

STONECHAT



**Cymdeithas Codi Waliau Sychion
Cangen Gogledd Cymru
North Wales Branch
Dry Stone Walling Association**

Registered as a Charity No. 1040299

ED.

Summer draws to a close and Branch activities begin to wind down. It has been a fruitful, if somewhat hectic *period*. Competitions, demonstrations, marathons, training, preparing newsletters, writing press releases, trying to earn a crust, it's beginning to take its toll...

There is no grant article in this edition, a lack of time and energy have precluded it - In its place I have tried to provide information on pricing of walling work as it seems to me this fits into grants somewhere. The article is essentially a re-worked and expanded extract from a draft booklet, "Stonework", the Branch has produced. This details various aspects of quality, pricing and cost effectiveness of stonework and provides information on those able to undertake such work.

This is currently only available as part of a pack sent out to those enquiring about having work done, and at events - or to anyone who asks me to quote for work! One of this winter's headaches will be trying to produce and fund this project. The diary might look a bit sparse but I assure you the winter months are not passed idly by!

Should anyone like a copy let me know and if there's anyone you can think of who could be approached for funding...

Elsewhere we have an article from Andy Kehoe on life on the Carneddau Footpath Repair Team. Hopefully I will be able to twist his arm further for a contribution of the technical aspects of their 'stonework' for a future edition.

Tim Roberts has started a new series and there are the regular pieces.

Thanks to everyone for their support, it helps make it oil worth the effort! Of course it anyone else feels they might have a literary bent...

Sean Adcock

FROM THE CHAIR

Well it's been quite busy over the past few weeks with the Royal Welsh, the quarterly meeting the Snowdonia National Park and Anglesev Competitions and finally the marathon. Of these will pick on the meeting upon which to comment as I think that the others are being covered elsewhere.

The quarterly meetings used to be rather lengthy discussions on the Branch and its activities with, more often than not, little coming out of them at the end. The format has evolved into something a little different now as we have an active committee of six discussing and organising the Branch activities with members kept up to date through "Stonechat" and 'Branch News'. The quarterly evenings are now used to bring members together to have a drink and chat, an informal update on any news, followed by a slide show/talk. It is not possible - or even desirable - to have talks every time with a walling content, but I do try to bring somebody along who is involved with 'the great outdoors' and linked as closely as I can get with our interests. Having said that, the last two did have a walling content in them and very interesting they were too! In April we had Adam Voelker from the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings ISPAW talking about his rebuilding of a medieval hall/house, and in July we had Daemond Hall giving an audio-visual presentation on the "Past and Present in Aberconwy". This had a number of walls in evidence, with Gareth Pritchard announcing on several occasions "I did that wall!" much to the interest of the speaker!

The point of these remarks is to let you know that they are from boring evenings, open to

members and non-members, and that we would like to see a few more making the effort to turn up! We would also like more feedback from our members about events we organise or should *he* organising, and these evenings are a good time to tell us. For example. I know that those who turned up for the last two meetings enjoyed the talks, and what I need to know is the names of any individuals or groups who can come and give us a talk in 1995. Do you know of anyone? Is there a group advertising anywhere? Is there an ad. on the local library notice board? - that's where I found Daemond's name.

Daemond also showed us some slides about a farmhouse on Anglesey (for which he is fund-raiser) where the owners are looking after nine handicapped people in the house and providing holiday accommodation for a further fifteen. The people in the house are there for two years, receiving training in how to do things which most of us just take for granted. A few days after the meeting I took someone to Holyhead to catch the ferry and on the way back took the opportunity to look up Barry and Karen Field, the parents of a severely handicapped boy, who run the centre. I suggested to Barry that we might be able to help in some way, i.e. training courses for their guests, or a Branch training course or practice meet on one of their walls. I explained to him that this was a very tentative idea at this stage as it all depends on our membership.

Over to you.... Volunteers??? Ideas???? Feedback???

Ring Sean after 8pm any evening. (Cheek- phone Don ANY time - Ed!)

Don Eland.

LETTER FROM SOUTH WALES

Ups and Downs of the Summer.

Satisfactory ups and one big down in South Wales this summer.

Let's get the down out of the way with a big apology for the cancelling of our Grand Prix competition. However, we've planned another competition for Saturday 1st. October. at an attractive roadside location (a very minor road!) at Ystradfellte on the, southern slopes of the Fforest Fawr, the westward extension of the Beacons range. This has been the site of several of our 'ups' with our Branch certification near there and some monthly meets in conjunction with the Brecon Beacons National Park.

As I scribble I realise I'm not sure whether the wall is carboniferous limestone, old red sandstone, or a mixture of the two, the boundary of the two types runs through that area.

The competition will be late for the Grand Prix of course, but there will be BIG prizes! So pack your hammers. Cogs, and come and heat us! Details from John Sansom on 0873 831725.

Another up was the Royal Welsh Show. They were glad to have the two Welsh Branches back for a second year to continue the wall outside the residential centre, Neuadd Henllan, Whether we will do more next year as they want - is a moot point. The wall is trending away from the roadway and the punters. It is also vulnerable to the high spirits of the stockmen, whose canteen is just behind. This provided the only down of a highly successful event with good public interest and excellent media coverage. Every evening the wall was vandalised. and there was some unpleasant hackling of a certain non-Welsh accent (no, not one from east of Offa's Dyke, but across the Irish Sea). We did in fact provide good South Welsh accents throughout, with Mike Davies from Brecon (winner of the Amateur prize at Cerrig y Drudion last year) and

then a more valleys version from Peter Tennant, our man in Ystradfellte. Alan Jones also travelled down from Pentrefoelas to be interviewed by S4C and BBC Radio Cymru, and it was also good to see Aeryn Jones helping out on the wall.

Another up was the presence of Jacqui Simkins the National Secretary. The DSWA management committee had agreed to let her be with us and coupled with the presence of her impressive exhibition and masses of booklets, leaflets and even a sack of rocks helped us present a far more professional image.

