

DSWA Dorset News

October 2022

Norman's Quarry, Purbeck



As I sit down mid-month to begin October's newsletter, the weather is glorious – sharp, bright and sunny with fabulous skies.

Taking an 'archaeological' stroll around the villages of Acton and Langton Matravers, I came across the remains of this capstan used to haul carts from the adjacent underground limestone quarry shaft (Norman's Quarry).

Traditionally, these capstans were made of a combination of three types of wood – oak for strength, ash for pliability, and elm for its

water resistant qualities.



Norman's Quarry is an adit that opened in the early 20th century and was worked by 'Sunshine' Norman, so called because he always wore a hat, disliking the sun on his face. It closed in the 1940s. The quarry shaft and branches from it continue for over 100 metres below the ground. The rails on which the wheeled carts were hauled, are still visible. The name 'Norman' is common amongst Purbeck quarrymen but Trev Haysom tells a tale of Sunshine Norman's wife visiting this quarry but he had a difficult job to push her back up the shaft. She was heavily pregnant - with twins as it turned out.

The whole area was known as Burnbake back in 1775 and paving stone was dug here. Two shelter huts remain on the site – one is visible beyond the

capstan and the other is behind me although both have been enclosed with wire fencing. Today, the only occupants of this underground quarry are horseshoe bats which overwinter in a comfortable constant temperature of 12 degrees C.

If you are interested in taking a walk around this area which includes this site, download the Quarryman's Ways leaflet from Dorset Council (<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/283293/quarrymans+ways+leaflet.pdf/b5686e09-4dca-daf9-9cce-75c65034d7d3>)

Came Down, 1 October

This is the very final section of wall to be rebuilt at this site before we move on to pastures new.

Tim and I arrive on a beautiful morning and survey the site. Tim is buoyed up by having officially retired the previous day and enthusiastically gets stuck in to taking down the wall.



Meanwhile, I am panicking about tyre pressures and punctures because I've just replaced yet another tyre due to my regular off-road expeditions.



Time for a change of transport methinks.



We are joined at lunchtime by Phyllis who has been at Portesham helping to set up the community volunteers who will be continuing to build their village wall. We'll be returning to this project later in the month.





By the end of the day we've made a good start on the foundations

Came Down, 7 October



What a difference a week makes!
It turns out that Sally came out mid-week to get as much of the wall completed as possible but there isn't enough stone to finish it.

No sooner have we bemoaned the lack of stone than the farmer arrives with a couple of loads for each side of the wall. After sifting through the clods of earth, grass and other strimmings, (thank goodness it's not muddy) we unearth some really good stone, so Sally and I are soon on a roll.

It's another gloriously warm day and by the end of the day the wall is almost up to height. One more day should finish it.



Came Down, 10 October

And so it turns out! Sally and Mary complete the wall and tidy the site by early afternoon. Mary says that she was climbing over the wall rather than relaxing on it. We believe you Mary ...

The finished wall below. Farewell to Came Down. We've already committed to another nearby wall on Donkey Down.

Below – the finished wall.





Winters Lane

It's back to this site to work on a section of wall where we started two years ago. It's a lovely site near Portesham overlooking the sea. Shame about the tyres – maybe they're my old ones ...

The site has been used as a farm midden. In the past we've found sacks full of baler twine, a ton of heavy-duty plastic, and the remains of an old chain harrow.



Sally says: 'The foundations went in quite well. The back of the wall is largely mortared and seems fairly sound in places, so we decide to build into it and prop it up or take down and re-build as we go along.'

‘The stone we are having to use - which came out of this bit - is very irregular and lumpy. It is rather different from what we had in the previous sections. There is a lot of mortar - even more than in the typical mortared band you can see to the right of this section in some of the pictures. This means that we are taking out a lot of the volume of the wall (probably about a cubic metre) and so we are likely to be rather short of stone.’



‘Mary working to tie into the initial part of the wall which was built back in 2020 but suffered somewhat when the cows decided to go walkabout over it.’

The eastern end of the wall.



Ham Hill

Geoff says: ‘At the end of September we finally finished adding copes to the restored wall section, up to the gnarly tree stump. Very satisfying to complete such a length of wall. The setting sun casts a lovely rosy glow on this beautiful stone.

