

DSWA Dorset News

June 2020

The past few months have changed all our lives in the ways we work, volunteer, socialise, and pursue leisure activities. The fabulous Spring and early Summer weather has made aspects of the lockdown bearable and also made us very aware that individuals and families with access to the countryside are extremely fortunate. I know that some members are key workers including NHS and Social Services staff, delivery drivers, teachers and lecturers. Others are volunteering to keep essential services like the Citizens Advice Bureau operating to support vulnerable people and communities. Some of us signed up to the Dorset Covid-19 volunteer force and have been given the opportunity to experience new community roles.

My placement has been as a 'meeter and greeter' in my local recycling centre, or 'the tip' as most people call it. The role mixes social and conversational skills with diplomacy and traffic control. I wear hi-vis clothing, carry a walkie-talkie and wield a traffic cone (and maybe a bit of power!) Here's a photo of the tip's 'guard dog' – a cool dude indeed and one you wouldn't want to mess with!

I'm enjoying the social interaction with staff and clients although greatly missing my walling companions. I hope you enjoy this month's newsletter and look forward to seeing some of you on a wall in the near future.



Ode to C19 lockdown

I quite like social distancing. I think it's really neat.
My neighbours now all talk to me from a distance of six feet.
They ask me how I'm doing. I say I'm doing fine.
Then I scuttle back indoors again to pour a glass of wine.

It's not easy being on your own although there's lots to do.
Some days pass very slowly, I've even scrubbed the loo.
My garden is immaculate. The weeds all run away
When they see me coming down the path, they know they've had their day.

The governmental guidelines say I have to stay at home.
Stay safe, save lives and have no thoughts of Paris, Bern or Rome.
I'd like to do some walling or walk the coastal path
But dry stone walls will have to wait until the aftermath.

I'd like to do some baking but there isn't any flour,
So, I've dug out some embroidery, it will pass another hour.
At least I can go walking in the fields along the Fleet
And briefly talk to people from a distance of six feet.

You'll notice I'm not metric, two metres doesn't rhyme,
But my IT skills are blossoming and improving all the time.
I miss my baby grandson but he smiles at me on Zoom.
I "see" my two granddaughters only in another room.

I'm lucky not to be confined and free to go online
As well as going out to shop whilst I'm only sixty-nine.
So, a great deal to be thankful for, this all will pass I guess.
In the meantime: stay at home, stay safe, protect the NHS

Mary Civil, 9 May 2020

Interviews with Merrie Wilson and Sally Fielding

It's always interesting to learn how members became wallers so I asked our Chairman, Merrie, and Secretary, Sally, to tell us their stories.

Have you always lived in Dorset, and if not, what brought you here?

Merrie: I've lived in Dorset for thirty-three years - ten years in Ferndown, and twenty-three years in Swanage. Whilst we lived in Ferndown we bought a flat in Swanage, and when Graham retired it was the obvious place to move as all the family had moved on. We downsized from our three-bed house to the two-bed flat until we decided to up-size to our present home.

Sally: I was brought up in Derbyshire and although I never walled there, I think the landscape seeped into my bones. We moved to Dorset in 1977 after qualifying as a vet and working in Whitby for three years with Martin (we met and married at vet school). He carried on working and I had three boys which kept me busy.

How long have you been walling and what led to your interest in it?

Merrie: Walling for approximately fifteen years. I saw a flyer at Durlston Country Park when I was walking the dogs, and I had always wanted to have a go, so booked on a course that Shaun was taking. Unfortunately, I was hooked!

Sally: When the boys were all at middle and upper school, I had some spare time and started volunteering with a conservation group BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers). I did some walling with them from about 1994. They were running a course for dry stone walling with the South West Branch at Spyway and had a free place available at short notice. I went along and I was hooked. The treasurer of SWEDSWA at that time – a chap called Hywel, did a very hard sell and you could not really leave the course without joining up. That was probably late 1990s/2000 on a stretch of the wall we still use at Spyway but further along towards Dancing Ledge. Shaun was the instructor. He had a different style then and I clearly remember him starting day two by walking along critiquing our work and removing some of the worst stones for us to re-build. His approach is far more laid back now.

I went out with the SW Branch whenever they were down this way but it was only a couple of times a year. We worked at Durlston a few times and I was involved in building the original exam site there but only in a small way. I also did some walling with BTCV.

When we moved to our present house in 2003 the wall between us and the neighbours was down and our solicitor was negotiating for the neighbour to take over the boundary. He was only going to put up a fence and I threw up my hands in horror as all the stone was there in the garden. There was a huge pile which we uncovered under the head-high brambles in what is now the veg. plot. To prove I was capable of the re-build I took my initial exam in the Cotswolds (our site wasn't built then) and I practised for this on a wall Dave found near Swanage. I passed it in May 2004 and set to on the garden wall. The neighbour kindly let me lay out stone all over his pristine grass. This kept me sane throughout the Summer whilst we had extensive renovations done on the house (the builders were with us from Easter to Christmas Eve!)

What is the project you are most proud of, or the one that was the most exciting to work on?

Merrie: I've built a lot of walls in our garden, but the one I'm most proud of is the wall I built between us and our neighbour. There is so much work that went into the build below ground, and actually getting everything



straight and level. I think I used about ten tonnes of stone because of the depth I had to go for foundations.



The project that was most exciting to work on is the stone seat we built at Tyneham. It was truly a joint effort from everyone who helped build it. I am proud of everything we have built and the help and attention that has been given by all our members.

