

DSWA Dorset News

May 2022



A couple of days ago I went for a walk with my sister along the Thames Path at Greenwich. Here we are looking across the river towards Canary Wharf. The sandy shore in the foreground certainly wouldn't win any 'clean beach' awards, but the Museum of London is full of the historical treasures discovered along this shoreline by modern mudlarkers. In similar fashion wallers are always delighted to discover 'treasures' in walls even it's an old bottle or a clay pipe. I'd love to

hear from anyone who's uncovered an interesting object in a wall, especially if it has historical value.

Behind us, on a brick wall, under the chimneys of Greenwich Power Station (built in 1906 to provide power for the London County Council tramways), is the story of Stan who finds a message in an old bottle which instructs him to gather gloopy mess from the river and, at



sunset, empty it along the banks. After he does so, a marvellous colourful jungle of flowers pushes up through the earth and stretches towards the sky.

It's amazing what you come across on a wall during a simple walk on a sunny day.



Came Down, 30 April



Sally amongst the silage gatherers. Another section of wall goes up at this farmland site. Silage gathering was very quick, done with military precision albeit a tad noisy! After I saw this photograph taken by Wendy I suggest an article on Dominator Tractors but this is met with downturned faces. I am warned that you never know what you might uncover ...



There is another session here on 15 May but unfortunately no photographs. As Phyllis said, 'We sheltered from lightening in our cars for a bit in the morning and finished at 3 pm as we were rather wet.'

Spyway course, 7-8 May



Fifteen novice wallers arrive on Purbeck to take part in our first course of the year. They are divided into two groups under instructors Peter and Jed. The weekend weather is perfect. Branch members have already sorted some of the new stone delivered by the National Trust and Peter shows his team the different types of stone.

We welcome three new branch members, Bill, Ian and Nick who joined after the course.



Peter's team set to with a will and soon have their section of wall stripped down to the foundations.

But Jed's team come across some huge and difficult-to-remove foundation stones. The massive stone behind this stalwart waller is a particular nightmare. To remove or not to remove? Consensus is to remove because it is lumpy on top but probably smooth underneath and therefore easier to build on. Fortunately, this proves to be the case, but it is very slow going and rather dispiriting for novice wallers.





Fortunately we have a timely break for one of Jed's Tai Chi sessions which helps everyone stretch and relax.

I have bought a large container of chocolate snacks which soon get gobbled up. Memo: to bring a bigger container tomorrow!

Jed's team deserve a photo for creating a great foundation trench. Removing very large and deeply embedded foundation stones mean that they are behind Peter's team but we know they will soon catch up once they begin to build. The two sections of wall are adjacent but you never know what you will find until you start to dismantle a wall.



Meanwhile, Peter's team are flying with their foundations. Note the lovely square 'jumper' (left with tools on top) they have already

placed in the trench.

Jed lays a couple of stones next to the massive foundation stone that took such effort to remove.





Peter keeps an eye on his team as they begin coursing the wall. This looks very neat with plenty of hearting.

Jed's team (below) are catching up fast. This is a lovely site with the sun shining on Ballard Down in the background.





Sunday morning and both teams have completed the first lift and are looking for suitable through stones.



And before you can say 'dry stone wall' it is time for copes. Jed's team (below) with their finished section.



Peter's team proud of their wall!



Thanks also to the branch wallers who organised this course and spent the weekend helping to make it an enjoyable and memorable event.

Wallers to the rescue



This is the track at Spyway car park that leads to a farm and a National Trust holiday cottage. The car park is to the left of this track. At the end of the Saturday of the course we arrived here in two cars, which we had taken to the field near the walling site, to find a vehicle parked in the middle of this track. It was impossible to pass and therefore no access for farm vehicles or the emergency services. The only way out for our cars was to move the giant stone on the left which we proceeded to do with our heavy bars and

mattocks. It has been *in situ* for years and was deeply embedded in the ground. After we'd driven our cars through the gap, we had to move it back!

Curved Walls on the Gower Peninsular



A month or so ago, Tush, one of our occasional wallers who lives in Hay-on-Wye, told me about the walls he had seen in the Gower Peninsular, South Wales. They were, he said, curved like a tulip shape. Intrigued, I asked for photographs next time he was in the area.

The waller he spoke to, named Steve, did not know the history of why they were built this



way but perhaps others may have the answer. Please contact me if you have more information.

Here is a limestone wall being built with a template that replicates the curve. I have looked at images of drystone walls being constructed in Gower, including the Great Wall of Mewslade, but this used a traditional 'A frame' for a sloping batter.



Limestone roof tiling in Croatia



The roof interior shows that the pieces of limestone are not regular like the rectangular stone roof tiles that were made

My cousin is currently in Croatia and sent me this photograph of the olive oil museum in Škrip, the oldest settlement on the island of Brač.

The roof of this building is constructed with limestone tiles which use no rails or pegs but are wholly supported by the roof timbers.



on Purbeck but are thin, random pieces placed with care along the timbers. Apparently, there are only two remaining drystone roof artisans on the island, which has several limestone quarries.

Spyway, 14 May



We return to Spyway to finish the walling begun during the weekend course a week ago. There are only four of us and we work hard until 6pm to get as much walling done as possible before the farmer's herd of Herefords returns to graze.

