

## Tantalising Tasmania – Diary of a wall spotter

*By Jim Holdsworth*



**T**he heritage, the landscape and the dry stone walls of northern Tasmania had been a tempting trio of attractions to us mainlanders for many years. I had had the privilege of visiting some of the area's oldest and more recent dry stone walls with local waller Andrew Garner and his colleague James Boxhall some years ago and, when the Committee discussed the prospect of a week-end in northern Tasmania, a plan was quickly hatched.

### **Day 1**

It's Friday evening, 11 March in Launceston and an enthusiastic group gathers at Highbury, the old two storey house on the hill converted to holiday apartments where some of us are staying, for welcome drinks, kindly hosted by our vice-president Allan Willingham (that's Allan with two Ls!) whose birthday is today. Local members and others from Victoria and South Australia meet Andrew and James who outline the program for the weekend.

### **Day 2**

Saturday dawns bright and sunny and, armed with comprehensive and seductive notes on what we are about to see, we pile onto a bus and head out of town, westwards into the Meander valley. Through rolling rural landscapes, backed by wooded hills and the imposing Western Tiers, we soon pull into the small village of Meander. A prominent feature of the main street is an impressive dry stone wall (see above) built by Andrew and James along the road frontage of the school. They sourced the creamy grey-pink Triassic sandstone locally and constructed the wall over the summer of 2008-09. As Andrew said: 'It was a very hot summer. Temperatures were into the low forties and the chisels were too hot to touch without gloves'. The result, with a small plaque



## Tantalising Tasmania (cont.)

noting its construction details, is a piece of superb craftsmanship and a visual delight.

A second visual delight awaits us in the Meander hall where the local ladies have laid out a morning tea that was both a picture to behold and a gastronomic challenge of some proportions! We embrace the challenge and hoe into sandwiches, scones, cakes and other goodies, along with tea and coffee. As the overfed stragglers return to the bus Andrew notes we are already behind schedule!

At *Bonney's Farm*, established in the 1830s, we walk alongside some strong and substantial paddock walls built of Tertiary basalt; their particular feature being the hilly country and the steepness of land on which some walls have been built. In a valley we observe a dry stone culvert beside a venerable peppercorn tree, as a herd of inquisitive cattle observe us.

Nearby, in the village of Chudleigh, we sit in the warm sun in the garden of the local store and enjoy a fine lunch prepared for us by the storekeeper Margaret Wilson. Like Meander, the character of Chudleigh is greatly enhanced by its roadside dry stone walls, this time those of the large property *Bentley*. These significant walls, over 2 metres high and built of local basalt over several years up to 2008, are only some of the extensive walls on this large and beautifully maintained property.



*Learning the history of Bentley*

Andrew and James are quick to honour the memory of prolific local waller John Wilson who had built many of these walls and who was an inspiration to all who met and worked with him. John sadly passed away in 2102. His magnificent legacy lives on.

For those anxious to buy a winery, we drive to *Three Willows Vineyard* with its 'For Sale' sign at the front gate. While the tasting room is the attraction, a neat basalt wall built across the slope at the foot of the vineyard attracts the true aficionados. Again the work of Andrew and James, this wall of basalt from the top of the winery

hill was built in 2008-09 and, as an appealing touch, bears a small stone plaque bearing its builders' names.



*A 'curious wall' at Bowerbank*

Heading back towards Launceston, our last stop for the day is a curious wall, unfortunately split by the recent Bass Highway and surrounded by other roads but still sufficiently long and impressive to be an attractive feature of the landscape. Curious, because we can't understand why the largest stones are half way up the wall. Was it built in two stages; lower and upper? Were the large stones found later? As one irreverent mainlander put it: 'It's in Tasmania; logic enough!'. Travellers speeding along the highway wouldn't have time to appreciate this fine wall and its nearby semi-circular structure which is also a mystery. Was it a sheepfold built in the 1930s when this land was part of the *Bowerbank* property?

These questions, and others, entertain us as we gather in Launceston for a group dinner at King's Bridge restaurant, part of a collection of appropriately fine stone buildings near the Tamar waterfront.

### Day 3

Coffees from the kiosk in City Park and a brisk start to Sunday sees us all aboard the bus for another day out and about. A few kilometres west of Launceston is the large and historic grazing and cropping property *Springlands*. Owen the bus driver negotiates farm tracks across open country until we disembark and walk a short distance to look down on a stone sheepwash. Andrew and James had known of this structure for some time but only recently had spent some days clearing the scrub to reveal more stone walls, races and plunge pools and other parts of this extraordinary complex. We wander all over it, speculating on where the sheep were yarded, led to the wash and herded through the washing process. None of us knows much about how these places operated, but immediate comparisons are made with the similar dry stone sheepwash at *Bessiebelle* in western Victoria.

## Tantalising Tasmania (cont.)



*Sheepwash at Springlands*

A large cast iron cauldron nearby was to boil tobacco leaf which, when combined with caustic soda, arsenic and other concoctions was used to treat sheep infected with scab. In the 1860s scab was such a problem that the *Scab Act* (1870) was introduced to require farmers to treat their flocks. By 1881 Tasmania was declared free of scab.

Fascinated, and with every corner and wall thoroughly photographed, we return to the bus. There's much yet to be found out about this wonderful piece of dry stone heritage and it's a credit to Andrew and James for revealing its extent and arranging for us to visit it.

