

The build continues – 2013 to 2019.

The end of 2013 and early 2014 brought more problems, this time it was not snow, but rainwater ingress again which managed to penetrate down from the garret level all the way to the Gt Hall. Work internally stopped and the Sarnafil company brought back onto site to remedy the problem. Much mastic was applied around the joints on the crow step blockwork as well as covering all the crow step gable ends with Sarnafil, more unexpected expense and delays, but at least the problem was resolved for the time being. Summer of 2014 was a wash out with hardly any work being carried out. The Tower was again drying out following all the issues with the water ingress. Painting of the ceilings had also stopped as had the lime based plastering.

All the bathroom and shower room furniture and fittings were delivered to the Tower and stored in the Gt Hall along with the kitchen furniture and stove/cooker. All just waiting to be installed.

By March - April 2015 work recommenced with installation of some of the shower and bathroom fittings and the plaster boarding out of the kitchen and dining room ceilings. Painting of the ceilings by Jennifer Merredew had recommenced. For the remainder of 2015 lime base plastering continues as well as lathing out the spiral stair well in preparation for plastering. Complete installing coping stones to external stairs. Carpenter continues preparing all wooden floor areas for laying of UFH coils.

August sees the start of erecting scaffolding for the start of harling all the Tower. At this point I find out that the contracted harling company decide they do not want the job which leaves me paying for the scaffolding but no harling taking place. By October I had managed to find another harling contractor, but they were from Edinburgh so had to pay for all their transportation and accommodation in Turriff while they were on site. I also had to pay for the scaffolding to be on site from August to when the harling was finished in December to when the scaffolding was taken down at a cost of £22K, this in addition to what the harling actually cost, this being £41K. An expensive couple of months. The harling finally stops the last of the rainwater ingress. For the remainder of 2015 and into 2016 snow stopped play again but work on boarding out and lime base plastering continues.

2016 see work on landscaping by the handy man and ceiling painting ongoing with Jennifer Merredew. Preparation with insulating the floors in readiness for UFH coils continues. In July the UFH company arrive on site and commence laying the coils, along with this the screed is overlaid to seal the coils and prepare the floor for the reclaimed oak flooring to be laid and also on the ground and 1st floor the Caithness flagstones to be laid.

August sees the painted ceilings completed and all windows now installed. Lime based plaster work and boarding out continues on all floors. Commencement of installation of boiler and hooking up to the UFH manifolds commences. Temporary small boiler installed to get the system up and running. September through the year and into 2017 the painting of all window frames is completed. The installation of the shower room, bathroom, toilets, and kitchen furniture continue to be installed. The plaque over the front door – 1998 – is installed and laying of the Caithness Flagstones in kitchen and Gt Hall commences along with the laying of the oak flooring. Commissioning of the Whole House ventilation System is completed. However, the Central Vacuum System has to be replaced as the motor burnt out when starting the power plant for the 1st time.

Weatherproof doors are fitted to Cap House and the back door, repairs to the road are ongoing as well as installing an up-graded plumbing system due to the original one being underpowered for the Tower. More costs that were not expected. The septic tank system is hooked up and commissioned.

Although we managed to keep going through 2016 and in to 2017, it was not a good year for me workwise. There was a huge downturn in the Offshore Oil & Gas Industry worldwide which, in my case, meant that I was unemployed for 6 months. However, working to my rule, of 'Never Give Up', I secured a job as a Security Guard working night shift at a local insurance company in Southampton, this basically kept the wolves away from the door, with Meryl keeping the home fires burning bringing in the money from her work as a schoolteacher. For me it was also a sad period as I had to sell both of my beloved Lambretta Scooters, a 1964 TV 175 and a 1966 LI150 Special. It near broke my heart to let them go, but the sale brought me in £10,800 which gave us breathing space and also cash to keep the build ongoing. The Trades were wonderful in agreeing to delay invoicing me until I got back offshore, all pulling together, a great team.

Work fully resumed at the Tower in September 2017 with the handy Man clearing the site and doing general work keeping the weeds and grass down. The work of laying the Caithness Flagstones recommences on the ground floor and the Gt Hall.

