

DSWA Dorset News

June 2021

‘June brings tulips, lilies, roses, fills the children’s hand with posies.’ Tulips have always been a spring rather than a summer flower but it’s true that warming climates have resulted in earlier



blooms than when this verse was written by Sara Coleridge in the early 19th century. Mine (left) were at their best during April.

After an unseasonably wet and cold May, we are now enjoying hot, sunny and dry days – great weather for walling and to be out and about in the countryside.

As ever, we’ve got lots going on. The first weekend beginners’ course on 3-4 July sold out quickly. Peter capped the numbers at 22 participants although with the lifting of Covid

restrictions now postponed until 19 July we will probably have about 16 novice wallers. The course will take place at Spyway, Purbeck, on a National Trust wall. The organisation has been more complicated than usual because of the need to comply with Covid regulations. At the end of 2020, Head Office secured funding from a National Lottery Heritage Fund Emergency Grant for the essential supplies needed to meet Covid-19 requirements for national training courses. This was a generous grant and enabled us to buy all the PPE, cleaning materials, and additional tools required for 60 course participants and instructors. My garage looks like a PPE warehouse!

Langton Herring, 29-30 May



Mary looks pleased to be back at this peaceful farm field, invigorated by her early morning swim in the sea at Weymouth. Yes, she swims in all weathers. I’m sure it’s good for you.

The foundations are down so it’s onwards and upwards!



Piles of forest marble across the site will soon disappear into the wall and then we'll be casting around for more stone. There's never enough. In the background is Sally's tidy 'lock down' wall. She lives across the road from the field and spent many muddy winter hours digging up stone and clearing the site of vegetation. Even the farmer didn't know there was the remains of an old wall, and even a well, buried beneath brush and bramble.

Geoff thought that his dog, Honey, would enjoy a day out with his walling chums but it wasn't her scene at all. Fetching a ball was endless fun but boredom soon set in when Geoff turned his attention to picking up stone.

It's always good to have a dog with us but some are more self-contained than others. My friend Keith's dog, Maddie, is happy pootling around on her own, sniffing out animal trails and uncovering the loathsome remnants of human refuse. On the other hand, Cookie, a cocker spaniel, has extreme separation anxiety – a tiresome trait. The perfect dog is one who can be trained to collect hearting!





Towards the end of Saturday and we're well on the way to laying the first couple of courses.

A public footpath runs through this land and a number of families enjoying the half-term break stopped to chat and admire our work. We occasionally meet people from other parts of the UK who have enjoyed dry stone walling or do it professionally. I'm always on the lookout for dry stone structures when I'm traipsing across the country.

The photo below shows a section of the wall at the end of the weekend. Unseen since the 19th century, the 'lost wall of Langton Herring' will once again be a prominent feature of this stunning landscape.



Tyneham 5-6 June

I haven't been working on the lettering wall at Tyneham so there are no photographs showing the artistry in progress. The photo below, featured in April's newsletter, shows the letters taking shape under the direction of Dave.



And here's the latest image. This is by no means a straightforward project. Peter says that one of the most difficult parts of the build is finding the right size and shape of stones to butt up against the stones that make the letters. I'm particularly impressed by the triangular stone that fills the top section of the letter 'A' in the word 'Tyneham'.



Renscombe, 12-13 June

Eight wallers arrived on a brilliantly warm and sunny day to complete the wall that we began in the autumn of 2020. It certainly looks peaceful but as ever, on a lovely day, the car park was soon full to bursting.

I chose to rebuild this collapsed section of wall (below) at the car park exit, no doubt the consequence of vehicle misjudgement – to put it politely.



Geoff knocking seven bells out of a coping stone while Mary looks on in some trepidation. I have known the head to fly off a rubber mallet – no doubt she's imagining the same thing.



Meanwhile, on the far section of wall, Iain and Sally complete the copes.



And so, we all pose for a group photo at the end of the re-build. Well, not quite ...

On the other side of the kissing gate we start to dismantle another section of seriously wonky wall, largely held up by wooden props. Well, we can all see why this wall collapsed, can't we? Every stone a traced stone and not a through in sight. Exactly the same issues as we found on the other walls.



In addition, Geoff discovered that some of the foundations were laid on tarmac. Huge lumps of the stuff had to be dug out of the ground with a mattock.