Nearby is historic *Entally House* where we meet Don Walker, former owner of *Springlands*, who tells us about *Entally* and the early days of European settlement of the area. We wander the gardens, grounds and interior of *Entally House*, and gather in the tea room for morning tea of scones and jam and cream.

A drive out to the north-east of Launceston brings us to *Hollybank*, once cleared farmland but now a public reserve managed by Forestry Tasmania and set in mature eucalypt woodland but dominated by European and American conifers and broadleaf trees.

Waiting for us, with a picnic lunch are Liza Garner and their children and James's partner Belinda. Again, our tour is happily interrupted by lashings of tasty food and great hospitality. In the reserve are several dry stone walls, some in disrepair but showing a distinctive style where the lower half is built as a double wall of smaller stones capped by a single layer of massive stones or boulders which bind the wall together.

Hang on! Is this the same type of wall as the one near the Bass Highway that had us all so puzzled yesterday? We think so. Andrew and James tell us it is a Scottish wall, the owners of *Hollybank*, the Orr family, in the 1880s having employed this style of wall construction.

There's an eeriness to the tall pines, the lichen, the overgrown walls and the stillness broken only by kids playing cricket on the old cricket ground. Great photo opportunities for fans of dry stone walls.

Out of the forest we drive further north to the hilltop vineyards of *Sinapius Winery*, a boutique winery in the famed Pipers Brook region. Along the roadside in front of the winery and beside the driveway to the winery are two long dry stone walls, the latter a retaining wall topped by the rows of vines. The weight of the high ground is causing bulges in the wall. How long will it resist this lateral pressure? Was it built to withstand these pressures? Such weighty questions were set aside as the winemaker was quizzed on the estate's offerings, tasted and enjoyed in the warm afternoon sun.

One can't feast on dry stone walls, food (and a glass of wine) only and, on the way back into Launceston, we detour to look at the Batman Bridge, spanning the Tamar river. Andrew explains that the tall A-shaped pylon whose cables support the single span is located on the western bank, where more solid foundations were to be found, unlike the poor bearing capacity of sandy soils on the eastern side. Like dry stone walls, here is a practical example of geology driving the solution to a local need.

Thanking our driver, the proposal is to gather back at Highbury for pizzas and a wrap-up of the weekend. As Sunday's sunset fades over the roofs of Launceston the conversations out on the deck and inside around the pizza boxes are of a fabulous weekend thanks to the excellent itineraries, wonderful food and superb hospitality of Andrew, James and their families. Whether a local or a visitor to the area, we all learnt much about the rich heritage and the important part that dry stone walls, old and new, play in making this part of Australia so special.



# President's Message



**G**reetings!

This issue of *The Flag Stone* comes at a time that coincides with our biennial election of Committee members and office bearers for the next two years. It is thus a good time to reflect on the recent past and to look ahead.

All the signs are that the Association is entering a new phase, built on the good work of the outgoing Committee and with exciting activities and events in the foreseeable future.

In the last year we have had field trips and tours in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, and forward planning is underway for a weekend in New South Wales in early 2017. As well as increasing memberships in States beyond our home state, this demonstrates our evolution from a Victoria focused Association to the national one that we aspire to be.

Other signs of our growth are the recently upgraded website and the online activity it generates. We're getting enquiries and interest from far afield, both Australia and overseas. While increased traffic on our website is welcomed, it does require response which means an added workload for the committee members. As well as information about upcoming field trips and other events, the website includes details of future Committee meetings and an overview of agenda items for each meeting.

Committee meetings are open to any member and if you are interested but unable to attend we can incorporate a phone hook-up during the meeting. Most Committee meetings are held in Melbourne but this could change with a new committee after the Annual General Meeting.

This year's **Annual General Meeting**, on **Saturday 18 June**, will be combined with a lunch, rather than in the evening. Our speaker at the lunch will be our Secretary, **Andrew Miller**, who will describe some of the technical aspects of dry stone wall repair and maintenance. After lunch, we will be able to see local waller **Alistair Tune** putting these skills into practice on a property outside Camperdown. The AGM will include election of office bearers for the next two years. I encourage you to put 18 June in your calendar and join us, from 11.00am at the Commercial Hotel in Camperdown, and then for an outing into the nearby countryside. A venue for an informal gathering later in the day will be announced later, as will details of the AGM and election.

Every voluntary organisation benefits from new people and fresh ideas, so I would like you to consider nominating for a position on the 2016-18 Committee of the Association. Our Secretary will be advising you of the nomination process soon, and details will be published on our website. Even if all current committee members re-nominate, there is room for new faces.

If you would like to discuss taking an active role in the Committee I would be pleased to have a chat. I would particularly like to see more committee members from beyond Victoria as befits a truly national organisation.

In terms of my position as President, I have held that role since our first election in 2006 and while I have been pleased to serve the Association as President I have no delusions that I own the position. There are many people who could do my job; differently and probably better. I welcome a nomination from any member for the role of President at the upcoming election and, indeed, for any position on the Committee.

