

DSWA Dorset News

July 2023

Tyneham, 24 – 25 June



The Branch has had a very busy month. Skills training at Tyneham continues apace with novice and more experienced members working on the test walls to increase their expertise, and in some cases, prepare for the qualifications day in September.



Mary, Stephen and Tim plan to take their level 2 exams so are busy building cheek ends and getting up to speed – their sections will need to be taken down and rebuilt in seven hours. From experience I remember being less stressed once I knew that I was able to accomplish the task within the time limit. This is crucial because you automatically fail if you don't finish the wall, even if you build the wall of your life.



Andy, Andy and Alex work on their level one skills. Again, these walls will need to be completed within seven hours for the exam. We expect candidates to have worked on a variety of walls across Dorset, using various types of stone before attempting the qualifications.

During August and early September, candidates will do a couple of timed mock exams to prepare for the real thing. We wish them the very best of luck and will be following their progress.



Corton Down course, preparing the site, 2 July



Mary, Geoff and I arrive at Corton on this sunny Sunday to clear vegetation ahead of our second beginners' course of the year the following weekend.

There has been a large stone drop but it's impossible to see anything that resembles a wall, not that we're expecting anything more than a low, collapsed structure.



Geoff clears the ground with his brush cutter ...

... whilst Mary and I remove rampant vegetation from the top of the wall and create a couple of pathways between the stints.

We hope that this lovely weather (not too hot) will last for the duration of the course.



Eventually, we can see the wall and mark out the two stints – one for Geoff who will be assisted by Phyllis, and one for me, assisted by Mary.

We are expecting 20 participants.

Corton course, 8 – 9 July



Our terrific teams of novice wallers get down and dirty despite the dodgy weather – frequent showers with an occasional burst of sunshine.

The rain comes down as the foundations go in (right). Geoff's team (below) lay their first course.





Carole's team soon get to grips with walling technique and produce good straight courses.

Everyone seems to be enjoying the weekend despite further sporadic downpours. I have messed up by forgetting to bring the three flasks of hot water which I left in my garage. Phyllis remembered her three but has to go home at lunchtime to refill them. We all get through plenty of hot drinks and snacks. Fortunately, I didn't mess up with my choice of biscuits.



Eventually, on Sunday, as the second lift progresses and everyone knows exactly what they are doing, the sun comes out and the view is stunning.



Meanwhile, further along the wall, Branch members do their own thing but spend time chatting to the novice wallers during breaks.

Rob is the hero of the weekend because he takes away our huge bags of rubbish in his van. Thanks Rob.



Almost up to height. Geoff's team build their final courses (right) and Carole's group add their copes. (below) Eventually, the 'standalone' stints will be joined up and then we won't have a clue as to who built them. That's the beauty of running courses on a long wall. In the end, the build is more or less uniform all along its length.





All finished ... Geoff's team pose behind their wall (a cute shot of Geoff)! Two of the participants express an interest in joining the Branch.



Carole's team. A couple of these participants are also interested in joining the Branch.

For all the course photos on our Flickr site:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/192778251@N07/sets/72177720309672455>

Crack Lane wall finished



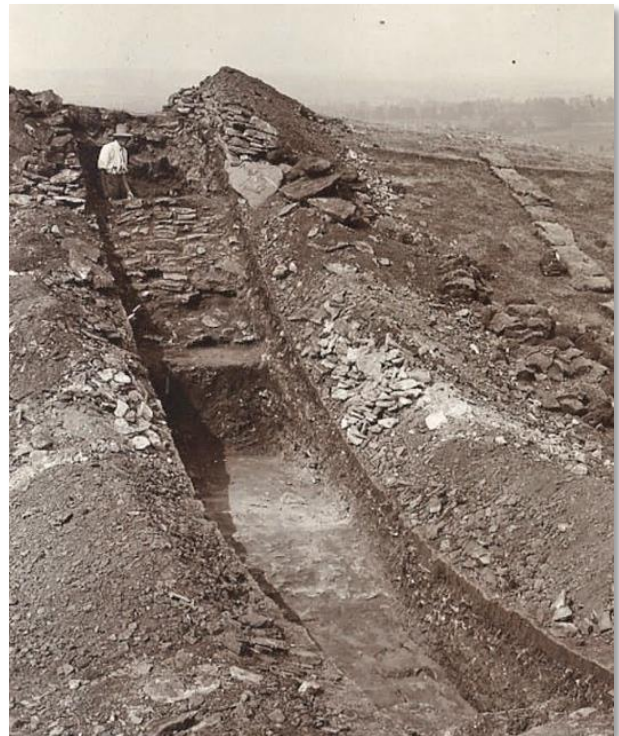
On Thursday 6 July, Peter and I completed this 100-metre wall which we began in April 2021. If we hadn't involved the Branch, it might not have been finished this year. Branch members had a significant impact on the speed of the build, often in really horrible winter weather. The whole length of the wall can be seen from the A351 (Valley Road) and we've had some positive comments from local residents.

