

DSWA Dorset News

October 2023

Farewell Sycamore Gap Tree



Gill and Mike, my Cumbrian friends, sent me this photo after a walk along Hadrian's Wall last winter. As far as I'm aware we still don't know the identity of the mindless morons who took a chain saw to it but what an inspired decision to plant a tree in this site in the latter half of the 19th century. It was named Tree of the Year in 2016.



Any waller who has walked some or all of Hadrian's wall may have been itching to tackle a restoration project at some of its tumbledown sites. It is a wonder that any of the wall remains because for many centuries after its demise as the north-west frontier of the Roman empire, it was plundered to build castles, churches, farms and houses.

The wall is built of sandstone dressed blocks quarried locally and bonded together with lime mortar. It is double skinned with a core of hearting.



Right: A section of the wall was reconstructed as a dry stone wall in the 19th and 20th centuries using salvaged Roman dressed blocks.

I haven't walked the entire length of the wall but I think I would like to do that.



Sea Spray, 7 – 8 October



It's a beautiful Saturday when Andy, Sally and I walk to Sea Spray to work on the final section of wall. Peter and I had already taken the pins and braces so we arrived with just our buckets and minimum tools.

The wall is of varying heights along its length and runs quite steeply downhill on this section. As well as our walling guidelines, we set up a central line across the whole stint to help maintain a height of one metre yet wall with even courses.



Right: Andy and I bring the wall to height while Sally roughly fills in a small gap that we made as a walkway during the course last April. This section of wall will be taken down by the Branch in the Spring when members rebuild a significant stint so there is no need to make a perfect job of tie-ing in.

We have asked the National Trust ranger to cut back this bramble so that we can get to this wall.



Sunday is even hotter than Saturday as Andy and I set about coping the finished stint. Meanwhile, Tim finishes filling in Sally's gap.



Then comes the laborious task of piling up all the stone that's lying around the field on both sides of the wall into mounds of different sized stones. We decide to pile it rather than stack it because the field will get wet and muddy during the winter months and the stone is likely to disappear in the grass. There are only three of us and the process of collecting, sorting and piling takes a few hours. And it is very hot.

Eventually, we sit back to survey our handiwork before heading off to Spyway car park.

You can see the dilapidated wall where the next course will be held. Hopefully, the National Trust will deliver a load of new stone before the winter rains begin. Remember last year ...





... when the trailer load of stone got stuck in the mud (this is a very muddy field) and was too far away from the wall to be of any use to us.

AGM, 30 September



The Branch AGM took place at Portesham village hall, attended by twelve members. You will have received the minutes, Branch report and accounts. The only notable changes to the committee were the resignation of our treasurer, Iain Pullen, after thirteen years – a first-class innings by anyone's account – and the unanimous vote to confirm Peter as our new chairman.

Following the AGM, nine of us enjoyed a splendid lunch at the Kings Arms – a most enjoyable get-together which doesn't happen very often.

Phyllis has already sent out this message to you all but if anyone feels that they could take on the job of Branch treasurer, please contact us. It is a very important role in any organisation, and Iain has done a meticulous job, so everything is in good order.

‘Gentleman Jack’ and her dry-stone monument

Wendy drew my attention to a recently completed monument to Anne Lister (1791-1840) of Shibden Hall, near Halifax, also known as ‘Gentleman Jack’.

Sally Wainright, director of the television series, ‘Gentleman Jack’, argues that that in Yorkshire at the time, the nickname wasn't a nice one because Jack meant dyke or lesbian. ‘So, it was either very vulgar language like that, or sensitive posh language like “wintering in Rome.”’



Anne inherited Shibden Hall in 1826, turning the property into a business, bringing in money from rent, wood, tolls, two collieries, and shared canals. It was where she could also be secure in her private life.



In 2022, The Women's International Stone Alliance (<https://www.womenstonealliance.com>) created a monument to Anne in the grounds of Shibden Hall where there are already existing dry-stone exhibits.

The monument has several components that celebrate Anne and her life. It's a showcase of different traditional stone trades. The cantilevered benches are supported by traditional dry-stone walls. These are built into large stones that have been carved with different motifs representing important parts of Anne's life. The monument, when viewed from the upper monolith is in the shape of a 'W'. This represents formidable women everywhere; past, present and future.



