

DSWA Dorset News

July 2021

‘Hot July brings cooling showers, apricots and gillyflowers.’ As I sat down to begin this month’s newsletter early in the month I couldn’t recall a particularly hot day in Dorset over the past couple of weeks. My friends who live in Calgary had been baking in temperatures of 40 C. Canada just isn’t the place for heat. I remember sitting in a plane at Montreal Airport while it was de-iced for take-off. I think the outside temperature was about minus 15-20 C. I must admit that whilst the heavy showers have once again churned up the mud at our walling sites, it has been very beneficial for our gardens and allotments. No brown and crisping lawns this year nor need to spend a couple of hours each evening watering fruit and veg plots. However, resuming work on this newsletter on 19 July it’s a very different story and we are all roasting in temperatures of 30 C. This makes walling very hard work at times since most of our sites have no natural shelter. We shouldn’t complain as it almost certainly won’t last long.

We’ve plenty of news this month so grab yourself a cuppa and read on.

Building a Bield



My good friends, Mike and Jill, who live in Cumbria and often contribute interesting dry stone walls and other structures to our newsletter, sent me this photo taken above Ennerdale Water, the most westerly lake in the Lake District National Park. It shows a Bield – can you spot it?

Mike says that Biolds are normally associated with sheep shelters but this one is a fox trap. Apparently, there should be a plank balanced like a see-saw over the hole with a tasty morsel on the end. Mr Fox tiptoes onto the plank and bingo! drops into the hole. Without going into gory details of disposal, Mike suggests that ‘the farmer sorts it out from there.’



Looking into this well-built dry stone structure I wondered if a strong young fox wouldn't be able to scramble out of it but the waller has cunningly left no paw-holds on the internal walls. And it is deeper than it first appears.

Langton Herring, 26 June



The wall at this lovely AONB site is really coming together and looks great. I wasn't able to wall on this particular Saturday because my sister came from London to stay with me for a week. Walling was cancelled on the Sunday because of bad weather and my sister and I went to the Russell-Cotes Museum in Bournemouth (<https://russellcotes.com>) – well worth a visit if you haven't been.

Course for novice wallers, Spyway, 3-4 July

Yes, folks, this is July! Sixteen enthusiastic participants, eager to learn the art, were split into two groups on two separate sections of wall. Peter and Iain were the course instructors, assisted by Phyllis, Merrie and Carole.

Fortunately, the early morning mist on Saturday cleared after an hour or so and with the foundations laid, the first couple of courses rose as if by magic.



Peter (second left) was the instructor on this section of wall and here he seems to be encouraging a participant to pick up a stone while Phyllis acts as overseer.

Meanwhile, further down the wall, Iain and Merrie check out a gigantic stone selected by two participants who hope to become professionals. This is going to be a challenging build but the newcomers prove up to it and proceed to construct a very chunky section of wall.





Day two and Peter's group are fully focused on building a straight wall with perfect batter. Hearting is going into the wall by the bucketful and the concentration is intense.

On Iain's wall participants are learning to eye up a piece of stone. They have been told that once you pick up a piece of stone it should theoretically go somewhere onto the wall. But, of course, few of us do this with the utmost confidence.



As the day wears on the weather takes a turn for the worse and we have some heavy showers and very blustery winds. I particularly like this jumper set into the wall.



Is Peter's wall going up faster than Iain's? The race is on ...

Iain's team loses a participant who leaves early so Carole steps into the breach. 'Clever Clogs' decides to knock a lump off a stone without taking it off the wall and promptly splits it in half. Iain tells his group to learn from my stupid mistake, and red-faced I am sent off to find a replacement stone. Whoops!



And finally, as the sun comes out, the copes go on to a very creditable wall.

Below – the two completed sections of wall.

Over the following two weeks, Peter, Merrie and I finished the sections unable to be completed by the participants during the weekend. Once the feedback forms are analysed we'll be able to report on the participants' experience.



