

Parish Magazine – March 2025

Well, it feels like this winter just keeps on giving...from high winds to pouring rain, ice to sleet. I am sure I am not the only one counting down to spring arriving!

In an encouraging sign, the snowdrops are now out on the estate, hopefully shortly followed by the crocuses, daffodils and tulips. Our new Gardens and Grounds Manager, John Myers planted an extra 15,000 Spring Bulbs in Autumn so we are looking forward to a good show when the weather improves.

Much work is also underway in the grounds, with the Woodland Garden getting some intensive care and attention to get it ready for the coming visitor season.

January has been a busy month for repairing, conserving and getting the Estate into tip top form for the coming year. We have undertaken plaster repairs to the higher reaches of the Gatehouse Corridor, re-polished the entrance stone in Outer Hall of the Castle & repaired/repointed paving slabs on the East Terrace of the Castle, including fitting new damp proof membrane to prevent water ingress into the boiler plant room.

February Half Term is coming up fast with an event entitled *Chaos in the Castle*. The concept is that objects in the Castle are misbehaving and moving around in response to the arrival of a peculiar new Desk. Featuring live performers as Lady Baillie's Butler, Mr Borrett and Mrs Hills, her secretary, this will be a magical experience for families. The trail requires families to solve riddles, complete challenges and uncover the secrets behind the chaos. The event is included in the 12-month ticket.

The desk in question is the *Secretaire*, a stunning hand-painted object created by interior designer, Stephane Boudin for Lady Baillie's Cream Bedroom in the 1930's. It has not resided at the Castle for many decades, but we are delighted to have acquired it recently with the support of National Lottery Heritage Fund.

We were hoping the *Secretaire* would arrive in the Castle in time for February Half Term, but it is coming on a ship from the United States and has been delayed by severe weather. Fingers crossed for a timely arrival!

At the end of January, we held a Weddings Fair, showcasing the Castle, Maidens Tower, Battel Hall and Fairfax Hall all dressed in stunning fashion for weddings. We were delighted to welcome over 80 couples to discuss potential weddings at the Castle and everyone was wowed by the stunning floral displays, including floral chandeliers.

Since we changed caterers in 2023 and chefs more recently, the quality of food has gone up enormously with our new caterers Graysons. For all events like weddings, private dinners and conferences, we also offer access to five other excellent caterers, with a wide range of catering offers and price points to suit different requirements.

We have been working with an external consultant over the past few months to establish our Estate Carbon Footprint. We reviewed this recently and will be moving on to develop our plan and realistic timescales for achieving Net Zero Carbon. As you can imagine, with a large estate that operates 24/7 year-round, it is a challenge to achieve this, but we will focus initially on driving energy usage and external procurement down.

We will then plan for replacing fossil fuel-based heating systems with suitable heat pumps over time. (as that charity's finances allow). Finally, once we have reduced carbon emissions to the lowest we can, we will look at offsetting remaining usage, with initiatives like additional tree planting.

Helen Bonser-Wilton, Chief Executive