

DSWA Dorset News

August 2020

Dorset walling resumed on Saturday 18 July when six committee members returned to Goulds Hill to work on the farm wall and test the feasibility of socially distanced walling. In practice this means that each waller works on their own stint rather than the usual practice of one person on each side of the same section of wall.



This works well for experienced wallers but it is arguably not the ideal way to train novices. Nevertheless, for the foreseeable future, the DSWA has mandated that social distancing must be maintained on site and that no more than six wallers can work on any one practice day. Sally has set up a Doodle Poll (<https://doodle.com/poll/stx4fer8vx6y8h2e>) for those wishing to sign up for a specific session. Until the end of August, all practice days will be at Goulds Hill.

The London School of Dry Stone Walling

After last month's feature about Siân Tarrant, the new Sheep Dyke Warden on the remote island of North Ronaldsay, it seemed appropriate to explore the life and work of an inner city waller. John Holt is the principal of the London School of Dry Stone Walling (<https://www.londonschoolofdsw.co.uk>) which runs regular workshops at Mudchute Park and Farm, a 32-acre rural environment and community charity on the Isle of Dogs in East London (<https://www.mudchute.org>). As usual, I interviewed John 'remotely' and I hope you enjoy reading his story.

When and why did you set up the London School of Dry Stone Walling?

During 2011, I received a delivery of a few tonnes of stone from Huntsman Quarry based in the Cotswolds. This was the beginning of providing 'hands-on' ad-hoc DSW workshops for youth activity in the garden at Hilldrop Community Centre, Islington (<https://www.hilldrop.org.uk>). It was from here, the LSDSW began, following the workshop activity and increased interest. The workshops would be an introduction to the heritage and rural craft of DSW and also to help and improve personal health and wellbeing. To do this by providing a 'hands-on' workshop facility within relative easy reach of the city for anyone, regardless of ability, or those less able to readily

visit the countryside. The workshops also provided a means for those who had seen dry stone walls, perhaps on holiday, and had had a long-time fascination to just 'have a go'.



The London Olympics of 2012 was on the horizon and the idea was to somehow, take these to raise the profile and promote DSW. Adjacent to the Community Centre was a disused, tarmacked ex-basketball court, large enough to develop the idea for five interlinked DSW Olympic 'Sheep Fold' rings. However, as I was not an Olympic sponsor, the local authority and community centre management would not

allow the feature! As it happened, it was also the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Year so the format changed to constructing a DSW diamond, interlinked with four DSW sheep fold rings. Three Woodland sheep, Charlie, Bob and Dave, demonstrate the size of the sheep folds, but spot Mary!

I imported thirty-plus tonnes of stone from the Cotswolds and commenced the build with some sterling support by supervised youths from the community Centre. Some enjoyed the 'hands-on' approach and others enjoyed breaking stone for fillings! For further intended promotion, I was not successful in attempts to contact the BBC breakfast TV to include the project!

Mudchute Park and Farm is a lovely rural environment in East London and you run regular walling workshops on the first Saturday of every month (I realise that lock down will have changed this). On average how many people attend these workshops and what mix of people do you see?

On average there may be between four and six persons for each workshop. I have found that four is a good number per trainer. This helps to give good supervision to each and no one is left out or feels isolated. It also helps the group as a whole listen to directions being given, as similar difficulties may be experienced by others. There are normally a mixture of talents, ages, abilities and ethnicity. John (far right) with workshop students who have just completed this practice wall at Mudchute.



Apart from your practice wall, it looks like you and your workshop students build permanent dry stone structures in London? If so, can you tell us something about these?



Permanent structures have included a boundary wall at Hilldrop Community Centre. Unfortunately, the sheep fold rings, a packhorse bridge (pictured above) and Thomas the Tank Engine (left) were demolished and removed during the development of the garden to a Soft Play Area before I could salvage the stone!



At Walworth Garden Farm (<https://walworthgarden.org.uk>) in the



Borough of Southwark, a charity dedicated to improving lives through horticulture and environment education, we built a dry stone wall around a pond and formed a boundary wall to a new entrance. Another few tonnes of Cotswold stone! Students at work (above right) and the finished curved pond wall (left).

We built walls at Roots and Shoots Garden, Kennington (<http://www.rootsandshoots.org.uk>) (right), and raised flower beds at Crossbones Medieval Memorial Garden, Southwark (<http://crossbones.org.uk>).



I was interested to read about your project in the Crossbones Memorial Garden because I was part of a team that studied some of the human remains excavated from this old burial site. What have you and your students built there?



That is an interesting place with its unique history and well worth a look at the web site www.crossbones.org.uk or visit the garden. At the time I was involved, the garden was under redevelopment consideration in conjunction with site owners, Transport for London (TFL), the garden managers, Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST), and garden/community trustees. The photo shows delivery of stone to the Garden in the shadow of the Shard.



Dry stone walls were required to provide raised flower beds (right). The idea of DSW from the trustees, was interesting. The irregular shapes and construction method, it was thought, depicts life itself, with its irregularities, as opposed to formal brickwork. Also, interesting, was incorporating oak timber seating provided by Arthur De Mowbray, a renowned and interesting local carpenter (www.arthurdemowbray.co.uk) (a web site well worth a look). Local people took part, along with employees from city firms doing their bit for the community. On the 23rd of every month at 7pm there is a vigil held in the street (Red Cross Way) by the Crossbones shrine at the garden to honour the Outcast, dead and alive.