Renscombe, 17-18 July



This weekend members returned to Renscombe to begin a new section of wall on the other side of the kissing gate – that is, adjacent to the recently completed wall.

Mary lays the foundation stones for the cheek end.

It was a very hot weekend but members worked diligently to complete the foundations and begin laying the first courses.



Two youngsters seem fascinated by the work and stop for a chat.



Whew! The heat gets too much even for hardy wallers and out come the colourful brollies. Shelter is essential when temperatures are in excess of 30 C, and there's no place to hide at Renscombe.

Slopy wall, Purbeck, 18 July



The slopy wall on Purbeck is taking shape. There's a messy bit in the middle which Peter says was there at the outset but Sally has clearly mastered the technique. Not sure about that huge slab though – Sally says she's 'still thinking about it.'



Dave, Sally and Peter contributed to this wall at Durlston when the Dorset branch was based there some years ago. On Friday 16 July, I went walking with a couple of friends from Acton to Durlston and took this photograph. It's a nice piece of walling and I for one would love to do more of this creative work. I've often noticed visitors taking photos of particularly attractive stone work so it is clearly appreciated.

Qualifications 2021 – last call for prospective candidates

This year's qualifications weekend is 11 and 12 September with a supervised practice weekend booked for 21-22 August and the mock exam on 4-5 September. If you plan to take your level one or level two this year, please contact Phyllis as a matter of urgency (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com). The application forms and payment to DSWA need to be completed at least six weeks before the exam so that arrangements for the examiners can be organized. Examiners are master craftsmen / women who usually travel from Cumbria or Yorkshire for the weekend and you'll appreciate that this needs to be set up well in advance. For those who have previously expressed interest in taking your qualification but have now changed your mind, it would also be helpful to let Phyllis know.

We cannot hold a qualifications day unless we have at least six candidates. In the event that we do not reach this number (several prospective candidates have already dropped out), here's the link to the various other sites offering Certification Test Days this year (<https://www.dswa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Test-Days-2021-V2.pdf>)

This newsletter will reach your inbox on Friday 30 July so the deadline for contacting Phyllis is Monday 2 August.

Tyneham, 24-25 July

Saturday morning saw us back at Tyneham to work on the curved farmyard wall. We arrived in torrential rain and mist which cleared after an hour to give us a pleasantly warm day with plenty of sunshine.

Dave seals the lettering with lime mortar to prevent slippage as the wall settles.





At the curved end of the wall we continue the build, aiming to keep level despite the steep slope. We have asked visitors to keep clear of the site which is littered with stone. Tyneham is a popular destination for visitors. This is the first weekend of the school holidays and by lunch time the car park is full.



Mary rounds the curve while Sally completes the cheek end and prepares to cope.



By Sunday we have a nice-looking wall but have run out of suitable stone. Geoff pushes by with a barrow load of stone 'stolen' from the exam site in the farmyard. We'll replace this with the four tonnes of stone still at Lovell's Quarry awaiting delivery to Tyneham.



Wendy takes time out from walling to bring out her sketchbook. Phyllis is curious to see what she's drawing and indeed she's captured both Phyllis and I as we work away at our sections of wall.



This is the last photo of the day on Sunday afternoon. The cheek end section of the wall has been coped and the lettering section is ready for copes. Members will return to Tyneham on 21-22 August, and during this weekend there will also be a practice session for those taking their exams in September.

‘Dinosaur head’ found in Purbeck wall

This week I, working with two colleagues for the National Trust, started taking down this old collapsing wall on Purbeck. It backs onto Lovell’s Quarry but there are cows in the field and there’s a risk that some of the inquisitive calves might break through the vegetation to investigate the quarry.

The stones are huge so it was with much grunt and puff that they were removed, stacked, and the invading vegetation cleared.



And there, somewhere down the middle of the wall, we uncovered this ‘dinosaur head’. Its size can be revealed by my size 5 boot just visible at the bottom of the photo.

