

DSWA Dorset News

October 2020

Autumn has arrived with exciting new projects, new qualifications for five members, and changes to the committee ratified at the branch's AGM on 17 October. Although we are still maintaining the rule of six for all members' practice days – and hopefully there won't be another lockdown – the branch has been very active. Clearly, the warm sunny weather will soon be a lovely memory as we hunker down to chilly walling weekends but maybe time to invest in some warm DSWA clothing, available from head office (<https://www.dswa.org.uk/sundry/>)

Ancient dry stone wall restored on the land of bone and stone!



This was the headline I used when submitting our press release to the Dorset Echo, informing the world that after five years we have finished restoring the wall at Goulds Hill. On Sunday 11

October Wendy opened a bottle of bubbly and we enjoyed a grand ‘topping out’ ceremony (although four of us returned a few days later to complete the coping).



Sally’s dog, Button, wants his photo taken before I begin coping my section of wall. Once the copes are on, the wall will no longer be dog-friendly. Unfortunately, Martin threw a dog treat into the wall which meant that Button chucked a section of my top stones off while scrabbling around for it. But he’s a very special walling dog so all was forgiven.

Merrie looks dubious though!



And here’s my section of wall with copes! Being the first person to cope, I manage to choose all the best stones for my section, leaving my fellow wallers to do some ‘creative’ coping with what can only be described as ‘seconds’.



We enjoy a day of rainbows. Of course, you have to accept the showers alongside the sun but what a heart-warming sight, especially in these COVID days when a rainbow takes on deeper meaning than Dorothy’s trip to Oz.

Mary, Tush, Tim and Geoff work hard to finish the final courses. It's all looking splendid but we are helped by the fact that the dairy cows are no longer with us – they have moved on to pastures new for the winter. And if we are walking along this path early next summer we hope to see them with their calves.



Meanwhile, at the other end of the wall, Wendy, Phyllis and Sally begin creative coping, eventually driving off to find some good size stones further up the path towards Upwey. The wall ended up looking magnificent as you can see in the topping out photograph.

Wendy and Sally have given interviews to Purbeck Coast Radio and BBC Radio Solent. And news has just come in that Bournemouth News also wants a story.

Test day at Tyneham, 10 October



Five Dorset wallers arrived at Tyneham on a sunny Saturday morning, their cars laden with more equipment than they would normally use for a members' walling day. This was the BIG day for the Famous Five who had been taking down and rebuilding Tyneham's walls for a month under the tutelage of Geoff, Sally, Peter and Dave.

Their examiners are Bill and Cuthbert Noble, father and son master craftsmen from Yorkshire. There are three candidates for level one (initial) and two for level two (intermediate).

Russell (level one) pauses to consider which way up – or down – to use this stone. He's a master hedgelayer but wants to add walling to his portfolio. He says, 'I have finally found the time (due to C19) to get around to doing some proper training and going on to do level one with a view of adding to my summer work. Just managed to get this done now as I'm full on hedgelaying till March.'



I've won first in my class for 11 out of 16 years at Melpash Hedgelaying and Ploughing and won overall Champion for 4 years running. I've also won the Dorset class for 3 out of 7 years at the National Hedgelaying Championships. I've had many other local competition wins and placements covering Dorset, Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire, and East Sussex. Examples of my work are spread all over the Dorset and neighbouring counties as well as in France.

I'm proud of being invited to Highgrove and Sandringham by Prince Charles who is Patron of the National Hedgelaying Society and being the guide through the Dorset section at one of these events. Also getting Dorset Style Hedgelaying in the National Championships 7 years ago and teaching people the craft of Hedgelaying. When not working we're out somewhere in our camper van (and commenting on how good or bad the hedges are) or out with the dogs, kayak/paddle boarding, and amateur radio. I love Dorset but I also like going places.'



Russell can be contacted at info@dorset-hedgelayer.co.uk



Russell finished his wall with time to spare, and of course he passed level one.

