

DSWA Dorset News

September 2024

Shipping container storage unit now on site



Our storage container was delivered to the prepared site in Chickerell on Friday 30 August. Peter and Steve were there to receive it. After washing out the interior, it will be racked out to store all the Branch tools and equipment. Thanks to Steve and his sister for making it possible to have a storage container on their land.

A painting session is being planned for the near future!

Cornish walls

Lavender growing in the top of a garden wall in St Just-in-Roseland, Cornwall.

Sally recently returned from a holiday in Cornwall and, as ever, was always on the lookout for lovely dry stone walls and other structures.

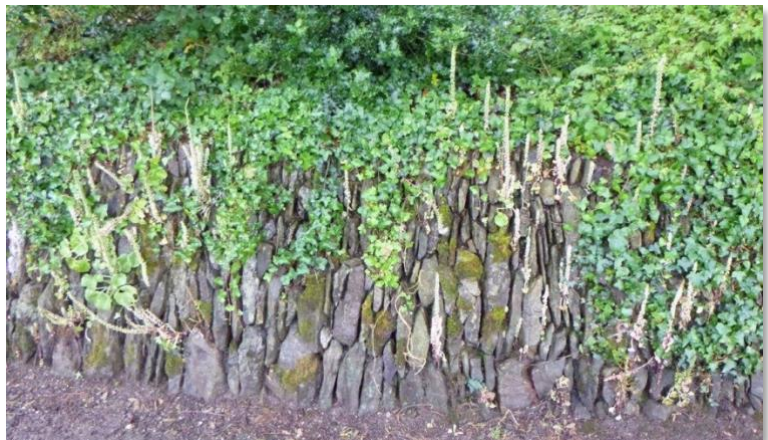
St Just-in-Roseland, on the edge of a creek off the River Fal, near St Mawes, dates to the 13th century, and its setting probably didn't look much different then.



It's such a beautiful and tranquil place that I thought it was worth including a photograph. It was raining when I visited in 2015, so I've chosen a photo that shows it at its best.

Photo: Baz Richardson, Flickr

Vertical stones in the retaining wall of Veryan Parish Church (dedicated to a French martyr, St Symphorian), also on the Roseland Peninsula. Pennywort is growing in the wall.





Left and below: Lovely vertical walling on a retaining wall at the back of Trelissick Beach, a National Trust site near Truro.

Note the stile step from the beach to the path above.



Stalbridge quarry's secrets in stone

The Forest Marble delivered to us at the Oak Fair from Stalbridge Quarry was lovely stone. Geoff noted these marks in some of the blocks. He says: 'The dark fragments are fossil wood or lignite, suggesting a near shore or intertidal swamp deposition environment.'

‘Old Steamy’ gets a new home at Ham Hill



Geoff write: ‘Random Hamstone drystone retaining wall under hand-felled and hand-crafted timber frame.

This will become the engine shed for the refurbished 'Old Steamy' which will drive the sawmill for Tinker’s Bubble off-grid community, who are our neighbours at Ham Hill Country Park.

I had no direct involvement with this, though a couple of Tinkers Bubble folks helped out with a few of our volunteer walling sessions on the Hill.

Makes a nice comparison to the Branch efforts building a dry stone platform for the storage container at Chickerell.’

For more about Tinker’s Bubble:
<http://www.tinkersbubble.org>



Donkey Down, 31 August



The farmer has cleared most of the vegetation on one side of the wall but alas, not all the old wire fencing. Peter hauls out a length which we have released from the soil.



Rob gets busy with the strimmer while Sally and Tim decide what's next on the list to be done.



Another 'treasure' buried in the soil. An old grease gun which Rob reckons dates to the 1960s. His first job was with the company that made this gun. We reckon that it was used to grease a tractor and perhaps dropped and lost in the field. Although very rusty, it is not entirely seized up, probably still some grease in the system.



We have decided not to demolish sections of this long wall that appear sound, much as we did at Came Down, further along the ridgeway.

Peter repairs a hole in a stint that we are leaving intact. There is some mortar in the wall but having removed the surrounding vegetation, the wall doesn't look too bad and is stable.

