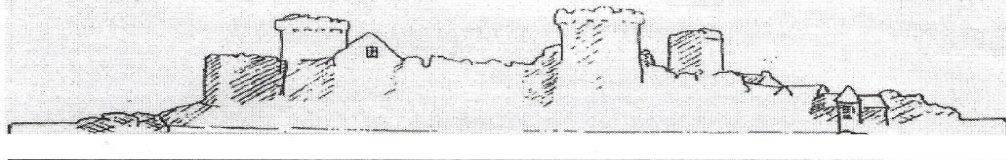


Usk Castle Friends

Newsletter Winter 2021-2



Chairman's introduction

In his book *Wales, Churches, Houses, Castles*, Simon Jenkins says "Usk Castle is wild, unmanicured, idiosyncratic...if ruins must be ruins, let them be like this". This seems a widely held view, given the huge surge in membership, both individual and family. UCF offers not just privileged access to the Castle, valued though it is, but a programme of events and activities, as this edition of our regular Newsletter will tell you. Currently we are considering how best to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee so would welcome your suggestions.

In the meantime, on behalf of the Committee, may I offer thanks for your support and I look forward to meeting you at one of our events.

Elizabeth Baker 01291 67123 elizabethbaker945@btinternet.co

Visiting the Castle

Now that the days are lengthening and the worst of the covid-19 crisis may be over members may wish to make more use of the Castle. Just a reminder of the opening times:

Winter

Monday, Thursday and Saturday from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm

Summer (after the clocks change)

Monday, Thursday and Sunday from 10.30 am to 5.00 pm.

Entry to the Castle is, of course, free to members. Other visitors are asked to pay an entrance fee of £4 either in cash or by card reader.

As covid restrictions are easing we expect to welcome more visitors to the Castle. Rosie Humphreys would very much like some help on Saturdays (Sundays in summer) in meeting and greeting visitors. If you would like to join a small team or find out more please give Rosie a ring at the Castle (on 01291 672563) or email her at info@uskcastle.com or contact the secretary.

Dates for your diary

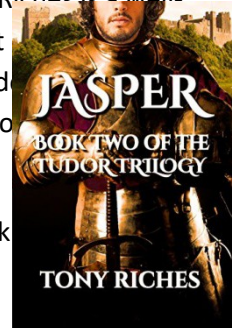
Saturday 12th February. (for your information). Mortimer History Society zoom conference on Passion and Power in the Marches. <https://mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk>

Tuesday 15th February. AGM. 7.00pm at the Sessions House, Usk. All members are welcome. The formal business is usually despatched fairly quickly and will be followed by a talk by the local historian Liz Jones: *Church versus Chapel, the Usk Almshouse Election of 1891*. Refreshments will be provided. We always welcome nominations for the Committee. If you are interested in being nominated please contact the secretary. *See below for the minutes of last year's AGM*

Saturday 9th April. Margaret Beaufort and Jasper Tudor Meeting. 10.00 am at the Memorial Hall, Usk. Lectures finish at 1.00 pm followed by a guided tour of the Castle in the afternoon. Our two speakers are Nicola Tallis and Tony Riches. Their topic will be the two people most responsible for Henry VII's success, Margaret Beaufort and Jasper Tudor. Nicola's recent book on Margaret, mother of Henry VII, was well received and was reviewed in a recent Newsletter. Tony Riches is a well-known author of books on the Tudor period. His book on Jasper Tudor was part of the series. It tells the story of how Jasper fled to Brittany with his young nephew Henry Tudor during the invasion of England. He has also written *The Brandon Trilogy*, among other historical fiction. Tony writes a popular blog.

Tickets: £5.00 for members and £7.50 for non-members. Pay at door or by bank transfer

Usk Castle Friends. a/c 65049750. Bank sort code 82-92-99



Opera at the Castle

We are having discussions with the company Opera in a Box about a performance of Puccini's *Tosca* at the Castle in June or July. Date to be announced!

Saturday 9th July. Joint meeting with the Mortimer Society. John Grove who died recently founded both the Usk Castle Friends and the Mortimer Society so it is fitting that the two Societies should come together to celebrate his contributions. The event will be at the Castle in the Tithe Barn and will be an opportunity to meet members of the Mortimer Society.

Saturday 24th September. Dissolution of the Monasteries. 10.00 am at the Memorial Hall, Usk.

Dissolution
tell us about
Dissolution
years by
millennium
Sian Rees



was a radical and momentous process and we are lucky to have two experts to it. Professor James Clark of the University of Exeter has recently published *The of the Monasteries: A New History*. The Dissolution was carried through in four Thomas Cromwell (see picture), 1536-40, and largely put an end to a of monastic life. Professor Madie Gray is a good friend of the Castle and with wrote the authoritative chapter the medieval Priory at Usk in the book *Usk, Castle, Town and Priory* co-edited by our President, Professor Jeremy Knight.

