



Progress 2021/2022

Wow, 2021....2022, where does one begin?

Firstly, I need to apologise, as it has taken until July 2023 to finally get this letter published. I must confess I'm surprised that some of you still have an appetite to read the report after all these years; it's clearly putting some of you to sleep.

As I was writing my annual report in December 2020, I was feeling optimistic about the coming year when later that week the Scottish Government instructed us to close again. They said it would just be until mid-January; in fact, it was the end of April before we were permitted to reopen. Initially we had to open with restricted alcohol sales and reduced hours of operation; resulting in limited numbers of guests visiting until mid-May when these draconian restrictions ended. Although local restaurant trade then came rushing back in unprecedented numbers, it was September before our bedroom occupancy returned to its pre-pandemic levels.

Thankfully, business support, job retention schemes, rates relief, and reduced VAT rates propped us up through the enforced closures and downturn in business. It was the fabulous support from our loyal and new guests that has buoyed us personally this past couple of years. Everyone's enthusiasm and overwhelming appreciation for the Coul House team and their hard work has provided Susannah and I all the encouragement that we needed to keep us going through these tough times.

One of the biggest challenges we faced this past eighteen months has been to maintain the standards that we set out to provide as we catered for unprecedented numbers of guests with just the core members of staff plus a few new recruits. Susannah and I are immensely proud of the staff and their commitment in the face of such challenges. There were so many days that we could have benefited from having more staff on duty to assist, however, we soldiered on and always seemed to achieve what at times had seemed beyond us. I coerced Aurora and Liah to comeback home and for a year to help us out; they have now escaped for new lives in Edinburgh.

Despite the challenging times we were delighted to host five bicentenary events to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Coul House being built. We had musical story telling recitals by Bob Pegg, Christina Stewart, and Bill Taylor, a story telling from the esteemed author of Sion of Heroes; Stuart McCulloch, which was fantastic and a couple of wine tasting gourmet dinners. With hindsight, the highlight of my summer was a fun, re-written rendition of the long lost play by Sir George Stewart Mackenzie, remastered by local playwright Phil Baarda. Thankfully, we had beautiful weather and were able to host two performances in the garden for an audience of around sixty. Changing what started out as a cameo role; Phil blindsided me by casting me as supporting actor, Robert Ramsay, Sir George Stewart's nemesis; alongside two very accomplished semi-professional actors. Despite my initial nervousness and indeed thanks to the supporting cast, I must admit I thoroughly enjoyed myself. By the end of the second performance, I was basking in the applause and the thought that local theatre companies would be knocking at my door..... but alas I wait!

Dare I say it, we're feeling ready for another lock-down.... Shhh.... I know; we need to be careful what we wish for...I'm sure we just need a rest, and we will be right and rain again.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Stuart + Susannah".

Proud owners