

DSWA Dorset News

August 2024

Dorset DSWA awarded Best Trade Stand Exhibit at Melplash Show



Dorset's hard work over the past few years culminated in this amazing award which was completely unexpected. Our new branded gazebo, flag, display boards, wall building display, children's wall, geology posters, books and leaflets all contributed to a really exciting and very well attended stand. We are all absolutely thrilled to have this lovely award for a year.

In the photograph are: Carole and Phyllis holding the cup; behind them are Geoff and Mary, and behind them are Stephen and Rob. The ladies to the left of us are some of the judges.

Chickerell – preparing the site for our shipping container



This will be the site for our small shipping container on farmland owned by Steve's sister. Over the weekend of 3-4 August, Steve and Peter organised a work group to build a small retaining wall to enclose the site and spread crushed stones to act as a base for the container which will house all our tools and equipment.

Right: Harvesting new potatoes is a perk of the weekend. Steve and Mary dig in.





Left: Geoff, Peter and Sally forgo the spuds to make headway on the wall.

Sally and Wendy weren't amused when they arrived to drive along the track to the site. Wendy says: ' Peter's description that the first part of the track was "quite bumpy" was a bit of an under statement! Bl**dy great craters!!! Despite proceeding very mindfully and cautiously I still managed to ground the car several times. Sally also. Better on the way out but I wouldn't want to be doing that again in my car. You have been warned.'

Portesham Millennium celebration, 27 July



Our rather deserted pitch at this event. I'm sure that there was more of a buzz than depicted in this photograph but as I wasn't there I can't complain about the lack of images showing the day's excitements.



Portesham village was chartered in 1024, under King Cnut (Canute) of Wessex, who gave the manor there to a Scandinavian aristocrat (thegn) called Orc, and his wife Tola who founded the Benedictine Monastery at Abbotsbury, dedicated to St Peter.

Orc and Thola had no surviving children so Portesham was bequeathed to the Monastery until the Dissolution of Monasteries in 1539.

On the highest point in the parish, the summit of Black Down, is the monument to Vice-Admiral Sir Thomas Hardy (1769-1839), captain of H.M.S. Victory at the battle of Trafalgar, whose home was at Portesham.



National Trust rangers & volunteers from West Dorset, Sea Spray, 7 August



Peter and I enjoy a day instructing eleven volunteers and rangers from West Dorset into the art of dry stone walling. The only National Trust walling volunteer group is on South Purbeck so helping these novice wallers achieve an understanding of walling may encourage the NT to start a group on the other side of the county. There are certainly enough walls.

Alongside our Tuesday group colleagues, we have already prepared the site to ensure maximum walling experience for this one-day event. In other words, no digging out old foundation stones and laying new ones. A single course has already been laid.

The weather stays fine and the group soon gets to grips with the basic understanding of laying courses and following the string lines. They are a really nice, friendly group. We ran a similar course last year and many of the same people returned for this event.





Coffee time and the West Dorset rangers produce a wonderful range of biscuits and other enticing snacks. I like the chocolate crispy bits and keep going back for more. You can't beat chocolate when you're walling – or at any time really.



By the end of the afternoon two further courses have been laid and the wall is looking very nice indeed. Peter chooses a section of completed wall to demonstrate coping before we secure the site with hurdles. It's a cow field and we aim to keep the critters at bay until we are able to return and bring the wall to height.

Tyneham upskilling day, 3 August

While the hard-working team was preparing the site at Chickerell for our storage shipping container, Dave and I are at Tyneham for an upskilling day. In the event, it is another ‘Andy’ day as he is the only person who takes advantage of a practice on our training walls.

This time Andy decides to strip out an entire section with the aim of completing it in a day. It isn’t = quite as long a stint as it will be in his exam but near enough.



A nice cheek end coming together.



Dave casts his instructor’s eye over Andy’s foundations. They are looking good and solid.



The day is getting very long now. I top us up with barista coffee from the Salt Pig horsebox. I can’t resist a chocolate muffin, but Andy and Dave abstain.

The end of the day and the final stone before the coping begins. We won't be having a qualifications day in Dorset this year because we don't have enough candidates so Andy will be going to Cumbria to wall for four days and then take his level 2 qualification. He hopes to become a professional waller in early 2025.

If you're reading this and fancy attempting level 1 or 2 in Dorset next year, please let us know. Ideally, we require six candidates to make it viable for an examiner to visit from somewhere near head office. Examiners are all master craftsmen or women with the additional examiner's qualification, and we don't have anyone in the south with that level of expertise.



