

DSWA Dorset News

January 2021

‘January brings the snow, makes our feet and fingers glow’. Fat chance of that when we’re locked down again and can only skim our gloved hands over coping stones as we take our daily allowance of exercise. Do I sound frustrated? You bet. Fortunately, like all of us in Dorset, I have the countryside on my doorstep – woods and heathland mostly as I’m five miles from the sea. And my garden has benefited from a makeover. There are no dry stone walls, alas, but newly planted rose beds, bulbs by the score, weeding, feeding and freshly edged lawns. Today, I even cut the grass – a necessity after applying lashings of autumn feed in October! However, the Met Office has predicted another ‘beast from the east’ by the end of January, while Storm Christoph looms on the horizon. At least the daylight hours are gradually getting longer. On the day of the Winter Solstice I was hacking down rhododendron on National Trust land near Knoll Beach. We ate mince pies and Christmas cake by a roaring ‘rhodo’ fire. Alas, no more National Trust volunteering either.

Despite the lack of walling and other conservation activities I was lucky enough to review Treleven Haysom’s newly published book, ‘Purbeck Stone’. The review will appear in Spring’s ‘Waller & Dyker’ but I have included a version in this newsletter along with more illustrations than I was able to submit to the journal. Importantly, I didn’t want to repeat anything I had written in the article about the Purbeck quarries in last May’s newsletter. It’s an excellent publication – as much a social history of Purbeck and its quarriers as it is about the trade itself.

Renscombe, 31 December-1January



New Year’s Eve, and Peter, Merrie and I decided to make one final assault on the wall before lockdown. It was a very icy day and the early morning drive to Renscombe was fairly treacherous in places. Nevertheless, it was sunny which makes up for everything. As ever, a beautiful day brings out the walkers, and the car park was soon filling up. We always deter people from parking too close to the site but by the end of the day, and several attempts to stop children clambering over the walls, we concluded the area would need to be coned off while we’re in lockdown.

Merrie and Peter's hard work warmed up the stones so that by coffee break we could feel our fingers. Our exertions stirred up the mud but it is a naturally muddy site. We were pleased with our day's work, having straightened up this section of wall and levelled the courses to compensate for a wall with a downward slope from the cheekend.



Merrie insisted on taking a photo of me because she says that I don't usually appear in them. Too right. I prefer being behind the camera than in front of it. However, I'm proud of my cheek end although Merrie's shadow is obscuring much of it. You can see why I avoid taking photos of Renscombe from this side of the wall. Nothing attractive about a row of cars. I'm wearing my new warm DSWA insulated woolly hat which is too big and makes me look like a large pixie.

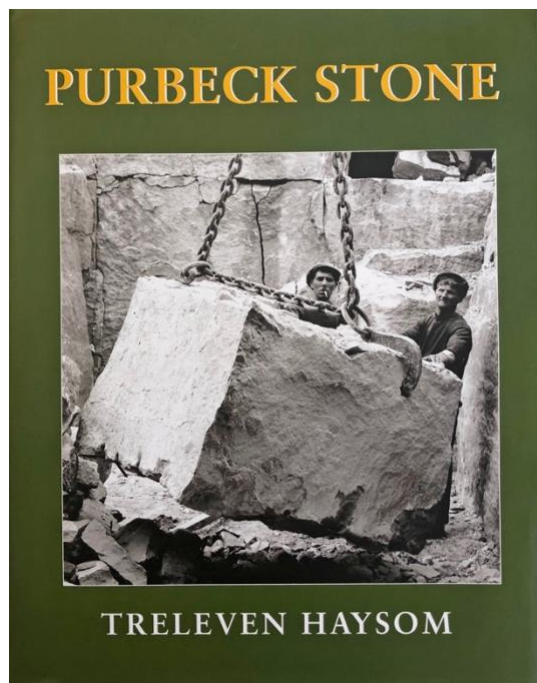
During the afternoon, Geoff, a fellow National Trust waller, came by to say hello with his wife and dog. After a pleasant chat with us they went on their way to visit St Adhelm's Chapel. That very evening, Geoff joined the branch so a big welcome to you. What a shame that we immediately went into enforced hibernation.



New Year's Day and this is the appearance of the wall. It's not perfect but is beginning to shape up. Sad to say, this is the last we'll see of it until we come out of lockdown. But the site has now been coned off so hopefully, visitors (and let's hope they are local) won't be tempted to climb over the wall rather than pass through the new kissing gate.