As the 'front of house' man I took a lot of names of people interested in the craft. Many of these were from West Wales, which our Branch doesn't really cover. If I had enough time and energy I would love to circulate them all about forming a new Branch. In the area we do cover - Brecknock, Radnor, Glamorgan and Gwent - it was very noticeable that this majority of people were from the tatter two counties. I know there are more people there, but it is also my impression that this century walling has survived better on the farms between the valleys than it has further North.

Having sat through the ridiculous wrangle at the DSWA Management Committee over which Branch or Branches were to represent the DSWA at the Great Yorkshire Show, I felt our pleasant co-operation at Llanelwedd was a model! Let's hope it survives into the days when we have West Wales, Mid Wales, Glamorgan, Beacons, and all the other Branches we should have! Before signing off I'd like to thank Don and Sean for coming down for the whole show.

Philip Clark, South Wales Branch.

BACK ON THE CHAIN GANG

The highs and lows of life on the bare mountain

Branch member Andrew Kehoe is the supervisor of the Carneddau Footpath Repair Team whose work is funded by the National Trust's Snowdonia Appeal. The team also includes branch members Barmy Roberts and Maggy Scott. The Trust has pioneered footpath repair techniques in upland areas throughout Britain, notably by re-introducing traditional methods of stone pitching in the Lake District where four gangs now work full time. The work is characterised by the use of indigenous materials to try and create a path that is in sympathy with the local environment.

March 1993

When the choughs are mating, ewes are lambing and the arctic alpenes are in bloom, the Carneddau mountain repair team emerges from winter hibernation in order to begin its spring offensive against erosion.

The team - Gareth, Barry, Maggy and I - works on about 60 miles of footpaths in Snowdonia, rectifying the damage caused by people, sheep and the weather. The scale of our task is awesome. Imagine repairing a half mile long scar, up to 70 feet wide and 7 feet deep, on a 45 degree slope using shovels and a couple of yellow plastic buckets. The stone is painstakingly hand collected from the surrounding mountain, the larger ones taking two people up to half a day to position. It's also a 1½ hour walk from the nearest road, 3000 feet up; no good finding out you've forgotten something once you've got there. Oh, and it rains all the time. No problem.

22 March

Our first job is to carry our B&Q garden shed up the mountain to establish our base camp at

1500 feet. We use this for storing tools and sheltering during wet tea breaks.

Fortunately for us this coincides with the arrival of a group of unsuspecting volunteers from Leicester University. The group leader Chris, a rotund gentleman, finishes the last trip on hands and knees. By the end of the day we're all exhausted and the volunteers retire to the nearest pub, with footpath team in tow, to recuperate.

30 April

It seems like winter will never end. The wind is ferocious, with a biting chill. The rain horizontal, occasionally turning to snow. The need for the 230 foot long stone-lined drain we're building higher up is obvious as water can be seen cascading down the scar worn by thousands of walking hoots during the summer months. Keeping motivated is difficult. I think the National Trust should provide free chocolate bars every time it rains - preferably Yorkies.

2 May

Sue Wilmore, our Regional Personnel Manager, comes out to-look at what we're up to. On the way down she attempts a magnificent leap across a peat bog, only to land in the middle of it, disappearing up to her waist in freezing black slime. 'I think I'll have to take my tights off before I go back to the office', she remarks somewhat mysteriously.

30 May

Summer on the mountain is like spring - only wetter.

Years ago the valley shepherds, following the hafod a hendre system, would spend the summer with their flocks high up on 'the Glyderau. 'the intrepid footpath team does likewise: we head for the tops. An army Lynx helicopter helps us by lifting a four wheel drive motorbike plus trailer onto Y Cam. This will be used for shitting stone and gravel. Maggy and Gareth go along for the ride: it's like being shaken about in a bean can.

June

Interview day for the seasonal work contracts; 50 applicants from which 10 get a Krypton-style grilling. First a half day walk up Tryfan, a 3000 foot peak, to look at previous work and see how fit they are. Then normal style interviews, still in wellies. Hefin, one of the short listed 10 is asked how he might help motivate the team. "Well, I suppose I could bring chocolate biscuits". He gets the job, and brings the biscuits

10 June

Frantically organising for 30 army cadets to come and help for a day lugging stone for a path we're constructing through a peat bog at 2700 feet. They're to meet us on the way back from an overnight camp. The weather's poor, visibility down to 30 feet. By lunchtime there's still no sign of them and we're all worried in case they're lost. At 3.30pm we decide to go down and are relieved to find them already descending, unable to find us they had decided to give up.

August

Ten weeks on 2½ hours walking every day, eight weeks of which are spent in cloud carrying and digging.. not a B&Q hut in sight, the strain is beginning to show. Instead of getting fitter I think my legs are going to drop off. Maggy and I have been carrying stone for two weeks non stop to let the summer contract team members get experience of stone-pitching. Yesterday Maggy broke down and cried. I knew exactly how she felt,