Regards

Jim

*The Association's vision is that dry stone walls and dry stone structures are widely accepted for their unique place in the history, culture and economy of the nation and for the legacy they represent.*

*Our goals are:*

- *That governments and the wider community recognise the significance of dry-stone structures built by indigenous peoples, European explorers, early settlers and modern craftspeople as valued artefacts of our national identity.*
- *That this acceptance is manifested by appropriate statutory protection and landowner and community respect and celebration.*
- *That the craft of dry-stone walling grows as a modern reinforcement of the contribution that dry stone walls and structures have made to the culture of Australia.*

# Brewarrina fish traps

By Stuart Read; DSWAA committee member

Not all dry stone walls are entirely terrestrial. Sea walls around Sydney harbour (or any port or harbour, in rock-bearing areas) are an obvious example. So are weirs, dams, fish traps and aquaculture-related structures such as at *Budj-Bim* in South-Western Victoria, or fish traps in the Barwon River at Brewarrina, north-western New South Wales.

Known as Baiame's *Ngunnhu* (pronounced 'noon-oo'), the Brewarrina fish traps are complicated structures built in weirs and pens of schist on a rock bar in the river. They show considerable skill and understanding of hydrology, ecology and the inter-relatedness of a way of life for district Aboriginal people. Sadly that traditional way of life was interrupted in 1788, but the site remains a vital link with a great ancestral creation being, Baiame and hundreds of generations of his descendents in the Brewarrina Aboriginal community, from the Ngemba and Morowari tribes.

Baiame travelled widely, with his wives and family, frequently stopping to help people or allocate land to a particular tribe. One notable 'stop' was the *Ngunnhu* in a time of drought. The Ngemba were facing famine as Gurrungga (a deep water hole upstream) had completely dried up. Seeing their plight, Baiame made them a gift – an intricate series of fish traps in the dry river bed. These he created by casting his great net over the river. Using the pattern of his net, his two sons Booma-ooma-nowi and Ghina-inda-mui built the traps from stones. They are a series of dry-stone weirs and ponds arranged as a net across the river, over a 400 m long rock bar between banks. The river here is fast and shallow, falling 3.35 m over four low rapids. Below this it deepens.



*Brewarrina fish traps - so many cormorants and herons could not be wrong*

Baiame then showed the old Ngemba men how to call rain through dance and song. Days of rain followed, filling the river channel and flooding the traps, filling them with fish. The men rushed to block the entry to the traps, herding

fish through the pens. Baiame instructed the Ngemba how to use and maintain the *Ngunnhu*, and to share them with other cultural groups in the area. Baiame left two large footprints at the *Ngunnhu*, one opposite the rock called Muja, the other some 350m downstream on the southern bank.

Aboriginal descendants are likely to have adjusted and extended the fish traps, responding to floods and variations in river conditions. That said, in 1848 the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Wellington, W.C. Mayne noted 'no slight degree of ingenuity and skill must have been exercised in their construction, as I was informed by men who have passed several years in the vicinity, that not even the heaviest floods displace the stones forming these enclosures'.

The first written description of the traps in use was by William Richard Randell in 1861: 'The blacks assemble here in great numbers during the time of low water; the neighbouring tribes suspending hostilities for the time being; and ascending the river for some considerable distance, they come down in it, making a peculiar noise, and driving multitudes of fish before them into the cells – where they are stupefied by the meshes and easily speared by the blacks stationed there for that purpose.'

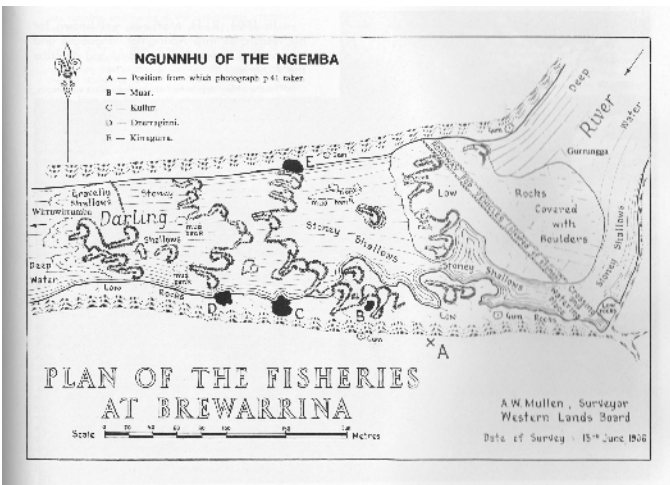
Surveyor R.H. Matthews in 1901 made a detailed description of the traps and their use. He noted (paraphrasing) that fish came upstream in immense numbers in early spring months or any time there was a 'fresh' (likely a 'freshet' or small rise in level of) in the river. The traps had open ends towards the direction from which the fish approached. As soon as enough had entered the labyrinth, narrow openings were closed up by large stones laid alongside for the purpose. Fishers entered the pens, splashing water with hands and feet to frighten the fish into ever-smaller enclosures where they were more easily caught. Large fish were speared early by young men before they started eating smaller fish. Outlier 'wings' of traps running bank-to-bank intercepted fish, entering large enclosures, from which they were chased into smaller and smaller pens (as for sheep and cattle). Some were speared or clubbed as chance allowed, but on arrival at the smallest ponds all were caught and killed. The smallest were caught by hand, fishermen passing their hand through the gills and inserting a cord, stringing as many fish as they could. Fish were a variety: most were Murray cod, but also black bream (the favourite) and yellow bellies.

