

# DSWA Dorset News

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April 2022



I just popped into my garden to take a photograph of Spring. Although this view of the garden looks attractive – I am particularly fond of tulips – it's been something of a shambles this month because I've had 70 metres of fence replaced. Most of it blew down during Storm Eunice but I've had to move many plants away from the fence to prevent them being trampled underfoot during the work.

However, when my friends in Calgary sent me this photo of their

garden last week, I realised just how fortunate we are to live in more southern climes. Stella, their 'pet' rhino looks most forlorn beneath a layer of fresh snow whilst an American robin, perched on a plant pot, scans his surroundings for a morsel of food. It's difficult to make out the bird's orange-red breast in this monochromatic photo. The American robin is not closely related to our European variety.

Due to my fence fiasco, I have missed two training sessions, both held at Corton Down. The first was for 33 agricultural students from Kingston Maurward College, closely followed by a day's training for 11 community wallers from Portesham who plan to restore a wall in the village.





## Corton Down, 2 April



We spend a day at Corton Down preparing the site for the Kingston Maurward students who will be spending two days learning the rudiments of walling. Peter and Phyllis sort stone into manageable stacks. The electricity pylons in the background will soon disappear from this landscape as the National Grid bury cables underground. I have mixed feelings about this.



Although this is an AONB area, I believe there is an argument for preserving some of our industrial heritage. The road from Corton to Winter's Lane cuts across the site where the National Grid is churning up the landscape to complete its works. It's likely to be a good few years before the environment fully recovers.

Geoff, in matching hat and gloves, finds a barrowful of small stones to add to the pile of newly delivered stone for the course. Unfortunately, the new stone has been dropped in the wrong place and has to be moved – a task not undertaken by Wendy and



me who are given the far less arduous task of getting walls to various heights, ready for the Portesham volunteers' course. Meanwhile, Sally fills in a gap further down the wall.

Phyllis on the rocks - collapsing onto the stone pile after a day of barrowing the stuff.



This looks ominous! A very dramatic sky which fortunately looms as we are finishing for the day. In fact, it didn't rain apart from a few large splats as I was driving home, but sunshine and black skies photograph well.

## Kingston Maurward course, 4-5 April

The 33 agricultural students were divided into two groups with Peter and Geoff as instructors, assisted by Phyllis, Sally, Wendy and Mary.

No need to worry about clothing for this group – they arrive well equipped and soon get down and dirty. We hope that a few will be keen enough to join as student members of the branch.





Mary keeps a watchful eye as the first course is laid and before you know it, the students have almost completed the first lift.



A well-earned afternoon break and time to enjoy the landscape.

Feedback from the students was very positive:

‘I can’t believe we actually built a wall that was half decent.’

‘We wouldn’t have a clue without the people that actually know what they are doing helping us.’

‘The instructors were great at

giving tips and having a laugh.’

‘Really glad we learnt something new.’

‘I may have to do some of this on my farm now.’

‘Dry stone walling is really hard work but at least you feel like you have achieved something.’



## Portesham volunteers' course, 9 April

Four days later it was back to Corton to train 11 volunteers from Portesham who plan to rebuild a village wall.

Peter was the instructor – here laying the first foundation stone – and once more assisted by Phyllis, Sally, Mary and Wendy.



This was a very cheerful group – the sunny weather helped as ever – and they were soon building a very nice wall.

It's very rewarding to be involved in training students and community wallers, so I'm taking the opportunity of reminding you of our forthcoming courses for novice wallers. We are running two courses at Corton Down, in July and September. The first course on 7 and 8 May will be at Spyway, Purbeck (<https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/events/>). This is now fully booked.

Portesham volunteers showing off their lovely straight wall and (below) lining up to add the copes.







## Winter's Lane, April



There's been plenty of activity at this site near Portesham. This is the penultimate section before we reach the gate at the end of the field. Mary and I wall alone for the day on Good Friday while Sally entertains her son and family for Easter. We begin at this height ...



... and reach what we think is full height until Sally decides we need to match the height of the wall that we will eventually join. Of course, she is right! You only have to tie a string between the sections to see how this will work but we didn't do this.



A family of Sika deer roam the fields below our walling site and these two came very close to the wall. Actually, we weren't there at the time, but Sally captured this photo as she happened to be driving along Winter's Lane.

And here's Philip, our friendly pheasant, who regularly struts his stuff as we're doing our own thing. However, Sally must have some animal magic – well she was a vet – as he's never been this close before, and she captures him examining our work after Mary and I leave



the site.

And while we're on the subject of animals I thought you'd like to see my new banana pod, complete with monkey! I have been trying to find one of these for ages, but Phyllis spotted this one in Haskins Garden Centre and snapped it up. Needless to say, I am delighted, and can now carry my bananas in style.





A rare photo of me taken by Sally. Usually, I'm behind the camera but if anyone takes my photo I'm invariably doing something weird or caught in an unflattering pose. Here I am about to chip something off a cope because Mary and I are getting our own back on Sally by giving her the task of bringing the wall to the height she has specified while we cope our own sections.



Our next task will be to take down the final collapsed section of wall, prepare the ground, and tie in the rebuild with the wall that is still fairly intact. A lot of the earth bank will need to be removed although it will probably fall out once we begin prising out the stones. The lovely Spring weather has pushed up the vegetation, so we spend the final part of the afternoon pulling up nettles. Even wearing thick gardening gloves, the stings are still smarting the following day when we return to Spyway to finish preparing the site for the first course of the year on the weekend of 7-8 May.



