

DSWA Dorset News

May 2024

Beginners' course, Tyneham 27-28 April



This is the first time we've used our test site at Tyneham for a course but our original choice of Sea Spray proves too wet and muddy. It is impossible to get a trailer load of stone to the site and we all remembered last year when the trailer got stuck half way up the field – too far for the stone to be used.

Peter and I are instructors, ably assisted by Phyllis and Andy. We have 22 participants, a fine weekend (it was fingers crossed that the mist and early rain would clear), and two decent sized walls. After the usual briefing with our excellent flip charts, the cheerful groups quickly strip out the walls and begin re-laying foundations (right and below left).





Peter would have preferred to work on a 'real' field site where the walls would stay up in perpetuity, but there are definite advantages to working at Tyneham. The major one, as far as I can see is not having to spend most of the morning on the first day mattocking out foundation stones. For people who have never picked up a walling stone and have signed up to a walling 'experience' or a fun weekend, this task can be dispiriting and arduous. And because we leave the cheekends *in situ*, participants learn how to tie-in to an existing wall, something they never do when building a stand-alone stint in a field.

There is also a barn for shelter, decent toilets, and a Salt Pig kiosk serving barista coffee!

Alright, not the reality of our weekend walling sites but a totally immersive and enjoyable experience for participants, judging by feedback forms.

Right: First lift by Peter's team.



Left: learning to assess a stone before placing it in the wall. Some people develop spatial awareness fairly quickly, others need a bit of practice.

As usual, we have participants with mixed interests. Some have garden and field walls they want to restore – one couple own a house in Portugal with many metres of dry stone walls and they become competent wallers very quickly; there are gardeners, builders, farmers, and folk who come to enjoy a weekend in the countryside. Camaraderie soon develops amongst them.



The site at Tyneham. For anyone who hasn't seen our test walls in the farmyard, the random piles of stone, as opposed to the participants' carefully stacked stone, are usually separated into foundations, throughs, copes, hearting, and general walling stone – all carefully labelled. However, visitors to Tyneham like to build their own dry stone features (you can see what passes for a sheep pen in the foreground), so the stone gets all muddled up. For these weekend wallers, it is useful additional stone.



Happy wallers ...



Left: a nice through stone.

Below: second lift. Peter's team are fast coming to height. We have plenty of water, tea, coffee, and snacks to keep everyone topped up as they approach the finish.

Phyllis remarks that even though the wallers didn't spend hours digging out foundations, the walls aren't actually built any faster. However, the stints are longer than we would normally assign to a course weekend, and the wallers have to tie in to the cheek ends.



Very nice straight coursing with this Purbeck stone. Sunday afternoon is warm and sunny. We feel sorry for Sally and other branch wallers at Corton where it rains heavily and incessantly.

Below: my team coming to height.



Coping – the end of a very successful weekend.



The finished walls. If you'd like to see the full set of photographs taken by me throughout the weekend, visit our Flickr site:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/192778251@N07/albums/72177720316568697/>

The Environment Agency at Ham Hill

Geoff writes: ‘a couple of Fridays ago, I had ten folks from the Environment Agency on a walling taster/team building session.

Given the limited time, we worked on a slightly low and slumped wall section (right), taking it down to just

below through-stone level, then rebuilt with a few extra courses to make it fully stock proof.



A thoroughly nice bunch that really seemed to enjoy the experience. Even threatened to come back to wall at Ham Hill on their next volunteer jolly.’ (Photos used with permission)



Finished stint.

Corton 26-27 April



Sally writes: 'Friday - the ground had dried out nicely so I took a calculated risk and drove along the top track. I did, however, turn round and park the right side of where the muddy puddle had been, just in case. We had a good day, getting the date stone installed and Mary got the last stint up to height.'



Left: 'I thought it was a good move to tie the date stone in with a through.'



‘Saturday - Karen did a bit of levelling on the top of where the course had been and then joined Tim and me on the date stone section. We were getting short of thin stone but managed to gather some from the remains of the delivered piles. By early afternoon we'd got it all to height and took the pins out. It always looks better then.’

Right: ‘Karen was keen for us to do some copes - it has to be said, she wasn't so keen on the random lumpy bits we've been putting between the traditional copes. However, the side she was working on looked a lot better than the side the public see.’

We decided to break for a quick cuppa about 3.40 pm. There were a few raindrops, then light hail.’



‘The huge black cloud came over and it absolutely pelted down. It didn't seem as if it was going to disappear any time soon. Where we were working was soon back to a mud bath, my boots were soaked as I'd been through the grass to get some lumpy stones. Tim and Karen didn't have waterproof trousers and I was wetter than I'd have liked. Tim poured a lot of water out of the wheelbarrow, and we

decided to give up at that point. The lakes, puddles and mud were back with a vengeance. I was pleased I'd already parked the right side of the big puddle - I was still a bit worried as to whether I'd get out. There is still a good length of coping to do. We are planning to go up on Wednesday 8 May to finish it.'

Corton, 8 May



Wendy writes: 'Here are a few photos from yesterday's final session on the Corton wall. The weather was lovely although a mist descended.'

'It was rather challenging finding enough copes and a great deal of creative coping was required including a new style named "pebble tops".'





‘Several large copes were also liberated and relocated from another wall - the farmer had suggested we could do this if necessary and it was.