Hamilton noted the stones ranged from 20 pounds (9 kg) to a hundredweight (50 kg), others larger. Walls 2-3 feet high (60-90 cm) were tapered from a wide base of two rows of rocks each ~18 inches (45 cm) with small rock



## fish traps (Cont.)

infill to a narrow (~50 cm) single-coursed top, all without mortar. Large basal stones were rolled into place, smaller ones carried. Some through-stones were used in all wall levels. Ponds varied in size and shape, all presenting curved walls against the direction of water flow.



*A W Mullen's drawing of the fish traps (1906)*

Traps built at different levels on the river bed allowed different parts to be used when water was high or low. A waterway was left, where traps were difficult to build, for fish to travel up-river to catching ponds of other families.

Some of the earliest photographs (c.1906, the Tyrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum) show the traps after they had largely fallen into disuse and been altered by Europeans. In the mid-1860s a crossing was built by settlers at the upstream end, filling holes with trap-stones, moving others to ford the river with crossing stock and drays. Stones were moved to enable river craft navigation and in the 1920s dray loads removed for building foundations in the town. Constructing the 1.2 m high Brewarrina weir in the mid-1960s further disturbed the upstream end of the *Ngunnhu*. This weir blocked fish movement upstream except during floods. It also changed the flow pattern through the traps. Prevention of fish migration by dams and weirs has caused major decline in native fish populations in the Murray-Darling system.

In 2000 Baiame's *Ngunnhu* was listed on the NSW State Heritage Register, being the whole length of the 'bend' in the Barwon above the weir, including land on both the southern and northern sides of the river. The area listed has since almost doubled north of the 'bend' with small additional areas to the south-east. In 2005 Baiame's *Ngunnhu* were listed on the National Heritage List as an outstanding place to all Australians. A conservation management plan has policies and actions to improve their condition and presentation.

Land around the *Ngunnhu* is complex in ownership and management. Brewarrina Shire Council manage Crown land south of the river 'bend' where the traps are as a park called *Weir Park*.

Aboriginal people believe that all elements of landscape were created by great ancestral beings. The *Ngunnhu* is linked to other regional features through Baiame's west to east journey, impressions of his giant feet at Cobar, Byrock, Coronga Peak, Gunderbooka and Narran Lake. Baiame's travels are only one of many creation stories set in the landscape of the Brewarrina district. Long-distance linkages mean that many features such as these fish traps are important to Aboriginal people from distant places as well as local communities. The rivers were both important travel and trade routes, with tribes and clans having clearly-defined territory along and between them.

Near the fish traps the riverbanks and area were occupied by thousands of people during important inter-tribal gatherings. They contain an extremely rich collection of axe-grinding grooves, burial grounds, open campsites, knapping sites, scarred trees, ceremonial sites, middens and stone quarries. Before European disturbance, both banks were lined with almost-continuous middens of shells and other objects over a metre deep.



### *Fish traps along the Barwon*

Other smaller fish traps are arrayed along the Darling-Barwon River, such as at Collewary, 40 km above Brewarrina and another near Newfoundland Station. Smaller fish traps were built across tributary streams and gullies when they flooded to impound fish as waters receded.

The future management of the fish traps offers possible reversal of past damage to their cultural and natural heritage values. It also offers badly needed local training and employment opportunities along with financial benefits from tourism and education. Heritage listing and promotion can help cultural renewal and cohesion in the Aboriginal and wider community.

Source: Sam Rando, 6/2007, *Looking after Baiame's Nggunhu: Conservation Management Plan for the Brewarrina Fishtraps.*

An earlier article on the Brewarrina fish traps appeared in *The Flag Stone* #23.



# *Budj Bim* recognised for significance

*By Raelene Marshall, DSWAA committee, in collaboration with Gunditjmara elder Denis Rose*



*Lake Condah dry stone fish traps, with walls in the distance*

The Victorian Government recently allocated \$8 million to fund the first two stages of a three-stage plan to develop the *Budj Bim* indigenous site in south-west Victoria.

Sacred to the Gunditjmara, the Mount Eccles *Budj Bim* National Heritage Landscape at Lake Condah is home to the remains of potentially one of Australia's largest indigenous aquaculture and permanent stone house systems. Formed on the lava flow from *Budj Bim*, also known as Mount Eccles, the landscape reflects the intrinsic layering and heritage values that range from ancient Gunditjmara cultural practice to their early European contact and post-contact experiences.

The area shows evidence of a large, settled Aboriginal community systematically using the abundant stone in the landscape to build houses and dry stone fish traps for farming and smoking eels for food and trade. The elaborate system of canals, more than three kilometres long, were designed as a series of elaborate trapping facilities and ponds to enhance fish growing conditions and habitat expansion. Dating back some 6600 years, the eel traps represent one of the world's first engineering projects.

Recognising the significance of this aquaculture system the *Budj Bim* National Heritage Landscape was one of the first places included on the Australian Government's National Heritage List in 2004. This latest investment will allow

enhancement of the Lake Condah eel traps and stone huts as an international tourist site, which might ultimately contribute to UNESCO World Heritage listing.



*Hand woven native grasses eel trap basket*



# What to do with an old wall

By John Cox\*

Those of us hooked on dry stone walls notice every single wall as we drive around the country. How many times have we stopped and got out to inspect the wall? As Geoff Duggan says, once you have taken one of his courses you become a stone wall snob so the chances are that you will see the vertical joints, the big gaps, a lot of front pinning and 'really that stone should have gone into the wall not along it if they expect it to last'.