The most authoritative book on Purbeck stone you will ever read



Treleven Haysom. *Purbeck Stone*. Stanbridge, Wimborne Minster: The Dovecote Press, 2020. 312 pp. £35.00. ISBN: 978-0-9955462-6-4.

This beautifully produced and illustrated book, the result of eighteen years research, explores the Purbeck stone industry – its history, geology, technology, trade, architecture and the decorative arts. The author has served as Warden of The Company of Purbeck Marblers and Stonecutters, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Bournemouth University, and has a cretaceous mammal – *Dorsetodon Haysomi* – named after him. What brings this book to life, however, are the first-hand accounts of the industry's people and practices, based on oral tradition handed down through generations.

Seacombe Quarry, c 1928, watercolour by Leslie Ward, Langton Matravers Museum.

Stone has been quarried on Purbeck since the Norman Conquest. Purbeck Marble, a polishable limestone consisting of fossilised shells of freshwater snails (*Viviparus*), decorates the cathedrals of Canterbury, Salisbury, Durham, Ely and Exeter, Westminster Abbey and York Minster. Treleven (Trev) Haysom, a tenth-generation stone mason with unrivalled knowledge of Purbeck quarrying and its history





Photo: Seacombe Quarry, April 1930.

identifies 31 Purbeck beds including three of marble. Quarrying for centuries was open cast, using picks, shovels, wedges, levers and windlasses. By the mid-17th century, Purbeck quarriers adapted to underground working. At the cliff quarries this was assisted by the introduction of gunpowder but increasing mechanisation was transformative. Today, all quarrying is open cast with machines removing the overburden and taking out the stone.

From medieval times, Purbeck masons travelled the country. In the 1380s, Thomas Canon of Corfe was paid £30 6s 8d (c. £18,000 today) for making thirteen stone images of kings for Westminster Abbey, still in situ today. At that time a labourer earned just threepence (c. £7.80) a day. Thomas was probably the grandson and son of two quarriers named William Canon of Corfe who in 1309 and 1330 supplied marble for Exeter Cathedral. An enormous sum of £132 17s 5d (c. £81,492.55 today) changed hands in 1330.



Photo: Exeter Cathedral nave. The pillars are of Purbeck marble polished to a subtle bluish-grey colour.

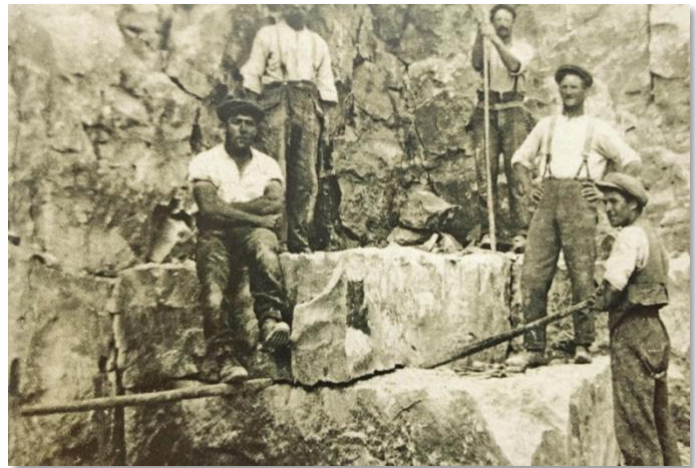
When the marble industry declined in the 14th century, the demand for Purbeck building stone replaced it. Stone was quarried for roof tiles from the 13th century and for paving from the early 16th century. Early Tudor paving is still tucked away in London's Inns of Court. An outdoor privy at Gallow's Gore, built in the 19th century, shows a long roofing slab distorted by dinosaur trampling! This is, of course, the Jurassic coast.



Purbeck headstones, memorial tablets and ledgers, can be found as far afield as Newfoundland, coinciding with cod merchants establishing trade with Poole during the 18th century. The photo shows a mixture of Purbeck and Portland headstones at St Paul's Anglican Church, Trinity, Newfoundland (Leigh McAdam). The inscription on one stone reads: James Pottle (1781), Native of Christchurch, Hants.

