

# DSWA Dorset News

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June 2024

**Sherborne Castle Country Fair, 26-27 May**



Our new gazebo gets its first outing at Sherborne. I have spent the past few weeks panicking as to whether it will fit into my car as it's dimensions are 4 x 4.5 metres. The day before the show, Phyllis, Adrian, Stephen and I get everything set up. Here we ponder how the guy ropes work but finally realise that guy ropes are guy ropes, however sophisticated the tent.

Stephen starts unpacking the dumpy bags. Sherborne Stone once again provides our stone and have included some seriously large pieces in this batch.



We receive a welcome visit from Russell and his spaniel, Conker. As usual, Russell has his own pitch, demonstrating his award-winning hedgelaying.

Bank Holiday Monday dawns bright and sunny, and we keep our fingers crossed that it stays that way. Breakfast consists of bacon and egg baps and barista coffee from the nearby refreshment stands.



Wendy and Phyllis have set up our banners and display boards. The exhibition boards fit neatly on a table inside the gazebo, leaving plenty of space for DSWA books and leaflets. We soon attract interested visitors.

We all take a turn building the demonstration wall, and the children's wall proves as popular as ever with the young visitors.

Geoff and I find something hilarious – not sure what but it's getting towards the end of the day and it hasn't rained yet.

Yesterday, after setting up our pitch, Phyllis and I went to visit Geoff's walls at Ham Hill. The rain was atrocious and we rode around the walls with Geoff in his Ranger's 4-wheeled buggy with no side windows. As I was sitting next to the windowless passenger door, it was my job to step out into the mud to open the gates. Despite this, it was a fantastic visit and so good to see in person the splendid wall building being done by the Monday wallers under Geoff's leadership.



A colourful old haywain passes behind our gazebo. Thanks to Wendy for nipping across the road to take this photo.



Finally, the day is over, most of the visitors have left, and the wall is ready to be dismantled and re-packed in the dumpy bags. Not before a couple of ladies pass by pointing to a running joint in the wall. I approach them, not realising at the time what they are pointing at and cheerfully ask if they are interested in dry stone walling. The lady doing the pointing turns to me and says: 'I already do it.' She and her companion disappear into the dwindling crowds. Yes, there is indeed a running joint but I can only see one ...

## Much Hammering on the Wall



Mary, Tim and I were recently enjoying a sunny day at Donkey Down when Mary mentioned a little village that she knew called Much Hammering on the Wall. I was greatly amused by this and asked Mary for more information about this little known hamlet. She obliged with the following ditty:

Drystone walling is a dying art, at least I've heard that said  
 But here in deepest Dorset it isn't yet quite dead.  
 For in a little village, you may not have heard of it at all,  
 We're all alive and kicking at Much Hammering on the Wall.

We often meet at weekends, come rain or wind or sun  
As the weather doesn't matter when there's walling to be done.  
Some plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land  
But we're happier heaving stones around and building walls by hand.

A broken wall's a challenge, restoring it's a must.  
Saving all the good stuff before it crumbles into dust.  
Then laying sound foundations to support the stones above  
And coursing very neatly takes some skill (and lots of love).

Then finally when it's high enough and the strings and pins have gone,  
We'll add a row of capstones and stand back and think "Job done".  
So here's to drystone wallers and thank them one and all,  
Who give their time and effort at Much Hammering on the Wall.

Mary Civil

## **Donkey Down, 8-9 June**



Farmer Tim has open the field as a weekend pop-up campsite. The weather is perfect although on the cool side, and the view across to Portland and Weymouth Bay superb. Mary, Tim and I arrive with instructions from Phyllis (who has flown to France for a week relaxing in the sun), to cope a finished stint and bring the next stint to height.



So, we coped a stint ...



... then enjoyed a coffee break with a view ...



... and by the end of the day we had accomplished Phyllis's wish list.



We are running our next course here during the last weekend of June so next time we return to Donkey Down it will be all hands on deck to clean up the site, sort this pile of stone into more manageable sizes, and do some strimming / brush cutting.

## Ham Hill



Monday volunteers coping the restored wall running down the Hillfort ramparts below Strouds Meadow, and also part of the intersecting parish boundary wall, dated c.1600.