It will go back onto the wall as the coping stone on the very end of the cheek end. Very apt for a wall on the Jurassic coast.

Tom’s Spring

It’s good to have Tom’s news after a couple of months gap during which he has been extremely busy as you’ll see from the amazing work he and his team have achieved.

April was a sad month in our house. Cherry’s compadre, Sting, had to be put to sleep unexpectedly. At least he didn’t suffer but Cherry has appeared a little lost. At least with the continued cold weather she had the fire to lay in front of. It was a busy month, dry and sunny but cold. Good weather to create walls in.

We had a couple of ongoing projects. A garden in Stoney Stoke... there is a clue in the name and you only have to dig a spade in the ground -





well, at least attempt to – and you hit stone. There is no one big wall that we are creating, rather a series of small walls, steps and well to build or repair. Once complete we will install a terrace. Pictures will follow later in the year as there is a lot of landscaping to be done and I cannot get any decent pictures.



Our latest walls at The Newt in Somerset were recently completed and here is an image now the ground has been levelled. We did have a little alteration to make... this is par for the course and something we are used to. Whilst sometimes a little disheartening to dismantle our work, we understand that it is our clients who gives us the work and you have to respect them. We are always grateful for everything we are asked to create.

As some of you will remember we were filmed for 'Love your Weekend' with Alan Titchmarsh last November. Following on from that, an old school friend saw the episode and asked us to build a Pear for his children's primary school as a thank you for all they have done for his children. Such a kind thought.





I set off for Chiswick with the Pear dismantled, not expecting that by the end of the day, I would have experienced one of the most fulfilling days in many, many years. I was warmly welcomed by the head mistress and my school friend. It turned out that I was the first person to visit the school in over a year... well since pre-Covid-19 days and that seems a while ago! Now!

I spent the entire school day with different classes showing them how to build a wall... not with the Pear! I took extra stone with me. They were so interested, asking great questions, and children being children, always manage to ask a question that you have no idea what the answer is! They really enjoyed being hands on and you never know, maybe there will be a future dry stone waller that will emerge from Chiswick.



What a wonderful day and made me realise



how lucky I am to live in the West Country with all of the wonderful countryside. Whilst Chiswick is far from inner city it must be difficult when we were all locked down with limited space to get out in.

I'll finish with a pile of stone... I had a chap who use to work for me, he still does carry out a few jobs for me. We had had a fresh 19t load of stone tipped and his words...

'Well, all we do is make a pile of stone look tidy' Such true words. How lucky are we all that we can tidy stone.

What a contrast **May** has been...cool like the previous month but wet, unlike last month, how different to last year! Not that this has stopped work, not a lot does really, which is another of the joys of Dry Stone Walling.

Going into May, I was on quite a high after my trip to Chiswick. I think it was the boundless enthusiasm of the children. They really were so enthusiastic. The questions were wonderful but the thank yous from both the staff and children were humbling, but when one of the children said to me 'thank you for coming to my school, no one comes to my school anymore'... well that was emotional. I guess that is the Covid world we live in.

May continued in much the same vein as April... well the rain was a change!!!



Our project at Maperton continued with a rebuild of a small wall in the garden using Sherborne stone and a set of three steps using Blue Lias (below) which we found on site buried in a pile of rubble and soil. The lesson learnt from that is, never discard what looks like rubbish, there could always be a pot of gold hidden at the bottom. There was... well, a dry stone waller's pot of gold!

We finished the curved entrance walls and wall between this and the barn. To me this is the essence of dry stone walling, using what is lying around... after all, this is how it always used to be and should be embraced more often in this



modern world. All too often I hear that people will only use new stone. I know not why but can only assume it is a reluctance to work with something old that may require a little more work.

