

Keswick Reading Room Annual Report April 2022 to March 2023

Last year:

The new garden bloomed, volunteers continued to maintain it. The irrigation system kept it watered through the dry months with a drip system that turned on for one hour in every six.

A grant was received for installing a projector and screen from the District Council, but only covered half the anticipated costs. After consultation with District Councillors, the money is being used for preparatory works. We have brought the fuse box wiring up to current safety standards and allocated funds to fixing curtain tracks which will make it easier to control light levels. John Lewis have been paid for this work and we are waiting for it to be implemented.

New railings and a hand-rail have been installed at the front of the building. The railings are made from galvanised steel which should dull over time and weather nicely. They require no maintenance.

A sign has been installed at the front of the building to reassure visitors they have arrived at the right place. The sign incorporates a QR code which links to an updated website with general user information and details on how to book.

The railings and the sign complete the works to improve the external appearance and make the Reading Room more inviting. The money received for business rates relief during the pandemic has been spent and the bank balance is back to where it was pre-COVID. As of 28 April, the bank balances stand at £7016.11 and £1072.14 with a bill for £600 for the railings work outstanding. The committee hopes the improvements made using this money, such as the removal of asbestos, interior decoration, addressing the damp problems and the deterioration of the masonry along with the external improvements will be seen as a pandemic legacy for future generations. The garden is made from oak, the railings from galvanised steel. Both are largely maintenance-free.

The Reading Room hosted its first hybrid meeting with video. The wifi is adequate to do this, but it does require people to bring their own screen and projector.

The legal status of the Reading Room has been clarified. It is leased from the Gurney family trust for a peppercorn rent and operated by a committee independent of the parish council as a "small unregistered charity." The current lease runs until 2036, and the Reading Room has been used as a village hall for as long as anyone can remember. The Gurney family currently has no intention of changing its status. Most years, including this one, the Reading Room receives no funds from the parish council and survives on its income from users, which is £10 per hour, and grants. The income just about covers costs so there is a need to increase the user base. A notice has been placed in the parish newsletter to advertise the Reading Room to parishioners.

The committee has welcomed a new member, Susannah Parr and is up to four active members. We would still like to find another.

The defibrillator continues to be maintained and registered on Circuit with the emergency services.

We also continue to engage Safety Solutions to carry out annual safety checks on fire extinguishers, PAT testing and the first aid kit. No accidents have been reported.

Future plans

The committee now plans to focus on increasing user numbers. This will help us save up the necessary funds to install a projector and screen. We will continue to monitor available grants for opportunities to make desirable improvements such as building insulation, heating, add bicycle parking, car park lighting etc.