During October we hit problems with both the en-suite shower rooms for the master Bedroom and the 2nd Bedroom in that due to another miscalculation the walls had to be battened out meaning the area for installing the shower trays and doors was now smaller so the units I had purchased now were too big and I could not return them. I had to buy two more complete shower cubicles and trays. More cost not accounted for. Further, it seems that the plumber who purchased all the shower room and bathroom furniture with my money had disappeared along with all the furniture for one shower room and the bathroom along with one toilet system, so, had to re-buy all these items again. What was my Building Site Manager doing..??

The fitting out of the Kitchen is ongoing with all units and white fittings along with cooker range being commissioned. All lime based plastering is now completed throughout the Tower.

2018 sees the start of installing the wooden secondary staircases on 3 levels with the varnishing for all the wooden floors. The Minstrel Gallery is being completed and varnished. Work is ongoing completing the fitting out of 3 en-suite shower rooms, 2 toilets and the bathroom. The tiler arrives to tile all the wet rooms and the painter lines out the secret passage and completes the painting of the same. During all this time the electrician has been commissioning all the power and lighting circuits, along with the smoke alarms. The loft insulation is installed and the loft access door with drop down ladder is fitted. The CCTV security system is installed, and the monitors set up in the small security room along with the internet, Wi-Fi system.

June sees the start of the elevator being installed in the Tower. Final commissioning of all power plant and electrics ongoing. The front door is installed, but not yet painted. The Yett is hung and re-painted

August and we move in, nothing is really ready for us as we were promised it would be and we end up having to sleep in the Gt Hall with all our furniture and clothing, etc. which arrived with us from the South of England. There are no internal doors fitted in the Tower, so no privacy. The site is a complete mess with rubbish everywhere. I take over management of the site and pay off the Building Site Manager. At this time, we cannot use the 2nd, 3rd or 4th floors as the varnishing of the wooden floors has not been completed. Makes life difficult as all the showers and bathroom are on those floors.

By October the internal doors, 32 of them, arrive and get fitted. Site clearance is ongoing. Electricity is run to the Log Store and flood lighting around the Tower is set up. We eventually get moved into the bedrooms and life is slowly getting better. We get the Gt Hall fire going and have the two log burning stoves installed and commissioned along with chimney hoods fitted to stop birds nesting and rain coming down the chimneys. All floor varnishing along with the wooden stair varnishing is now complete. The new doors were fitted to the Log Store and the side door to the

garage along with all the nail studs while the 19th century old church doors were modified and made to fit the garage main door entrance. All looking good.

November and December see the internal doors being varnished and the front door and window seat cupboards being painted. Contractor moves in to start clearing and levelling the land, big row-row skips are hired to shift all the rubbish. The log store is cleared, and logs and firewood are put into the Log Store to dry.

December is here and we enjoy our 1st Christmas in the Tower. The pools are cleared of weeds and the weir is fitted with a mesh dam to stop the trout from escaping.

2019, clearing and levelling of the site continues at a pace and internally the varnishing of the doors continues. The carpenter started installing handrails on all 3 stair levels and also completed installing a rope handrail to the steps up to the Minstrel Gallery. Snow in January & February halted work outside, but the majority of the land had been cleared of rubbish and levelled out ready for the grass seeding to begin once the weather improved. As the snow cleared more chuckies were delivered and the land around the Tower was raised as required by the Building Warrant.

March and April work commenced on installing the Tower's external lighting, boarding out and plastering all the lift lobbies and the machicolation. Fitting of the 12" chimney cowls was completed and the 1st of the French tapestries hung in the Gt Hall. We also restocked the pools with 40 brown trout, much to the approval of the local Heron which again started to visit with us on a regular basis. Not sure how many trout we still have now..!! We also received 2 baby Runner Ducks along with 3 Scottish Dumpy Chickens, to which we have now added 2 more Runners and 4 Call Ducks along with 8 battery rescue chickens.

The downside in April was that the 'new' big oil fired boiler just installed burst and when checking the documentation, we find that the plumber had given us a very old model which was not guaranteed. This we had to replace with a new one using a different plumber as the other one had vanished..!!

As the year progressed, we started building the entrance gate pillars, the grass seeding of the site continued at a pace, even though we continued to have torrential rain fall throughout the summer which washed lots of seed away. In May we had serious problems with the sewage system that require the whole of the garden at the back of the Tower to be dug up and a new filtration system installed, really messed up the land we had prepared for grass seeding, but we got on with it and all is good now.