## Spyway, Purbeck, 23 April



We spend the first few hours sorting out the stone dropped by the National Trust for the course. Over a welcome coffee break, we contemplate the song of the skylarks which sing throughout the spring and summer on Purbeck.

Mary is the first to spot the cowslips – the first I have seen this year. She tells us that the common name, ‘cow’s lips’, derives from the shape of the flowers which have a definite ‘mouth’. Later that evening, Sally emails us to say she has discovered that cowslip actually seems to derive from the old English for cow dung (cūslyppe), probably because the plant is often found growing amongst the manure in cow pastures. Well, this is, in fact, a cow field.



We complete the small section of wall begun at the end of March. As well as a members’ practice wall, course members will be able to see what is achievable during their weekend course.

Below, the coped wall.





## Mary Anning goes for casting



It's great excitement at the beginning of April because the statue of Mary Anning is almost ready for casting. Her wax is cut into manageable pieces ready for the final layer of ceramic.



Sculptor, Denise Dutton, makes last minute adjustments to Mary's dog, Tray.



Once her ceramic shell hardens (right), she will be ready for pouring.

By Easter, she is transported to Castle Fine Arts Foundry, Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant, Nr Oswestry, Powys.

And here's the video of her torso being cast in bronze:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leeLJ4iH5gE>



Just out of the melting pot.



One of her boots still in its ceramic cast waiting to be cracked open and cleaned up.

Mary's statue will now be reassembled, and Denise Dutton will do the final finessing. Then the foundry will add the patination.

The unveiling of Mary Anning's statue will be in Lyme Regis at 14.50 on the 21<sup>st</sup> May, Mary's birthday (and I believe it's also the birthday of our chairperson, Wendy).

Photos Anya Pearson and Evie Swire



## Dry stone structures in Devon



Sally, Martin and Button spent a week in North Devon and discovered some interesting dry stone structures. Our professional member in Devon is Martin Stallard and we know that he does this type of walling. Sally observed that this is a 'fairly new retaining wall; stones vertically placed but probably built all along the length at once rather than a vertical course at a time like we did with the slopy walls on Purbeck (right)'.



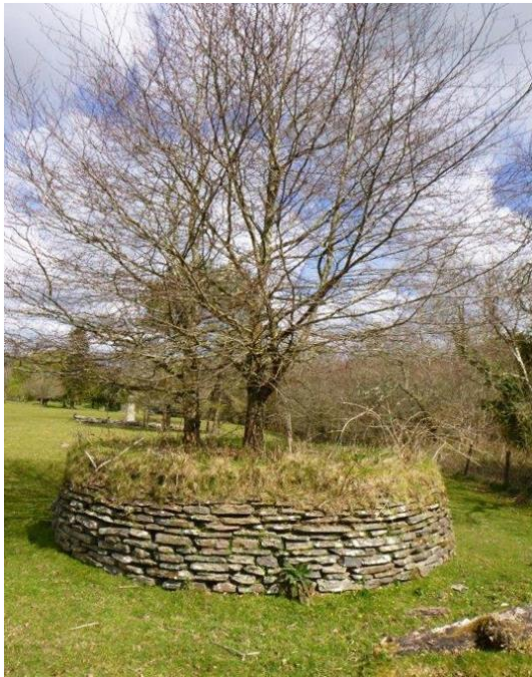
Martin might be able to give us more details regarding this particular style of walling.





Newly built garden wall and cheek-end - no tying in. Will they stay up?

Tree roots embedded in a Devon hedge.



Giant plant pot in the grounds of Killerton House, Broadclyst.



Above: Restored 19<sup>th</sup> century limekiln at Heddon's Mouth (more or less on the beach) on Devon's north coast, once a popular venue for smugglers. Note the corbelling of the roof.



Left: Curious combination of vertical & horizontal build in retaining wall.



## Cumbria corner



Above: Mike and Jill's lovely photograph of an abandoned sheep fold with lunky, on the footpath to Arthur's Pike, a fell above Ullswater, near Pooley Bridge.

Left: Mossy stepped squeeze style near Eskdale Green near the end of a walk from Muncaster Fell.



Below, on the same walk three massive stones make a bridge over a beck.





View from the top of Muncaster Fell, height only 758 feet. To the right along the stretch of coast in the distance is the Sellafield Nuclear Plant. A few years ago, I managed to cadge a helicopter ride from Scotland, where I'd been working, to its base in Northampton. We followed this coast in the late afternoon sunshine with stunning views of Sellafield and the surrounding Cumbrian scenery. An experience never to be forgotten. Photo: Andrew Locking.



Jill at the top of Arthur's Pike with Biggal, Didley Doo, and Ranni. Last year, Biggal and Didley walked over 1000 miles with their owners and wear celebratory collars to mark the achievement. Not bad for 11-year-old pooches. Ranni's the baby – just coming up to her first birthday but already a sturdy walker.

Fellow Wallers – that's March's news in a (large) nutshell. We've enjoyed amazing weather although it's now getting very dry. On Tuesday I was working above Worth Matravers on a long stretch of collapsed National Trust wall. The wall had been taken down a couple of weeks previously but as ever with the Trust we get moved to whichever wall is



most urgent to repair. Returning to the site after three weeks of sun and wind, the ground was rock hard so that digging out buried stones to create a foundation trench was really tough work. Probably better than kneeling in mud though!

Compensated by the view from the wall ...



As ever, I welcome news and images from all members. Until next month, enjoy the weather and your walling.

Carole Reeves