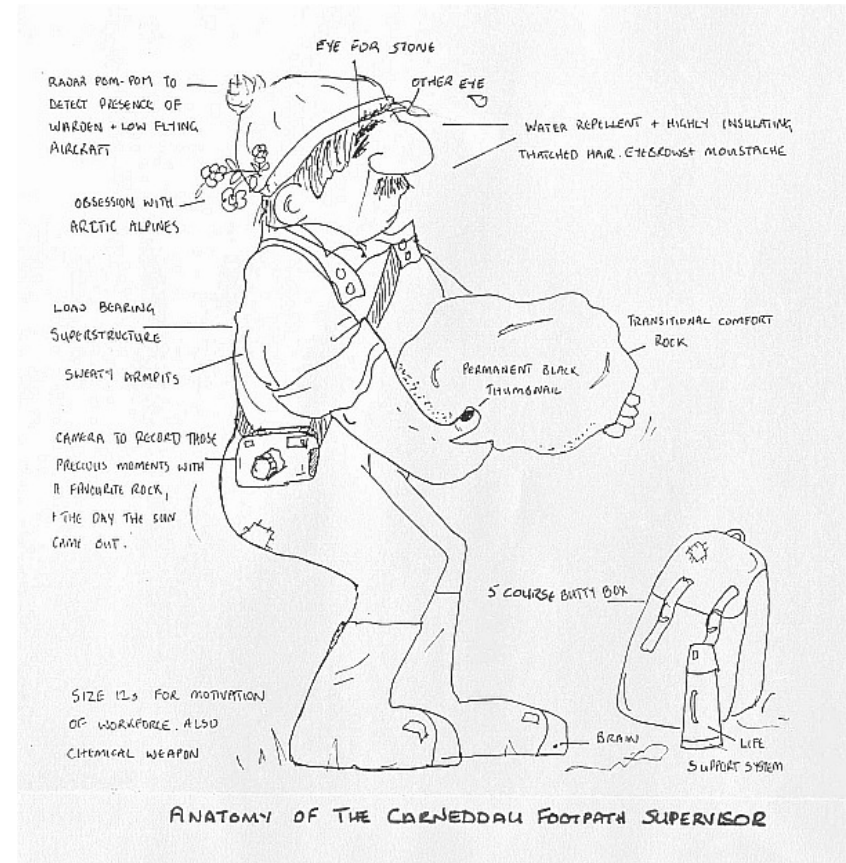
11 September

Temperature inversion. 'lie cloud has settled at about 2800 feet and we're above it looking out over the eddies gently moving around the mountain 300 feet below. Our shadows are

projected onto the cloud surface; each one is 45 feet tall and surrounded by a rainbow aura. This is definitely one of the perks of the job.

20 September

It's 9.30am. Gareth has gone to retrieve our 4 wheel drive bike from its hiding place behind a rock. He returns 5 minutes later, minus bike, boots and trousers, and totally mud bespattered. He had driven into a peat hole. We manage to lift it out between the four of us; fortunately it's none the worse for wear. We then have to get it down the mountain. This takes all day lowering it down steep banks and driving down precarious slopes.



30 September

The season of mists and frozen pick handles is upon us and we are dressed up like onions and rapturously re-united with our hut halfway down the mountain.

Our autumn project is landscaping along a length of path constructed earlier in the year. This involves loving and pegging small turfs collected from around and about and building retaining walls. The end result leaves this part of the mountain looking almost natural again, the original scar 'healed'

11 December

I am blown over by a stray gust of wind and roll 60 feet across the mountain before I manage to stop myself. Is someone trying to tell me something?

30 December

The team comes off the mountain to carry out winter work at other National Trust sites. This year's project is to rebuild a retaining wall and path at Plas Newydd on Anglesey. It's like being on holiday, the ground is flat -- in fact it is a beach, and we stay comparatively dry, except when the tide comes in.

11 February

The team briefly returns to the mountain to chaperone Sir Anthony Hopkins and an entourage of reporters and National Trust staff. The actor lays the last stone in a mile of pitched footpath. That, we can assure you, is a lot of stone!

Andrew Kehoe.

SNOWDONIA NATIONAL PARK SOCIETY COMPETITION.

The Snowdonia National Park Society held their annual competition in good weather on a road towards Snowdon at Llanberis on Saturday 16th July. The wall had been demolished in advance and an abundance of extra stone provided. Everybody seemed to enjoy this friendly competition, with members of the Society providing the usual fine buffet lunch and continuous refreshment during the day.

The winners were:-

Professional

1. Iain Richardson (Rhiwlas, Bangor) *
2. Sean Adcock (Penisarwaun, Caernarfon) *
3. Aeryn Jones (Maserdy, Corwen) *

Semi-Professional

1. Maggy Scott (Tal y Bont, Bangor) *
2. Don Eland (Cerrig y Drudion) *
3. Paul Jones (Llanrwst)

Novice

1. Elfyn Lewis (Porthmadog)
2. Gerallt Williams (Bethesda)
3. Darren Parry (Tregarth)

* denotes Branch member.

The prize money was very generous this year, although there were suggestions from some quarters that the competition could be improved, and perhaps the attendance, 'liot' extending prizes to fourth and fifth rather than by rewarding the winners so well.

At the end of the day Mr. Dafydd Morris, the farmer, was pleased with the assistance given to clear excess stone from the road, and he told me that he felt this year's wall was better than that produced by the competitors the previous year. I look forward to next year as there is still quite a hit to do there

One final thought. Whilst DSWA members were prominent in the first two classes I wondered why there wasn't even one member in the amateur section!

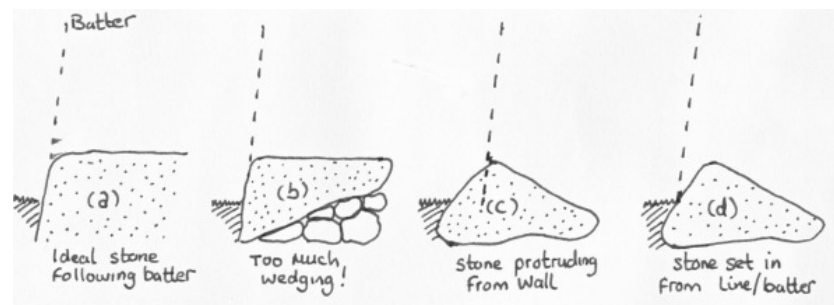
Ann Eland

MASTER CLASS

Foundations - Part 3

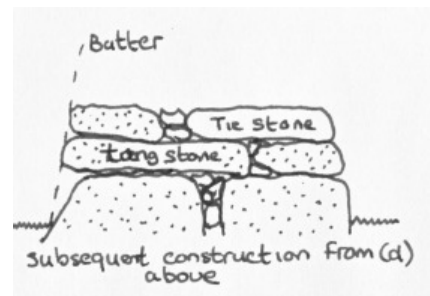
In the last two Master Classes we have looked at the basic principles involved in building foundations with reasonably regular shaped stone, and how to deal with essentially triangular stones. In this, the third and final part, line and batter and a North Wales speciality, vertical stones, are dealt with.

Ideally foundation stones should have a bare minimum of wedging beneath them - lots of wedges and then these are effectively the foundations. Hence it is not always possible to get the face of the stone to exactly fit the batter (slope of face) of a wall.



There are essentially two different approaches to solving this problem, as shown by (c) (d) above.

