

DSWA Dorset News

January 2022



Happy New Year to you all and I hope that your New Year resolutions include a weekend walling with the branch. We're looking forward to seeing you.

In last February's newsletter I included a feature on Mary Anning (1799-1847), the professional fossilist of Lyme Regis who explored the sedimentary rocks deposited under the sea around Lyme about 200 million years ago, and who became a significant figure in the burgeoning geological community. Anning's importance in the history of vertebrate palaeontology has never been in question.

'Mary Anning Rocks', a crowd-funding campaign launched in

2019 to commission a statue for Lyme Regis, reached its target £100,000 within 18 months. Mary is now ready to be cast in bronze and her unveiling date is set for her 223rd birthday on Saturday 21st May this year. These

photographs show Mary's clay effigy, and the sculptor, Denise Dutton, putting the finishing touches to the work.

The plan is to have Mary carry a basket in which visitors can take out and put in fossils and finds from the beach. It will be interesting to see how that works!

Photographs: Evie Swire and Anya Pearson



Came Down, 9 January



This was our first session of the year. Sunday was a fairly murky day, but Saturday's walling was cancelled due to high winds and driving rain. This is a very exposed site, and the bad weather would have made walling uncomfortable and not particularly enjoyable. Sally prepares to cope this section of wall and stands back to consider the coping stones at her feet.

Mary, Phyllis and Peter work on a section further along the wall. It is certainly looking a great deal better than when we first began work at this site in early November. It's a pity that no one except the farmer will admire this wall. Although it is within an AONB, there is no public right of way.



During the day we receive a visit from Adrian who brings along his grandsons to see how grandad spends some of his free time. The boys have been living with their parents in Taiwan but have recently moved to the UK. There are some very creative retaining walls in Taiwan, which have been featured in our newsletters (courtesy of Adrian's son) so maybe these young boys will be inspired to recreate them here. One can always hope!

Winter's Lane, 14 January

A lovely bright day at this sheltered site near Portesham, and the wall is coming up fast. Last week, two people from the Dorset mental health team came to see the wall and assess how they can take the project forward. The past few months have been difficult as NHS staff have been dealing not only with the mental health issues of new parents but also with Covid. As you will recall, the project was begun with a grant from the National Grid to offer practical therapeutic support for the partners of mothers with peri-natal depression. Take-up during this second phase of the project hasn't been as consistent as we had hoped, and much of this section of wall has been built by branch members.



We know that the Dads won't be back at Winter's Lane until next month so we decide not to finish the build but to prepare the ground and lay the foundations for another section of wall. Believe it or not, there was once a retaining wall where there is now only an earth bank.

Mary makes a start on digging out fallen stone. This will be a day of flying mattocks, spades and bars.

It starts to get warm – this is a very sheltered site – the stone piles grow, and the ground begins to flatten out. There are only three of us, we work hard and are pleased with the progress we make after four and a half hours.





And then we begin to unearth what's left of a piece of farm machinery and what feels like half a ton of heavy-duty plastic. This is so deeply embedded into the ground that we decide to call it a day and contact Paul the farmer to dig it out and take it off site. Then it's off to Sally's house for a delicious lunch of curried parsnip soup, homemade bread, tea and caraway seed cake. Thank you, Martin and Sally.

Courses 2022



7th-8th May 2022: Purbeck



2nd-3rd July 2022: Corton Down, South Dorset
Ridgeway, near Martinstown



24th-25th September 2022: Corton Down, South
Dorset Ridgeway, near Martinstown

These are the dates of this year's walling courses for beginners. 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



Sherborne Castle Country Fair, 29 May



This year we plan to have a presence at this fair which is organised and run by volunteers to raise funds for West Country Children's Charities.

Although it's going to be a lot of preparation for one day, we think it's important to engage with the community and hopefully attract the interest of visitors.

If you fancy joining us at the fair, in whatever capacity you feel that you'd be most useful, please contact me. It would be great to include at least one professional

waller. As you can see from the photograph taken at the Sherborne Fair a few years ago, we'll be building a demonstration wall with free stone from a local quarry. If you want more information about Sherborne Fair, visit the website at: <https://www.sherbornecountryfair.com>

Crumbling wall by Crummock Water

Crummock Water, Cumbria, is nestled in a valley with Grasmoor on the west and the fells of Mellbreak on the east. The River Cocker starts from here, flowing towards Cockermouth where it joins the River Derwent.

