



DRY STONE WALLING ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN

Westmorland County Showground, Lane Farm,
Crooklands, Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7NH
telephone: 015395 67953

e-mail: information@dswa.org.uk website: <http://www.dswa.org.uk>



A Traditional Craft for the Future - Dry Stone Walling Conference, 3 September 2014

Delegates were welcomed to the conference by Ray Stockall, DSWA Chairman, who thanked everyone for making the effort to attend what he hoped would be an informative day. A delegate list, including email contacts, would be produced and circulated following the event, along with links to the various presentations given during the day, which would be made available from the DSWA website in due course.

Building on the Foundations - The Next Step

A presentation by Richard Love highlighted the work done since the last major conference held in 2006, "Building on the Foundations". Copies of that conference report were available. In response to questions raised, the following points were noted.

- Instructors should be aware of students who struggle with concepts such as spatial awareness and try to take account of this but not exclude them from courses.
- DSWA is good at offering beginner training courses but there is a void in terms of people then being able to progress further, particularly in terms of work related opportunities with existing professional wallers. This was something that would hopefully be addressed later in the day.

Training Voucher Scheme

Linda Clarkson outlined the project that the DSWA was running with support from The Prince's Countryside Fund, which has training vouchers to the value of £50 available for young people working or studying in agriculture or rural skills. The voucher is valid towards the cost of a DSWA beginner training course and there is a further £50 available should the recipient wish to work towards and enter for the DSWA Level 1 qualification. A lively discussion followed and the points below noted.

- Clarification would be sought as to whether people who have not done the beginner training course would be eligible for a voucher towards the Level 1 qualification.
- The scheme will run until 31 August 2015 and funding for 150 vouchers had been provided although there had been a very small uptake to date.
- Volunteers in the agricultural/rural skill sector who were studying either full-time or part-time courses were eligible for the vouchers.
- Fencing, countryside skills and gamekeeping were courses included in the "other" rural skills eligible for the training voucher scheme. A check would be made to see if landscaping could be included within the scheme as there was an increase in the demand for dry stone walling within this sector.
- Non DSWA training providers could access the scheme although the courses being offered would have to be run by DSWA Instructors.
- Participants in the training voucher scheme do not have to be DSWA members but would be encouraged to join the Association in order to access additional training opportunities through the branch programmes.
- It was slightly disappointing with the low uptake for the training vouchers to date, which could be due to the perceived image of dry stone walling/wallers. Targeting students on environmental conservation/countryside skills courses might be more appropriate rather than purely agricultural courses.

- A suggestion was made that employees with grant giving organisations, such as Natural England, should be encouraged to attend a beginner training course in order to better equip them to assess dry stone walling work that is grant aided.

Heritage Lottery Fund Project – DSWA Plans

Linda Clarkson gave a summary of the project the Association is hoping to run, subject to second round HLF funding being secured. The project would run over a two year period and would include training bursary funding for five people. Although the participants would need to live in the north west of England, the placements, etc could be UK-wide. If successful, the project could be rolled out to other parts of the country, subject to funding being secured. The presentation gave rise to discussion points noted below.

- The bursary funding would be for an 18 month period during which time the participant would work through Levels 1 – 3 in the Craftsman Certification Scheme. It was noted, that there was a 6 month work experience period within the bursary scheme during which time the qualifications could also be taken, bringing the time frame to 2 years.
- Trainees would not necessarily be completely new to dry stone walling although they should not hold any of the qualifications but ideally would have some experience.
- Opportunities need to be made available for people who currently hold the Level 2/Intermediate qualification and who wish to progress to Level 3/Advanced and beyond. It was noted that the funding currently being applied for from HLF would not have covered this as a stand-alone project but the Association was keen to include CPD opportunities where possible.
- The placements for the bursary trainees could be for varying lengths of time with different providers but could equally be for the 18 month period with one provider.
- Conference delegates were encouraged to consider taking on a placement and to contact the DSWA office before the end of October if they were willing to do so, in order that a level of commitment could be identified. Placements need not be restricted to the north west.