The finished coping. Phyllis and I saw the wall like this when we visited on 26 May. It really does look beautiful.

## Sicily from Sally

Sally writes: ‘I have recently returned from a holiday in Sicily. We visited the Egadi island of Favignana off the north west coast. The island was full of quarries and there were many stone walls built of the very random, rather sharp tuff-like limestone which they called ‘tuff or tufo’ (right). It was very coarse and near the coast, particularly, it was very weathered, more like a sandstone. The stone is actually calcarenite which is sedimentary shells/fossils and sand compressed from the sea.



I saw a newly built length which included some slopy walling (left), though many of the walls were very random. I’m not quite sure about the bottles – are they, perhaps, a way of marking the length in the same way that many Yorkshire walls have protruding throughs placed at regular intervals?



There were also some recently built examples (which I neglected to record) of walls where a flat topping of concrete (not even mortar) had been applied. The wall had obviously settled and dropped away from the topping which hadn't moved with it. This is a classic problem of a rigid top acting like a beam so the underlying build collapses because there is no longer any weight on it.

The Phoenicians and Romans quarried stone to build lookouts and shelters, and the pits they used can still be seen along the coast, though now they are submerged at high tide. When the Arabs arrived around 1000, instead of making a pit they started to cut horizontally below the surface in caverns. This avoided having to remove the unwanted rocky topping and they could access the more desirable white calcarenite. They would remove what they wanted leaving supporting pillars in situ.



We visited 'The Impossible Garden' (above) which was stunning. It has been developed since the 1960's and opened in 2004. It has over 600 plant species in its 40,000 square metres. The land used was a series of disused quarries and pits and there was a very informative booklet about the quarrying as well as the plants.

The stone was originally quarried in pits removing the rocky top stone – 'cappellaccio' or 'shoddy hat'. The quarry workers used traditional tools displayed in the quarry (right). They would mark out a grid with a stone axe which had a blade with a point and a cutting edge. They would cut out to a depth of 25cms and discard two blocks by breaking them into pieces. Then they would have the space to cut the blocks

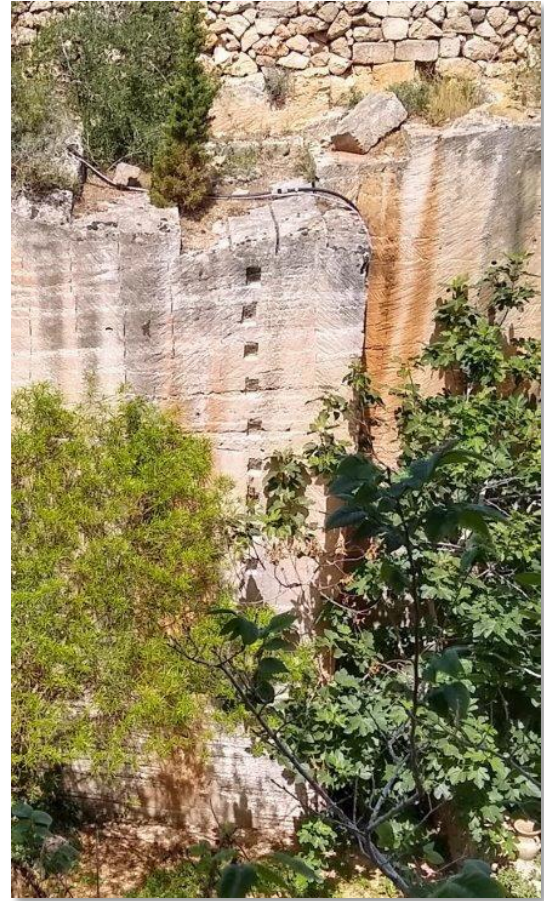


precisely and prise them out by inserting the point as a lever. This produced very regular blocks 25x25x50cms, much like breeze blocks.