‘The Goosewing’ entrance to Crossbones Memorial Garden showing the dry stone raised flower beds. The wooden structure was created by Arthur de Mowbray. Local legend maintains that the burial site was once the final resting place for the Winchester geese, medieval sex workers licensed by the Bishop of Winchester to work in the brothels of The Liberty of the Clink, which lay outside the law of the City of London (photo Katy Nicholls).

You’re a level three waller. How long have you been walling and what led to your interest in it?



I became interested in dry stone walling from an early age living on the family farm in North East Lancashire. A waller, Jimmy Briggs, visited the farm between Easter and October to carry out ‘gap’ walling. These may have occurred over winter or through animal pressure. Horses and cows

were great at finding an ‘itching spot’ on a protruding through stone! During this time, I progressed from just watching Jimmy, to placing fillings. From time to time I received a ‘cuff’ on the head and a serious, verbal telling off for displacing internal shims/pins being used to secure the face stones! That early interest has stayed with me and which I have practiced on and off through a few decades!

I attended the National Stone Centre (<http://www.nationalstonecentre.org.uk>) where I received excellent, ‘top notch’ professional training from Gordon, Trevor, Sally and Andrew.

Over time, and following the loss of more blood, sweat and tears, certification followed to achieve Level 3. Creeping up on years now, precludes me from going further!

What stone(s) do you use for your London builds and from where do you source it?

The stone used depends on what is available. In the main it is a grade variety of limestones and sandstone. Suppliers include Huntsman Quarries in the Cotswolds, Churchfield Quarries at Oundle (<https://www.churchfieldstone.co.uk>), and Stamford Stone, Lincolnshire (<https://www.stamfordstone.co.uk>)

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

There are two - the Packhorse Bridge and Garden Cabin. For me, both were exceptional projects. The bridge was later demolished making way for site redevelopment; the Cabin remains. I had not built these forms previously and therefore no previous type of experience. They were both what I had in mind and I picked up a few hints from books. The bridge was all my work from setting out to completion. The knowledge I gained was to ensure, sturdy, suitable formwork and tight joints of voussoirs, soffit, extrados and placing key stone. The side cheeks big enough to withstand the forces placed on them.

I did have support with the Cabin (right) from my son, a carpenter, who completed all the timber work and fitted the roof. Of particular interest was the front overhang, inglenook fireplace with the need to build an external chimney stack (below).



Finally, I was fascinated in the wall with lunky and bee bole that you built at Southwark Cathedral. What was the story behind that?



This wall (spot Mary) was built for London Craft Week 2016 and was a fair task to undertake. First, locating the material from Peterborough, and the logistics of an inner city delivery to the site. Then preparing the site, making batter frames, obtaining tools, ideas, and support. Thank you to Matthew and Jed (www.drystonejed.co.uk) for helping with this project; it was good to have you, 'on-board'. (Jed Baxter, of course, is one of Dorset DSWA's professional members).



The wall was built in the rear courtyard of Southwark Cathedral. Interestingly, above where the wall was built is the stained-glass Shakespeare window (South Aisle) depicting Romeo and Juliet in front of a wall! In another scene are characters from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and a couple of appropriate verses come to mind:

I fear my Thisbe's promise is forgot!—
And thou, O Wall, O sweet, O lovely Wall,
That stand'st between her father's ground and mine.
Thou Wall, O Wall, O sweet and lovely Wall,
Show me thy chink to blink through with mine eye!

WALL holds up fingers as chink

Thanks, courteous Wall. Jove shield thee well for this!
But what see I? No Thisbe do I see.
O wicked Wall through whom I see no bliss!
Cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me!

Unless otherwise stated all photographs are courtesy of John Holt.

Goulds Hill, 25 and 31 July

Saturday, 25 July, was a very bleak day with torrential rain. Four stalwart wallers managed half a day before emptying their waterlogged buckets and leaving the site.

A week later it was the other extreme with a cloudless sky and the temperature topping 30 C. In this heat, it was sheer hard graft taking down the old wall and digging foundation trenches. I'm ashamed to say that, it being my first day's



walling since February, I was exhausted by 3pm and left Sally, Wendy and Russell soldiering on.

Our frequent visitors during the day were a herd of yearling cows, which although very cute and curious, really had no concept at all of social distancing.



Goulds Hill, 7 and 8 August



Another very hot weekend. Four wallers enjoyed the sun on Friday and seven came out on Saturday. Fortunately, there was enough wall to keep the two metre distances.

John and Sally pause for a photo during the final preparations for laying foundations. We shouldn't really complain about the heat because much of the time we work at Goulds Hill in challenging weather conditions.

'Five are together again' – all lovers of Enid Blyton will know that this is the title of the final book in the Famous Five series. It seems very apt in the circumstances!



'Cowgirl Sally' herds the cows over the hill towards Maiden Castle. Finally, we had some peace – but only for an hour or so. Next week we expect to find our newly sorted stones plastered with cow poo. But we have missed all aspects of walling!

DSWA clothing and other branded items

If you fancy looking the business when you're out walling, the DSWA has a new range of clothing, drinking bottles, and other items including next year's calendar. At last I can swap my Panama Canal baseball cap (only worn because it's blue) for a DSWA version. Visit the website for more details (<https://www.dswa.org.uk/sundry/>).

In the meantime, I hope you and your friends and families stay safe and well.

Carole Reeves