We check to see whether they have cheated with mortar? If so, well it's not really a dry stone wall, is it! OK, it's in a public place so the cap stones need to be set in so no-one gets hurt or tries to pinch the stone.

We also look at a wall and think 'that's been there a long time'. It may not be a wall but just a long pile of stones which in places looks a bit like a wall. We may find an old Chinese gold working or a wall that seems to go nowhere, but it's still a wall. Sometimes it's just the foundation outline so we speculate what it was for and why it should be there. Who built it? What were they like these stone wall builders? Where did they come from?

There are some great stories of walls in Victoria gathered by Raelene Marshall, Jim Holdsworth and others in the *Stone Upon a Stone* exhibition and other works such as *If These Walls Could Talk* which documents walls in the Corangamite district. Bruce Munday has documented South Australian walls in *Those Dry Stone Walls*.

So what should we do if we find an old wall on our farm, in the garden or in a forest? Are we able to protect it? Firstly, we need to ascertain its historical value; if it has been documented there may be limitations on what can be done with it. Secondly, we need to establish within heritage guidelines what we want to do with it.



*This wall was undermined by rabbits and overwhelmed by cattle. There was enough of the old wall remaining to establish the style and dimensions.*

There are three main courses of action governed by the Burra Charter, in Australia the primary guide to the managing places of cultural significance: 1) *preserve* the wall against further deterioration; 2) *restore* it to what we know it looked like, using only stone from the old wall; or 3) *reconstruct* it using original and new stone but copying the original wall using historical photos or drawings.

The question then becomes what is the wall's future value to society? Is it worth more as a pile of stones, as a partly restored wall, or as a fully reconstructed dry stone wall in its full glory?

A dry stone wall should always be restored as it was originally built, which is easier if there is a record of the original structure. An imposed new style defeats the purpose of heritage management and is not reconstruction but the building of a new wall.

Collapse is generally the failure of the foundations, tree root interference, capstone loss, animal interference, machine damage, the removal of stone for other purposes or just poor workmanship. All these will have a bearing on the management criteria for the resulting work.

Dry stone walls require constant maintenance – restoring an old wall is just belated maintenance with feeling. Always keep in mind the Robert Frost *Mending Wall* which sums up the need for constant maintenance – 'Good fences make good neighbours'.

## Assessing heritage walls

Old walls that stood the test of time have a certain strength and beauty, even if they are out of shape or no longer follow a straight line. But not all walls survive or are lovingly maintained to please the neighbours. Some have outlived their usefulness – the old gold mine closed 90 years ago so why bother maintaining the walls. Only now that we see the need to preserve and remember our heritage is there a desire to fix them up and tell a story.

The story of a stone wall needs an accurate record of what remains and what is known of its history, not just for the immediate restoration process but for the future.

Comparing walls requires consistent assessment guidelines, along with location, the relevant management authority, and a general overview and history of the site.

*John Cox is an experienced and enthusiastic waller who has reported on the Adelong gold field in The Flag Stone #20 & #25, and his work in restoring walls has enhanced the interpretive value of the site. Jim Holdsworth described the site and its restoration in The Flag Stone #33. Here, John shares his thoughts on the challenges facing a waller and how to deal with them.*



## What to do ... (Cont.)

A wall will be in varying stages of deterioration and needs to be separated into workable sections, short enough to be photographed or drawn in detail, but long enough to allow for the building of individual sections that are distinct from their neighbours should some sections need to be managed in a different manner.

Walls will be freestanding or retaining, the style may be coursed, random or maybe Galloway Dyke and that style will be dictated by the stone of the region, and perhaps the origin of the builder. Categorising the wall as 'stock proof' or 'not stock proof' aids visualising the condition of the wall being assessed.

Special features such as style, gateways, smoots and cripple holes need to be recorded and wherever possible recreated when rehabilitating a wall. The remains of past remedial work such as closed or opened gateways should be recorded, to be dealt with in the future.

Classify the wall as to its quality, dressed or undressed stone, and geological origin. Generally walls will be from locally gathered field or quarry stone, however imported stone will need to be identified.

Assess each working section of the wall for its state of repair, the foundation, middle and top integrity. Any movement, slump or collapse will aid in determining the cause of degradation and the repair required. This will dictate whether the wall is *preserved* as is, *restored* with what is available or *reconstructed* bringing in new stone.

The many causes of wall damage include undermining by rabbits, dislodging cap or cope stones by livestock, vandalism, tree roots and falling limbs, subsidence or slip on waterlogged or sloping ground. A generally intact wall with partially collapsed sections without stone close at hand indicates that stone was removed.

Soft or crumbling stone will eventually collapse, for example where poor quality sandstone or slate/shale is used. Some field granites can also be subject to erosion, especially if the wall retains significant moisture.

The quality of a wall will often depend on its original purpose. For instance where quick and ready walls were needed around gold mine workings, quality suffered for expediency. Generally, less care was taken with hearting or foundations. Where the wall was part of a building or shored up machinery, more care was taken.

Note any special features found during the assessment and identify changes that can improve the quality of the build. As a general rule, where a wall is poorly constructed the rebuild needs to be better.

