

SECRETARY'S REPORT

MARCH 2022– MARCH 2023

This has been another busy year for student caving. We currently have 62 students signed up through the union system and are still taking new cavers underground, including some who have joined through our recent joint weekend in Yorkshire with two other student clubs, UBMC and UBES, the mountaineering club and expeditions society.

Late last summer saw a trip to Co Clare led by Ashley Gregg, which succeeded in surveying another 1,565 m of passage in the Coolagh River Cave, bringing the re-survey tantalizingly close to completion, as the total passage surveyed so far has reached 6.213 m, leaving approximately one kilometer left for those who need their annual fix of cold water, dark limestone, copious amounts of Guinness, and an inflatable unicorn. Members also attended the International Congress of Speleology held in the Haute-Savoie region of France. Both trips benefitted from grant aid from the Tratman Fund of the University of Bristol and the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund. The trip to the Congress also received a grant from the British Caving Association designed to assist younger cavers.

The autumn term started as usual with a weekend trip to the Mendips staying at our own hut and this was followed by trips to Wales, Yorkshire and Derbyshire. Our Hut also played host to the traditional Bonfire Weekend and the New Year's Eve Dinner, the society's longest standing continuous tradition, with a well-attended Christmas dinner held at the Spotted Cow in Bedminster. In January, members took advantage of a prize won by Henry Morgan at last year's CHECC (the Council of Higher Education Caving Clubs) of a free night at the MNRC's Mendip hut, which Henry kindly donated to the society. A trip was arranged to Fairy Cave Quarry, which houses one of the jewels in the area's crown, the beautifully decorated Shatter Cave.

The society's latest book, *Caves of Southern Ireland*, edited by Graham Mullan, was launched at the Irish Caving Symposium in Ballyvaughan, Co Clare. The book has been very well-received and is already close to breaking even on production costs. For the fourth year running, we have produced an online newsletter every month, recording as many of the society's activities as we can. Recollections of times past, as well as present activities are always welcome.

Archaeological work continues at Fishmonger's Swallet in South Gloucester, in conjunction with the Hades Caving Club and the 2022 issue of our *Proceedings* was dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the discovery of the cave with a series of papers on the site's history, geology and archaeology.

UBSS members, led by Linda Wilson, have embarked on a survey of the historic graffiti in Kents Cavern, Torquay, Devon. This is a long-term project, which aims to tackle each area of the cave in turn. Work is also being carried out on the history of the cave and its visitors. Early results are extremely encouraging.

We were saddened by the death of Angus Watkins last year. Angus joined the society in the mid-1950s and remained a member thereafter.

Zac Woodford, Hon. Secretary

MUSEUM REPORT 2023

The past year has been a strange one for the museum. The building has remained inaccessible awaiting works to repair the unsafe floor in library stack room, affected by wet rot in the joists where they meet the outside wall. This was delayed and delayed again due to pressures on the university's estates team, and then issues of budgets came into play and further delays ensued. As we started to move from autumn into winter, I began to wonder all this was proving insurmountable, then news came through that an order could finally be raised with the contractor. Christmas and covid then led to further delays, but at the end of January, we finally reached the point of a pre-works site meeting that I attended along with Nathan Cubitt and Jan Walker. At that point, we learnt that the scope of the works was greater than we had expected and would include two new windows at the back, and the tanking and redecoration of the wall above the affected joists. A start date of 1st March was tentatively agreed.

Then, naturally, the building turned out not to be on the asbestos register, so a survey was hastily arranged, and I crossed all fingers and toes yet again. The survey was clear, and I'm delighted to announce that I learned late last night from the tireless Gary Spillane, our estates contact, that work has started. The floor has been jacked back up into place, the rotten sections of the joists have been cut out and new ones have been bolted into place. Once everything is finished, we will have a huge task ahead, including a long overdue redecoration in areas not covered by this contract, then the return of everything to where it should be and a revamp of the displays.

While this has all been going on – or mostly not going on – research requests have been forming an orderly queue, at the head of it is UBSS member Dr Adelle Bricking, patiently awaiting access to the Backwell Cave material as she has grant funding for a further radiocarbon date from the site; Jess Peto, who worked on the faunal remains from Fishmonger's Swallet is now doing a PhD at Exeter and will be examining Pleistocene wolves from Picken's Hole; Sylvia Bello and colleagues from the Natural History Museum would like to examine lithics from Sun Hole and other sites. So, once we are back open, the museum will once again be hosting a steady stream of research visits.

Work on Fishmonger's Swallet has continued, in conjunction with the Hades Caving Club and colleagues from Cardiff University, led by Adelle Bricking, who was awarded her PhD this year. The 25th anniversary of the discovery of the cave was celebrated in 2022, and our Proceedings for last year was dedicated to work at the site. That concluded the first phase of our work at the site, however, work on the second phase of our investigations into the human and faunal remains from the cave has started, thanks to a grant from the BCRA to fund more C14 dates and some stable isotope work. Further samples from humans and dogs have been taken and are now with the dating facility in Bristol, and the plant samples for the isotope work are awaiting analysis. The cave now has new owners, and I'm delighted to report that Mr and Mrs Potter are very happy for work there to continue and for future finds to join the material we already hold in the UBSS museum. We were saddened to learn of the death of Mrs Joan Hawkins, long-time owner of the cave whose famed tolerance for muddy cavers made all this possible but the Potters are equally interested in what lies beneath their land and seem to have the same tolerance for muddy cavers!

Thanks to the efforts of Simon Parfitt at the Natural History Museum, some further material that was on loan to Roger Jacobi at the time of his death some years ago has been identified and can now be returned to the museum once some current work has been completed. I'm very grateful to Simon for his help with this.

Linda Wilson, Museum Curator