

DSWA Dorset News

December 2020

I hope you all had a lovely Christmas even if it wasn't the one you planned although planning for events in 2020 went out of the window back in March when the whole country experienced the first lockdown. Since then we've gone up and down the tier system, with a couple of our members now reaching the heights of tier four – very unfortunate because they are unable to join us on walling weekends. Throughout this time, your committee members have been liaising with head office in an attempt to keep up to date with ever changing rules regarding members' walling. Recently, we managed to influence a decision made by the Trustees to suspend walling until March 2021. We felt this was going too far in terms of Covid restrictions when we are already confined to six members on each day, we are easily able to social distance, and we work outside in remote locations.

In October we were informed that our branch had been allocated £600 for PPE items / equipment in order to run our weekend training courses in 2021. This was a generous grant made to all branches from the National Lottery Heritage Emergency Fund. Apart from the usual face masks, visors, hand and tool sanitisers, we spent our allocation on enough goggles, walling gloves, hammers, tape measures and other tools to cope with 60 trainees. My garage looks like a PPE warehouse. We hope to run our first course at the beginning of May and I'll keep you up to date with news of that. You might know someone who would appreciate a weekend on a wall!

Renscombe, 12-13 December



This was our first weekend after the November lockdown and we were all eager to get to work on this wall after taking it down at the end of October. Saturday was sunny if windy. Despite the recent heavy rain, the ground was surprisingly free from mud which made it easy to dig the foundation trenches. The strong winds which blow across the fields from the coast had clearly kept the site from becoming too waterlogged – or so we thought.

Peter lays the first foundation stone at the cheek end, which I will be lucky enough to build. Dorset Council which runs Renscombe car park (although the land is on the Encombe Estate), have put in a new kissing gate between the wall that we are building and one that is collapsing but has now been added to our 'fix it' list.

Note the encroaching mud behind our stacked stones.



Peter, Phyllis and Mary enjoying the sun. This was a lovely day to be on the cliff top above Chapman's Pool. In the background, Wendy and Sally build the corner, properly this time.

We find another example of this shockingly built wall. This huge foundation stone stacked sideways and traced.



Half way through the day, Alan turned up with a BBC sound recordist who was interviewing him for Radio 4's Today programme. This was broadcast on Christmas Eve on a show guest edited by Prue Leith who wanted to include people who have learned new skills during lockdown. Alan featured in October's newsletter when he gained his intermediate qualification after only a few months' walling. He had previously spent 35 years as a quarryman and now runs his own business.

On Sunday we welcomed a new branch member, David, who moved to Dorset three months ago and had previously walled in Leicestershire and also worked on the sheep dyke wall on Orkney's North Ronaldsay (see July's newsletter for an article about this wall). He and Pete soon began building up the courses with me on the cheek end. The weather was pretty dire – driving rain and gusty winds churned up the mud but had us working hard to avoid the chills.



Phyllis and Mary work on the corner – still smiling throughout driving rain. Very few walkers are braving the elements today but it's always surprising to see how many turn up on a day like this wearing white trainers.



In this photo Tim reminded me of the flying ace 'Biggles' so I thought he deserved his own plane (created in Affinity by 'Slammer').



Renscombe, 19-20 December



Merrie and David continue work on the cheek end of the wall ...

... whilst Tush and Sally build up the corner. Heavy rain during the week has bequeathed us a quagmire. When will it stop?





What a difference the sun makes! We enjoyed a very productive and sunny day on the Sunday and this is more or less how we left the wall until we return in the New Year.

Langton Herring – our next project



Sally says: ‘It’s all a matter of perspective. To you – a muddy mess (we agree with you there). To me – an opportunity. Whenever the local farmer deep ploughs the fields at the top of Rodden Ridge a lot of nice stone gets brought to the surface. The trick is to go and pick this from the gloopy mess before another tractor comes along to cultivate it and breaks the stone.’