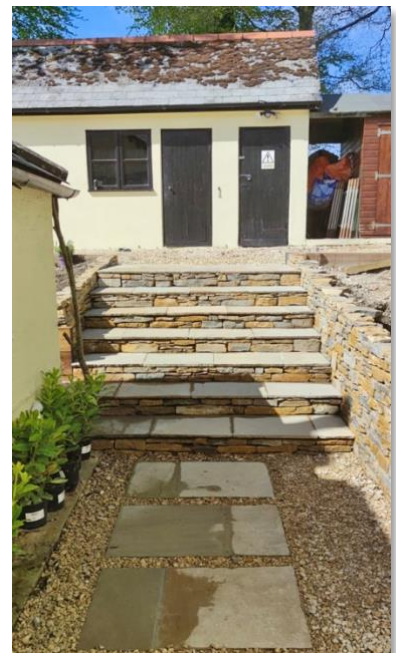


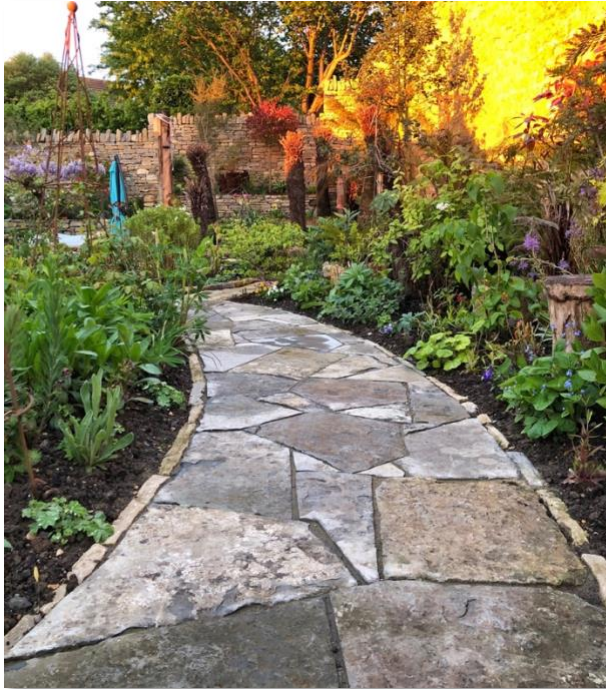


The final piece of the jigsaw at Maperton was to install new Forest Marble Cock and Hen along the roadside wall we repaired when we first began this job. And with that, there was another project completed. A variety of different stones were used all from site, bar the Cock and Hen.

Stoney Stoke continued apace throughout this month, rebuilds, repairs and new builds are all part of this project. alas no pictures to share this month; maybe once we have completed our work next month I will have some to share with you all.

We had a small job in Chicklade, Wiltshire. A set of Purbeck steps and flanking walls. The treads were Indian sandstone. Not my favourite material to use as it never weathers well. Why should it? It comes from a different climate and in my opinion does not react well to our cool and damp climate. But as it is a very cost-effective material it will continue to be used. I find it rather sad that it is cheaper to buy than products produced in our country.





We also had a lovely little project to lay a pathway using old Blue Lias paving to create a pathway edged in Purbeck. It is a crazy paving style which although the phase often has a negative tone to it, when cut and jointed closely, in my opinion looks great. You decide, it is always interesting to hear others' opinions.

May was a month where we had a break from The Newt in Somerset, we are back there next month for more walling! At least it gave me a chance to take some pictures of the walls we have created over the winter months (below) which was wonderful as it gave us the air of normality whilst the country went through the long winter lockdown. I hope you enjoy the pictures.



And finally, for this month I end on the news that Cherry has not one but two new compadres... Bumble and Buzz – Jack Russells – and as would be expected they are mischievous but bundles of joy. Cherry even plays with them... when she thinks we are not looking!!!

Well, fellow wallers, I hope you enjoy reading July's bumper newsletter. Our forthcoming course will be held at Corton Down, West Dorset, on 7-8 August and there will be a further one, also at Corton, on 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