Winter's Lane Project

Last November, Sally reported on a project she and Geoff began for the Mental Health Team at Winter's Lane near Portesham. This is a support group for Dads whose partners have had perinatal depression. They had decided that the activity they really fancied was walling. After advertising on a farming Facebook page they found a retaining wall in dire need of repair. Sally applied for a grant from the National Grid to pay for the project. Seven months on – and after a couple of lockdowns – here's the latest news.

Sally says: 'We've finished the current section of the wall at Winter's Lane but we have paused now until the organiser can get some more participants. They are a difficult to reach group as they are fathers with new babies and mostly are working. It is only thanks to sympathetic employers that they can get the time off to come walling. There have been 12 different people taking part including the organiser and an occupational therapy student.



One member brought his son when he came along – including to cope and finish the wall.' Baby Fergus keeping an eye on the quality of his Dad's copes! The little boy 'celebrated his first birthday one day when he was out with us.'

'They have all enjoyed the experience. The organiser has to do it without being allocated specific time so it all has to be fitted around his other duties. We hope that the big campaign he is launching will get more people interested. The group has contributed 45 person-days of the 77 we have taken to accomplish this.

It has been a nice project to work on – we have rebuilt about 16 metres of retaining wall and used up pretty well all the stone we took down, which was originally from a quarry very nearby.

Baby Fergus seemed to be enjoying his efforts with a hammer (in case you're worried about Health & Safety it was his Mum who popped him on the wall and gave him a lump hammer! Not my responsibility!)



Slopey wall, Purbeck, 19 June



Sally, Peter, Ian and I arrived at Spyway on this overcast Saturday to learn the art of slopey walling, instructed by Dave.

This is the section of wall we decided to tackle first – a hasty and messy repair to a section of slopey wall which was itself entangled in ivy. The Purbeck rangers had thrown stone into a gap in the style we often see in these repaired walls – straight courses.

Sally and Peter begin to strip off the ivy from the top of the wall although one hefty tug pulls the stone with it. We find a thick-stemmed ivy plant rooted in the ground in the centre of the wall from which it has infiltrated the stone – clearly the cause of the wall's collapse.



Ian begins to take down the wall and stack the stone. We have decided to take this section down to the foundations because we are uncertain how they have been laid. Dave thinks the wall has been built either on flat foundation stones or by knocking the foundation stones into the ground at the angle of the slope and building up the courses from a sloping basement level.

We are all surprised to discover that the foundation stones have indeed been knocked into the ground at an angle but at the opposite angle to the slope of the wall. Even Dave didn't expect this to be the case.



We work out that the first course of stones are laid against the foundation stones in the manner illustrated. This should give a stable wall with minimum slippage. But it's very difficult to get our heads around this type of walling which is counter-intuitive to everything we've learned.

It's like learning to wall all over again.

And so we begin. The objective is to overlap squarish stones against the protruding foundations. We are aiming for a straight edge to the wall but leaving sufficient overlap on each stone to begin a new course without running joints.





Here is Peter's nice attempt. He was repairing a hole in the existing wall rather than starting from foundations but you can see the principal behind the build.



Sally is tying-in to the existing wall. As expected she immediately and skillfully got to grips with the technique while I floundered for a while.

We didn't put up a line for this initial attempt but by the end of the day we realized that it would have helped to do so. Next time!



Preparing the course wall, 21 June

Peter and I went to Spyway on midsummer's day to clear brambles and other scrub from the walls where we'll be holding the first course of the year on 3-4 July.

The weather was atrocious and after four and a half hours we were thoroughly soaked. A herd of Herefords and their calves were taking shelter from the rain on the far side of the field. We took the opportunity to climb over the wall to do some lopping and chopping. But then we spied a massive bull and nipped sharply back.



Fortunately, 'Toro' decided to pay amorous attention to one of the cows, which enabled us to climb back into the field and finish the job.

Well, fellow wallers, I hope you enjoy reading June's newsletter. We're looking forward to running the first course since 2019 on 3-4 July. The dates of further courses will be 7-8 August and 25-26 September. If you know anyone who would enjoy learning our craft, please direct them to the relevant page on our website: <https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/events/>

You can book online for any of the courses at: <https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/courses/online-course-booking/>

I look forward to seeing you on a wall very soon.

Carole Reeves