises when the work was carried out, so in that respect, it has been both a busy and eventful year. Wrestling the old gas flues out of the wall was an exercise that all our hut engineers, past and present, would have had huge sympathy with! Eventually, hitting things with big hammers proved to be the answer.

Over the past month, student museum curator, Nathan Cubitt, has worked on a short film on the society's most recent acquisition, namely the material from Fishmonger's Swallet in South Gloucester, as part of an Alumni Spring Showcase event. UBSS/Hades Caving Club member David Hardwick, one of the discoverers of the cave, was filmed in conversation with Professor Mark Horton, who was involved in the original dig there, 25 years ago by Time Team. The material was donated to UBSS by the landowner, Mrs Joan Hawkins in 2019. Work has commenced on bringing together a series of papers on the site for a future issue of Proceedings. When current lockdown restrictions ease, work will also be carried out on the material by Adelle Bricking from the University of Cardiff as part of her PhD on Iron Age mortuary practices. Adelle has been a frequent and always welcome visitor to the UBSS collection over the course of her work.

At the Institute of Archaeology in University College London, work continues on the samples from King Arthur's Cave in the Wye Valley taken by Dr Rhiannon Stevens and her team. This involves a biomolecular technique known as ZooMS to identify morphologically

unidentifiable skeletal faunal remains. Rhiannon reports that one sample has been identified as human, but this has not yet been radiocarbon dated.

The gradual easing of lockdown will, we hope, enable work in the museum to begin again.

I'd like to thank Nathan Cubitt, Tony Boycott and Helen Rossington for their help through all the upheavals of the past year.

Linda Wilson