Each section or groups of sections can now be categorised as to the work needed for restoration and all options explored for rehabilitation. The final management

option chosen will depend on available skills, equipment, funds and time but should always aim for longevity.

Just remember 'Good fences make good neighbours'.

### Decision time

If we rebuild an old dry wall and someone comments that 'they certainly knew how to build walls back then', we have succeeded in authentic restoration. If they cannot pick the join, great. Every waller will build a wall as he/she sees it, no wall will ever be the same as the original. But if the homework is done and the rock is the same, the new work should be hard to pick.

Once the wall assessment is finalised, all those involved including the waller should decide whether to *preserve*, *restore* or *reconstruct* or a combination of all three.



*The wall (previous page) was stripped out and rebuilt with the original stone*



*Much of the original large filler stone was used to complete the face of the wall*

## What to do ... (Cont.)

Actions common to all three options are centred on the need to ensure no further degradation takes place and the alleviation of the causes of failure of the wall. Regardless of the preferred action, stabilisation of the site is paramount, particularly drainage, foundation stability, invasive plant retention/removal and restriction of access.

Redirect surface or ground water from undermining the structure, noting that runoff drains will need constant maintenance. Avoid future erosion of an otherwise sound wall by ensuring there is no further degradation of the foundations. On sloping ground it may be wise to build a lower retaining wall to prevent slippage.

On many derelict sites invasion by woody plants and trees is common. Removing these for the wall to remain as is requires the utmost care. Trees planted close to a wall at conception become part of the wall and despite the damage a decision to leave the tree may well be the right course of action.

Public or animal access on or around derelict walls always contributes to degradation, so it may be necessary to isolate it with protective fencing.

So, to building the wall. The art of dry stone walling and the principles have not changed since the first walls were built. A skilled waller will rebuild a heritage wall in much the same style and manner as it was first built using the available stone and simple tools that have barely changed over the centuries. Generally, the wall will remain a genuine dry stone wall.

The skill of the new builder is to interpret what was done before and to replicate the earlier builder's style. With extra care in foundation laying, packing the centre and the use of throughs to stabilise the wall it should look just like the original. The strength of a wall is what is inside it and not necessarily what it looks like from the outside.

So if we want to leave our heritage intact for the generations to come, remember – 'Good fences make good neighbours'.

## Some walls are unique

Andrew Miller (DSWAA Secretary) recently happened upon an old copy of *Domus*, an architecture and design publication, amongst some secondhand art books shipping to a youth arts group in Ainaro, Timor-Leste. 'Domus is always a good read and much more so on this occasion! Flicking through the pages my eyes were quickly drawn to an image of a dry stone wall which incorporated some rusting painted cans.

'My first thought was the wall was a contemporary and artistic use of dry stone construction. On reading the accompanying story it was clear that the wall had a purely functional form.

'The story surrounding the reason for the wall is compelling. The wall is in an internally displaced persons camp in Iraq where the dwellings have been built from adapted Iraqi Army stables. Metal cans filled with earth have been used, along with stones, to build a dry stone dividing wall. Clearly it is a totally functional wall in this Iraqi environment that has experienced devastating conflict, but at the same time there is an unmistakable artistic element – at least for those of us with the luxury of looking from a safe distance.'





# Preserving, repairing and reconstructing

By Bruce Munday

The historic dry stone walls along Pine Hut Road near Eden Valley are among the most noteworthy in South Australia. Built between 1860 and 1880 many kilometres of these walls are still in excellent condition thanks to their skilled builders and diligent owners. Nonetheless bushfires in 2013 did quite a bit of damage when trees fell across them.

Recently a group of Aboriginal rangers from Ngarrindjeri Ruwe Contracting and Ngopamuldi Aboriginal Corporation spent a week with Jon Moore learning the basic skills of dry stone wall restoration as part of an Aboriginal Learning on Country (ALOC) employment and training program. As they learned they applied these skills to some of the damaged sections of the Pine Hut walls.



The training, facilitated by the DSWAA, involved many of the principles discussed in John Cox's article (pp 8-9 in this edition) – given the heritage value of the walls the repairs had to be consistent with the style of the original wall, using only

original stone. The owner of these walls, Roger Lillecrapp was delighted with the result. The following week Jon trained the team in mortared wall building.

The ALOC program operates throughout the SA Murray-Darling Basin region, doing a range of conservation and land management activities, and is supported by the SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme and the NRM levy.



The SA autumn walling workshop was at *Kadlunga Station*, Mintaro, on the edge of the Clare Valley. This historic property, developed in the 1850s to grow hay for horses working in the Burra copper mines, later passed to the former SA Chief Justice, Sir Samuel Way. There are several kilometres of dry stone walls across its 2400 ha including the still-working sheep yards.



Mintaro is famous for its slate quarries and *Kadlunga* has a slate wall along the main road frontage. The wall that we worked on was sandstone. This is a very pretty, tight wall but damaged by falling tree limbs and several sections had 'acquired' a disconcerting lean. Pulling down the damaged section was a learning exercise in

itself, showing that the attractive face stones concealed a huge pile of rubble thrown in (photo above). The question is then, as John Cox points out (p 7), do we rebuild as the original wall looked or according to best practice: length into the wall with tight hearting. We went with the latter, keeping coping stones undressed as in the original.

