

DSWA Dorset News

February 2023

100 metre wall – end in sight!



Merrie, Peter and I began rebuilding this medieval boundary wall at Crack Lane almost two years ago. It abuts Crack Lane quarry, from which Purbeck marble and burr was quarried from Roman times. The quarry closed in 1952. Much of the stone used to build the wall was quarry waste but Purbeck marble is very friable when exposed to the elements although it survives beautifully when polished and used for interior decoration. Many cathedrals throughout Britain feature Purbeck marble. Last August we invited branch members to begin work on the wall at the far end next to a broken down stile, the objective being to join the two ends together. The owner of the field, Trev Haysom (Haysom Purbeck Stone) arranged for a striking upright megalith to be placed at the cheekend. Just six months later, it is possible to see the two ends of the wall (above) with only about 15 metres to build. Merrie, in her trademark dayglow jacket, is standing at the half way point.

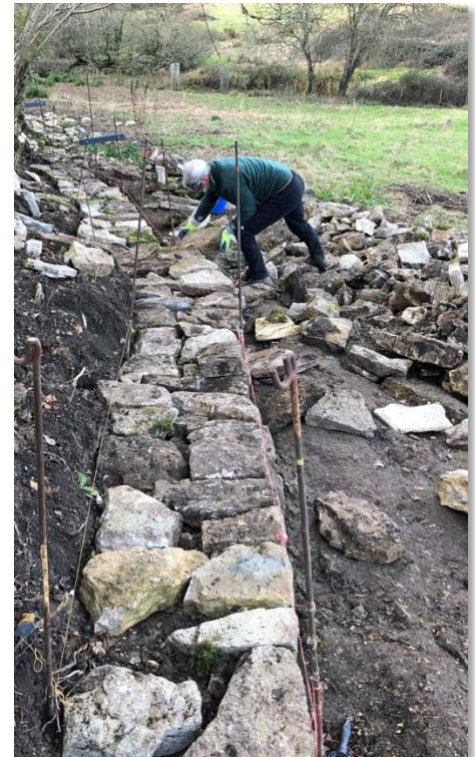




The first weekend in February sees ten branch members dig a foundation trench the entire length of the gap, and lay foundation stones. Hooray, we have joined the stints.

Ian swiftly removes any overhanging branches and tree debris which hasn't been dealt with by Trev Haysom's digger.

We welcome Andy (right) who did the Spyway learners course last May and who has walled with SWEDSWA and with Geoff's group at Ham Hill. He enjoys his weekend and wants to take his level one qualification this year. For those of you who haven't visited Crack Lane Quarry, it is now a DIGS (Dorset Important Geological Site). The photo below shows the remains of the ancient burr face which has been exposed by volunteers.



When I first visit the quarry in 2019 I notice what appears to be a metal shelter half hidden by fallen trees, vegetation and



large stones (below). I ask Trev about this and he tells me that he and friends used to play in it as children just after the second world war. He thinks it might have been an ARP (Air Raid Precautions) shelter dumped in the quarry – as many things were – after the war.



I relay this information to the National Trust which promptly removes it for 'safe' keeping. Would anyone have stolen it after 80-plus years?



But ... having recently joined the National Trust's Heritage Archaeology Ranger Team on Purbeck, I set to thinking that maybe this is, in fact, an old quarry blast shelter. On Trev's advice, I visit an elderly gentlemen in Langton Matravers whose father had been the foreman at Crack Lane Quarry. He confirms that it is indeed a blast shelter although the door is now missing. Well, it is only missing because the National Trust has dumped it in a metal recycling skip. It is now irretrievable, having gone for scrap.



Dave and Wendy (above left) rubble top a completed stint while the rest of the gang mattock and dig through the mud.



A lovely bunch of wallers enjoy a break from their labours and by the end of the weekend the big gnarly foundation stones are in place.

Peter concentrates on placing his final stone, and this is where branch members leave Crack Lane until the beginning of March.

Crack Lane 16 February



Just Dave (right), Merrie and me in the mud at Crack Lane on this murky Thursday. It only takes a day or two of steady rain to churn up this site. Dave works on Peter's stint ...



... while Merrie and I build up the other end of the wall and I'm tying into the 'honey monster'. Yes, I know it's not the world's best walling but, in places, we've tried to retain some of the original build even though it lacks beauty.

Winters Lane

Sally says, 'We have finished and coped the main section of wall now - just a bit of tidying up beyond where we've been working and up near the gate.'

For anyone who isn't aware of the significance of the Winters Lane site, near Portesham, the project was begun in late 2020 with a grant from the National Grid to support fathers whose partners have had perinatal depression.



The dads – all identified through Dorset Mental Health – had decided that the activity they really fancied was walling. After advertising on a farming Facebook page, they found the retaining wall in Winters Lane which was in dire need of repair.

By June 2021, Sally reported that there had been 12 different people taking part including the organiser from the mental health team and an occupational therapy student.