John Grove 1937-2021

Many of you will already be aware that John Grove, our founder, died recently. We remember him with a mixture of affection and sadness. John who died in December 2021 loved to innovate. He made at least two remarkable contributions to life in Usk, the Usk Castle Friends and the Castle Friends (2000) was his idea. It was his energy and enthusiasm that got it off the ground. His vision was that the Friends would stimulate interest in the Castle, provide education about its history, and encourage visitors. He became its first Chairman and continued his support long after he had left Usk for Ledbury. John wrote indispensable notes for volunteer Castle guides. He delivered historical lectures on, for example, Simon de Montfort and the Mortimers and on one memorable occasion gave us an impromptu lecture when a speaker failed to turn up. Indeed he was on great form speaking on Elizabeth de Burgh at our most recent meeting last Autumn.



John was a lover of Shakespeare and investigated Shakespearean visitors to Usk: William Marshall (in *King John*), Edmund Mortimer (in *Henry IV pt1*), Edmund Mortimer II (in *Henry IV pt1*), Lady Katherine Percy (in *Henry IV pts 1 and 2*) and Davy Gam (in *Henry V*). Others who *may* have visited Usk included Owain Glyndwr, Prince Hal, Hubert de Burgh and Harry Hotspur.

John was also responsible for suggesting The Diary and seeing it through its initial stages. The Diary, now in its 17th year, is full of information and special features, is distributed free to households in the area and has a print run of 4,500. But Usk Castle Friends was only one of John's innovations. John definitely loved to initiate projects. He restarted Ledbury in Bloom in 2006 which he chaired for several years: it went on to win 14 RHS gold medals. Pursuing his interest in the Mortimer family he founded the Mortimer Society in 2009, a society now boasting over 400 members, many of them overseas. He and his second wife Zsuzsa researched the church designer Frederick Preedy, producing the Evesham *Preedy Trail*. I also know from correspondence with him that in recent years he thought deeply about the meaning of life, the causes of the First World War and many other subjects.

As a teenager John was an evangelical Christian. A conscientious objector, he elected to do two years work at a hospital rather than national service. He was educated at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, obtaining a degree in Economics and Theology. From 1964 to 1966 he taught economics and Christianity in Calcutta and New Delhi. On returning to the UK he took on several teaching jobs eventually becoming Head-teacher at Crestwood School in Dudley in 1983. He became interested in Scandinavian teaching methods about which he wrote articles published in the Guardian and elsewhere. While teaching in Hungary he developed a relationship with Zsuzsa and separated from his first wife Tierney, a well-known as a local artist. In his frequent visits to Hungary he voluntarily taught English, especially Shakespeare. For many of us he became a firm friend and we shall miss

him. John leaves a son, Stephen and two daughters Naomi and Miriam and their families and Zsuzsa's family.

Hon. Secretary. David Collard. 01291 673666. collarddavid@yahoo.co.uk

Usk Castle Friends

Minutes of AGM . June 8th 2021. Law Court. Sessions House

17 members were present. Apologies: Liz Brooker, Hartley Dean, Jeremy Knight, Ann Morse, David Murray, Kit Waring.

Minutes of the 2019 AGM were agreed. There was no AGM in 2020 due to covid restrictions. There were no matters arising other than those covered in the reports below.

Chairman's Report.

The Chairman began with the sad news that John Barrow, a stalwart supporter of the Friends for many years, had died. She reported that most of our activities had been cancelled or postponed due to the epidemic but that we could look forward to the September conference on the theme of Elizabeth de Burgh, to Alison Neil's performance as Mrs Nesbit in October and to our Spring conference on Margaret Beaufort. She hoped that we should be able to revive our programme of visits such as that to Bacton. A success during the lockdown was the production of a new Guide to the Castle. This had been distributed free to all members. There had been a large increase in membership as a result of the decision by the owners of the Castle to allow entry to members of Usk Castle Friends.

Treasurer's Report.

The accumulated general fund of £33,907 had increased substantially since last year as a result of the increase in subscriptions and restricted activity. The Treasurer noted that membership as at 31st January stood at 103 (65 family memberships and 38 individuals) compared with 44 in 2019/20.

Election of Officers.

Chair	Elizabeth Baker
Treasurer	Barry Morse
Secretary	David Collard.

Committee

The present Committee was re-elected en bloc. Additionally Ann and Paul Handisides were elected to the Committee on the understanding that their commitment would be limited until next April

Following the meeting, David Collard gave a talk on the fascinating life of Edward Trelawny, adventurer, raconteur and biographer of Shelley and Byron who lived for 12 years at Cefn Ila, Llanbadoc.