Names of quarrymen (no women) and quarry owners are mentioned throughout the book and lists are included in the final chapter, including firms and men of Purbeck origin working elsewhere. This is very useful for anyone wishing to discover their Purbeck ancestry. The names Haysom, Bower, Burt, Lander, Corben, Phippard, Keates and Collins feature over several hundred years – great dynasties of stone workers. Nevertheless, life could be hard, especially for those working underground.

Billy Winspit (real name William Jeremiah Bower), second from right in this photo taken at Seacombe in the 1920s, lost a few toes, as had his father and grandfather before him. In the early 19th century, when Swanage parish had over 90 quarries, one man was killed on average every year. In Langton Matravers old cemetery, there is a headstone to 11-year-old Frederick John Harris, who was 'accidentally killed at the quarry' in 1888.



Two young boys work in the quarry at Hedbury in 1885 (left). The boy at centre is putting a sling chain around the dressed stone on the quarr cart ready for lifting by the gibbet. Trev Haysom's grandfather started work for his father as an 11-year-old in 1874 in Swanage. He would sometimes be sent with messages to Hedbury. An old man, 'Uncle Allan' Bower, would brew him a 'shard of tea' before he walked back

along the cliff top to Swanage. When this painting, 'Quarrymen of Purbeck' was created by Henry Tanworth Wells (City of London Corporation), this part of Hedbury Quarry was owned by Thomas and James Lander. The central figure is probably Thomas and the two boys his sons, Albert and Thomas, both of whom gave up quarrying to become bakers – one in Swanage and the other in Langton Matravers.

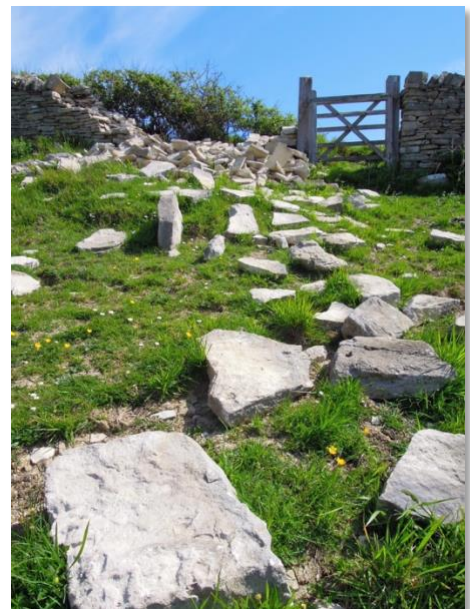
In my article on the history of Purbeck and the stone industry in May's newsletter, I included Ralph Treswell's map of 1585-86 marking the Domesday manorial boundary walls. So, I was intrigued to learn from this book that some old walls contain large, pre-wall manorial boundary marker stones. When I spoke to Trev Haysom about these and asked for their location, he gave me a rough idea of their whereabouts so I will make an attempt to hunt them out when we are 'unlocked'.



He also mentioned that an iron age sandstone quern has been placed on top of a wall near Spyway. As these are round (reproduction featured left), it's possible that it (or what's left of it) was used as a coping stone. Again, Trev was rather vague about location but it's definitely worth a search. Unfortunately, most of the walls around Spyway

and in the Priest's Way are now covered in ivy and bramble.

Trev also believes that the rebuilding of some of the old boundary estate walls lessens their archaeological value. However, the National Trust says that while most of the walls in South Purbeck are at least 200 years old, most of them will have been partially or wholly rebuilt two or three times. The Trust archaeologists say that the section of a wall that will most likely be original is the foundations. This is why when key walls (such as parish boundaries) are repaired, the foundations are disturbed as little as possible, and only dug out if absolutely necessary.





Exceptionally, on Purbeck, a culture of barter went on 'into the age of lorries'. Pub landlords were often also quarrymen and accepted stone in exchange for beer or tobacco. When the weather was right, Billy Winspit and Buff Bower put out lobster pots and either sold their catch or exchanged it for goods from Anthony ('Hantney') Haysom's shop in Herston Cross. Hantney would walk across the cliff top to collect the lobsters.