‘The Ham Hill Walling group is an informal collaboration of Dorset DSWA and South-West England DSWA branches, local conservation volunteer groups including the Friends of Ham Hill, EuCAN, the Tinkers Bubble off-grid community and the community



support group Thera South West. All with the full support of the Ham Hill Country Park Rangers, who have generously supplied any additional stone required from local quarries. This autumn, we have switched our Ham Hill walling sessions from Monday to Wednesday.

‘Since the easing of the COVID shutdown, we have restored a 140m length of wall dividing the Strouds Hill

wildflower meadow on the Ham Hill plateau. The site has also hosted a SWEDSWA weekend walling course.

‘Restoration of a stock proof wall will allow flexible grazing management of the Ham Hill plateau wildflower meadows. Restricting access to defined points, field gates in the wall will help minimise disturbance of (near) ground nesting birds, such as skylarks and stonechats.

‘We are in the process of completing a length and condition, style and features, natural history and history survey of Ham Hill dry stone walls. This has already fed into the management plan for Ham Hill Country Park and the report will be submitted to DSWA HQ and available, with a supporting interactive web map, on the Dorset DSWA website.’

See more photos and information about Ham Hill at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/192778251@N07/albums/72177720296167133>

<https://www.facebook.com/hamhillcountrypark/>

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1D8kUKtUnjWZb6-1OeWnGk6beujPxcQNG&usp=sharing>

Merton Priory and Abbey Mills



Merton Priory, one of the most important Augustinian monasteries in Britain, was established in 1117 by Gilbert, sheriff of Surrey, and received the manor of Merton from Henry I in 1121. Thomas Becket, later Archbishop of Canterbury, and Walter de Merton, founder of Merton College Oxford, were both educated at Merton Priory.

The Priory covered an area of sixty acres in what is now the London postal district of SW19, encompassing parts of Colliers Wood, Morden, Mitcham and Wimbledon. The River Wandle, London's only chalk stream, flowed through its precincts. Nothing above ground

remains of the Priory, apart from remnants of the Precinct Wall, but excavations by the Museum of London in 1986-90 before a huge Sainsbury's was built, revealed the footings of the chapter house. My sister went along to the Chapter House Museum under the A24 to check out the building materials (photo above: Chris; photo right: Katie Wignall).





Not surprisingly, limestone and Purbeck marble feature in the mix, remains of which can be seen in surviving fragments of capitals and window tracery.

Over 700 burials were excavated; this expensive sandstone coffin would have been the final resting place of a prior.

One of the skeletons, an adult male aged between 26 to 45 and buried within the north transept of the remains of the church, was found clutching a hernia belt placed low down on the pelvis. Another man was interred with a copper alloy object placed on the knee area. This may have been intended as a 'medication sheet' to relieve the symptoms of joint pain such as might be found in an arthritic condition (photos: Katie Wignall).

There is an interesting direct link between Purbeck and Merton Priory. Matilda, daughter of Henry I



the castle.

(reigned 1100-1135), who gave Merton Priory much moral and material support at the time of its foundation, failed in her attempt to seize the throne following the death of her father, there being no direct male heir. During the ensuing civil war centring around the royal garrison at Corfe Castle, the pretender to the throne, Stephen of Blois, built a siege castle directly opposite Corfe Castle. 'The Rings' are the remains of his siege castle (artist's impression left), an enclosure of earthworks topped by a wooden palisade where Stephen's army sheltered just out of bowshot from

Merton priory was surrendered to the crown in 1538 during the Dissolution under Henry VIII. From the 17th century, however, what remained of the Priory was renamed Merton Abbey and became a textile manufacturing hub thanks to its location on the River Wandle.

In 1724 the first calico (white cotton) printing works were established here and in 1881, William Morris established Morris & Co on the site. The water of the Wandle (a chalk stream) was ideal for dyeing. All the dyes Morris used were made from natural substances based on early herbal recipes. These dyes gave a softer tone to the textiles unlike the aniline chemical dyes which gave harsh colours and soon faded. Hand-printed silks for Liberty's were produced at Abbey Mills until the early 1970s.