Pete, another level one candidate, gets to the bottom of his section of wall. Stripping out carefully and stacking the stone earns marks and this V-shaped strip down looks very good. Pete has a scientist's interest in stone. He says, 'I currently work in the oil and gas industry, starting my working life as part of a seismic survey crew, so have an interest in rocks and what lies beneath us. I did a Geoscience qualification and did my final project on the structural development of the Isle of Purbeck over the last 200million years, which was one of the most interesting projects I've ever done. So, I love rock and stone, and particularly the strata of the Purbeck area.



Also, in my youth I used to climb a lot and would spend many weekends down around the Purbeck coast and sea cliffs, which was just fantastic, particularly on a cold, clear winter day, where around the sea cliffs with the sun shining on us from the south keeping us warm whilst climbing, or the inevitable time spent hanging around. Often, on wet weekends, we would end up in the old Swanage Fortes café, now Harry Ramsden's fish and chip shop. So, I know and love Swanage and the Isle of Purbeck.

I did the introduction to Walling course in Purbeck in May last year, so am a real newbie. Since then I have been helping the Dorset crew in walls at Tyneham over various weekends, starting to gain an insight into the craft. I was uncertain whether to take the exam, but after the mock, decided to go for the level one, which luckily I passed. However, I do realise that this is a journey and I am just such a novice. Looking at the work of other, far more experienced wallers, I realise that “the eye” is key, and this takes significant time to develop that capability, skill and craft.



The Dorset branch are a fantastic team, so knowledgeable, supportive and friendly, the rapport and banter is good; they are a great bunch to spend time with. Work takes up around 80 per cent of my time... too much. Outside of that it is spent with family, friends, with beer, wine. I love Spain, Spanish and Spanish speaking regions, so holidays are often in these areas. I am a bad but passionate countryside photographer.'



Steve steps back to check whether his courses are straight. Another level one candidate, Steve is walling professionally. He says, ‘After being made redundant I have decided to set up as self-employed with dry stone walling as one of my main services, along with hedgelaying, coppicing and selling logs. So, I decided to become a member of the DSWA and take the level one exam so that I could be accredited, which will hopefully enhance my reputation as a competent dry-stone wall contractor.

I previously worked on a beef and arable farm which mainly involved tractor driving. There were small amounts of dry stone wall repairs. But I have been repairing the stone walls around Higher Farm, Langton Herring in my spare time for the last 10 years. I feel there is a need to maintain and restore the original dry stone walls in the area as well as building new ones. There is great job satisfaction when projects have been completed.





The project that I am most proud of is the job I am currently working on in Rodden, which is an extensive dry stone wall contained in a private garden.

When I'm not working I enjoy spending time with the family. I also have a private allotment that I grow various vegetables in. I am also currently restoring a vintage tractor.'

You can contact Steve at: <https://sb-stonewalling-hedgelaying.co.uk>

You can also find him on Facebook and Instagram.

Steve's finished exam wall. Of course, he passed!



Alan was a level two candidate. Before the exam he had only built two cheek ends and he didn't seem at all nervous! In fact, he seemed to enjoy the day. Like Russell and Steve, he plans to add dry stone walling to his professional portfolio. A Dorset quarryman for 35 years, he says: 'I started my quarrying life under the watch of an incredible Purbeck quarry man called Steve Payne. I was fortunate to be taught the old ways of stonework, from splitting the paving beds to cutting and dressing quoins and jambs. My career then progressed over

the years to the sawn works of various quarries, learning the cutting and polishing side of the business but ending during the Covid-19 crisis when I was made redundant. I am lucky enough to have worked in such places as St Martins in the Field, St Paul's Cathedral and Salisbury Cathedral. Dry stone walling was an idea my wife came up with as a way to transfer my skills and add a new string to my bow. I have to admit I didn't have any idea I would enjoy it so much. To go for the level two exam put to me by Sally and Geoff as I seemed to have a knack for it.'



Alan has set up 9Barrow Stone Studio (Facebook), and produces some exquisite stone carving. Here's the stone that he restored for the Swanage Railway.



