



We care for a part of Scotland's history which belongs to our community

# **NEWSLETTER No.24 - Autumn 2021**

## **UPDATE ON VOLUNTEERING**

Our new path in the woodland has proved very successful, and a great deal of clearing of bracken, etc., has been carried out, together with tree-pruning to keep paths clear. The pond, together with its supply ditch, has been worked on as usual, but the pond has been very low in water over the summer. Dragonflies have been very busy in later summer, and the wild flower meadow area is developing.

At several work parties we have discussed the orchard, which as volunteers know, takes a great deal of maintenance time. Soft fruit has done exceptionally well this year, apart from blackberries, some of which developed a brown leaf blight (which apparently spreads from wild brambles). Our trees are maturing well - apart from some losses, which are inevitable - but not producing much fruit so far.

Despite Covid-19 and weather limitations, volunteers have worked hard, removing encroaching brambles and plenty of other weed growth on the Castle site, the Orchard and the Woodland. Repairs to the timber stairs are ongoing, together with timber treatment and path maintenance.

The following summarises our intentions for the coming year:-

- We will replace one row of blackberries with cane raspberries planted in a timber-surrounded bed, to limit weeding and allowing remainder of the mound to be more easily strimmed.
- We will add to blueberries and gooseberries by planting in pots located on a platform. If possible, we will move potted raspberries to this also, making them easier to manage. We will add a frame to the platform, for a bird net, and locate some large water tanks nearby.
- On tree rows, we will trial one row, protecting the trees with timber at low level and removing the plastic ground cover which has restricted weed growth, allowing small trees to mature. The tops of mounds will be prepared for grass, which can be strimmed. Ditches will still need controlling, but hopefully maintenance will be easier. We will also trial battery electric trimmers, as I now have one and find it very convenient for relatively light work on grass.
- None of the above will cost much, but will take volunteer time and effort, hopefully reducing this in future years while increasing fruit production.
- We will continue planting our willow “fedge” this year, along the fence line.
- We have 50 free trees ordered which should arrive in January for planting in the Woodland.
- We have no firm plans for more Castle exploration, but continue to discuss this with our Archaeologist, who hopes to complete, by the end of this year (2021), publication of the work done on completed digs, by which time the last of the detailed laboratory reports delayed by Covid-19 should be in our possession.
- Our sheep continue their sterling work. They are cared for, winter and summer, by our volunteers.

If anyone wishes to comment on any of this, or has any other suggestions, please let me know.

On behalf of everyone, residents and visitors, I would like to thank all our volunteers, who contribute a great deal in different ways to make our ancient Castle the visitor attraction and local leisure area which it has become.

## **WORK PARTIES**

Work parties take place on the first Saturday of each month, from 10.00 am.

If attending, please continue, for the time being, to bring your own tea break ingredients/materials. On site, we have hand and tool sanitiser, and social distancing continues. Please feel free to pay us a visit. We enjoy meeting visitors and explaining our work.

*With best wishes,*

*Robert*

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