The wagon wheel embodies Anne's love of travel (she died whilst visiting Russia) and the importance of a life lived in constant motion. It also features bare branches of an oak tree in winter. The pocket watch is an ode to Anne's obsession with time and her detailed recording of the passage of time in her journals. The carving also features branches of an oak tree in summer. The funeral hatchment is copied from Anne's displayed within the Hall. It is carved on the front of the centre monolith reclaiming the idea that Anne was unmarried when she died. It is known from her diaries that Anne did have a marriage ceremony with Ann Walker in 1834 but of course it would not have been officially recognized at the time.



Building the monument.

You can read more about the project at: <https://museums.calderdale.gov.uk/explore/anne-lister-monument>

Corton, 16 October



It's a beautiful day although chilly and very windy when Sally, Karen and I set about bringing a couple of stints to height. The clouds are so low that they seem touchable and indeed, we do experience a few rain showers and see a distant rainbow.



Sally sifting stone for copes which are few and far between. I find some rubbly lumps hidden in the grass which Sally views with disdain and would prefer to use as foundation stones. I rather like coping stones with character.

Karen doing her milkmaid impression, carrying two buckets of hearting.



There's a lot of finished wall to cope but will we find enough stones?

Seen and heard ...

An elderly man, walking the ridgeway, stopped as I was collecting hearting. 'Taking jobs from the men,' was his only comment, uttered rather bitterly I thought. I looked up but didn't say anything, being uncertain whether I'd actually heard correctly. It must have been my look because he went on his way, muttering ... 'only a joke'. Probably not though.

Corton, 21 October



It's a wet and windy start to the day and none too warm when Sally, Tim and I decide that we would rather build than cope. We see many large, random stones hidden in the long vegetation which has grown up around the wall. After digging them out we agree they need to go into the wall. The rain is supposed to clear by about 11 am – at least that's what Sally tells us – but coffee break comes and goes, and the wind gets colder. Woolly hats, jackets and hoods go on but by 3pm when we must leave for our topping out

ceremony at Langton Herring. However, we have almost brought the stint to height and begun straight coursing with the smaller stones. Corton will be our 'go to' site for the rest of the year as we endeavour to get as much of this wall finished as possible.

Langton Herring – the last days of the wall



Up on the ridge above Langton Herring, farmer Jane ploughs a field ready for winter planting. As luck would have it, Sally happens to be walking spaniel Button and carrying her mini mattock. Within twenty minutes she has stacked a pile of stones unearthed by the plough – enough to finish the wall – and rings John Mowlem to bring up his trailer.

White date stones – 2023 – carved by Martin, are set into both sides of the wall.



The wall finished and coped. Sally was left with just one cope – a brilliant finish!

Right: the final section of wall that was untouched by the Branch – we don't know when it was built – possibly a hundred or more years ago. We tied into it and just straightened the wonky copes.

It's not the most beautiful piece of workmanship but it's been standing a very long time and it was felt important to keep something of the original build.



Topping out ceremony, 21 October



John cuts the ribbon to celebrate the completion of the wall on his land, the reconstruction of which began as Sally's lockdown project in 2020. Left to right, Tim, Mary, Sally, me pointing to the date stone, John, Wendy and Phyllis. The sun has emerged from the murk, which makes the celebration extra special.



John pops the cork on the Prosecco and we dig into huge iced buns. Thanks to Martin for taking all these photos.





I take a photo of the very end of the wall (apart from a low section to allow access to the field from the stile). Sally's final cheek end.

Ham Hill

Geoff says: 'The wall is now up to height though still needs a further 30 metres of copes to be placed.'



There are now sheep in the middle field (Strouds East) to stress-test whether our rebuilt wall is stock proof. Though, to be safe, we have added some lengths of orange mesh to the lowest segments.'

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1D8kUKtUnjWZb6-lOeWnGk6beujPxcQNG&usp=sharing>

A very sturdy cheek end abutting the field gate.

Geoff runs a Monday walling group at Ham Hill. If you fancy joining this group, please contact him directly:

rowland.geoff@gmail.com

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

Upcoming events

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

Currently, the walling dates are as follows:

Saturday 4th & Sunday 5th November – Corton
Saturday 18th & Sunday 19th November – Corton

Saturday 2nd & Sunday 3rd December – Corton
Saturday 16th & Sunday 17th December – Corton

Please contact Phyllis if you require maps / directions to this site. If anything changes Phyllis will send out the relevant information.

As ever, I welcome contributions from all members.

Carole Reeves

