

Hello folks,

I am not promising a newsletter every month by any means but thought it was an opportunity just to report on the AGM and give a brief résumé of another couple of projects.

Some of you may have met Livia who came on a course at Donkey Down last year, when she was planning a sculpture work on Portland, and again a couple of times this year. After several changes of venue and date she, with help and advice from Phyllis and Pete have finally achieved it. It is part of an exhibition, in Tout Quarry and the Drill Hall, under the umbrella title – One Island - Many Visions. It continues until 31st Oct. if anyone wants to view it, though this installation will remain in situ.

Livia describes it for us:

Ab Initio (70 × 800 × 45 cm) is a new permanent installation at Tout Quarry Sculpture Park & Nature Reserve in Portland, Dorset.



The Project, sponsored by Dorset DSWA, was developed in collaboration with Peter Curtis and Phyllis Warren of the Dorset Branch, Hannah Sofaer, Creative Director of Portland Sculpture & Quarry Trust (PSQT), and with valued contributions of fellow artist Ros Burgin MRSS and local naturalist Bob Ford.

Ab Initio—Latin for “from the beginning”—signifies a return to origins, reconnecting with principles of place, ecology, and the craft of dry-stone walling. The artwork highlights how traditional walling skills can be integrated into contemporary art practice to address environmental change and support habitat regeneration.

Ab Initio aligns with the interdisciplinary project led by PSQT for the regeneration of the landscape. It is a sculptural habitat designed with curved lines that capture sunlight from varying angles. Its amphitheatre-like forms reflect and retain heat within the concave structures, generating a microclimate with slightly elevated temperatures that creates shelter and encourages plant growth. The elevation of the walls above the ground reduces wind speed, aiding the dispersal and settling of wind-borne seeds. Cracks and cavities within the dry-stone walls have proved to be ideal niches for flora, insects, invertebrates, and small mammals. The thermal properties of the stones are particularly beneficial for small reptiles, offering warmth and shelter. The developments of the sculptural habitat will remain under observation and will be documented in the years to come.



Photos above by Livia



We visited shortly after it was finished and viewed some of the other works.



‘Tout Quarry’ created by Nicola Turner from Portland wool, cotton thread and net. It is embedded along the transition bed. This is where the Portland and Purbeck beds meet where there was a massive environmental change from a marine based origin to a freshwater one.

I did quite like this one, but others were beyond me.

[Work — NICOLA TURNER](#)

Chemicals and minerals have dissolved out of the rocks, and then oozed from between the strata, before trickling down the vertical rock faces - where they have crystallised into a surface sheet of stained calcite-like material. Whilst the stone is generally pale in colour, there are areas where the rock has undergone a colourful transformation.

The work is created from tendrils of wool, sourced from Portland Sheep, and is embedded into a crevice between rock stratas. Portland sheep are an at-risk breed. The Domesday Book records that in 1086 there were 900 sheep on the isle of Portland but the increase in quarrying saw their decline with the final flock leaving Portland in 1920, although there have been re-introduced. The Portland is a typical representative of the old tan-faced sheep that was found throughout the south west before the Roman invasion.

I must admit I thought, at first, this looked like something made from expanded insulation foam crammed into old tights and jammed in the rock but I did quite like the form. The signage on these installations was not wonderful, some of the QR codes were a bit fuzzy because the print had got wet and some were missing altogether. I do not really enjoy art when you have to wade through a lot of words to find out what it's all about. However, when I looked it up on-line and found the above information on the web-site it did all have a lot more significance. Visit and make up your own mind.



This tiny circlet was only about 6 cms. Diameter. It seemed to be made of tiny coloured wire fibres glued to the base of a piece of stone but I could not find out anything about it. It was dwarfed by the surrounding environment.

Passing Through is a site specific in the quarry itself calling both to the contrast between rock and plaster, body and stone – but also their visual similarities. This sculptural installation is activated by the changing light throughout the day, and, like the rock itself, it darkens in the wet. It appears to be a mix of human, rock and animal, and yet is strangely ‘other’. The hands call out, from the skyline in particular, as a reminder of the human hands that worked the quarry and shaped the landscape, and as a tribute to makers in general including the group of exhibiting sculptors. [Anna Gillespie : Work](#)



Portland Stack by Caroline Saunders, Natural Stone, hand-carved 2025
Portland Stack speaks to the relationship between human intervention and the land, celebrating the unique character of local stone varieties while acknowledging the site’s industrial heritage. The sculptures capture the character of a place where industrial heritage and natural regeneration intersect.

[sculpture projects instillations and commissions - carolinesaunders.art](https://carolinesaunders.art)



Riot by Fiona Campbell is apparently inspired by lichens growing in the quarry. It is wearable and there is a link here to a youtube performance [Bing Videos](#) if you wish to pursue it! They say art is in the eye of the beholder!

Back to matters Dry Stone.



The **AGM** on Saturday 12th Oct. This was a more social occasion this year. 12 members attended. We met over breakfast at Putlake (a petting farm in Langton Matravers).