As usual, overnights stayed in the shearers quarters, Alan retreating occasionally to the car for the footy scores until it became too depressing.



# A Stone Upon a Stone Exhibition (Glenelg Shire)

By Raelene Marshall, DSWAA committee

## Dry stone walls shaping Australia's cultural landscape

This article follows companion pieces in issues 34 and 35 of *The Flag Stone* featuring the Corangamite and Melton Shire Panels.

In May 1999 and in October 2000 the Australian Government supported a Touring Exhibition designed to capture, promote and affect an awareness of the history and cultural significance of some of Australia's dry stone walls. Produced and curated by Raelene Marshall, the research and development involved twelve Local Government areas in Victoria and New South Wales. Local farming communities and other interested parties generously came together to produce the information, histories and images of their significant dry stone walls and structures.

*The Flag Stone* will continue to feature these local areas in subsequent issues. A view of the Exhibition can be found at <http://www.astoneuponastone.com/exhib.html>

### Glenelg Shire Panel



The Greater South West of Victoria appears to be a rather unique region, as evidence suggests that over time, two distinct cultures were adapting to the challenge of this difficult landscape, by using similar materials to assist their survival.

The basalt lava flows that resulted from the eruption of Mt Eccles about 27,000 years ago, significantly altered the local landscape, and were a major factor in influencing both Koori and European use of dry stone constructions in the region.

The eruption led to the formation of Lake Condah, and over time, the increased abundance of flora and fauna gradually resulted in the Gunditjmarra (the local Koori population) adopting a less nomadic lifestyle. Prior to European settlement this modified way of life led the Gunditjmarra to make practical use of the local stone. They created fish traps and constructed low, circular dry stone walls. The latter formed the base for shelters that were re-built annually from branches, leaves and grass.

In the mid 1800s, early Anglo Saxon pastoralists acknowledged the rugged nature of the region by naming it the

"Stones", and also used the materials at hand to establish their presence. Early European settlers like the Henty family (1834), relied heavily on farming for survival, and as a result, used local stones for the construction of sheep washes, cattle yards, and more typically boundary and dividing walls.

One early settler, Mark Cross, was a labourer on a pastoral property in Ettrick owned by W.M. Learmonth. Cross had his own 90 acre allotment near Heywood, and by 1875, had built 30 chains of dry stone wall on it. He gained freehold ownership of this property in 1882. During the 1880s, he kept a diary which records his continued construction of dry stone walls to meet Lands Department requirements.

### Timeline

1855 District of Portland created.

1863 Heywood proclaimed a Shire.

Borough of Portland proclaimed.

1867 – 69 Lake Condah Aboriginal Mission established near Heywood, and dry stone walls built around it.

1885 The Lake Condah Mission property extended. A team of Aboriginal people from the Mission employed to build the long *Serpentine Wall* across five selection allotments in the Parish of Condah.

1879 – 93 Condah Swamp drained.

1949 Township of Portland proclaimed and deep-sea port established.

1963 The Port of Portland officially opened after extensive development of the harbour.

1994 The Shire of Heywood and the City of Portland amalgamated with the Shire of Glenelg. Commissioners were appointed to establish the current Glenelg Shire Council.

### Key Structures

In the Lake Condah area, the Koori population used dry stone techniques to construct fish traps and low foundation walls for semi-permanent shelters.

A local farming property in the Heywood district still has an excellent example of dry stone wall cattle-yards, which originally had a holding capacity for about 100 head of cattle

In the Bessiebelle district, a fine example of a wool wash built using dry stone techniques still exists. The main wash is approximately 100 feet long.

*Blacks Wall* is an extensive dry stone wall on a local farming property in the Heywood district. Much of the wall is still in good condition, and extends for over 4 kilometres in a straight line. It has an average height of 1.5 metres, though considerably higher when it crosses deep gullies.



# Membership matters

By Sue Jones, DSWAA Membership Secretary

I have now looked after the DSWAA membership list for over three years, following the excellent work of Sandra Fitzgerald and Jim Holdsworth's brief caretaker role in February 2013, so this seems a good time to share a few reflections.

## New Members

We have welcomed 11 new members since the January *The Flag Stone*: Ellie Lee from Queensland; Clive Abben, Tony Ayers and Sera-Jane Peters from Victoria. South Australians Alan Burns, Nick Carter, Darryn Filsell Bray, Raelke Grimmer, Alison Hastings, Jocelyn Meline and Adam Troyn are new members who completed a two-day walling workshop at Mintaro in April.

The President and Committee join me in welcoming these new members to the DSWAA.

## Membership Growth 2013-2016

During this time the membership, including individual, family and professional members, has increased nearly fourfold.

## Comparison of DSWAA membership figures for February 2013 & 2016

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY	Feb 2013	Feb 2016
1. Individual	47	240
2. Family	24	35
3. Corporate or Not-for-Profit	3	1
4. Professional, including wallers	4	9
<b>Total for all categories:</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>285</b>

It is great to see interest in dry stone walls and membership of the Association increasing in South Australia (now with 104 members) and in Tasmania (with 24), largely due to the excellent walling workshops in those states. Victoria and New South Wales figures total 86 and 56 members respectively and 2 members have recently joined from Queensland.