Above right: one of the remaining mills at Abbey Mills on the River Wandle. Abbey Mills is well worth a visit if you're in that area of London. If you want to know more, visit:

<https://www.mertonpriory.org> and <https://www.mertonabbeymills.org.uk>

Our AGM, 15 October



We held our AGM at Portesham Village Hall, followed by lunch at The King's Arms, generously funded by the Branch. Nine members took advantage of a 'free lunch' and thoroughly enjoyed our meal, particularly as it

was raining cats and dogs on the Portesham community wallers a few yards down the road.

Welsh slate walls

Merrie spent September touring Wales, visiting areas where she lived as a child. These slate walls are near Barmouth, north-west Wales. Slate has been quarried in Wales for nearly two thousand years. Romans used it for building, but the industrial revolution in the 18th century saw the industry really take off. By the end of the 19th century Wales was producing 485,000 tons of slate and 17,000 men worked in the industry. If you have an old slate roof the chances are that it's Welsh slate.



Portesham, 22 October



It's back to Portesham to complete the community wall at Goose Hill. Members of the Branch will be here every Saturday until the wall is completed.

Mary and new member, Alex, join local volunteer wallers in this lovely sheltered spot.

Sally deep in concentration as she sets up her frames for the cheek end and curve.

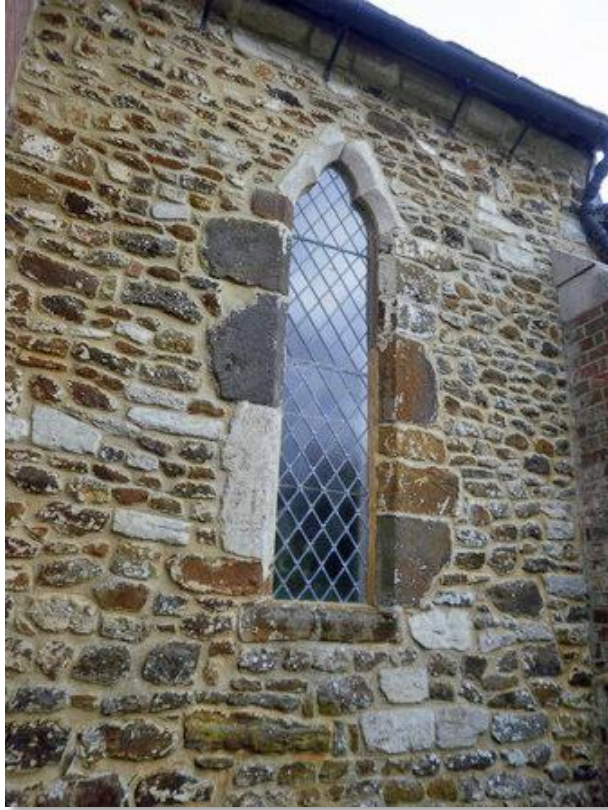


Heath Stones



I was recently working on Godlingston Heath, helping to check out the condition of some of the Bronze Age barrows for National Trust archaeology. These are surveyed every few years for intrusive vegetation, animal burrowing, etc.

Beneath this unattractive link fencing, laid to protect the barrows from badger setts, are large heath stones. These are dark brown sandstone pebbles which have been used in local building for centuries.



This is St Hubert's Church, Corfe Mullen, some of which dates to the 13th century. The south wall of the chancel is not rendered, and the original dark heath stone is clearly visible. The lighter stone is Purbeck limestone, with the window frame blocks of Purbeck Burr limestone.

The darker the heath stone, the more iron oxide it contains. The Romans used this stone in mosaics and smelted it for iron, and there is evidence of this at Norden. Check out this interesting account of an archaeological dig at

Norden (<https://archaeologynationaltrustsw.wordpress.com/2019/03/28/a-hole-in-the-isle-of-purbeck/>)

Wallers - that's October's news wrapped up. Don't forget to put your clocks back this coming Saturday and join us at our walling venues if you can.

I have a number of 2023 DSWA calendars if you'd like one. They are £6 each and I'll only be bringing them out to our walling sites, rather than posting them to Members. You can also buy them from Head Office, but they are more expensive at £8. Please let me know if you wish me to reserve a calendar for you. This year there are two photographs by Dorset branch members – one by Sally and one by me.



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

Carole Reeves

Happy Halloween!



My sister spotted this eye-catching painting on the wall of a bar in Islington. She said, 'Well, it's stonework, isn't it?' (photo: Chris)