Most walkers aren't looking for walls except for my friends Mike and Jill who discovered this old collapsed, mossy wall and send me a photo. It looks like people have broken through to get to the pebbly beach.



Apparently, the lake is popular for wild swimming.



Looking across Crummock Water to Grasmere which drops dramatically on its western flank to the shore.

Crummock Water and neighbouring Buttermere, which were once one big lake, have national (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and international (Special Area of Conservation) status because of their wildlife interest.

Both lakes have very clear water because of the very low nutrient status of the water combined with

great depth and low water temperature. In these particular conditions live a community of well-adapted species, reliant on chilly, clear water.

One of these, the spectacular Arctic Charr (right) is a glacial relict fish (a fish that originates from time after the last glacial period approximately 12,000 years ago) which, in England, only lives in the Lake District. Brown trout also live in the lake and sea trout and salmon pass through to spawn in tributary becks.



Over the past decade otters have spread back up the River Cocker and now their signs (spraints) are regularly found in favoured spots around the shore, though the animals themselves are rarely seen.



Winter's Lane, 21 January

Back where we started a week ago at this sheltered, sunny site. Did the farmer clear the junk? No, of course not. After a mammoth mattocking we unearth what is left of this chain harrow plus a mound of buried plastic wrap and a sackful of baler twine.

Meanwhile, Mary and Sally sort out the vegetation and uncover what was once the front of the retaining wall.

We take a well-earned break for coffee and watch a group of foxes and some very brave rabbits exploring the field below. The sun is very warm and although there is a road behind the wall, we rarely see vehicles. However, walkers often stop for a chat and tell us how well we're doing. Not that you can see much of the wall from the road, but it's always encouraging to be on the receiving end of compliments!



Once the farm machinery is hauled off site, we start to see some progress although it's clear that we won't be laying any foundations this week ... or even next week.



This is how we leave the site with all the vegetation cleared and what was once the front of the wall exposed. The house on the hill, with wonderful views across the fields to the sea, is where – with kind permission from the owners – we park our cars.

Langton Herring, Sally’s winter clearance!

Sally has begun clearing and exposing the next 30 metre section of wall to be built at this lovely AONB site. It’s a hard task – a lot like the extreme ‘gardening’ at Winter’s Lane. This is what she was faced with at the beginning of the task.





She even found a log sticking out of the wall, as well as this twisted branch with ivy entwined around it (below right), which had contributed to the collapse of the wall. It looks amazing though.

Below left – what remains of this mid-19th century wall is revealed.



The site looking much clearer. In the distance you can see the wall that we completed last autumn. We look forward to getting back to Langton Herring which is very peaceful with stunning views across the countryside.



Renscombe, 22-23 January



The year's first visit to this noisy and busy car park. It might look empty and peaceful, but we do make an effort to choose points of view where the traffic is not in evidence. Considering the cold, miserable day, we were amazed to see the car park so full by lunchtime that visitors were parking on the track.

Peter, Sally, Tim and I continue where we left off before Christmas.

Meanwhile, Phyllis and Mary inspect a section of wall that has clearly been knocked over by a vehicle. Mary says that the wall was so poorly built that it wouldn't have taken much of a push to send it tumbling. Nevertheless, I can imagine that the vehicle limped off battered and bruised into the sunset after knocking off four courses and cemented copes!



And talking of cemented copes, Wendy circumnavigates the wall picking up fallen copes, scraping off the cement, and re-laying them.

During the afternoon, a volunteer coastguard drops by to unlock their charity box and remove the donations. The car park is fuller than we've seen it since the summer, and she collects ... 50 pence.



By Sunday afternoon the wall is pretty much up to height, but it is decided to complete the coping next time we're at Renscombe.

Mary and Phyllis cope the car crash section of wall. Once the main wall is coped we will say goodbye to Renscombe unless we're called back to repair any sections trashed by visiting numpties.



Ham Hill, January

Geoff reports that progress on this lovely site is going well. 'Having restored over 50m of wall last year, we have started on rebuilding the next 30m section of semi-retaining field wall.



We have recovered some wonderful walling stone and have just started to get the foundations set.'



'Margaret has shared photos of lichens and mosses (above) on the derelict wall which we have tried to preserve by translocating to the restored section. Also, see if you can find the cluster of overwintering 16-spot ladybirds.'