Opinion differs over the acceptability of either method since ideally no stone should protrude from a wall (c) and foundations should provide a solid base for subsequent building without overhanging stone (d).

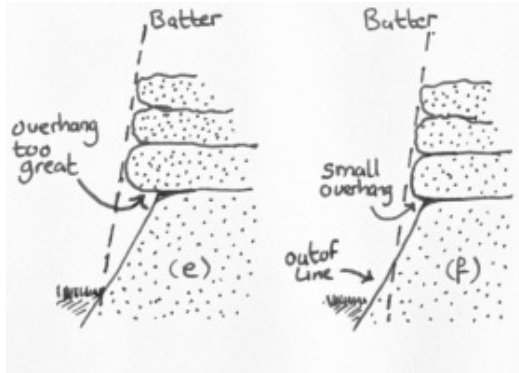


I generally prefer (d), provided the slope is not too great. It should be possible to place a suitable stone on this, running well into the wall. This is essentially the same as the method employed for 'traced' foundations as seen in part 1. With longer slopes this becomes more difficult as the overhang is necessarily greater.

So why not poke it out of the wall? I frequently do and I am not convinced that there is any real reason beyond the fact that, (dependant largely on individual taste) it can look sloppy. If this is the most solid method for utilising a stone then this criticism is hardly a capital offence. The stone has got to be used somewhere and somehow. Unlike stone protruding higher in the wall it is not going to provide much of a springboard for marauding sheep to vault the wall. There is risk of a tractor driving over protruding foundations, but this is more a matter of degree and it is going to take a very determined tractor driver to go over slightly protruding ones (with longer slopes you could always combine methods (c) & (d) to minimise or reduce the risk) without crashing into the wall anyway!

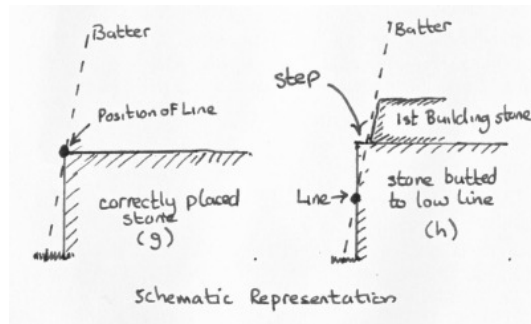
With larger stones with sloping faces use of method (d) often creates an overhang too great

for subsequent building (e).

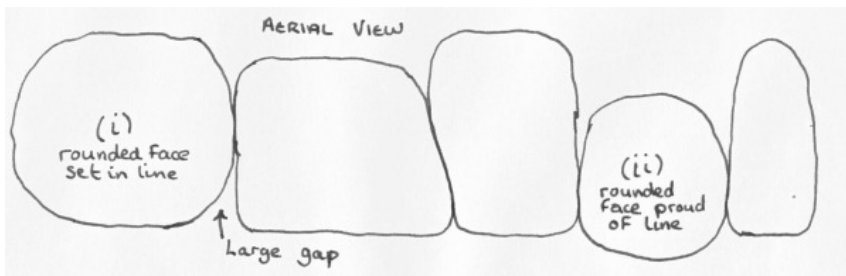


Placing the stone so that its top would tend to be in line with the correct batter of the wall (Method (c)) means the stone will be poking out quite a lot, which given its height exacerbates any apparent "untidiness". This can be minimised by placing the stone so that it combines methods (c) & (d) as in (1). It is all a question of compromise and perhaps taste. No solution is ideal but something has to be done.

Large stones with good faces which do not follow the batter should be aligned so that the top of the stone is in the correct place for the batter at that point (g). The key with larger stones is to have your line high enough so that it is at (or slightly above) the tops of the stones. All too often inexperienced wallers have the line low down and butt the foundation to it (h) As the top of the stone is above the line it cannot be in the right place if the wall is battered. The result is an unacceptable step (or bulge if the subsequent building stones are placed to the edge of the top at the foundation), definitely providing purchase for errant, vaulting, sheep.



Irregular faced stones present similar problems to slightly sloping stones.



Again either solution (i) or (ii) could be acceptable, subject to the same problems and reservations as for sloping faces. There can be no prescribed solution and I can only emphasise it is all a question of degree: how severe the slope/irregularity is and how best it

can be placed for subsequent building. There is no ideal solution; each stone will have different implications. Experience probably helps in coming to the 'correct' decision, but that's not a lot of help until you have it. Remember, as with any other foundation stone, it needs to be solid and you need to be able to build on it solidly. If you can't take it out and try again!

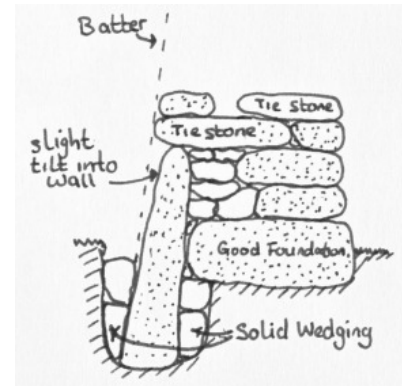
Vertical foundation stones are a no-no. They are highly unstable and every foundation stone must be sitting on its largest surface, never ever stood on end. Ideally you will be able to drop them down onto a larger surface and progress as normal from there.

Well at least that's the theory and should be the first approach. However things are not quite that simple in the real world, especially this corner of it, even if we avoid arguments about maintaining local styles.

If the vertical stone is dropped it must either be the exact width of the base of the wall, or leave sufficient space to build the opposite foundations sufficiently well. Unfortunately they are sometimes too long and poke out, or - more often than not, not quite long enough and thus impossible to build around. They are also very often such ridiculous shapes that anything other than standing them is too great a nightmare to contemplate.

Another consideration is that dropping the stone effectively reduces your supply of building stone and increases the available hearting (i.e. the stone now provides less of the face of the wall and more at its middle). In order to regain height some of the hearting will have to be used for building? which is not always the ideal solution.

So beyond giving up and going home you are likely to be faced with having to re-site the stone as it was. In such circumstances the following approach should be adopted.



