

SECRETARIES' REPORT

MARCH 2021 – MARCH 2022

This year has been a bumper year for caving, with the lack of activity in 2021 being more than made up for with this year's colossal student intake. We currently have 85 student members signed up through the union and are still taking some people underground for the first time!

The year got off to a great start with the trip organised by Elaine Oliver to the Gouffre Berger in the Vercors. This trip was a joint venture with the Cambridge University Caving Club and some Polish cavers and was an excellent introduction to large Alpine caving for many of our students. We managed to somehow avoid COVID throughout and luckily the travel rules were relaxed at the 11th hour, allowing a three week trip to France, including some pre-Berger trips in the Vercors. Our thanks go to the Tratman Fund and the Oliver Lloyd Memorial fund for generously grants to assist with student travel and the purchase of necessary equipment for the trip.

The Welcome Fair was busy this year, as all those students in their second year who had missed out on caving the previous year also signed up in force, leading to the record number of student members. We were placed next to UBMC and UBES this year, which has led to friendships between the societies, and we are looking forward to a joint trip with all three clubs in the Yorkshire Dales.

The first term saw the obligatory trips to South Wales and of course our Hut on Mendip for the usual activities. Many students braved Storm Arwen to attend the CHECC forum in Yorkshire, although the idea of camping was quickly changed in favour of cramming as many people as possible indoors. The Christmas dinner was held at the Eldon House in Clifton, our usual Tuesday evening haunt, and we are pleased to report that the tradition of a New Year's Eve dinner at the Hut remains unbroken, despite the pandemic. The amount of midweek caving has been very healthy and we hope this will continue.

We were saddened by the deaths of two of our members in the last year. Dr Martin Crossley-Evans, former Warden of Manor Hall, last year, and Dr Steve Trudgill at the start of this year. Martin was a generous donor to our library and Steve, who reconnected with the Society at our centenary, was an enthusiastic follower of our activities in our online Newsletter.

Henry Morgan, Hon Student President
Merryn Matthews, Hon Secretary

MUSEUM REPORT – 2022

The past year has seen more tribulations for the museum. Just when we were hoping to be able to resume work in the museum, including the long-delayed redecoration following the installation of the new staircase and the replacement of the old gas heating with new electric heaters, yet another problem with the fabric of the building was identified, this time with the floor joists in the library stack room. These have suffered badly from wet rot and had dropped by several inches, making the floor unsafe. The inevitable problems of getting work done during the pandemic then came into play, and even the original investigations took several months. When the extent of the problem was identified, a team consisting of Tony Boycott,

Nathan Cubitt, Helen Rossington and Jan Walker then swung into action in my absence on holiday and evacuated the exhibits from all cabinets and a line of props were deployed to hold up the joists. Estates' plan is to jack the floor back up to its original position, cut out the rotten sections and bolt new wood into place.

The second phase of evacuation saw the contents of the library stack room moved into the museum stack room, with most the bookshelves themselves moved downstairs into the library room. This was a massive effort by Tony, Helen, Jan and myself, with some assistance from Zac Woodford and Henry Morgan. I never want to move another Ikea bookshelf as long as I live, but eventually they will all need to go back into their original places, but not before that room has been thoroughly redecorated. We do not yet have a time scale for this work from Estates.

The building works, on top of the earlier covid restrictions, have meant that research visits have been impossible in the past year, and several requests from other institutions are now waiting in an ever-growing queue, however the loan of the Fishmonger's Swallet material to Adelle Bricking of Cardiff University has meant that work on an important part of the collection has been able to continue. At the end of the year, several radiocarbon dates were obtained from Tim Knowles in the university's dating facility. These put a very different complexion on our knowledge of the site and appear to exonerate the Romans from whatever societal stress produced the evidence of cannibalism at the site as the dates turned out to be approximately 125 years earlier than the Roman invasion, pushing things firmly back into the Iron Age. The results on the dog remains were similarly exciting, with what might well be the oldest known small dog from the Iron Age, running contrary to accepted belief that small dogs were a later introduction to Britain, possibly by the Romans. The project has been assisted by a generous grant from the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund, which paid for the radiocarbon work. A further grant for more ¹⁴C dates and some stable isotope work has now been obtained from the British Cave Research Association.

Work on the material from the Lime Hill Kiln Quarry (M42), now on loan to Professor Danielle Shrieve of Royal Holloway has been delayed by the pandemic but will restart this year.

There will be a lot of hard work ahead when the building work on the Stables finishes as I would like to take this opportunity to refresh our displays downstairs, incorporating the Fishmonger's story and displaying for the first time in our own museum some of the original material from Read's Cavern, including the famous horse-hobbles, that was on long-term loan for nearly 50 years to Woodspring Museum. And perhaps in the absence of any more building related upheavals, we might finally be able to move on with the long-held aspiration of achieving Arts Council accreditation for the collection.

Linda Wilson