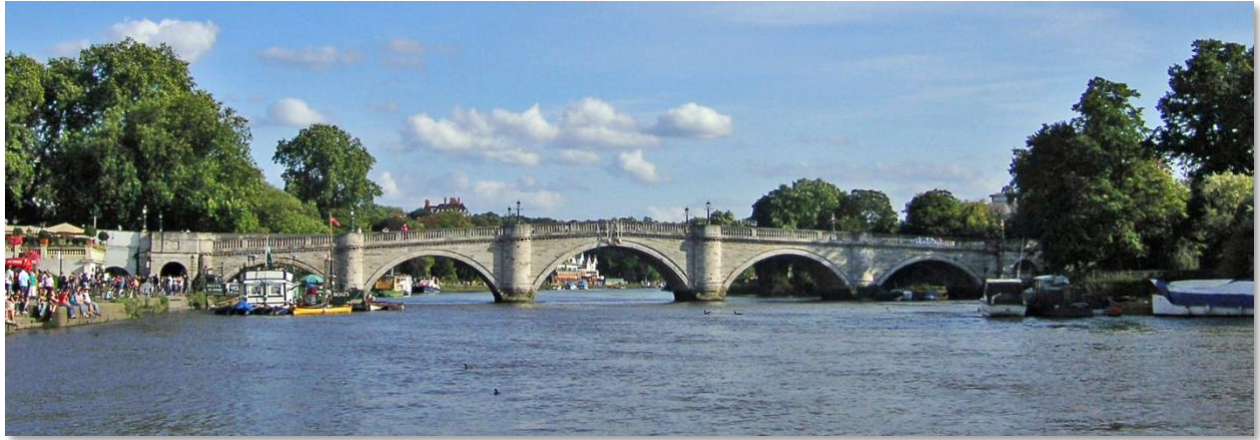
St Adhelm's Chapel (left) was once used to store fishing gear but also probably served as a shelter from the rain for quarrymen who left graffiti. 'J Thicket 1729' carved into the central pillar is probably James or John Thicket, both of whom were Marblers. This

family continued to quarry until at least 1826.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, stone merchants inevitably also owned stores at which the quarrymen were obliged to shop for goods in lieu of cash wages. This was the 'trucking' system and came in for criticism as resulting in a condition of 'absolute bondage'. While their menfolk were quarrying, women and children were spinning flax or knitting stockings for a factory at nearby Kingston. This was established by William Morton Pitt (1754-1836), MP and inheritor of the Encombe estate 'to encourage industry and detach the population from smuggling'. Although quarrymen could use cliff quarries to hide smuggled contraband, this small dry stone cave, at Bacon Hole, just west of Mupe Bay, is remote and difficult to spot from land or sea as it looks directly out onto Mupe rocks. It contains a false back wall with a small square door (photo: Terry, the Dorset Rambler). In 1826, James Marsh of Swanage and Thomas Lander of West Lulworth took out a lease to quarry at these beds which are Portland stone. They, or perhaps others who came later, walled up the deep cave they made with the help of gunpowder rammed into drill holes.



Although I have sometimes gone off at a tangent in this brief article by following up stories told in 'Purbeck Stone', the book has proved so compelling that I have wanted to dig a little deeper into the world of the quarry workers. One of my follow-up pieces of research centred around the term 'Turk' which was another name for a quarryman. Trev wrote: 'Examining the stonework of Richmond Bridge (built 1774-77 with Portland balustrade and arches, and Purbeck spandrels), I



noticed a sign advertising 'TURKS LANDING'. Enquiries revealed that a waterman family of that name had worked on that part of the River Thames for generations (since 1710, in fact). Perhaps the first arrived with a consignment of stone.' In this panorama of Richmond Bridge, Turks Pier is on the left where one of their pleasure boats is moored. Trev continued: 'One of the Swanage Butlers in the mid-19th century, was particularly known as 'The Turk'. His father had a quarry at the eastern end of Durlston Bay. Apparently, 'The Turk' and his friend Frank Tomes, ran off to London 'to avoid the music' after he pushed, or allowed to fall, his father's quarry donkey over the cliff.'

I was born and brought up in Richmond so this story interested me and I wondered if there was indeed a Dorset connection. I emailed Turks River Cruises, now owned by Richard Turk, a descendant of the Richard Turk who founded the company. Unfortunately, he did not respond, no doubt finding the whole story a bit weird.