One member regularly brought his son when he came along, and here's Baby Fergus keeping an eye on the quality of his dad's copes! The little boy celebrated not only his first but also his second birthday on the wall! He then went on to become a model for John Lewis baby clothes.

However, with changes of mental health staff and the inability of fathers to get time off work on a Friday, the project began to unravel, eventually turning into a branch walling day with up to three regular wallers out most weeks. Sally, Mary, Tim and I have all worked on the wall.

Rural Skills Hub Walling Experience Day, 14 February



The Rural Skills Hub is a joint project between the Dry Stone Walling Association and the National Hedgelaying Society, supported by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The objective is to provide advice, guidance and financial support for people who want to start a career in dry stone walling or hedgelaying.



The Green Recovery Challenge Fund was developed by DEFRA UK and is being delivered by [@heritagefunduk](#) in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission (photos: DSWA).

On 14 February, Geoff involved eight Friends of Ham Hill volunteers in this Experience Day.

He says, 'We worked along a "stepped" section of wall so that participants gained a flavour of all stages of construction; foundations, first lift, throughs, second lift and copes. All enjoyed the day and I hope a few may feed into our regular Ham Hill walling sessions and DSWA membership.'

Thank you for today I really enjoyed it and learnt lots. I'd happily join you again as it would be great to learn a bit more and to help complete the section we started.

The location is Ham Hill Country Park in South Somerset. Just over the border from Dorset (Hence the involvement of Dorset DSWA).





Ham Hill (Hamdon Hill) is a wildlife haven with far reaching views across Somerset, centred around an Iron Age hillfort and disused quarry workings. The hill is capped by a localised deposit of shelly, honey coloured limestone (Hamstone) laid down in the Early Jurassic (~175 million years ago). This has been quarried since Roman times and there are still two active quarries.



There are almost 5 km of Hamstone dry stone walls on Ham Hill, most in a derelict state. Some follow the parish boundaries of Montacute, Stoke-sub-Hamdon and Norton-sub-Hamdon and date to around 1600. For the Experience Day, we were working on a ~200 year old wall dividing meadow fields on the Ham Hill plateau. When fully stock proof, this will allow for more flexible grazing management of the plateau fields for wild flowers. Also, sensitively managing access will minimise disturbance of ground and near-ground nesting birds such as skylarks and stonechats’.



Langton Herring, 18-19 February

It’s a pleasant, dry weekend at this peaceful site. There are unmistakable signs of Spring, and the sheep have cropped the field next to the wall.

Langton Herring is one of 13 ‘Doubly Thankful’ villages in Britain, so-called because all the men and women who served in the two world wars, returned.

The original term ‘Langetone’ means ‘Long farmstead or estate’, because the villagers’ dwellings are scattered in a long and straggling street, partly in the valley and partly on the hill side. (Langton Matravers is a similar straggly village). Philip de Sarmunvile held manorial land here in 1227 when the village was known as Langton Sarmonvill or Swinevill, and then in 1268, Phillip Harang was granted the manor. The name Langton Herring stems from this time – nothing to do with fish!

Andy and Sally scabble around in the dirt to prepare a trench for the next stint. At Crack Lane and now at Langton Herring, Andy has done nothing but foundations. Fortunately, he doesn't seem phased by this, and good naturedly heaves the heaviest stones into the trench.



Andy hopes to take his level one qualification this autumn. We hope that he'll have built a whole wall by then ...

Meanwhile, at the sharp end, we welcome Fiona, another new branch member, who did a weekend course in Yorkshire last summer, and who also doesn't seem phased by the 'difficult' stone at this site. In fact, working on the other side of the stint, I'm struggling to keep up with her! She has a natural eye for stone. Next to us, Wendy smiles and quietly gets on with bringing her stint to height.



By the end of the weekend, Andy has achieved his ambition of building a wall ...

... and Mary and Sally have completed four stints and coped the lot! A fantastic achievement by the Magnificent Three.



Catching up with Tom



We have missed our regular features from branch professional, Tom Trouton (www.tomtrouton.co.uk) but I'm delighted to include his creative adventures in this month's newsletter.

Tom writes: 'How lucky we were as a team to continue to visit some beautiful spots and to be allowed to get creative in them.

We finished creating a wall at the Wrinkly Shed. The brief was to build a wall that gives the illusion that the house behind it is indeed

just that... a shed hidden behind the wall. Of course, there is always a twist. This wall is actually part of the house, and the Wrinkly Shed? Well, that is the house, so named due to the use of corrugated metal sheets as the roof. I really do feel the poppies set this structure off so well. Plenty of Purbeck stone used in this creation.

Heather and I visited Abbotsbury sub-tropical gardens for the first time. Truly beautiful but perhaps the hottest day of the year. On our way home we stopped off to see how our solar circle was settling into the landscape four years on. How privileged we were to be able to create this legacy... it works perfectly. Summer and Winter solstice sunrise and sunset shine through the windows of each tower and illuminate the standing stone in the centre. The fifth and tallest tower faces due north.