'These beige insects, with 13-18 black spots, measure only 3mm and are often overlooked. Found in grassland and meadows, they overwinter in low herbage, gorse, plant litter, on fence posts and stone walls, often in large aggregations. They feed on pollen, nectar and fungi.'

This is fascinating Geoff. I can also see a caterpillar at the top of the photo but can't identify it. Maybe someone else can enlighten me! Thanks to Geoff and Margaret for these photos.



Wolfeton Farm Cottage Wall, January



This is Geoff's current professional project. Check out November's newsletter to see photographs of the start of the wall.

Geoff says, 'I have (just about) finished the first third of the dry stone wall at Wolfeton Farm Cottage, using very regular and blocky Purbeck Limestone from Haysom Quarry.'

'This is a relatively high (1.5m-1.6m) wall with horizontal cover stones rather than vertical copes.'

'I had originally intended two rows of through stones, but had very few of sufficient length, and needed these as cheek end ties. Instead, used three-quarter through stones, in Cotswold style, throughout the build. Because of the regularity of the stone, I was able to use a batter of 1/10, rather than the "textbook" 1/8. Anyway, the Dorset style tends towards the vertical.'



'I am also a recent convert to Jed's trick of securing lines with bulldog clips, rather than fiddly elastic bands and S-hooks. These work really well with Screwfix (other suppliers are available) high visibility builders line, which has enough elasticity to keep the line taught, but enough give to minimise any trip-hazard.'

'I still intend to rearrange the cover stones to make the top a little more neat and level. Then start on the remaining two-thirds (10m length) of wall.'

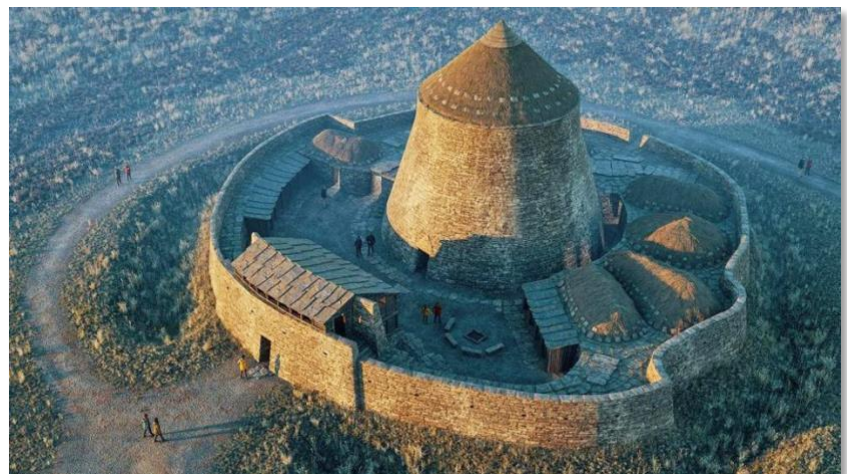
Crack Lane, 15 January



Meanwhile, at another site near Langton Matravers, Peter and I continue with our wavy wall in a field belonging to Trev Haysom, also using stone from Haysom's quarry although a lot more random than the stone being used by Geoff. Since this was originally a medieval boundary wall, we are trying to include some of the original stone – mostly Purbeck marble quarry waste from the nearby Crack Lane Quarry. However, since this is now very friable, we've had to import 'new' stone. Like Geoff's wall, the client doesn't want vertical copes, but large flat cover stones topped with rubble – and we have to make this look beautiful. Surprisingly, on the section we've finished it looks alright. We've curved around the oak tree, planted c. 1670, and tied in (left) with a section of the original mossy wall.

Caithness Iron Age Broch

Martin sent this photograph by Bob Marshall of the proposed reconstruction of a broch. These tall, double-walled dry stone towers, have only been found in Scotland. It is thought they were used as dwellings, perhaps for local chieftains and were built to heights of over 12 m (40 ft). Caithness is home to



about 200 brochs. For more information about this project visit:

<https://www.thebrochproject.co.uk>

Fellow Wallers – that’s January’s news. This month we’ve been lucky with the weather – not too cold and very little rain. This is probably not a good portent for the future, but it has given us scope to get stuck into our projects compared with this time last year when we were still in one of our lockdowns. When I began this newsletter, I thought there’d be a paucity of news, but it just goes to show. It’s always good to get photos and features from branch members so if you have something interesting to contribute, I’d love to hear from you.

What with a variety of branch activities and personal projects we’ve started 2022 with a very upbeat feel.

Carole Reeves