Ham Hill archaeology

Geoff writes: 'Archaeological excavations on Ham Hill have revealed that the hillfort ramparts were constructed in the early Iron Age c.800-350 BC, and its interior was densely populated. The earliest evidence for habitation is a circular building enclosed with a ham stone wall, just inside the rampart. The hillfort ramparts were constructed in at least four phases, with some stages using stone retaining walls (revetments) on the inside and outside, and lining entrances through the ramparts.'

Humbling to know that we are continuing a ~2800-year-old dry stone walling tradition.'

The photo (right) shows a 1929 excavation through a rampart by Harold St. George Gray (1872-1963), who became librarian-curator of the Museum for the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society.



For more gruesome discoveries at Ham Hill a decade ago, see:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/exclusive-slaughtered-bodies-stripped-of-their-flesh-a-gruesome-glimpse-of-ironage-massacre-at-uk-s-largest-hill-fort-8798680.html>

As some of you know, Geoff organises regular Monday walling at Ham Hill, where he is now an Assistant Ranger. If you'd like to join the group, contact him directly: rowland.geoff@gmail.com

You never know what you might uncover!

Sally's Yorkshire holiday



Sally writes: 'On our way up to the Yorkshire Dales we passed this wall, with very regular triangular copes, which was on the moors near Sheffield. It seems to be the local style and I believe the grit-stone is fairly easy to work.'



We also stopped off at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. I wanted to re-visit the Andy Goldsworthy sculptures (I think Pete dismissed the 'Rain Shadow' sculpture as a working sheepfold) – which the outer part is, but when you look inside there is a huge flat stone and the idea is that you

can lie on it in the rain and then get up and there is your image, dry, on the stone – that is, of course, if it's raining, which it wasn't, and you're daft enough to do it!



Sally's dog, Button, has a serious think about whether to give this a go.



'There are other sheep-folds further up the hill, in which trees have been suspended. The trees have decayed a bit since I first saw them, but the stonework is still pretty impressive.'



Further up the track the trees were fighting back!



On the walk back to the car there was some lovely walling in the old ha-ha of Bretton Hall and the newer stile and wall up the slope to it (below).



In the visitor's book in our cottage someone remarked that they had stayed there whilst doing a dry stone walling course – I think we came across the site of their efforts on one of our walks (photos below).'

An interesting cheek end ...



'We visited Reeth where Phyllis and I had been in 2019 for the wallathon to re-build walls washed away by the severe floods. I'm pleased to report that our wall was still intact although I could not get a very good photo. There is an ugly top on it now. They have put flat stones on top with occasional (every 1.5 metres or so), pointed copes mortared upright.



However, the wall along the main road into the village where many of the participants worked is already showing signs of strain – the dry weather has caused a huge crack in the verge by the wall which is beginning to lean into the field.

It was mainly having been there for the wallathon that led to my wanting to see more of the area and I was not disappointed.

The views are wonderful – I love the smaller, walled fields with a stone barn in nearly every one (below).





We also visited a Himalayan and Sculpture Garden near Ripon. There was a reproduction of a building there which is characteristic of those in the mountains of Northern India on the borders of Tibet.

They are built with dry-stone and large wooden beams to withstand the major earthquakes that occur there.'



Langton Herring, 16 July



Phyllis sets up a string along the top of a completed stint to check that it's level before coping. This wall is on a fairly steep sloping field, and we've been working upwards since we began to rebuild a couple of years ago. She and I use all the available coping stones to finish the section and Sally is concerned that we will soon run out altogether.

