

**Exchanges on Dry Stone Walling Training Techniques and Qualifications and the Development of the Profession**

**Visit to Cumbria, United Kingdom - hosted by the Dry Stone Walling Association 11-15 April 2013**

**Thursday 11 April**

Arrival at Crooklands Hotel, Cumbria. Informal introductions and evening meal.

**Friday 12 April 2013**

A warm welcome was extended to all attendees from Ray Stockall, Chairman of the Dry Stone Walling Association. A brief summary of the proposed programme for the weekend was given.

A short presentation on the DSWA Craftsman Certification Scheme was then given, detailing the different levels of certification and the criteria for each one and showing the progression through to Master Craftsman. A copy of the Craftsman Certification Scheme booklet was given to all attendees, which contains all the details for the tests. Examples of the different sections of wall for each section were also shown.



Following a coffee break a further presentation was given on the process required to become an Examiner. Discussions took place during the presentations and the following points noted.

- The Guided Learning Hours for each qualification are based on a standard formula for all UK accredited qualifications and refer to the actual tutored hours. Students would be expected to do some additional hours as practice, which may not be formally supervised.
- People seeking to become Examiners are usually well-known to the Association and therefore integrity is not a problem. Any issues that may arise would be highlighted on the Examiner assessment forms completed during the test days they attend prior to the standardisation course. If necessary a private word would be held with the individual if there were any concerns.
- The DSWA Craft Skills Group is responsible for the running of the certification scheme and is made up of Master Craftsmen, including the Chief Examiner, a representative from both a college and Lantra (the awarding body for the qualifications) and the Education Coordinator.
- The Examiners are assessing the students' ability to build walls and do not assess their environmental credentials although students would obviously be expected to show due care for the environment in which they were working. It was noted that as part of the walling exam in France there is a short oral examination on ecological issues. In Spain it is also important for wallers to understand and appreciate the ecological impact of their work.
- Colleagues from France were interested to note the number of people gaining the Level 3 qualification compared to those achieving the Level 2 certificate and what the economic effect was from the number of people gaining qualifications if the market was not able to support that level of activity. It was noted

that not all the people gaining the Level 1 or Level 2 qualifications were professional wallers. There did not appear to be a problem at present.

- Copies of the presentations would be provided to each partner organisation for information.

Discussions then took place on how the actual marking process is carried out, using a Level 1 candidate as an example. It was noted that the marks at the higher levels are weighted in terms of the value of the section of work and better reflect the students' abilities. There would be an opportunity to carry out practical marking during the day on Saturday when the actual assessment work was taking place.

After lunch, a site visit to the Andy Goldsworthy sheepfold at Tilberthwaite, near Coniston, was made.



The sheepfold was rebuilt as part of a public artwork commissioned by Cumbria County Council. By using existing or ruined sheepfolds the project created environmentally friendly responsive pieces that connect directly with the farming traditions and history of Cumbria.

The sheepfold at Tilberthwaite has a slate structure built into each side which catch the light in different ways and have the slate laid at different angles on each side.

A brief visit was also made to the DSWA training site where the practical work would be carried out on Saturday.

On Friday evening the group joined the DSWA Examiners for the briefing ahead of Saturday.

### Saturday 13 April 2013

During the day Examiners were marking the work of eight wallers; three at Level 1, two at Level 2, one building the Advanced retaining wall and two building Master Craftsman features. Marks were submitted and collated throughout the day. All marks would be available for discussion on Sunday.

Each of the visiting countries (France, Italy and Spain) had two "marking teams" to enable colleagues to experience and understand the marking process and the different levels of qualification. There would be an opportunity to compare marks on Sunday.



Lunch was taken on the field and provided an opportunity to meet Examiners from all over the UK, as well as those from America.

The walling assessment takes place over a period of approximately seven hours, at the end of which the candidates are advised if they have been successful or not and the Examiners discuss their performance on an individual basis. A copy of the mark sheet is given to candidates for their information and certificates issued shortly after the test day to those who were successful in gaining the qualifications.

On Saturday evening a presentation was given by Andrew Loudon, showing recent work he had carried out on the Isle of Skye. The project involved the construction of a round stone sanctuary near Staffin, in the north of the island, looking out towards Flodigarry Island.



A number of very technical issues had to be addressed during the build and there had been some harsh weather to contend with. However, the finished structure blended into the surroundings well, with a traditional turf roof and bespoke ironwork. The project had taken three months to build with three people working full time on the site.

#### Coordinators' Meeting – Production of the Project Film

**Present:** Cathie O'Neill (France), Donatella Murtas (Italy), Alberto Munoz Santos (Spain), Alfonso Rodriguez de Austria (Spanish translator), Alison Shaw (UK), Julia Rocha (Film Technician, Spain).

Following the visit to the Cevennes, Julia had produced a short film, available on YouTube, which all partners had seen. There were some very good shots of people working, showing hands and tools as well as portraying an enjoyable and happy atmosphere.

Julia had produced a suggested summary of what the film might contain which stimulated a lively discussion about the content and style of the film. While it was important to have some reference to the construction of walls, this should not be the main focus of the film. Instructional material already exists. The main objective should be to promote dry stone walling as a positive career and to highlight the skills needed whilst at the same time relating the craft back to its traditional roots. Some reference should also be made to the positive environmental credentials of dry stone walling. The film needs to be attractive to young people in order to encourage them to look at a career in dry stone walling as a good thing to want to do. There should be some key sentences subtitled throughout the film but it was not considered necessary to have a running commentary throughout. The whole film would not be much longer than 15 minutes.