‘For more recent members this is a picture of the seat we built up there from ‘picked’ stone in 2013.



The result (left) – after several hours hard labour – several piles of forest marble that will be very useful when we embark on our project at Langton Herring.

Last time I went I recovered three barrow-loads of stone just walking in from the main road with my wheelbarrow. I have now gathered the equivalent of 3-4 dumpy bags worth. Mind you it takes nearly as long to clean up afterwards.

I got caught in a massive hailstorm – I could see it roll in spectacularly over the sea but there’s nowhere to shelter up there.’ It might have cleaned you up a bit Sally!

‘The wall appears on the 1840 tithe map – look at the map on the Dorset DSWA web-site (<https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/map/>) and click on the tithe map tile on the right-hand side. It’s probably easier if you get rid of the OS grid underlying it.



Above are some pictures of ‘the lost wall of Langton Herring’, which I have now uncovered by cutting down most of the scrub to expose it. There is also a well in the corner – more of a dipping pond than a well where villagers used to come for water when the main one in the village had dried up apparently. I have yet to expose that. There was a band of blackthorn scrub about ten feet wide down that side of the wall which has largely been cut back by the landowner.’

Crack Lane Quarry and Dorset’s Important Geological Sites (DIGS)

On Monday 7 December I joined members of the DIGS group in Crack Lane Quarry, Langton Matravers. The group works to maintain important sites including clearing vegetation from rock faces to expose the strata and keep access paths open for visitors. Branch committee member, Geoff Rowland, is an active member of DIGS and encouraged me to don my hard hat and improve my knowledge of Purbeck stone. This was my first sight of the quarry and I was intrigued by the large bell with a perfectly cut out door shape which lent an air of mystery to the place. No one seemed to know when or how the bell came to be in the quarry and I couldn’t see an obvious mark of a bell foundry. Can anyone shed light on the origins of this bell?



During Roman and medieval times Purbeck Marble was quarried at the foot of the slope, near the stream that runs through the quarry, but now only moss-covered waste heaps can be seen in the woods. However, the Burr / Marble outcrop between Crack Lane westwards beyond Dunshay must once have

been a hive of medieval activity. Crack Lane is the only one of the Burr (Broken Shell Limestone) quarries where the stone is still visible in its natural place (photo above). It has therefore been registered as a Regionally Important Geological Site.





Crack Lane was worked as a marble quarry up to the 19th century by the Brown family and then briefly re-opened in the 1920s by William David who founded the Dorset Quarry Company in 1922. David installed an electrically driven crane at Crack Lane, the one and only such crane set up in Purbeck.

Hundreds of tons of building stone have been taken from Crack Lane quarry, some being used for bridges over the Swanage Railway, built in 1884 (photo Ian Taylor). For more

information about Crack Lane and other 'listed' quarries in Dorset see the DIGS website:
<https://dorsetrigs.org>

Tom's Month

Professional branch member, Tom Trouton, whose amazing dry stone fruit was featured in November's newsletter, will be writing a monthly column. Great news Tom – less work for me, only joking ...

December began in a hectic way. We appeared on 'Love your Weekend' with Alan Titchmarsh and the phone did not stop... I'm surprised that the buttons did not get worn away! A huge lesson in the power of television for us.



This month has been mainly focused on installing the Apples 'n' Pears that we have created. It took a total of six days to have them fully packaged and loaded onto a lorry, and then it was goodbye on the evening of the 14th until 8 am the following morning where we would be waiting at the installation site with bated breath. An early start and with a sigh of relief they arrived in perfect order, the driver had said he felt nothing untoward.

As you may imagine, transporting ten pieces of dry stone sculpture 100 plus miles on the back of a lorry and then to have them craned over the top of what is Europe's largest thatched building is a daunting if not a terrifying thought. We had transported one before this to The Newt in Somerset but this was only 10 miles down the road. However, we know it worked so why should it not this time!