‘Afterwards the five of us adjourned to the Wishing Well Tea Room, Upwey, for a celebratory cuppa and cake.’

There will also be a topping out ceremony organised by the farmer, Jim Bryce, with fizz and more cake!

Visiting dog, Tigs, wanted his photo taken against the date stone. Happy to oblige ...



Donkey Down, 4 & 11 May



It's a beautiful day when we return to Donkey Down on 4 May. Phyllis and Karen select a stint while Wendy chooses to work on the cheek end.



By the end of the day, much progress has been made although there looks to be a lean on the wall. Maybe it's just my camera angle.



First thing on 11 May, Peter has Andy, Sally and I taking down an unsafe section of wall ready for the course in June. It is the usual boring task until Sally discovers an interesting piece of metalwork just in time for Dorset Arts Fortnight. We add it to the mess of farm rubbish littering the site.



Tim the farmer delivers several loads of stone along stints that will be used for the course. He is very obliging unlike some of our recent experiences (no names mentioned).

Sally continues with the cheek end, straightening up the wall in the process ...



... while Phyllis and I make friends with a couple of visiting poodles and an immensely overweight Labrador which can barely walk. It looks like a grain sack on legs. Gross.



By the end of the day, Peter and Karen have brought their stint to a reasonably height and levelled it off while Sally has completed the cheek end.



Left: photograph taken at the end of the day on 18 May. Just three of us out today in unpredictable weather but we have brought all three stints almost to height. We

We won't return to Donkey Down until the beginning of June because a few of us will spend the forthcoming Bank Holiday at Sherborne Castle Fair. If you're visiting, come and see us.

Ham Hill



A delivery of cope stones for the restored wall running down the Hillfort ramparts below Strouds meadow.

Geoff says: 'It's going to be interesting/challenging to place copes, from the bottom up! Hopefully, starting on 13 May.'



And this is the lovely wall ready for coping. Congratulations to all the Ham Hill volunteers who built this wall. Building on such a steep slope while keeping straight courses is no mean feat. And the colours are stunning.

Here's a welcome resident of a Ham Hill wall – male slow worm. And for those of you interested in excavations on Ham Hill, these documents are excellent:

- [!\[\]\(1207edb9a08751d3d55970560645ed23_img.jpg\) 1159 Excavations at Ham Hill Somerset 2012.pdf](#)
- [!\[\]\(d7a34a706cfa4ef37c62a369101e1b36_img.jpg\) 1247 Excavations at Ham Hill Somerset 2013.pdf](#)
- [!\[\]\(7325769475e8f4bf67f57a0cbebc8ab9_img.jpg\) Excavations at Ham Hill Somerset 2011 20.pdf](#)



A team building day for National Trust consultants, 15 May



Another taster / team building day, this time at Queens Ground, South Purbeck. This was organised for National Trust consultants / external contractors whose skills ranged from trying to retain a 400-year-old staircase at Montacute House, made of Ham Stone (soft and crumbling) to building and land surveyors, and an archaeologist.

I ran the event with assistance from NT Ranger Adam, and the team soon got to work, taking down a section of wall, bringing a stint to height, and getting down and dirty laying foundations. The group turned out to be a very amenable, fun, and excellent builders apart from the inevitable temptation to lay trace stones.

I hope they enjoyed the day – feedback awaited – at least it was sunny, and they all repaired to the Square & Compass for a well-earned pasty and pint.





They managed to cope two stints, but we ran out of time to finish a third.

Northumberland wall



A lovely atmospheric photo of a gorse-covered wall in Northumberland, sent to me by Peter Swann, who has just joined the National Trust walling group, and is on holiday there. I expect the gorse is holding up the wall but there comes a time when it's better to keep the invasive vegetation than rip it out and collapse the wall.



And here's a Spanish wall sent to me by Jon Leyland, who was our NT walling ranger until he retired to live in Scotland although he also had a house in Spain.

Jon writes: 'The wall is near Rasquera in the Tarragona province of Catalunya. It's at the top of a small cliff. There's a sheer drop of about ten feet on one side and a hill and trees on the other.' Not much of a walling challenge then.

Fancy wall, South Harris, Outer Hebrides

An interesting wall sent to me by my friends Mike and Jill who are Scottish island hopping.

Lewisian Gneiss is the predominant rock type of the Hebrides, a metamorphic rock which is up to three billion years old, making it the oldest rock in Britain. The coping is interesting and clearly of very many cut slates.



The Stone Trust Waller of the Month

Check out the lovely work of Alex Hoffmeier, a level 3 waller working in Vermont:

<https://thestonetrust.org/may-waller-of-the-month-alex-hoffmeier/>

Upcoming events

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

Sunday 26th May – Preparation for the Sherborne Castle Country Fair

Monday 27th May – Sherborne Fair

Currently, the walling dates for June are as follows:

Saturday 8th / Sunday 9th June – Donkey Down

Saturday 15th / Sunday 16th June – Tyneham for those wishing to upskill. Members walling at another site TBC

Saturday 22nd / Sunday 23rd June – Donkey Down

Saturday 29th / Sunday 30th June – Donkey Down, beginners' course plus branch walling

Please contact Phyllis (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com) if you require maps / directions to these sites. If anything changes Phyllis will send out the relevant information.

As ever, I welcome contributions from all members, particularly if you have been travelling and seen some interesting structures.

Carole Reeves