There was a short stroll to the village hall for the AGM where we admired the interesting display of historical photographs.

Peter reported that we have 68 members, plus another this last week. There had been a total of 230 member days walling over the year.

The branch is in a very healthy financial position although we will not get the same income from the Dorset National Landscape (formerly AONB) when we finish at Donkey Down, which will end over this Winter. We are still looking for a project in the West of the county to replace it. There is possibly a church wall at Stourton Caundle which is being considered. In the East there is a bit of wall near the church at Tyneham and there will also be some walling at Putlake which has the benefit of being closer to parking and toilets so more convenient for access than Seaspray. Phyllis will keep you posted.

Committee: Carole has stood down now from the committee but will remain in charge of books and biscuits on the courses and as the branch rep. on the inter branch Zoom meetings. Peter thanked her for everything she has done on the committee over the last 6 years.

Karen Hodgson has taken over from Peter as treasurer – lightening his load somewhat.

Tim Mitchell and Rob Carter have also been elected so there are now 6 members.



Committee members: Karen, Peter, Phyllis, Geoff, Tim & Rob

Rob was elected in his absence – he was on holiday, fishing, in Ireland!

He is a keen sea fisherman. He runs his own gardening business. He came to Corton to do a dry stone walling course in the summer of 2022 and caught the walling bug. He started coming out regularly, travelling from Plymouth. He passed his level 1 this summer and has plans for level 2 in the near future.

Karen has been a member of DSWA for 4 years joining when we did the Portesham village project and she has been a member of the committee for the last 12 months. She has been bitten by the walling bug and is hoping that she hasn't bitten off more than she can chew by agreeing to become treasurer. Peter and Phyllis will of course be supporting her as she takes on this new role. Karen works part-time as a mental health pharmacist and volunteers for a number of other organisations, including Weldmar hospice. Tim has been a member for many years. A social worker working with families with children with special needs he has now retired and is able to join us more often for walling. In 2023 he and Mary challenged each other to take their Level 2 exam – they both passed.

There was a bit of discussion about the various items in Pete's report and a suggestion that the committee look into the possibility of a members' visit to Devon for some training on Devon hedges (double sided stone faced banks). This would be an exciting opportunity if it materialises.

Before lunch we visited the Stone Museum nearby. This was showing the history of quarrying in the area, mostly from items donated by a local historian Reg Savill.



Adrian & Carole in the museum



A mock up of a quarr – an underground working where the stone was raised on a low trolley drawn up the slope by a chain wound round a capstan with a donkey or horse turning it, on the surface.



Collection of fossils

There's always washing up to do



After a very nice lunch kindly arranged by Elaine (Pete's wife) we watched a couple of films about the local quarrying industry. The first was narrated by Reg Savill in an excruciatingly posh accent. The other, in complete contrast, was by Kevin Keates who is a member of a very old local quarrying family. He can date his ancestors back to the late 1600s and there was a picture of him, his father and grandfather all at the quarry together. He is hoping his son will take over in due course.



Putting on the through stone

Donkey Down

The wall is nearing the end. There is about 20 metres still to start from scratch but we have completed the cheek end and are gradually moving on to where the last course took place. Some of the last delivery of stone is absolutely huge so we'll be going up armed with a sledgehammer and hope someone is angry and wants to take it out on something!



Seaspray

Whilst some members prepared the site for the course, Mary and I prepared and started to re-build a gap further back. There was a lot of trace walling and one of the throughs was at a bit of a rakish angle.



The weather throughout this build has been interesting to say the least. We stood and sheltered under Mary's umbrella while the Red Arrows flew over en route to Swanage carnival.

The course on 21st/22nd Sept had to be curtailed on the Sat. afternoon at about 2.15. This was because a torrential downpour over lunch had made the foundations, which were not quite complete, an absolute quagmire. When time was called it was frustrating because we could see the better weather coming in – you can always see the weather well in advance up there! The next day the course members returned and continued but because the stone was mostly from the original wall – not a delivery of new stone, it was very thin and the build was very slow. They had to put some copes on an already completed section. Members will finish the course section later this year. Steve had hurt his back so Will stepped up and acted as Carole's assistant. He's a useful person to have around as there was a lot of kit to take to the site in his 4x4.



Foundation trench being prepared in the sunshine in the morning



Adder that had to be re-located further along the wall



The gap threw up some interesting stones – one closely resembled a huge molar. Rob managed to get this fitted in. Later up the build there was another one that looked just like a foot. It makes an interesting change to use some of these odd-shaped stones.

More course photos can be seen on Flickr [Sea Spray course](#) | [Flickr](#)





Mary & Carole putting on the flat topping before the rubble coping

Our last weekend there was again very wet at times, though glorious sunshine in between. We found that if we tucked down between the wall and the brambles it wasn't too bad. There was a brief rainbow as we went back to the car park at the end of the Saturday and on the Sunday we saw a crow chasing and harassing a Peregrine – another nice thing to see.

Mary, Carole and I did one last session to finish it.



Flat top completed by lunch-time

Rubble topped before tea