Dig the stone well in, the deeper the better preferably about half way (or more!!). The deeper you go, the greater the reduction in the chance of the stone being pushed over out of the wall, (leverage).

Slightly slope the stone into the wall (as you might do for a sloping face), as this means the weight of the stone is leaning into the wall and thus less likely to fall or be pushed out.

Firmly wedge the base of the stone in the hole so that it is very solidly held.

Make sure the opposite foundations utilise the available space as fully as possible, as if you were dealing with a traced stone (part 1).

Ensure good, solid well hearted construction of the opposite face of the wall.

Use good tie stones to hold the top of the stone in place as securely as possible.

A vertical foundation stone is a severe weakness. If it has to lie down - and it should really be avoided - then this weakness should be compensated for as much as possible with very sound, solid construction all around it.

This is true of much random dry stone walling from the foundations through to the coping, especially given the myriad of stone types and shapes in North Wales where the ideal can be virtually un-attainable.

It has taken three editions to deal with foundations? I'd like to think with good cause. They literally provide the foundation to good walling practice. The rest of the wall should be built

with the same principles and problems solved in essentially the same ways (except building stone would never be laid on end or out of line) with adaptations according to stone type. But more of this next time!

Sean Adcock

PAUSE

"I've got an idea for a series for 'Stonechat', but it needs a title."
Such posers are becoming grist to the mill for this dry stone waller.

The title is inspired by the following extract from 'The Village Curate' written by Richard Hurdis in 1792.

*"Let him speed who will,
And fly like cannon-shot from post to post:
I Jove to pause, and quit the public road,
To gain a summit, take a view, or pluck
An unknown blossom..."*

(Taken from "The English: Path". K.Taplin. Boydell.1984

I'm not sure as to how ethical the last part is, but hopefully the spirit of the lines encapsulates what will be the underlying theme of the series. In the hurly burly of everyday life we take many of our surroundings for granted, often not fully appreciating, or even suspecting what is around us.

Over to Tim....

About a mile to the west of Beddgelert, alongside the A498 to Pen y Gwryd, stands the hill of Dinas Emrys looking like a howler hat minus the brim. Though prominent in the valley, and easily accessible from the road, it is little visited by the casual walker.

Dinas Emrys is an important ancient British hill fort and several legends are associated with the spot. Best known of these is probably that of the red and white dragons in which the red overcomes the white, thus enabling the chieftain Vortigern to build his fort on the summit.

Less well known is the tale that King Arthur's counsellor-wizard Merlin once lived here. It is said that when Merlin left with Arthur he hid his treasure in a cave with the intention that it would be found in the future by a person of golden hair and blue eyes. When this person came near a bell would ring of its own accord.

A young man of this appearance was passing the hill one night when he thought he heard a bell ringing and a voice calling "come here". Knowing about the legend he leapt over a wall and followed the sound. The ringing drew him up through the oak and hazel trees until he was high on the hill under a ridge. A dark patch appeared and he strode forward thinking that it must be the entrance to the cave. The patch suddenly moved away and he saw that it was a black, hand reared, calf with a hell around its neck. When he told this story to his family he became the object of fun for long afterwards.

The only ringing heard at Dinas Emrys now is that of the church bell at Beddgelert and hazel, oak, and fern cover the remains of Vortigern's stronghold. It is perhaps just as well that walkers do not often tread its slopes because the place still retains some of the magic of wizards and dragons. Merlin's treasure cave lays hidden waiting for the fair-haired, blue-eyed visitor to come wandering through the trees.

Tim Roberts

BIRDS OF PREY IN NORTH WALES

In our series looking at North Welsh wildlife birds present scope for vast coverage. Perhaps the most easily identifiable are birds of prey and I have asked Dave Elliott, the Warden of the Conwy RSPB Nature Reserve to contribute on these. Even so the subject matter is somewhat vast and I have somewhat arbitrarily edited the article into two parts (essentially what I have seen and haven't seen whilst walling) with the next edition of "Stonechat" dealing with harriers, hawks and persecution in general.

Taking "North Wales" as everywhere in our country north of Aberdyfi, the keen, and lucky, searcher could see as many as 8 different species of raptor day-flying birds of prey

Red Kite

The Welsh red kite population now stands at around 100 pairs. It very nearly disappeared completely from the UK in the 1930s: as few as 2 pairs clung on in Wales - until very recently the only part of Britain where one could see red kites. Recent re-introductions into Scotland and England, of Scandinavian and Spanish Birds, seem to be going very well. However, it is still in Wales that one can most easily marvel at this mainly chestnut and dark brown, buoyant beauty.



The wonderful aerial maneuverability; the twisting, flexing, forked, rusty tail; long, angled, elegant wings; whitish head and buff upper-wing patch providing contrast; and its almost eerie, whistling call adding to its mystique. In Wales, kites make great use of the up-draughts at the tops of valley sides to "slope soar", enabling them to travel very

long distances easily, scanning the ground below for unsuspecting rabbits or other small mammals, birds (I once saw a kite catch a jackdaw in midair), or carrion.

They are found in the southern part of our region, but are, very gradually, spreading further north so keep your eyes peeled!

Buzzard

Common and widespread over much of our country - a familiar sight to many - the Buzzard is not quite so common in northwest Wales.

Their broad, blunt-tipped, fairly long wings, and shortish rounded tail, enable them to soar quite well. They are often seen spiralling upwards to gain a lofty vantage point from which to spy their mostly mammal and carrion food, rabbits being a favourite morsel. They also often hunt from perches and sometimes can be seen taking worms on the ground!



The sexes are alike in coloration - generally darkish brown above and paler below, with variable amounts of darker flecks and blotches.

Though it nests mostly in large trees, it hunts mainly over open country at most altitudes.

Kestrel

The kestrel, our commonest and most widespread falcon, is found in almost every habitat, though it has apparently declined in Wales over recent decades.

Its most common method of hunting -hovering over- rough grassland before pouncing on voles, mice etc., - make it a fairly easily identifiable. It does however, also hunt from perches, and will take small birds. When not hovering it has a fairly rapid flapping, but relaxed, level flight.