Some pits were cut with steps leading down into them but in others we saw what was really no more than a stone ladder. A rectangular slit was left at the end of each horizontal run of blocks and then the lower part of the inside of the slit was carved out to make a handhold (left). The slits were vertically above each other and

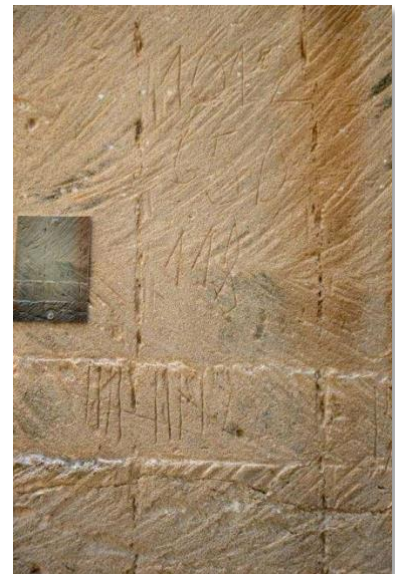
it must have been quite difficult to climb out (right).

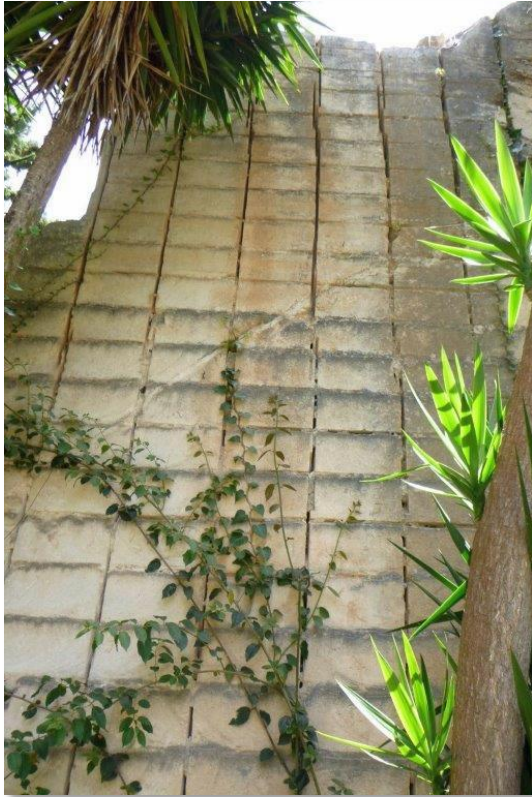


The older pits showed the marks very clearly (left), and there were also tally marks to indicate how many had been

produced (right).

There was a thriving trade from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the 1920's when more modern disc cutters were used and larger, less refined blocks were cut (below left).





The roof of one of the caverns is carved in a mesh of 16x16x32cms (below right) These stones were specially quarried to use as anchors to hold the tuna fishing nets to the seabed. The blocks would actually absorb water and become heavier. Tuna fishing was an extremely important part of the local economy and the local tonnara for processing and canning the fish was the largest in Sicily in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



One of the pits was 25 metres deep and the owners had only had to go down a further few metres to make a well to supply the garden. In other places they have filled in some of the pits with the debris they cleared to make a series of spaces at differing levels. The resulting garden is not only beautiful but has lots of cool, shady places to sit away from the rather hot sun.'

## Sicily from Mary



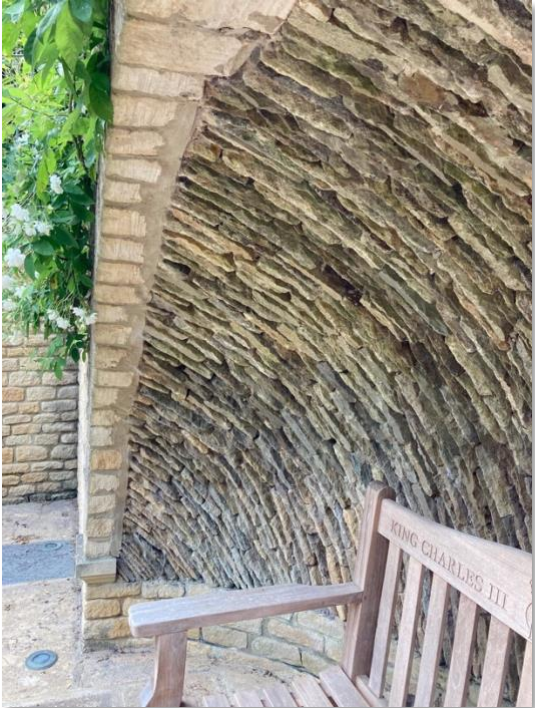
Mary also enjoyed a holiday in Sicily and sent this photograph which was taken on the island of Levanzo off the coast of Sicily. She said: 'They have gone to a lot of trouble over the wall and the paving which leads to a cave with 13,000-year-old paintings of deer, bison etc.' (below)



**The Cotswolds from Peter**



Peter sent me this photograph of a garden seat set into a semicircular niche in the grounds of an expensive hotel! The builders have used Cotswold stone to line the niche – mortared but very effective.