Built Landscape Heritage Awareness Campaign

Details of this aspect of the HLF project were highlighted by Linda Clarkson. The campaign aims to engage with communities in raising the awareness of their environment and the importance of dry stone walls within the landscape. Chris Bratt, from the DSWA Cumbria branch then provided a very informative summary of some of the projects the branch has been involved in recently and ideas it has used to engage with community groups, which included:

- The branch invested in a portable PA system that is used during demonstrations at shows and which helps engage the public for longer as they watch the practical display.
- Where possible, high profile sites are identified for community projects that will benefit the local community as well as offering a “feel good” factor for the branch members involved in the work.
- The branch is careful not to take work away from professional wallers.
- Good links with local press have been established which helps to get items in local papers and on the radio. This has resulted in the branch being asked to take part in some events because it has become more widely known.

The Association is keen to develop a “Training and Education Hub” for schools and colleges, using successful ideas from the branch network and identifying best practice. The resources would be available on line for groups to access as and when required but leaflets would also be produced and sites such as the walling panels at Crooklands, Derbyshire Eco Centre and Shibden would be promoted for educational visits.

Apprenticeships/Training Bursaries – The Way Forward?

Linda Clarkson outlined the opportunities for young people to pursue an apprenticeship in dry stone walling using the pathway in the Environmental Conservation Apprenticeship. The scheme is not difficult for colleges to administer but the challenge is in finding placements for potential students. Presentations from colleges and individuals followed.

Cathryn Adamson, Apprenticeships Course Manager, Newton Rigg & Askham Bryan Colleges: A summary of the apprenticeship was given, including the support available from the college, which starts with the recruitment process and offers guidance to the placement provider and the apprentice throughout the duration of the course. Functional skills (Maths and English) are also included within the course if trainees do not already have these subjects from school. Apprentices must be employed for at least 30 hours per week and paid at least the minimum wage for their age. The time can be split between more than one employer. Currently, there is also a grant of up to £1,500 available to employers taking on an apprentice.

Dave Birkett, Professional Waller with an Apprentice: Dave offered the conference his personal experience of taking on an apprentice, which had not been a decision he had taken lightly. However, he had found it a very rewarding experience with the opportunity to try and put something back into dry stone walling by encouraging young people to take up the craft as a profession. He also found that by having an additional pair of hands, he was actually more employable and the work load has increased. Initially, output decreases as time is spent teaching the apprentice but once they start to contribute in a positive way, output increases and some responsibility can be devolved to the trainee. He would strongly recommend wallers to consider taking on an apprentice as a way of ensuring the skills are there for future generations. The summing up of apprenticeships by his apprentice was “ Opportunities” – something that should be accessible to everyone.

A brief discussion then took place and the following points noted.

- There is some difficulty in sharing the passion of existing dry stone wallers with the younger generation who may not be aware of career opportunities in the craft, often due the lack of knowledge about land-based courses held by careers advisers.
- Involving the existing young people who are dry stone wallers could help promote the craft, which might include attending career/open evenings at local schools or talks to groups in schools and colleges.
- Students not taking A-levels or equivalent should be encouraged to consider an apprenticeship. Most students who complete apprenticeships and who want a job do actually have one.

A presentation by Nick Ferguson was then given, outlining his career progression in dry stone walling and how threats can be turned into opportunities. A lively discussion accompanied the presentation, including the following points.

- DSWA should be trying to get dry stone walling recognised as a heritage craft within the Construction Skills Certification Scheme, something David Winn from Lantra offered to try and pursue.
- Within the construction industry as a whole there is a lack of knowledge about dry stone walling, something the Association needs to try and address.

Discussion Groups

Delegates were asked to consider a number of questions in small groups and record their discussions and/or suggestions. This information would be used to help formulate the detail within the next submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Conclusion

A vote of thanks by Ray Stockall was given to everyone who had contributed to a very successful event and in particular to Linda Clarkson and Richard Love for their work in putting the programme together.

Delegates had the opportunity to visit the walling panels at Crooklands prior to departing.

Alison Shaw
10 September 2014

dswwa/tec/conf2014/notes