Males have a blue grey head and tail (with a blackish band at the tip), dark brown wings tips; and dark speckled, light chestnut, hack. In females the blue-grey is replaced by light chestnut.

Both tails and wings are long and slender, although not as sharply pointed as other falcons. It nests in a variety of situations, ranging from holes in trees to cliff ledges, or buildings, or even in an old crow's nest.

Merlin

Only about 70 pairs of our smallest falcon, the dashing little merlin (the males no bigger than a mistle thrush), breed in Wales. Its distinctive, very fast, very low hunting flight (often with steep banks and sharp twists and turns, when chasing after its small bird prey) is powered by relatively short, very sharply pointed wings, and steered by a quite long, but readily fanned tail.



The larger female is dark brown above, paler below with dark streaks, whilst the male has blue-grey under parts, musty below with darker streaks.

These days most Welsh merlins nest in the uplands, often in heather moorlands. It will however, use old nests in isolated hushes, and has of late taken to nesting just inside conifer plantations, as long as they have ready access to open moorland. Not necessarily a strong defence for conifers as much of the Merlin's habitat is destroyed by conifer planting - [Ed.] they once nested in other, more lowland, habitats in Wales, as well.

The merlin can also be seen hunting along valley sides and, like the hen harrier, move lower down in winter, often sharing the same areas throughout the year.

If not seen their presence is often given away by their habitual prey-plucking posts, often fence posts, boulders or walls.

Peregrine



Last, but by no means least, that regal flier the peregrine, our largest and most powerful falcon.

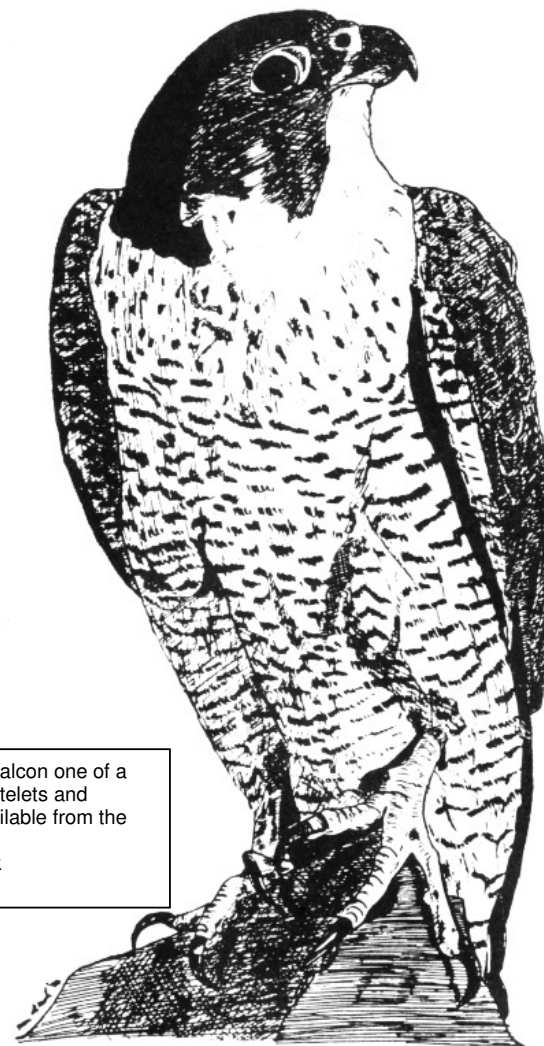
Both males and females are dark slate-grey above and whitish beneath, with some darker barring. Its long, sharply pointed wings, solid build and not too long tail, give it a distinctive outline often described as 'anchor' shaped".

Its speed, both in level flight and in its spectacular dives or "stoops", is used to devastating effect when catching its prey - birds around the size of pigeons and black-headed gulls. They hunt over open territory and nest on cliff ledges, both inland and on the coast.

The peregrine suffered catastrophic declines throughout most of its range in the 1950s and

60s, as did many of our birds of prey, due to pesticide residue poisoning. Fortunately, like the kite and some other species, it has made a remarkable recovery in Wales to its present level of around 280 pairs throughout the country.

Dave Elliot



Peregrine Falcon one of a series of notelets and posters available from the Branch.
© S.Adcock

HOW LONG IS A PIECE OF STRING?

A simple response to how much does it cost to repair a wall is "how long is a piece of string".

Dry stone walling is a very technical craft and as such short cuts in construction are many. As much of the strength of a wall is internal you are very much at the mercy of the contractor when it comes to the quality of the work being produced. Speed frequently results in a drop in quality as well as price. A wall can be built much faster if foundations are left alone whatever their state, if the hearting is insufficiently packed. If stones are traced (length run along the wall rather than into it), coping poorly placed and insufficiently pinned, and the wall itself constructed with scant regard for line and batter, rightness, running joints and the like. In short it is far easier to "throw" the wall up often at twice the speed of what might be expected for reasonable quality work. You will frequently only get what you pay for.

So what does cost?

You can pay almost anything. An average to reasonable work might be around £15 to £18 per square metre for dry stone work, but anything from around £12 to £25 per square metre might be applicable.

Pricing can be affected by a vast number of variables. The site situation itself can provide many:

distance from home might (but not always) affect the price; distance from vehicular access can also increase cost; the terrain could be another factor - especially boggy (difficult foundations) or sloping ground (just a pain).

The wall itself provides a number of considerations. For example features such as ends, curves, sloping ground and lunkies (sheep passageways) etc., normally carry a price in addition to the construction of the main body of the wall. This said the major consideration will be the stone and height of the wall.

Stone.

Stone is an important consideration in pricing. Walls built out of small stone generally take longer to rebuild than walls built out of larger stone. Unfortunately it is not quite that simple, walls with a number of particularly large stones present other problems and can be particularly time consuming to rebuild. This is especially the case where the foundation stones are large boulders which can take an eternity to remove and re-set. Frequently a quarter of the work involved in walls of this type is taken up on the foundations. Consequently the potential for cost-culling through slack workmanship is particularly high here.