Stone for this wall has come from diverse sources including an old rockery in someone's garden, and – we have just discovered – a collapsed lime kiln in the middle of the wall owner's field. I think we would have preferred that this be preserved as it is likely to date from the 19th or even the 18th century.

Sally lays the foundations for a new stint (right) whilst Peter and Mary bring a couple more to height (below).



We won't be back at this site until August although we suspect that Sally, who lives directly opposite the site, may clear some of the vegetation further up the wall.

Tyneham, 22 – 23 July



Another practice weekend, largely aimed at members taking their qualifications in September. This will be the final session run by Peter. In August and September, Dave will run a further practice weekend before the mock exam in September. John and Mary take down their cheek end stints.



Phyllis, Peter and I tidy the site of extraneous stone to give the wallers easier access to their own walling stone. Candidates are marked on health and safety, so we certainly don't want to create unnecessary hazards.

Andy practising for his level one. Saturday turns out to be a wet, windy, and generally miserable day. Our stalwart candidates work through most of it, but we finally call a halt at mid-afternoon.



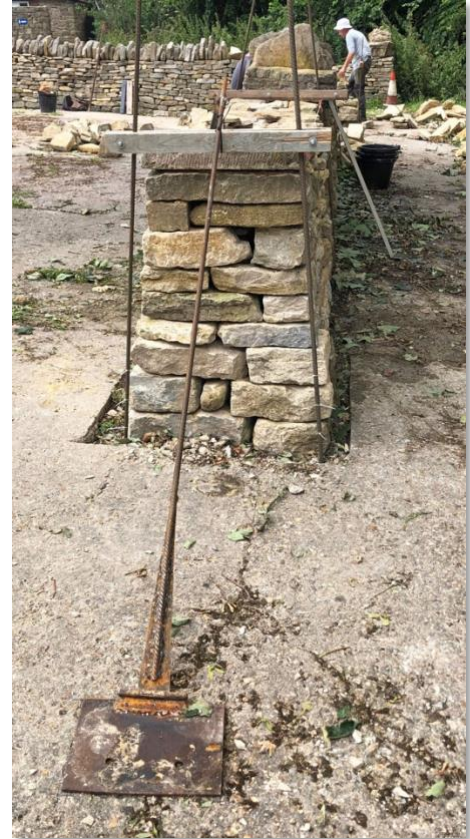


Steve measures and checks the level of his foundation stones.

He has made an ingenious structure for stabilising his end pins which will prove extremely useful if we ever get a pizza oven at Tyneham.

Well, we could certainly build one, couldn't we?

Below: It's a lovely sunny Sunday and John gets half his stint completed before he has to leave. Peter, Phyllis and I get it finished.



Mary completes her wall ...





... as does Steve who rushes off to take his girls to see the blockbuster film, Barbie. Hope you enjoyed it Steve.



Steve's wall at Abbotsbury

When Steve isn't in Barbie Land, he's building walls like this one at Abbotsbury. Well, this isn't exactly a wall – yet.

But it soon could be. The land is on a fairly steep slope, so the foundation trench and nice smooth steps are created.





The finished wall. I really like the colours in this photograph – lovely earthy greens, golds and browns. This could be a landscape painting from any past century – apart from the metal hurdle!

Upcoming events

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

Our final weekend course of the year, on 23-24 September at Corton Down, is now fully booked. We won't be holding another course until April or May 2024.

Walling and events in August are as follows:

Sat 5th/Sun6th August - Langton Herring – members' walling

Sat 12th/Sun13th August – Sea Spray, Purbeck – members' walling

Sat 19th/Sun 20th August – Tyneham - Practise for certification - exam candidates and trainers only

Wed 23rd August am - Set up for the Melplash show, near West Bay

Thurs 24th August - Melplash show

Fri 25th August - set up for the Oak Fair, Stock Gaylard Estate, Sturminster Newton

Sat 26th/Sun27th August - The Oak Fair

Anyone requiring directions to the sites please email Phyllis (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com)

The qualifications date for levels one and two will be on Saturday 16 September at Tyneham and the practice dates at Tyneham are 19-20 August and 2-3 September.

As ever, I welcome contributions from all members. Until next month, enjoy the rest of your summer.

Carole Reeves