Sally and Phyllis find a large stone to top their section of wall before coping and then roughly fill in a gap (below) to bring it to height and finish with rubble topping. This can be walled properly at a later date.





By the end of the day the entire wall looks reasonable, and we create two neat piles of stone (Sally's looks more like a carefully constructed cairn) on each side of the wall. The National Trust ranger will collect this with a tractor.

Cumbria Corner

Some more beautiful and interesting dry stone structures from Mike and Jill. In this photo of Jubilee Bridge at Eskdale, I love the way the clouds appear to form an 'S-shape' around the tree to match the sinewy shape of the wall.

On this walk they had a picnic stop on Harter Fell overlooking Hardknott Pass and Hardknott Roman Fort (below).





This remote and dramatically-sited fort, preserved by English Heritage, was built under Hadrian's rule in the second century. Well-marked remains on this three-acre site include the headquarters building, commandant's house, and bath house. The site of the parade ground survives beside the fort, and the road which Hardknott guarded can be traced for some distance as an earthwork.

Jill remarked that the winters would have been pretty tough for the Italian soldiers although in fact the fort was occupied by the Fourth Cohort of Dalmatians, from the Balkans so they were probably used to the cold and fairly hardy.

All dry stone built of course although there has been some restoration.





Winter's Lane, May



The last clearance of stone as we move to tie in with the existing stretch of wall.



The foundation trench is cleared ready to lay stones. To aid water run-off from the sloping road, Sally decides to build a smoot. A huge stone is lifted onto a prepared base and manoeuvred into position. To give us energy in our endeavours the farmer, Anne, keeps us supplied with delicious home baked cookies.



The foundation stone for the smoot in place (below).



Mary notices what looks like a nesting site in the broken telegraph pole by the gate. It turns out to be home to a family of Great Tits (*Parus major*)





The wall is fast coming up to height, and Sally's smoot is finished. It looks good.



View from the lane looking over the fields towards the sea. On our next visit we'll cope the finished wall.

Geoff's projects



At Wolfeton near Dorchester, Geoff continues with his professional wall at Wolfeton Farm Cottage, near Dorchester, 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.

The second, longer, section of wall is now almost up to half height.

West Bexington: Geoff says, 'My third visit to patch up various wall collapses in as many years. As a local farmer observed, 'The walls around here keep falling down.'



The location name (left) is particularly apt. The British Geological Survey has designated the whole area as a coastal landslip of Frome Clay and Fuller's Earth. So, not surprising that things are unstable.

I have re-bedded the foundations and am now progressing with the first lift. The Forest Marble stone was originally locally quarried from the ridge above West Bexington, Limekiln Hill and Tulks Hill, now managed by the National Trust. Replacement stone



is now only available from north Dorset (Lillington Quarry, operated by Sherborne Stone) or south Somerset (Stalbridge Quarries). I never tire of the view across Lyme Bay.'

Ham Hill



Lunch break at this lovely site in South Somerset, which is a regular Monday event led by Geoff who says: 'We have now completed the first lift on a 30m wall section and also placed a nice series of through stones. Onwards and upwards.'

DEFRA course, Corton Down, 11 May



Sally, assisted by Phyllis, Mary and Wendy, was the instructor on this team building day for vets and Animal Health Inspectors based in Taunton. She says: 'I didn't take any pics as it was too wet to get the camera out. There should have been 19 but only 11 were able to come out. The missing ones had been called in to help process Ukrainian pets' licences. These animals are coming into the country under special conditions where they can be isolated at home rather than having to quarantine, and so house checks have to be made to ensure the conditions can

be met. They left at lunchtime because the driving rain just got too much for everyone. One car

was a bit late arriving. They'd come from Bristol and were using the grid ref. to navigate. They turned left at Winterbourne Abbas and drove up the National Grid Project road - an interesting idea! It was only as they were moving some cones and a traffic light out of the way at the top that they were challenged but allowed to continue when they pointed out where they were going.'

Portesham community wall, 21-22 May



After their training day at Corton last month, the Portesham community wallers make a start on their own wall in this lovely village near Chesil Beach.

Peter, the lead instructor, checks the ground for a power cable before they knock in the pins.

And here goes!

The foundation trench is dug (below).



And the first couple of courses are soon in place. And this is where the wall will differ from the traditional dry stone structure.



The next couple of courses are mortared. This seems to be the tradition in Portesham and replicates what has previously been done on other walls including the one we helped these volunteers to build five years ago.



And here is what has been achieved by the end of the weekend. It is looking very nice indeed.

Meanwhile, back at ...

Spyway, 21 May



Tim and I fill in the gaps still remaining in the course wall. Probably not as exciting as being involved in the Portesham community project but necessary for the farmer to put her Herefords back into the field. We don't have enough cope stones so we rubble top the wall.

Fellow Wallers – that's May's news and I think you'll agree that we've been very busy indeed. So much so that we would welcome more branch members out on our walling weekends. We are all over the county so very soon we must be coming to a wall near you. The weather, for the most part, has been wonderful and it's been a joy to be lifting stone beneath the singing skylarks.

This coming Sunday (29 May) branch members will be at the Sherborne Castle Country Fair (<https://www.sherbornecountryfair.com>) which promises to be a great day out for everyone. Do come along and enjoy the day.

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

Carole Reeves