Foundations always present a problem with pricing as they are by and large unseen and the full extent of the work necessary is at very best a hazardous guess. It is not always necessary to move and re-place every single one, although the majority of collapses are usually caused by a poorly shaped or tilted foundation. Whatever the case the lower the price the less leeway there is for dealing with problems in the foundation and with particularly low prices they will often not be reset even if they are crying out for it. They can always be built on, just not very well, and rarely in a way that will last any length of time.

It, for whatever reason, stone has to be brought in then not surprisingly the price is likely to be higher. Often the client can save money by moving the stone themselves from elsewhere on the site or by having stone delivered to the site. This does not necessarily lead to a cheaper price for the actual rebuilding of the wall than if the contractor had had to dismantle the original one.

During the dismantling process (stripping out) the stone is sorted in order to enable faster reconstruction and good quality work, with stone roughly sorted into size and sometimes shape, awkward stones are also noted. Being confronted with a pile of stone (and this can be within a fairly narrow price band, although the difference in price between good and poor wallers remain (not to mention those poor wallers who charge as much, and sometimes more, than good wallers).

apply equally to pieces of wall which have completely collapsed) can lead to increases in price as the stone will need to be sorted in order to produce a good job. If it isn't sorted then the work will be slower (unless the wall is "thrown" up) and awkward stones left out or not used correctly. Reasonable stripping out of course takes time and costs can be cut here, but more often than not the end result is of a poorer quality than should be expected.

Not every stone in a wall is likely to be an ideal building stone. Very poor stones lead to weaknesses within the wall and are often the cause, or part of the cause, of the collapse. Often the only choice is to leave it out to inevitable grumbles from the client and comments as to declines in craftsmanship and how the old wallers would have used it. Undoubtedly they would have done and the wall then fell down. We rarely get to work on the walls built by true craftsmen from the past as they haven't fallen down yet! It is easy to assume that every wall has been around for a very long time, after a few years almost any wall looks as if it's been around for a while and if its falling down people seem to assume it's been around a while. I found it interesting to discover that the wall I am working on at present was only built in the 1930s and even then some parts of it appear to have been repaired (and now re-repaired) more than 10 years ago.

I digress. Awkward stones perhaps illustrate one of the ironies of walling. A good craftsman will theoretically be able to find more suitable uses for awkward stones than a less experienced or capable waller (of course at a premium) and hence normally be able to utilise almost every stone. As will the much cheaper, complete cowboy.

Height

Height can affect the price, especially where awkward foundations are involved. In a low wall the foundations represent a higher proportion of the work? and so a low wall might not cost less per linear metre than a slightly higher wall built out of easier stone. As the height of the wall increases so does the time in building it, unfortunately the increase in time is not necessarily proportionate. It is often said that a metre length of wall 1.5 metres high takes almost twice as long to build as a 1 metre length of wall 1 metre high - depending of course on all the other factors involved!

Any wall with a finished height over 1.8m is going to cause problems. Exceptionally high walls (normally retaining walls) will need trestles or scaffolding of some kind. Whatever the case dismantling, sorting and even being able to see the stone becomes more difficult the higher the wall, the stone also does not come 'easily to hand' and double, even triple handling becomes necessary. As a rule of thumb as the height of a wall increases so does the price - only disproportionately per square metre.

Retaining Walls.

Retaining walls supporting earth banks are normally single skinned walls. Whilst the stonework involved is less than for a free standing wall of similar height as a rule pricing will be similar. Considerable time is involved in excavating banks, ensuring a particularly strong structure in order to support the bank, and filling behind the wall and compacting any soil.

I do not pretend that this is an exhaustive or definitive appraisal of pricing. Hopefully it provides an insight into the complexity of the factors involved and the need to be wary of low prices. It is easy to see that almost any price could be charged especially as no two pieces of wall are going to be identical. This said many of the factors (except for particularly high walls) seem to average out. The net result (at least partly determined by market forces) is that any one waller tends to work

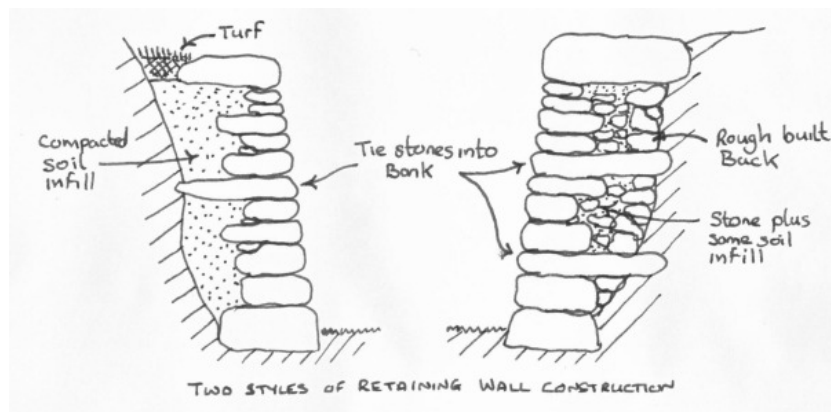
Market forces. short-cuts and cowboys all have implications on pricing, which spill over into (and in their own way are influenced by) grants. There is no doubt that without grants there would be much less walling work available and it is difficult to envisage the perfect scheme, and all too easy to criticise them. I do however feel that they can have a detrimental side effect on pricing and hence quality.

Fixed rate grants paying a sum per metre merely look at some-sort of average cost for a wall yet it is unlikely that any one wall is actually average and most farmers will want their higher (well above average), stock -proof. walls repaired and these would normally demand a price well above average. The sum paid is only a contribution to the cost, understandably the client is often reluctant to pay much (if any) more than this. Still the work gets done, often at half the price of what might be expected, which has obvious implications on quality and also plays a role in holding prices artificially low -- at least as far as ensuring consistent good quality, long lasting, work is concerned.

Percentage grants allow for pricing to reflect the variable factors involved! yet they too can restrict pricing and quality. 50-80% of a low price does not leave the client having to pay vast sums, 50--80% of high sums can leave the price still un-realistic as far as the client is concerned. Hence lower pricing prevails.

This opens up a whole new can of worms in terms of quality assessment and control. That is the stuff of future articles or perhaps a look at our booklet "Stonework" (see "Ed" column.).