Vertical walling

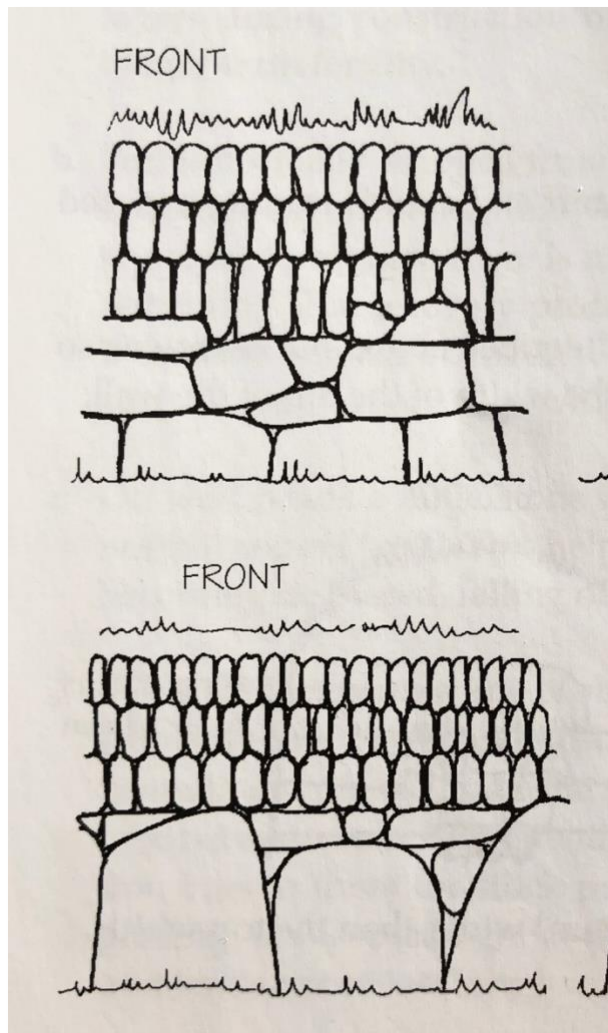
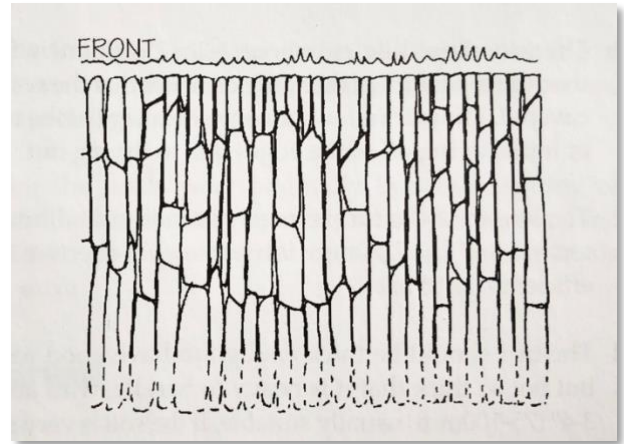


On a recent members' weekend, someone was asking about vertical walling. In the UK these seem to be more common in Ireland and Scotland but here's a photo of a lovely wall in Devon photographed by sculptor Ellen Christiansen.

I found a section about the technique of building in this way in my Dry Stone Walling handbook (available online from DSWA and worth every penny of £19), which I'm reproducing for those of you who don't have the book.

This style, known as 'vertical random' is usually associated with larger slates and some other fissile stone. With very fissile material you can usually tap the stones down securely without any shaping. Vertical joints are unavoidable, so instead you must break the horizontal joints as shown in this diagram.

When building this style with non-fissile stone it is usually necessary to trim off any rounded ends so that the stones above will sit securely.



These diagrams show stone-faced raised earth banks (cloddiau) which are built with horizontal coursing at the bottom but finished with vertically coursed stonework.

A variation used in areas with large boulders is to build the wall with random walling between the boulders and then finish off with courses of smaller, vertically placed stone.

The video (<https://tinyurl.com/y6ja7xo2>) illustrates two variations of wall built in this way – one in the Irish style and the other based on walls typical of Galloway. The dry stone waller is Nick Aitken. Thanks to Sally for sourcing this video.

A really inspiring website showing creative walling around the world is at:

<https://insteadof.com/blog/dry-stack-stone-wall/>



Wall by Andy Goldsworthy in Bedford, New York. A vertically laid wall holds up an enormous boulder.