Following earlier agreement by each partner, a fixed sum had been paid to Julia in order for him to purchase equipment. ABPS had paid the amount and it was agreed that invoices would be sent to the other partners for the agreed sum of 1000€.

A further discussion took place concerning the best way to facilitate Julia attending all visits during the project. So far he has been able to travel using one of the mobilities granted to the Andalucian partner but it was acknowledged that this was not entirely fair and the other partners could perhaps contribute to the costs in another way, eg to cover the accommodation and food costs for Julia on each visit. Further thought was needed on this matter to address the fact that he was there in a consultancy/professional role.

A copy of each partner organisation's logo was required by Cathie for the website that she was working on.

**Sunday 14 April 2013**

The marks for each candidate were discussed and Examiners had the opportunity to clarify some of their marks, if they were at variance from the majority.

Subsequent to these discussions, it was agreed that the following candidates should be awarded the relevant certificates: Initial candidates A, B and C; Advanced candidate T and Master M2. There was a short discussion concerning this last candidate as the mean mark produced from the day did not quite reach the pass mark. However, most of the Examiners agreed that they had only given a mark in the "Building and Packing" section for the lower part of the wall and would most certainly have given a higher mark had they realised it should cover both lifts.

All candidates are advised of the outcome and a mark sheet is produced for them. Successful candidates would be sent certificates and those who were not successful would be offered a re-test, at no cost to them, to be taken within the next twelve months. Copies of all matrices would be sent to Examiners attending the course for information.

#### Examiner Assessment

Following the above discussions, it was noted that all Examiners' marks would be checked against the tolerance levels given below and details sent to all attendees.

In each section of each test a variation of + or - 1 for scores of 10 and under; for scores over 10, a variation of +/- 2 is allowed compared with the mean mark of returning Examiners. Across all sections in all tests used, new participants must achieve 60% of scores, returning Examiners 70%, within these limits.

The above results would form part of the Examiner Progression Pathway now in place, a copy of which would be sent to all Examiners.

#### Comments from the Leonardo Participants

Colleagues from France, Italy and Spain had all had the opportunity to complete mark sheets during the practical day on Saturday and copies of their marks had been provided to each group in order to compare them against the DSWA Examiners' marks. A summary from each group was given.

**Italy:** The group has no experience of examiners or assessors in Italy but it was very interesting to experience the process although quite challenging with the terminology and the different marking structures used for each level. Some surprise was expressed by the type of stone used in the Master tests, which looked quite easy to work with!

**France:** It was very useful to see the process in action and was something that could be developed by ABPS. The marks were not too dissimilar from the DSWA Examiners apart from at Level 1, which is not a qualification offered in France. However, in France, different techniques have been developed for building high retaining walls, requiring the foundation stones to be inclined back into the wall. The retaining walls in France have a much greater interlinking structure and take into account the resistance of the wall from behind so care had to be taken to mark according to the English way of building, not the French one. The short timescale allowed for tests was also quite different from the French tests which take place over a number of days.

**Spain:** It was very useful for the group to experience the event. Currently there are no formal qualifications in dry stone walling in Spain although short training courses are offered. During these events, pictures are used to show students mistakes which can help them learn and improve. Some retaining walls are built using the French method of inclining foundation stones but there are also local techniques employed. It was encouraging to see all countries working together and sharing techniques and experiences.

Colleagues from Spain left at lunchtime.

Coordinators' Meeting – to discuss details of next visit to Italy in June

**Present:** Cathie O'Neill, Donatella Murtas, Alison Shaw

Donatella gave a brief outline of the visit to Arnasco in June. Arrival would be on Wednesday 5 June in time for an evening meal. The main work during the visit would be the construction of a new limestone retaining wall as well as some maintenance of existing walls. There would also be an opportunity to carry out some stone pitching/mosaic floor work. Work would be carried out in the mornings of 6,7, 8 and 9 June. The timetable would be dependent on the weather as it may be very hot during the middle of the day. There would be visits to cooperative sites on two afternoons and a seminar on the importance of dry stone walls on. On Sunday afternoon there would be a de-brief meeting. It was expected that participants would depart on Monday morning but there was the potential for additional visits on Monday or Tuesday if people were able to stay on. Time would also need to be scheduled for full coordinator meetings during the visit.

A short description of each partner organisation and the coordinator was required by Donatella.

The objectives for the SWOT analysis of the UK visit were discussed and agreed.

**Conclusion**

This was the second project visit in the Leonardo programme and a vote of thanks was extended to all DSWA members for their hard work in arranging such an interesting visit for the French, Italian and Spanish to experience the Examiner assessment process used in the UK.

**Monday 15 April 2013**

An early morning departure for colleagues from France and Italy.

**Date of Next Event**

This will take place in June 2013, hosted by the Cooperativa Olivicola di Arnasco in Italy.

The participants in the Leonardo project are:

| Country        | Partner  | Participants |
|----------------|--|--------------|
| France         | Artisans Bâisseurs en Pierres Sèches (ABPS)                          | 3            |
| Italy          | Cooperativa Olivicola di Arnasco                                     | 6            |
| Italy          | Parco Naturale delle Alpi Marittime                                  | 1            |
| Spain          | Asociación andaluza para el fomento y conservación de la piedra seca | 7            |
| United Kingdom | Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain (DSWA)                | 32           |

Alison Shaw  
DSWA Coordinator  
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