Donkey Down, 10-11 August



We arrive at Donkey Down after a few weeks on other tasks, to find that farmer Tim hasn't cleared the next section of wall of bramble and other vegetation. We imagine he's been busy with his pop-up camp sites so Phyllis and Rob decide to fill the gap we'd been leaving for access to the adjacent field. We did get a new stone delivery though.

It's a surprisingly cool, breezy, and very misty day as you can see by the warm hoodies they

are wearing.

They soon have a nice course of foundations.

We also find buried 'treasure', namely a plastic comb and part of an old plough.





And there's also plenty of wildlife. Phyllis spots this hairy caterpillar with a red stripe along its back. I discover that it is a white ermine moth caterpillar.



And here's what it will look like when it becomes a moth. It's definitely wearing ermine.

This all reminds me of the Kinks 'Autumn Almanack' ...

'From the dew-soaked hedge creeps a crawly caterpillar
When the dawn begins to crack
It's all part of my autumn almanac'

Then Rob spots a rabbit tucked between two stones so I take this photo before it leaps away.



I choose an easier option and build a few courses further along the wall which is almost to height. You can see how dull and misty it is.



What a difference a day makes! Sunday is beautifully warm and sunny. This long stint is now at height and ready to be coped.



A lovely view of the wall and the view beyond. We have to keep this photo in our heads during the winter when it will be pretty chilly up here.

Donkey Down, 17 August



An unusual photograph of Portland under mist, taken by Phyllis. Our wall is on the left.



The usual collection of fence posts and barbed wire needs to be shifted from the wall.

We discover that Tim, the farmer, is unwell and unable to clear the vegetation around the next section of wall. A couple of us get to work with loppers and Phyllis strims the site.





Left: Karen, Sally and Wendy cope a sizeable length of wall ...



... while Adrian, Phyllis and I work on bringing the gap to height.



Halfway through the afternoon we receive a visit from Maya, a sweet Welsh Springer Spaniel who is quite shy but takes a keen interest in

The Melplash Show, 22 August

We arrive bright and early the day before the show to set up our stand and take delivery of four tonnes of Forest Marble from Sherborne Stone. There's a warning of gale force winds overnight so we batten down the gazebo with our largest stones. The following day we discover that the gazebo has been lowered, probably by the organisers attempting to prevent the tents and gazebos flying off into the storm.





Show day dawns wet and windy but bacon rolls and coffee warm us up and we start building the wall.



particularly keen Melplash attendee for our September course at Donkey Down.

It's not the greatest wall in the world but it has been a very good visitor draw, and the weather was pretty grim.

We welcome lots of visitors to our stand and believe this is because we are demonstrating walling technique rather than having a static display. A significant number of visitors express interest in attending a course and indeed we have already signed up one



The Oak Fair, 24-25 August



Steve takes delivery of six tonnes of Forest Marble from Stalbridge Quarry. With so much stone we plan to build a cheek end wall and a corner.

The day following the Melplash Show we are setting up for the Oak Fair on the Stock Gaylard Estate. It is sunny but windy.



Fortunately, the dreadful weather doesn't put everyone off and we start getting visitors.

The first day of the show it is absolutely pouring with rain as we unload and stack the stone.



A bit of sun lifts our spirits as does the cider and other lip-smacking tipples, and the wall soon begins to rise. We are here for two days so we are pacing ourselves – someone needs to pass that message to Geoff as he's the king of the cheek ends and likes to get stuck into the stone. But Phyllis and Mary soon make the stone disappear into the wall.



Mary takes a break to do some tree climbing. It's not called the Oak Fair for nothing. There are avenues and woodlands of ancient oaks on this 1800-acre estate. It is a really lovely site.



Meanwhile, the sun emerges, and it becomes very warm. We take turns in exploring the fair and spending our money. Steve's daughters bought three chickens at the Melplash Show (well, dad paid for them) and the following day, one of them laid an egg. A good investment!



Geoff, rightly proud of his cheek end!

Ham Hill



The Butchers wall, overlooking the Witcombe Valley at Ham Hill, is almost to height and another couple of sessions should see it finished.



Anyone who fancies joining Geoff on his regular Monday walling sessions at Ham Hill should contact him directly:
rowland.geoff@gmail.com

Upcoming events

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

Saturday 31 August – Sunday 1 September – upskilling practice at Tyneham

Saturday 31 August – Sunday 1 September – Donkey Down members' weekend

Saturday 14 & Sunday 15 September – Donkey Down

Saturday 21 & Sunday 22 September – beginners' course and members' walling, Donkey Down

Please contact Phyllis (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com) if you plan to come to any of the walling sessions above and / or 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