Sally: The wall that gave me the greatest sense of achievement was probably the one at the bottom of our garden, built in 2007. The original wall was a cracked ‘crazy paving’ style with a lot of concrete in it and took a lot of demolishing.



pepper that Martin had carved. I see it every day and when the sun shines it really glows.



I reclaimed some of the stone, used the rest of the pile that was in the garden and even added a ledge to show off the





In 2017 I re-built the retaining wall in our drive and again this gave me a great deal of satisfaction and I see it every day. This was the first time I had actually used brand new stone for a project.

The Dorset Branch is only eleven years old. What prompted its formation and were you involved?

Merrie: We formed our branch because the South West Branch consisted of Devon, Cornwall, and the Cotswolds with a line going down to Dorset. It was too big, and Dorset was becoming known as a lovely place to wall. We were encouraged to separate from the South West Branch with the invaluable help of Chris Stevens and Ray Stockall. When we formed the branch, I agreed to be on the committee and I have been involved ever since.

Sally: SWEDSWA had quite a lot of money and at the time as a charity they were not supposed to have more than £10,000 without involving a lot more admin with their accounts. Coincidentally, Purbeck Council had employed Louise to run a project called Keystones to raise the profile of the stone industry and its contribution to the Purbeck landscape.

There were about 8-10 members who lived in Dorset and so an inaugural meeting was set up with a view to setting up a Dorset Branch. SWEDSWA donated £1000 to get us going. I didn't go to the very first one for some reason (I think I was away at the time) but at the second one they were electing the branch officers. In my mind I thought Dave would be chairman, Merrie secretary, and I might

10 Daily Echo, FRIDAY JANUARY 23, 2004

PURBECK



WALL GAME: Volunteers who helped restore a dry stone wall at Langton Matravers in Purbeck

Scheme to restore dry stone walls

MORE than 60km of traditional dry stone walls are in need of repair in Purbeck. The Dry Stone Walling Association is holding a series of training sessions this year to build up a pool of volunteers with the right skills.

There is believed to be enough restoration work in Purbeck to last 50 years and estimated costs run into several million pounds, depending on the level of restoration undertaken. Dave Rawson of the association said: "There is

growing historical interest in re-establishing traditional boundaries. In these cases the additional cost of supplying the stone needs to be taken into account." Purbeck District Council is bidding for National Lottery funding and if successful it

will make a significant difference to the way local boundaries are maintained. Anyone interested in learning this traditional craft can contact www.dswa.org or email dave_rawson@onetel.net.uk or tel 01425 673387.

offer to be treasurer but this chap, Stephen, who none of us really knew, put himself forward as chairman. I think he'd come along from his involvement with Young Farmers. There was a very long and embarrassing silence when the position of secretary was put forward so I put my hand up. Louise became treasurer, Merrie and Dave completed the committee, and the rest is history.

When you aren't walling what other activities do you enjoy?

Merrie: I have a lot of interests. I love walking. I read a lot. I love cooking, having dinner parties, BBQ's and entertaining. Meeting friends for coffee and a good catch up. Also, my family and being able to spend time with them and my nine grandchildren. Gardening, and basically thoroughly enjoying my life.

Sally: I enjoy gardening and walking, we have a dog that needs regular exercise, but also, we go sailing twice a week in Summer. Unfortunately, it tends to clash with walling and I have to decide which to do depending on the weather. I still do conservation tasks each Wednesday with a group that has evolved since BTCV, which closed in Dorset, but is still largely the same mix of people and skills. I enjoy being outdoors and tend to find any excuse to ignore the housework!

Covid-19 update

So, lockdown now is easing, we can all go out to play,
So long as the nearest person is at least six feet away.
Cattle released from winter barns kick up their hooves in glee
And so, it was last Saturday when some folk saw the sea.
They came in cars from near and far and brought large families too
To sit or swim and enjoy the beach and share a barbeque,
But soon we'll all wear facemasks if travelling on a bus.
When we show our passes to the man, how will he know it's us?
Some folk have now gone back to work and some still work from home,
But those of us who are retired just have more space to roam.
Maybe in a month or two I'll try to get away
And venture down to Cornwall if I am allowed to stay.
In the meantime, I shall stay at home and try not to make a fuss;
There are so many people who are much worse off than us.
For really life is much the same and goes on day to day.
I still can't hug my children, my grandchildren cannot stay.
We have to stay alert, save lives, but some things I really miss.
I long to have that day arrive when I can give them all a kiss.

Mary Civil, 9 June 22

I hope you have enjoyed reading June's newsletter. Thanks to Mary, Merrie and Sally for making it possible. I've already begun work on the July edition, by which time it will be almost five months since we were last permitted to wall. Walking around Dorset, I see many tempting sites where walls have collapsed or need some TLC. Unfortunately, the car park at Tyneham and Tyneham Farm, the site of our biggest projects, remain closed with no foreseeable opening date.

On 16 March, the DSWA Trustee Board made the decision to suspend all DSWA events, courses and activities until the end of June. Currently, this directive still stands and we await further information regarding lifting of restrictions. Branch members, unless professionals with their own insurance, are not insured to wall in public spaces while this suspension remains in place.



Contributions to next month's newsletter are always welcome. There may also still be time to submit images for next year's DSWA calendar.

The suggested theme is to capture the detail of things living in and on a wall or unusual features, or a close up of certain sections of wall – "small is beautiful " or "devil in the detail" whichever you prefer! The photos should be landscape in format / shape so they fit nicely across the top half of an A4 page.

Ideally, the submissions should be digital in jpg format but if you submit hard copies, they will be returned. Images should be submitted as soon as possible to Alison. Her email address is: information@dswa.org.uk

Address for hard copies is:
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Meanwhile, stay safe and well.
Carole Reeves