Sean Adcock.



ROUND UP

Committee Vacancies.

Neville Jones, general members representative on the committee, has had to resign his post following medical advice. Neville's contribution will be missed although we are pleased that he is still able to help out at events. This means another committee vacancy, the post of Treasurer still has to be filled. Any offers....

Competitions.

Congratulations to Aeryn Jones for his victory at the Anglesey Show.

Alan Jones has been competing in the Grand Prix and has placed in the Cotswolds, Cheshire and Lancashire. I'm sure we wish him every success in the remaining events.

This brings me to the National Championships at Settle. Both Alan and I will be attending and I still hope to organise a minibus - if I get a few more enquiries. It's an interesting experience even if you go just as a spectator. There are plenty of classes for all abilities including complete newcomers. Give it a go, travel up Friday evening camp or B&B. compete or watch, return Saturday night.

Alan gets around, I understand he's judging in South Wales, I hope to attend. Any other takers?

At the time of printing the last minute preparations (panic?) for our competition at Cerrig y Drudion are under way.

Marathon

The em marathon was a success - despite some newspaper comment to the contrary. Media and public interest was gratifying and 45 metres of wall rebuilt in two and a bit days. Working at night under floodlighting was a novel experience. Special thanks to Keith Jones, Phil Kulkowski and Don for helping out on the graveyard shifts - and to all the others who helped out with building and stewarding during the days. More detail (and full credit to the multitudes in the next "Branch News").

Sponsorship is still coming in - around £600 to date. Thanks to all who contributed, and a special mention for the generous contribution from Laing.

Publicity

The summer has proved a productive time for media coverage of the Branch and its activities. We have been on BBC TV, S4C, BBC Radio Cymru (twice) and there have been numerous pieces in the local press. A number of the newspaper pieces have been of significant quality, more than a mention in the what's on columns. Photographs have abounded too. It's pleasing to see so much coverage, but I know for a fact that there has been more than is sifting in front of me at this moment.

Different events get circulated to different papers depending on the locality of the event and the nature of the Press Releases. Most of the pieces which turn up in North West Gwynedd get picked up by me; however I must repeat my frequent plea for people to let me know when they see (better still send me) anything in their local papers. The following is a list of those that get press releases on more than an occasional basis.

Bangor & Anglesey Mail	Caernarfon Herald	Cambrian News	
Chronicle Newspapers	Daily Post	Denbighshire Free Press	
Holyhead & Anglesey Mail	North Wales Chronicle	North Wales Weekly News	
ValeAdvertiser	Western Mail	Wrexham and Mold Mail	Wrexham Leader

The North Wales Pioneer, Rhyl Journal and Clwyd Standard also receive bits 'n' pieces. I've never even seen these so would be grateful for any copy of them for my records - it helps in attempting to write the right sort of release.

If any other papers exist I would like to hear about them!

We do very well as a Branch in terms of media coverage, but we could do better. If I knew exactly who printed what and when...

This brings me to yet another request. Does anyone know of anybody - Branch member or otherwise - who might be able to undertake occasional translation work of short press releases. There are numerous Welsh language papers and the Branch is lacking in respect of attaining coverage in these. I presume this is because I am unable to send them anything. Tim does occasional work on this, but the committee work load is such that we really need someone outside of committee to help on this. There wouldn't be too many (the exact number would depend on any volunteer(s) ability/capacity to deal with them. i.e. to suit) and they are normally much less than one side of typed A4 double spacing

Christmas Is Coming.

Our last meeting of the year is scheduled for 2nd November (see Diary). Redecoration at the Tanronnen is complicating matters. As this is the traditional venue for our Christmas get together we are having problems with that too. Never fear all will be well! Update in next 'Branch News' - sometime in October, or phone Tim.

Less than 100 shopping days left to Christmas, at a loss as to what to get that special person? Might I suggest a North Wales Branch sweat-shirt, with tastefully embroidered DSWA logo with the inscription 'Gogledd Cymru' underneath. Available in a variety of colours and priced from £15.50 to £16.50 (p&p) extra. Alternatively why not try a Rugby shirt. blue/burgundy or blue/green quartered. complete with logo and a snip at £22.50. Contact Don if interested.

We also have a suitable range of stocking fillers:

DSWA car stickers	£0.40
DSWA lapel badges	p.o.a.
'Building & Repairing Dry Stone Walls". (DSWA)	£1.20
'Better Dry Stone Walling'. (IDSWA)	£1.20
'Building Special Features in Dry Stone'. (DSWA)	£1.20
Black pens. "Dry Stone Walling Association" gold lettering on side	£0.30
4 pens as above	(too
Range of notelets (Peregrine, little owl, roe deer, red deer etc.).	
Packs of 10 c/w envelopes.	£1.00
Range of A4 posters (Peregrine, little owl, red deer, puffin)	£1.25

Post and packing extra on all items. Available at all events and meetings. otherwise contact Tim. Proceeds to Branch funds.

The North Wales Branch would like to thank the following for their support in 1994.

Welsh Water Authority

Countryside Council for Wales, Laing, Prince of Wales' Committee.

Beran Filling Station (Deiniolen), BOCM, Farmers Supply Stores (Bangor).

Idris Morris (LlanDeiniolen), Penrhos Tool Hire (Holyhead), Rowena Tool Hire (Bangor).

Diary

3.9.94	North Wales Grand Prix, Cerrig y Drudion
17 & 18.9.94	Training Course Rhydllydan. Contact Arwel.
17.9.94	English National Championships, Settle.
2.11.94	Branch Meeting, hopefully at Tanronnen, Beddgelert. Confirmation in Oct. "Branch News" or phone Tim. Guest speaker: John Janes, Clwyd Historical Buildings
1.10.94	South Wales Branch Competition, Ystradfellte, Brecon. Contact John Sansom 0873 831725
15.10.94	Fflintshire Competition
15.10.94	DSWA of GB Annual General Meeting, Carnforth,
3.12.94	Christmas Dinner at Tanronnen, Beddgelert. Provisional Date only, Confirmation in October "Branch News" or phone Tim.

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Welsh Water are major sponsors of the North Wales Branch