We were asked to create a Pear for a chap in Manchester. We used Purbeck stone, built it at home, dismantled it and rebuilt it on site...successfully! He must be happy as only last week he enquired about an Apple!

The wall and steps (below) were created near Blandford, another fun project using Purbeck stone.



In September we had a week's break in St Ives, I do so love Cornwall. I couldn't help myself, I had to create something. I finished it just in time as the tide was coming in.

Here's a take on an Irish Beehut. Lime rendered inside where you will find Gregor Mendel podding his peas, and the structure planted with mainly native wildflowers. I really do get involved in so many weird and wonderful projects. The Beehut was 10-years-old when I took this picture.



And for the same client, the recreation of a temple (alterations to the original meant we had to begin again). Here you can see a buttress (right) that forms part of the entrance ...



... and the rear of it with two sets of steps.

Oh, and the boys, Bumble and Buzz, had to try them out... you always need quality control on hand. Forest marble and Sherborne stone were the order of the day.

Another large project that we created were these Purbeck stone terraces along with 28 (I think) steps to help you reach the top. This project was in Sherborne for yet another delightful client. Tea and coffee were plentiful along with a good



supply of biscuits. Very important part of the process is the nourishment that is supplied. I'm sure many of you will agree (yes, we do Tom, but we LOVE cake).



Perhaps my favourite creation were the steps and terraces flanked by walls either side at the top. The symmetry was fun as the garden had differing angles on either side, and the top did not measure correctly despite numerous attempts. In the end the 'eye' was the best measure. Out of sight behind the walls is a river where we built a floating patio that protrudes over the water. Maybe another image will follow in the future. Purbeck stone was used in this creation.

Cherry (right) would like you know that she is well and managing to put up with her new companions... most of the time. Bumble is the cheeky one trying to steal the sausages and Buzz is Mr Goody Two Shoes or at least that is what he likes to convey. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, well not whilst he sleeps.'



For those of us over the age of 50 time does pass by quicker and quicker as each year passes in a blur. At least in a blur I can put on my rose-tinted glasses and make out that all *is* rose tinted! In all seriousness, despite the trials and tribulations that we all face, how lucky am I to be asked to create so many wonderful structures and to be able to share them with so many people.’

Thanks Tom – it’s inspiring to see your creations. For anyone interested in Gregor Mendel and his work on heredity, here’s a paper from Nature Education (<https://www.nature.com/scitable/topicpage/gregor-mendel-and-the-principles-of-inheritance-593/>), and here’s what scientists did recently to celebrate Mendel’s 200th birthday (<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/12/30/1142202365/gregor-mendel-genetics-dna-analyzed>)

‘Safety wall’ at Eastington, Purbeck



Peter and I are working with a National Trust walling group on the Priest’s way, South Purbeck, building a three-sided wall around an old adit (underground quarry shaft). The National Trust thought it was a good idea in order to prevent walkers falling into the pit. But, as one elderly chap, weaving his way home from the Square and Compass put it, ‘I’ve lived here 60 years and I’ve never yet known anyone stupid enough to take a tumble into that there quarry shaft.’

Snowdrops on a wall



Mary took this lovely photo of snowdrops on a wall at Kingston Lacy in mid-February. Kingston Lacy is famous for its snowdrop walks. Check out the Kingston Lacy website for guided walks, or you can just meander at will.

Upcoming events

To keep up with Branch events please visit our website: <https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/events/> and get the dates in your diary.

If you know anyone who would like to participate in one of our weekend courses, please look at the relevant page of our website: <https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/courses/>

The April course on Purbeck is now full but there are still places for 8-9 July and 23-24 September, both at Corton Down. A free course place is offered to an individual meeting one of the following criteria:

- Currently unemployed (the Branch wishes to support people into employment)
- Veteran of the Armed Forces (the Branch wishes to thank those who have served our Country)

Individuals will be required to provide evidence of their status.

You can also purchase a gift voucher which is valid for two years. The weekend course costs £100.

We also plan to run training over the summer for Branch members who want to up their walling skills, especially important for anyone hoping to take level one and level two qualifications in September. More about the qualifications day when we have firmed up a date. You don't have to be a DSWA member to take a qualification, but you will have to pay the exam fee. Again, you'll be updated on this. We do require a minimum of six exam participants otherwise we won't be able to acquire the necessary master craftsmen examiners (there are always two examiners).

If you are interested in obtaining levels one or two qualifications this autumn, please let me or Phyllis (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com) know.

The next walling weekend will be at Crack Lane, Langton Matravers on 4-5 March. Anyone requiring directions to the site please email me or Phyllis (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com)

Anyone interested in purchasing new DSWA clothing (with a Dorset Branch logo), or replacing your stone worn clothing, please also let me know. I will be going to Crooklands at the end of February and will pick up a couple of items – a sweatshirt and a fleece – which I will feature in next month's newsletter. In the past, our distinctive royal blue clothing has been sourced locally so I'm not sure what colour will be awaiting me at Head Office!

As ever, I welcome news and images from all members.

Carole Reeves