Alan continues: 'As 9Barrow stone I am working at a smaller local quarry, dressing stone for a huge landscaping project. They seem to be thankful for my 40 years of experience. I am also working on a few smaller projects of my own, commissions for Christmas gifts. Away from stone my wife and I are lucky enough to have a caravan in Cornwall. We love nothing more than roaming Bodmin Moor with our two Cocker Spaniels and two Jack Russell terriers.'

One of Alan's beautifully polished candle holders – the perfect Christmas gift?

Alan and his wife have just become grandparents to Erin, their daughter's new baby. Many congratulations to your family.

Needless to say, Alan gained his level two certificate.





I was the final candidate for the level two qualification. In this photo I look a bit sick, which isn't surprising because I was very nervous. This was partly due to the fact that my wall collapsed as I was taking it down and crushed the little finger of my right hand. While Sally and Merrie were trying to patch me up I was panicking that the examiners would dock marks for my attention (or lack of it) to safe working practice.

By this time Sally was urging me to speed up, and then, miracle of miracles, Pete came over and plonked a huge piece of chocolate on my wall. This was just the incentive I needed to come out of my energy dip and juggle some more stones onto the wall.

I only began walling in 2018 after a one-day course at Tyneham for members of the Dorset Countryside Volunteers. Then I did the four-day Wallathon at Goulds Hill in



May the same year and have never looked back. Passing levels one and two were personal goals. If there's an exam to be passed I'll have a go.

I'd also like to train as a walling instructor although I need some more practice under my belt. Professionally, I'm a medical historian and hold an honorary post at University College London. At the moment I'm working with a production company on a series of audio dramas set in a hospital just before the founding of the NHS in 1948.

Not the best wall I've ever built but I passed the exam!





And here we are, in a suitably distanced line up for prize giving. We are all exhausted and relieved. Well done us!

A garden wall in Swanage

Over the course of a couple of months, Merrie, Peter and I have been building a garden retaining wall for a client in Swanage. This involved two cheek ends and a corner. I learned a lot whilst working on this wall and enjoyed every moment of it. Without a doubt, the project helped me pass my level two qualification. None of us were paid for the build but the client, who is delighted with the wall, made a significant contribution to the branch for which we are all grateful.



Branch AGM, 17 October

As most of you know, because you received an invitation to the Zoom meeting, Merrie and Sally stood down as Chair and Secretary respectively. Our new chair is Wendy, with Phyllis and I as co-secretaries. I will continue with the newsletter and also look after membership, whilst Phyllis will be in charge of committee minutes and the branch programme. Other committee members

are Ian – treasurer and instructor; Peter – course bookings and instructor; Geoff – web-site and instructor; Dave – instructor.

Geoff will make any contact adjustments on our website but if you want to get in touch with a query or observation I am happy to be the first point of contact. You'll know my email address because it's the one from which I send the newsletter.

Calling all women wallers

The Women's International Stone Alliance is a small international group of women (UK, USA, Ireland and Australia) working in traditional stone trades, keen to connect with other women involved, and those keen to give a try. Like many people, we are encouraged by the number of women interested in working in this area. We know from other trades that with the right mix of encouragement, support and by creating a welcoming environment, the numbers of women shall continue to grow.

Although numbers are small at the moment; we believe women, and eventually the stone trades as a whole, will benefit from our collective effort. We are keen to provide opportunities, advocacy and promotion to women in this field. In these early stages of becoming organized we would like your input to help us shape things as we move forward.

Below is a link to a short 3-5 minute survey which we invite you to complete as soon as you can.

[Link to survey](#)

If you know of other women working/volunteering in traditional stone trades, we would really appreciate you forwarding this email to them. The more input we get, the greater impact we can have for everyone. If you know of men working in traditional stone trades who can assist by forwarding this survey to the women they know, we welcome their support too.

We hope to gather as many responses as we can by the **31st of December 2020**. During January 2021 we will analyse the results and by the end of that month we will prepare and send a detailed response to all those who have provided their email address within the survey. We will publish basic results on our website: www.womenstonealliance.com

With thanks
Louise Price CoConvenor
Emma Knowles CoConvenor

I hope you have enjoyed reading this month's newsletter. I hope you and your families stay safe and well, and hope to see you on a wall before too long.

Carole Reeves