Sally begins tying-in the old wall with the new stint that we have built.

I turn up unexpectedly, having driven from Tyneham where Dave and I were meant to be running an upskilling weekend. However, the gate to the site wasn't open but tied to it was a small typewritten notice stating that tree maintenance was in progress and Tyneham would be closed for the weekend. No such advance warning appeared on the MOD website – no surprises there.



Further along the wall, Rob, Adrian, Phyllis, Tim and I continue to build the section we began in mid-August.

Donkey Down, 7 September

Hurray! The entire site has been cleared of vegetation. We can now see the length of the wall – it's 280 metres in total, so a few years' work to look forward to!



We begin the task of clearing the site of buried stone and bramble roots in preparation for our final course of the year on 20-21 September. Meanwhile, back in Chickerell, Peter is washing out the interior of our storage container ready for racking out.

Sharp-eyed Mary finds an ammonite cast (right), which she claims for her garden. We all have 'finds' like this. I keep mine around my pond.



Peter arrives with a new 'branded' wheelbarrow and 'Biffy', his camper van, is filled with new buckets, tools, locks and chains for keeping both our wheelbarrows

safe from theft. We remember chaining a new wheelbarrow to a tree at Crack Lane and some light-fingered Herbert sawed through it to pinch the barrow. Hopefully, it won't happen here but ...

Phyllis gets a shock when Roger Rabbit pops out of a hole under the wall – ta da! We know that Roger and his pals have a nice little underground housing complex on Donkey Down and we're sorry to disturb them, but we hope they move on safely over the next couple of weeks. We wouldn't mind a few donkeys here though.





Early afternoon and it's looking decidedly murky and drizzly. The sea mist rolls in and the rain splatters into the mud. We decide to call it a day and return next Saturday to finish preparing the site and to move stone into place for the course.

Before we leave, however, we manage to demolish two slices of Phyllis's wonderful Dorset apple cake. I take the largest second slice, for which I apologise, but my hand is guided quite unconsciously by my mouth. It was yummy.

Donkey Down, 14 September

It's a beautiful warm and sunny day so we manage to achieve a great deal. Phyllis and Mary begin by continuing the clearing session begun last week. I spend all day barrowing and stacking stone in readiness for the beginners' course next weekend.

Below: another 'treasure' discovered in this old wall. We now have a varied collection, but I think they should all go back into the wall to be discovered by future wallers.



Right: Sally ties in a new section of wall with an existing stint that we aren't rebuilding. There is only a small section worth keeping. Most of it is in a wholly dilapidated state.





By the end of the day, another section of wall is coped and next weekend, members will move along the wall to create foundations for a new stint.

Altogether, Branch members have completed about 30 metres of this wall. Because of its situation on very exposed and elevated land, we may not be here much through the winter.

We have just been given the go-ahead for another more sheltered site in Langton Herring that will be more suitable during very cold weather. More about this in a later newsletter.

Ham Hill



Happy volunteer wallers with Geoff (wearing 'Ranger green') on Butchers Hill, above the Witcombe Valley.



The completed section of wall on Butchers Hill with Geoff's trademark chunky cheek end!



Geoff says: 'Last Thursday, I was joined by some volunteers from Thales (the aerospace, defence, digital security and space company) who did a sterling job taking down some remaining derelict sections of wall ...

... and laying some large foundation stones (left).'



There will be walling at Ham Hill on Sunday 6 October which coincides with UNESCO International Geodiversity Day 'Conserving the Past – Sustaining the Future'.

Geoff adds: 'We may, or may not, get a little more public interest than from the usual procession of dog walkers. Will also invite members from the Dorset and South-West England Branches of the DSWA.' If anyone would like to wall at Ham Hill on that Sunday instead of Donkey Down, contact Geoff (rowland.geoff@gmail.com).

For more information on UNESCO International Geodiversity Day, see:

<https://www.geodiversityday.org>

Beginners' course, Donkey Down, 21-22 September

We ran our final course of 2024 at Donkey Down with 23 participants including three artists who plan to build a conservation wall at Touts Quarry and Sculpture Park on Portland. Peter and I instruct, very ably assisted by Phyllis and Steve. There isn't much of a wall to take down as most of it is rubble, held together by crumbling mortar.



