

# DSWA Dorset News

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March 2022



A couple of weeks ago, just after Storm Eunice, Peter and I were working at Crack Lane when we noticed that a huge branch had broken off the 17<sup>th</sup> century oak tree around which we have curved the wall. Nearby lay the intact body of a recently dead deer, possibly a casualty of falling debris.

We returned just a week later to find this – a skeleton picked entirely clean. Foxes, raptors, and other creatures of the forest had clearly made short work of a venison treat. I suppose we shouldn't have been surprised that the entire animal could have been disposed of in such a short time, but having expected to be confronted with a stinky carcase, it was good to see a very clean set of bones.



Well, it's now officially spring and delightful walling weather. I hope you are all managing to get out and about in our lovely countryside with so many signs of the spring season. I'm still waiting to hear my first cuckoo but the skylarks are making themselves heard across the county. I have been to London twice this month – the first time to Canary Wharf which is interesting for its 'piped' perfume throughout the underground shopping malls. There are companies that specialise in scenting the air of these spaces, and make the point that 'ambient scent subtly contributes to a favourable perception of quality, and may cause shoppers to linger and spend more.' Ho hum ... not me, buddy. The following day I was walling at Winters Lane where muck spreading was in progress. I couldn't resist the evil thought that it would be fun to pipe a little rural pong through the weird artificial environment of Canary Wharf.

## Winter's Lane, 25 February



We begin a new section of wall at our Portesham site. In the distance behind Mary is the gate where the wall ends, so we still have a way to go. Generally, only four of us work on this wall – we have given up hope of seeing the people for whom the project was initiated. That is, the partners of women with peri-natal depression. It appears that whilst Dorset HealthCare had good intentions to keep the project going, other priorities (including Covid) got in the way.

Dorchester Mental Health Forum had also expressed interest in becoming involved, but we have heard nothing further since that expression of interest back in November 2021. However, we four branch wallers are enjoying our Fridays at this lovely location and are very content to continue on our own.

## Came Down, 5-6 March



Back to Came Down to continue restoring this low farm wall on a very chilly day indeed. The wind whips relentlessly across the open land above the sea near Bincombe and despite wearing six layers I am feeling really cold after a few hours. Maybe it's because I'm only wearing one pair of trousers whilst Phyllis is wearing three!

Phyllis, Tim and I soon have this section coped and Sally fills in the gap we've used for crossing from one side of the wall to the other. The copes look enormous compared with the height of the wall but it's what we have scavenged from the land plus a trailer full of stone from the farmer.







A walk up the field reveals the next tumbled down section. You can see by the ever-changing sky that the weather up here is unpredictable. For some reason the copes haven't been mortared this far along the wall which is good news and will make it quicker to dismantle the wall.

We know that this wall was built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, so it has stood the test of time. Most of it hasn't been rebuilt during the past two hundred years but the stone is now very friable and much of it falls to pieces as we remove the stones. And of course, there is lots of trace walling.



By the end of the weekend the foundations of this new section have been laid and we bid farewell to Came Down until the beginning of April when hopefully the weather will be a bit warmer. No, I really mean a *lot* warmer!



## Winter's Lane, 4 March



Fridays come around very quickly and the four of us pick up where we left off last week.

By the end of the session we are well on the way to completing this section of wall (below).

Friday 11 March is very stormy so we decide to stay away and hope for a better weather outlook on 18 March.





## Winter's Lane, 18 March

You can see how close we are to the gate at the edge of the field compared with the photograph taken on 25 February. We aim to complete this section of wall today. There are only three of us because Tim is holidaying in Wales ...



... but we work until we have coped almost the whole of this section. Phew – I carried all of the copes up to the wall. No, I'm not really whingeing.





## Spyway, Purbeck, 19-20 March



This is the site of the first course of the year on the weekend of 7-8 May. Six of us begin clearing both sides of the wall of vegetation which largely consists of brambles and blackthorn, with clusters of ivy. Tush, wearing one of his fashionable head coverings in blue and lilac matched with a quilted fluorescent hoodie (Lidl £20 – a real bargain), shows a hefty bush who's boss.



Spot Sally in a wilderness of brush and ivy. This is jolly hard work.