August through September we completed the entrance gate pillars along with installing lighting on them, all the grass seeding was complete and the whole area started to turn green, wonderful change from the muddy brown we had become used to. The small wooden bridge across the burn and the waterfall were completed as was the new stile for access to the neighbour's land.

October through to the end of 2019 saw the clearing out of all the junk in the garage and painting of the wall white and the building of a work bench. Slowly the garage is becoming useful and somewhere I can store my tools and find what I need. Cutting of wood and logs for the fire continued. I completed building a 12' x 6' wooden chicken coop for our ever increasing number of chickens, this time though it was fully insulated as well as having a partition to store all the feed and bedding (nesting) materials. The major task completed during this period was the tarmacking of the start of our private road where it joined onto the main highway. This had to be done to meet the council's specific requirements, so not a quick cheap option, but the contractor made a fantastic job of it and it looks great and the council are happy, that's the main thing.

We are still having issues with water ingress into the prison pit area which is a very small room built under the front door external steps. Working on advice from a specialist damp proofing engineer we have had two small windows installed which will allow better ventilation. As the weather improves, we have to look at re-sealing the external steps which hopefully will then stop the water coming in. After which the internal walls of the prison pit will be painted with a liquid DPC and then we will use it as a wine store.

December saw us getting ready for our 2nd Christmas which we really enjoyed, celebrating with many neighbours and new friends with a Mulled Wine and Mince Pie evening.

There is one last issue I have to tell you about that actually came to light at the end of 2017 to which we are still trying to resolve. The open rounds and wall walk area flooring has completely rotted through with dry rot, this mainly due to poor workmanship during the installation period 8 years previously. This will entail us having to rip up all the flooring and have it replaced, we still have to do this, but need a long period of good, dry weather which we hope to get in 2020. I have managed to get a final further extension to my Building Warrant to cover this, but this is a major expense that we did not account for.

So, to 2020, what will that hold for us. Still, lots of little things to do at the Tower but will continue the story later this year.

I know some of you have been asking or wondering how much I have spent building the Tower over the past 25 years..?? I have to be honest and say we have run a bit over our original estimate and currently we are standing at having spent £1,306,113.24 But if I had not spent this on the Tower, I would have squandered it on other things and have nothing to show for it. To me, building this Tower was a lifelong dream (odd nightmare in between), but looking at the Tower now, it has all been worth every penny of what it has cost me.

Yours aye – Phill & Meryl

I have up-dated the Diary below to reflect the status as now.

DIARY

1992

Started looking for a Tower House in the Aberdeen area to renovate. Not much success for the required money.

1995

Decided to build own Tower House from scratch. Started looking for a suitable plot. Found a plot of just over 2 acres in a small glen known as the Den of Gask. Contacted John Wetten-Brown and got him to make drawings to submit for planning permission.

1997

Having obtained Building Authority Approval, started building. Attended night school to learn how to build in block work and rubble. Built Log store as a result. Learnt how to slate the roof by reading and asking questions....

1998/1999/2000

Completed the Doocot, which will be used as a garage. Laid the Tower Foundations. Cleared the site. Drained and deepened the original pool, built the bridge and the weir. Ran in mains water and electricity and cut down about 50 trees (not very 'green' but necessary, but I will be re-planting more soon). Laid a field drainage system to dry out as much of the field as possible.

2000

No more major work this year, we will have John Wetten-Brown do some stone carving over the doors on the Doocot & Log Store.

2001/2002/2003/2004/2005/2006

Just general site maintenance - save money. Look to finding more farms with Turriff red sandstone to purchase.

2007

Major landscaping work - Extend the pool, re-route the burn, plant trees. Prepare the site for the start of the main building program.

2008/2009

Start the Tower build to wind & watertight. This to include all external work to the Tower. Complete all the internal fittings in the Tower, complete all the landscaping and finalizing the site for rental in the initial 1st year or so or until I retire from the Offshore Industry and also convince Meryl that Scotland is a nice place to live and that 'Cold is just a state of mind that can be overcome by wearing more clothes..!!'

2010/2018

Work continued on the tower to get it a state ready for us to move in. This we did on 22nd August 2018. This was a day to remember as the Tower was not really ready for us, but we managed and now settled.

2019

The year was spent getting the Tower fully habitable and laying out the land ready for landscaping. We are still waiting to sort out the wall walk flooring but have managed to get one more Building Warrant extension to complete this work.