Vertically stacked stones have often been built into harbour walls like this one at Keiss Harbour, Caithness (photo James Bremner). Although not dry stone walls, the vertical placement of stones helps to disperse the energy of the sea as it lashes the walls and prevents it scouring out the stones.



Tom's Month – January's adventures!

Happy New Year from us all and of course Cherry who you can see is still happily ensconced in front of the wood burner.

It has been a strange start to the year as I am sure it has been for many of us. Another lockdown made us split the team into two just in case one of us caught COVID-19.

At least that way we would not all have to hide away for ten days. It's not often that I make a decision that turns out to be both wise and comes in to play so soon. Within ten days I had tested positive for the wretched virus despite showing no symptoms. At least it gave me the chance to catch up on things at home but more importantly no one else in the team or my family have caught it. We are out of isolation and back playing with stone.



No sooner were we out of isolation than we had a covering of snow. Always beautiful but never conducive to work. I took this picture out of our kitchen window before daybreak.



We have been busy on two projects this month. We are creating some dry stone retaining walls at The Newt in Somerset. There are to be four walls in total; all at approximately a little over two metres in height and in lengths of 15m, 40m, 60m and 75m. This will keep us busy for a while. We are using Forest Marble stone... to me the most beautiful stone.

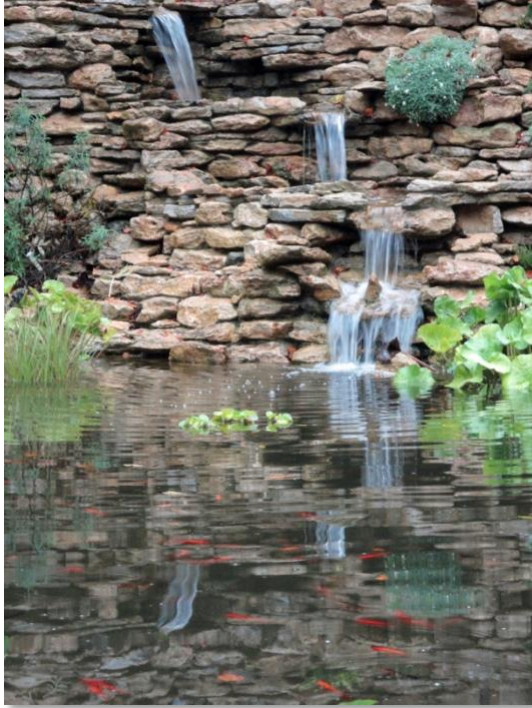


When the sun shines on it the warm glow is just beautiful. There are vast amounts of infill behind it, which in itself is time consuming but so critical to the structural integrity of the wall. Every piece has to be placed carefully along with large through stones tying the face of the wall right into the bank. I see so often a retaining wall built with only soil as infill and within a year or two they fail due to the pressure of the soil as it becomes saturated and bursts open. It is so important to fill all walls correctly as we are all aware. It is so sad to see a badly constructed wall knowing that someone has parted with their money only to see shoddy workmanship, often through lack of knowledge. Once finished the walls will be part of a new walk and provide views across the estate and far reaching views across Somerset and Dorset.



Our second project has been to clean a pond we created some years ago and check the waterfalls and stone work. All is looking good despite our enforced Covid break. This was a project that evolved; originally, we were just going to tidy an area of the garden for a couple of weeks... ten months later we had created the pond, waterfalls, pump house, a kitchen garden and extended the driveway. You never know what to expect sometimes. The clients are great fun and we regularly return to

their garden to help out.



I have been sent an image of the 'Apples 'n' Pears' illuminated which you can see creates a completely different feel. Personally, I really love the look.



I also received a picture of the first apple I created... someone has taken a bite out of it.



They also sent this rather atmospheric image of the fire pit which hopefully creates a warm feeling within you all as we find our way through the winter.

Only another month and spring will be with us and with it brighter times in more ways than one. Keep safe everyone and thank you for reading our continuing adventures.

Tom

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Seen at Durlston



This photo, sent to me by a loyal reader, is a funky lunky but would it pass the level 3 exam? Answers on a postcard please ...

Well, fellow wallers, I hope you enjoy reading this bumper newsletter. Thanks to all the contributors and hope some of you get your freedom passes, i.e. Covid vaccines, in the near future. I look forward to seeing you on a wall as soon as we're unlocked.

Carole Reeves