My oh my, the crane was enormous... a 200 tons machine! Finally, by 10 am we were all set and within five hours all the sculptures were off-loaded, craned over the house and installed. Not a stone had moved, no fractures, in fact everything went perfectly. The client was over the moon as much as we were relieved.

All that is left now is to fit the leaves to the apple stalks when they are ready and the lighting to be installed. We have learnt a huge amount along the way with this commission but perhaps most of all is that with passion, patience and care you can achieve almost anything.



We also had the joy of carrying out a small repair to a tiny wall but the joy this brings to the client is worth more than anything else we do. These small jobs are our bread and butter but it is these that bring such pleasure. Working with what stone is on site and making it work. We had a real mix of stone, Forest Marble, Blue lias, Shaftesbury green and a local stone that has probably travelled no



further than the spot we were working in... this is the true meaning of working with stone.



Tom's cosy fire pit. Wish we had one on every freezing walling site!

Our final task was to finish a huge boundary wall that is part retaining, part double sided. It is built using Purbeck stone and ranges in height from two meters rising to four meters and parts of it are retaining a bank that is almost two meters in height in places. More is to follow as a fireplace is created along with a stream. The idea is to create a jungle feel... time will tell so watch this space to see how it evolves.



Purbeck stone meets Hadspen stone along with a tree fern (looks like it's under wraps for the winter).

Cherry our dog would like you all to know that she has had a comfortable time in front of the fireplace that we created earlier this year... for her it would appear!!!

Finally, may we wish everyone a Happy New Year and let us look forward to a much improving one as we move towards the spring and the prospect of being able to be together with friends, family and our walling community once again.

Tom

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Retaining wall, Taiwan



Adrian's son, who lives in Taiwan, sent this photograph of an attractive tiered retaining wall. In the background you can see that the land is steeply sloped and there are a number of terraced walls.

Taiwan is an island country of 360,000 square km with 22 million people. More than 70 per cent of the island consists of slopes and mountains. Reinforced soil

retaining walls and reinforced slopes have become widely popular over recent decades because of the many large-scale hillside housing and industrial development sites. However, Taiwan is seismically vulnerable and the Ji-Ji earthquake in September 1999 (magnitude 7.3) resulted in devastating damage and the loss of 2200 lives. Following the earthquake, it was found that reinforced structures were better able to withstand earthquake damage than unreinforced soil retaining walls.

Although the face of this wall looks as though it is dry stone built, I suspect that with the amount of visible concrete, the stones are flattish and mortared at the back rather than being great chunks laid on top of one another. If anyone knows different, please let me know. It does look very effective though.

Christmas Ode

It's all just too confusing. Oh what a sorry mess.
What can we do this Christmas is anybody's guess.
We thought we'd got it sorted and made our plans in various ways
To meet with friends and family - a festival of five days.
Now the folk who live in London aren't going anywhere
Cos another variant virus is giving everyone a scare.
Father Christmas cannot visit so he's crossed them off his list.
They'll stay within their bubbles and may just get inebriated.
Elsewhere in the country it still won't be all right.
For Christmas now is one day and you'd best not stay the night.
But looking on the bright side if we cannot see each other.
It may cut down on the family tiffs between parent, sister, brother.
For sometimes once we gather in our groups for several days
We remember all the reasons why we went our separate ways.
Perhaps we'll think of them more fondly as we raise some Christmas cheer
And hope they'll all be round again for festive food next year.

As we look beyond this Christmas to the turning of the year
Is it Deal or No Deal leaving Europe that's the burning question here
Geographically in Europe but no longer in the gang.
Will we leave without a whimper or go out with a bang?
Yet, have the gods a sense of humour or is it just by chance?
That one of Covid's latest victims is the President of France!

Written on 20 December by Mary Civil

Well, fellow wallers, that's the newsletter tied up for December. Thanks to all the contributors and it just remains for me to wish you all a very Happy New Year and hope to see you on a wall in 2021.

Carole Reeves