



## Usk Castle Friends

Relaunch of Usk Castle, Autumn 2020

Dear Member

The owners of the Castle, Rosie and Henry Humphreys, have reluctantly decided to close it to the general public. In future the castle will be freely open only to Usk Castle Friends. Members and their families and visitors, as at present, will be allowed unlimited visits to the castle. The only exceptions would be for days when weddings and charity events are booked, or for community days such as Usk Open Gardens Weekend, Teddy Bears' Picnic etc. These have always been popular days, without charge.

*Temporary arrangement.* In the present climate, alas, it is necessary to book a time slot to avoid over-crowding, so please notify the Castle by email, text or phone if you intend to visit. The current visiting days are:

Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays (winter) or Sundays (summer) and visiting times are:

10.30 – 12.00

12.30 – 2.00

2.30 – 4.00

4.30 – 6.00 pm (castle closes)

We hope that a return to easier access will be possible in due course.

Your Committee fully understands the Humphreys family's decision though, of course, we wish that it had not been necessary. Rosie Humphreys has provided the following explanation of the background. We hope that members will continue to enjoy the Castle.

“After the extraordinary year we have all experienced in some form or other, it will be apparent that some things must change, and yet many will stay the same.

Following the closure of Usk Castle over Lockdown, we tentatively tried opening by appointment over the Summer Bank Holiday period, to help visitors find things to do over a damp week. It proved onerous and unrewarding, despite several cheery souls making the best of it. As a family, we now feel, after being open virtually every day of the year for about 30 years, that times have changed, and we would like to regain the privacy of our home and garden.

All those years ago, it felt right to share an opportunity of this lovely and pleasant space for families and tourists to visit. A donation for entry was a way of avoiding costs, (there is VAT on ticket entry) and we hoped that the special atmosphere would invite people to reward the castle with appropriate donations if they could afford it, yet still be able to visit if they were short of cash. We saw many single parents enjoying space to play with their young, romantic couples and interested antiquarians alike enjoying the calm of the crumbling ruins. I have met some of the most charming and interesting folk passing by our back door.

The income from donations was helpful with the cost of maintenance (it is impossible to get insurance for public access without proof of repairing and maintaining the ruins) and when events became popular, the castle was able to fund its own significant conservation programme over 10 years, without asking for grant aid.

However as times change, so did our visitors. We have had an increasing number of unpleasant experiences, from drug users and dealers, litter, theft, and plain rudeness. Visitors fumble in their pockets for small coins, little realising that the cost of conserving the banqueting Hall in 2010 was £90,000. The spirit of joyful appreciation – two boys exclaiming ‘This is like the secret castle nobody has ever found!’ has been replaced by the demands of a right to visit, and if not, why not?

The change therefore, is that we have decided for the future, that the Castle will be freely open only to Usk Castle Friends.”