A nice bit of dry stone walling using Cotswold limestone at Gloucester Museum. In about CE 86, the Roman army rebuilt Gloucester's timber walls in stone. They used a very showy technique called 'opus quadratum' which used large blocks without mortar and deliberately roughened to look ancient and strong.

It is very rare, especially outside of Rome, and was only used on the most important public buildings, like the Colosseum. The original wall would have been about eight metres high.

The skeleton in a glass case beneath the wall is that of a young woman aged about 25, from the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. The skeleton was found on the site of a villa at Hucclecote, Gloucester.

Thanks Peter/

## Tyneham, 14 June

Andy builds a cheek end – well half of one! This practice weekend is set aside for members planning to take their qualifications later this year. It turns out that Andy is the only taker for this practice session, and he can only come out on the Saturday. So, he only takes down half of the existing cheek end. Peter and I keep him company and every so often throw in a few pearls of wisdom.





Peter advises on setting up the batter frame for a cheek end.



... finished and coped. It's been a day of sunshine and showers, but Andy finishes his cheek end by mid-afternoon.

Another upskilling practice session is timetabled for the weekend of 20-21 July. If you wish to take part, please contact Phyllis ([warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com](mailto:warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com)).

It's nice to see some wall building taking place during the weekends when we're not at Tyneham.

This is a creditable attempt at copying our walls. Nice coursing and decent copes. We watch a couple of kids gathering stones to have a go themselves.



Almost to height ...



## Donkey Down, 22-23 June



I arrive at Donkey Down early on Saturday morning to a disappointing site. We had been advised that a farm helper with a brush cutter would have swept over the field, taking the grass and shrubbery to ground height and revealing all the hidden stones in preparation for our course next weekend. Also, that a new section of wall would be cleared for members. No such luck on either front.

Right: Sally gets to work pulling up fencing stakes which have screened off the wall from the pop-up campsite. We need to extend the boundary to work on a new section of wall, leaving the current tumble-down section for the beginners' course (below).



However, like magic, Geoff turns up with a brush cutter, and spends a good few hours transforming the course site. It is especially important to remove the giant hogweed because of its potential to cause skin burns when sap meets sunlight.





Left: Meanwhile, Mary and Tim cope the final stint on the members section of wall before Jill Hearing from Dorset National Landscape turns up with some welcome ice lollies. By now, the weather has turned very sultry. Thank you Jill!

Below: Geoff, Tim and Phyllis get down to foundations on the new section of wall to be built by branch members.



With the field brush cut we lay out stacks of stone ready for the course. What a transformation!





Geoff catches a snail on the handle of his mini-mattock. Apparently, it has been a bumper year for slugs and snails.

## **Soay Sheep at Ham Hill**



Geoff reports that 15 Soay sheep are hiding in the long grass at Ham Hill Country Park. The Soay has the most primitive appearance of any British sheep breed and takes its name from the island of Soay in the St. Kilda archipelago. Soay means 'sheep island' in Norse which suggests that there have been sheep on the island since at least the time of the Vikings.

## The Stone Trust Waller of the Month

Check out the work of Kelly Maloney from New York State who has just passed her level 2 qualification – only the sixth female Level 2 waller in the US. Goodness, why is the US so behind us Brits in the walling game!



Read more at <https://thestonetrust.org/june-waller-of-the-month-kelly-maloney/>

## 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 for June / July are as follows:

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

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> / Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July – Donkey Down

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> / Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> – practice walling session at Tyneham – for those who want to upskill, particularly on cheek ends.

Also, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> July – Stoborough Fair. Anyone who fancies helping out please contact me.

Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July – Portesham Millennium Celebration. Anyone who would like to help Portesham celebrate its 1000<sup>th</sup> year please contact Phyllis.

Please contact Phyllis ([warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com](mailto: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