The groups soon get stuck into the task and quickly make friends with each other. The weather, misty and damp at first, begins to brighten.

While everyone has a welcome coffee and snack break, Peter and I set up the batter frames. We create four stints but the two groups will join them up to make one long wall.

Right: The first foundations are laid ...



... and Peter checks them for stability. The mist clears, the sun emerges, and the jackets come off.



Most participants don't really believe us when we tell them that they will transform the rubble before their eyes into a wall exactly like the section we (and former course participants) have built. Others don't know what to expect from the course but enjoy the physicality, the environment, and meeting other wallers. Some join a course because they have walls to build, others have barely seen a dry stone wall.



The great thing is that they soon become very discriminating about their stonework. I watched a couple working together taking off stones that I had placed because they weren't good enough. Oh dear – I kept my mouth shut but they were right.

Unfortunately, Sunday's weather is really horrible and although it doesn't rain the entire day, it is pretty miserable and muddy.

Right: Steve places a nice through stone, and the second lift begins.



Steve keeps a watchful eye on our group ...



... while Peter inspects the coursing of his group. About twelve metres of excellent walling will have been completed by the end of the day – a significant contribution to the Donkey Down project. Jill Hearing of Dorset National Landscapes, and our staunch supporter, arrives mid-afternoon to observe our progress. She is really pleased and impressed.



Peter's group with their completed stint ...



... and my group. I seem to have lost a few along the way. One Sunday lunchtime leaver and two didn't come back on the Sunday at all. They may have looked at the weather forecast and / or decided that walling wasn't for them. This does happen. I think the warning is: 'Think carefully before buying a walling weekend as a birthday present or surprise gift.' However, for one young man, this was his second course – he had enjoyed the first one (in June this year) so much that he wanted more. We suggested he join the DSWA as a junior and come on the course for free.

For more images see our Flickr account:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/192778251@N07/albums/72177720320526870/>

Guernsey

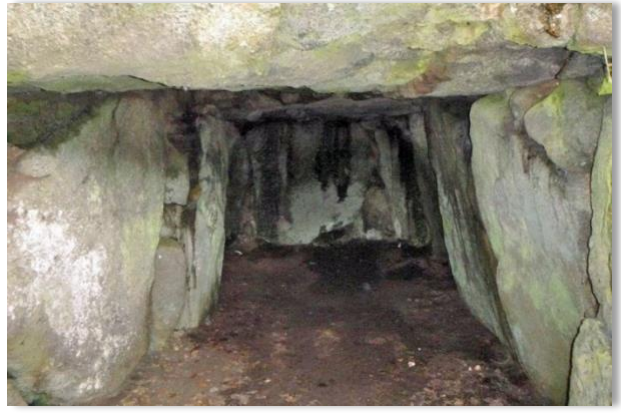


Sally and Martin had been to Guernsey for their honeymoon and recently visited again to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

Left: a granite wall on Herm, a small island which is part of the Parish of St Peter Port in the Bailiwick of Guernsey.

Sally says: 'The boulders are just thrown together. I did chat to

someone who said you couldn't dress the stones at all – just have to pile them up and he was dead right.



Above: ‘A couple of Dolmen – ancient burial chambers. The fairies were reputed to have built them, and they had supernatural powers so they could move the stones. They come out to dance when it is a full moon and get very cross if any person moves their stones – it brings bad luck to anyone who dares do this.’ Hmm, sounds like a good ruse to deter the temptation of vandalism.

The Stone Trust – September waller of the month



For more on Vermont waller, Dan Snow, see: <https://thestonetrust.org/september-waller-of-the-month-dan-snow/>

Upcoming events

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

Sat 28th September - Ham Hill - AGM

Sat 5th October / Sun 6th October - Donkey Down

Sat 19th October / Sun 20th October - 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. I will be in Peru for much of October and hope to return with photos of the dry stone buildings of Machu Picchu.

Carole Reeves