We currently have sixteen people signed up for the course. Peter will cap the numbers at twenty so if you know of anyone who fancies a weekend learning the skill, or you're looking for a gift that keeps on giving, check out the web page at:

<https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/courses/>

The cost of a weekend course is £90.00





The wall is cleared and all the brush raked and carried to sites away from the wall. The National Trust, which owns the land, will deliver stone to the site a couple of weeks before the course. This is a lovely site with Swanage Bay in the background and skylarks singing all day.

Meanwhile, we choose a small section of wall to take down and rebuild for members' practice.



Sunday is an easier day with just the wall to build, and the foundations are soon in place.

Today, Phyllis models a stylish fleece-lined check jacket (Cotton Traders), another cosy addition to her walling wardrobe.





Just a few hours work and we have a nice looking wall. The stone is surprisingly good.

## Winter's Lane, 25 March



our morning coffee break.

Another sunny day in this peaceful location and a further section is cleared to extend the wall. Today, we see deer in the field below us and listen to Great Tits and Chiffchaffs in the trees. We even get a visit from a male pheasant who boldly strolls past us as we take







By the end of the day we have completed the foundations and a first course.

Just before lunch, Sally sets the line. The objective is to tie in with what remains of the existing wall at the end of the field by the gate. You can see this wall just behind Sally. It's likely that some of the will have to be dismantled because it has a definite lean!



## Ham Hill, March



Work continues at this lovely site in South Somerset which is a regular Monday venue for Geoff, Margaret and Paul, who all live nearer Ham Hill than other branch locations.





I really like this stone circle at Ham Hill. It was built by the Millennium Project to commemorate many centuries of quarrying on Ham Hill and of the quarry workers who toiled here. The signs say ‘quarry men’ but I don’t believe there weren’t at least some women who got stuck in (photo: Gaius Cornelius).

## Focus on Tracey Blackwell, our new Trustee representative



England in Particular Drystone Walls  
Tracey Blackwell (Landscape artist)  
High Brearley, North Yorkshire

Simon 1881 1891  
Gaius Cornelius (Landscape artist)  
Copyright © 2014

Tracey, a professional waller from West Yorkshire, is our new point of contact with the Board of Trustees. She will be looking after the concerns of the South West England (SWEDSWA) and Cotswold branches as well as Dorset. If there are any issues that you wish to raise with the Trustees please contact me initially and I’ll pass everything on to Tracey.

Tracey is a level 3 waller (Advanced certification) who began walling in 2000 whilst working as a landscaper and took it up professionally soon afterwards. She says that she has served on the DSWA management committee and more recently on the Board of Trustees ‘for longer than I care to remember’.





Tracey works with sandstone as opposed to our usual limestone, and this looks like really nice ‘blocky’ building stone similar to that being worked by Geoff and his wallers on Ham Hill.

The photo (left) was taken last month, a reminder that Tracey’s winter walling conditions can be somewhat bleaker than for us southern softies. Yes, we suffered a few frosty mornings but snow? No!

I was very impressed to see that Tracey has been sponsored by Blacks Outdoor clothing (<https://www.blacks.co.uk/lifeoutdoors/tracey-blackwell>). Do we have any Dorset professionals wearing sponsored clothing?

## Courses 2022

A reminder that apart from the novice course at Spyway on 7-8 May, we are also running courses on 2-3 July and 24-25 September at Corton Down, South Dorset Ridgeway, near Martinstown.

Check out the web page at: <https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/courses/>

The cost of a weekend course is £90.00



## Cumbrian shelters

Thanks as ever to my friends Mike, Jill, and their miniature schnauzer pooches for keeping me up to date with dry stone structures in the Lake District. This is a wind shelter at the summit of Beda Fell which overlooks Ullswater.



Makes a good resting spot for Mike, Didley and Ranni.

Another shelter before the descent back to Howe Grain (Martindale). Martindale is a sparsely populated valley where there is a deer reserve which is home to the oldest native red deer herd in England (photo below: Andrew Locking)



A lovely old mossy wall on this walk.



Fellow Wallers – that’s March’s news. The weather has generally been kind to us and it’s been delightful to relax our walling muscles in the spring sunshine. As ever, I really welcome news and images from all members and now that we’re able to travel about more freely, please keep a lookout for interesting dry stone structures. One member (who shall be nameless but you know who you are) told me last week of a very interesting wall builder on the Gower peninsular whose walls funnel outwards at the top rather than the usual narrower build. ‘How intriguing,’ I said, ‘did you take any photographs?’ A glazed look came over his eyes ...

Until next month, then, enjoy the weather and your walling.

Carole Reeves