## What do we know about our members?

These brief figures reveal little about the blend of occupations, lifestyles and interests in the DSWAA. At recent field trips and other events I have enjoyed meeting members from country and metropolitan areas in four states, many of them from farming communities and many also who are wall owners. When Andrew Miller and I reported on the field trip to the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges and Clare Valley held in October last year I wrote: 'What a wealth of farming, geology, archaeology, landscaping and conservation interests walling attracts.'

Our wider membership includes education and community education and arts, anthropology, town planning and heritage consultancy, and in particular, both professional and do-it-yourself/owner wall builders.

My review of the dry stone wall interests nominated by 40 of the people who joined over the last three years revealed:

- 22 new members identified an interest in building dry stone walls – either DIY for new walls or maintenance (17), walling as a livelihood or potential livelihood (8) or unknown (2).
- 12 identified the history/heritage of early settler stone buildings (8) or of historic buildings in general (4).
- 7 stated that their interest was in their own farm walls or walls in a rural context. This seems low as the postal addresses indicate that most new members come from country regions.
- Gardens or garden history was identified by 4 members.
- Indigenous stonework was identified as an interest by 2 members.
- A further two identified architecture.
- Education/public education about dry stone walls, landscaping, conservation and engineering were among the interests identified by one new member in each instance.

## Membership processes

There is a summary of our categories of members, fee/payment and contact details on the back of *The Flag Stone* and on our webpage: [dswaa.org.au](http://dswaa.org.au)

New members can now [join the DSWAA](#) on-line through our website, or by contacting me by email or post. DSWAA field trips and events are also a useful time to join. New members will be due to renew their subscription on May 31 after their first full year of membership and we will send renewal notices. (June is a very good time to join!)

Due to the costs of printing and postage we will not mail paper notices or *The Flag Stone* to non-financial DSWAA members who do not have email addresses.

## Get involved in your Association

DSWAA Committee members welcome your feedback and would like to hear your comments and suggestions for future activities. You can see our contact details on the back page.

# Clever people with stone

By Andrew Miller (DSWAA Secretary) and Bruce Munday

**D**ry stone waller **David Long** has been a regular contributor to the Lorne Sculpture Biennale and although there was no entry from David at this year's Biennale, his high talent in dry stone construction remains in Lorne, thanks to Graeme Wilkie, owner of the amazing gallery spaces at *Qdos Arts*.

Graeme recognised David's talents some time ago when he commissioned a dry stone wall to complement the natural amphitheatre/performance precinct at *Qdos*. More recently in 2015, Graeme again commissioned David to re-install a sculpture from the 2014 Lorne Biennale in the *Qdos* sculpture garden. The sculpture, titled *Silent Witness* is a reincarnation of his 2014 Biennale entry and carries a strong environmental narrative. David's use of dry stone as a sculptural medium has significantly enhanced awareness of the craft.



The contemporary use of dry stone continues to grow and the next edition of *The Flag Stone* will feature some recent work by renowned dry stone waller, Alistair Tune, from Camperdown.

So, when in Lorne, don't miss David's sculpture at *Qdos Arts* and the outstanding collection of other major sculptures by Australian and international artists.

**T**he third [Adelaide Hills International Sculpture Symposium](#) has just finished with ten international sculptors doing wonderful things with stone. Held at the historic Hans Heysen property near Hahndorf, a highlight has been how the public flocked to watch rock being shaped into art. There are now 26 pieces making up the Adelaide Hills Sculpture Trail.

The only Australian sculptor this year was Bosnian-born **Marijan Bekic**. In 2009 he completed an amazing 8 metre high sculpture *Australian Farmer* at Wudinna on Eyre Peninsula for which he is rightly famous.

For the Symposium Marijan again used the beautiful Wudinna red granite, the result to be installed at Nairne in the Adelaide Hills.



**S**tone walls might be the oldest building structures known to man, but there is still plenty of room for creativity. **Chuck Eblacker** is a waller from upstate New York: 'Walling is the art of placing stone in such a way that gravity and friction, not mortar, hold the work together—often for centuries.'

When next in NY look him up, but meanwhile see how this modern wonder turned out and feast your eyes on <http://www.eblackerstone.com/Portfolio/special.php>





# Dealing with records

By Geoff Thomas, DSWAA committee

**A**rchives are those records we select for permanent preservation that essentially tell the story of DSWAA.

In general, records are selected as archives because of their continuing value to DSWAA, being the main creator of the records, as well as to society as a whole. Archives provide the means by which the DSWAA can provide for continuity and accountability for its actions, support better planning and decision making, facilitate access to the expertise and knowledge about dry stone walling and provide, over time, a historical perspective of the DSWAA and its achievements.

These records can be in any format but increasingly archives will be digital as we move away from with mainly paper records.

The DSWAA Archive Project commenced late in 2015 and is still in the planning stage. An Archive Working Party has developed an Archive Policy and Accessions Procedure and will establish an electronic system that will faithfully hold the records and permit easy discovery, access and use by the Committee and general membership.

The DSWAA archive will also be a useful library of reference material and possibly provide a museum component for physical artefacts.

Recently Bruce Smith, Archive Consultant at the Public Record Office of Victoria, held an excellent workshop covering the basics of setting up small archive collections.

Significant issues included:

- Development of an archives policy; clarifying DSWAA's archival purpose; why archive is needed.
- Understanding archives vs libraries vs museums - DSWAA probably encompasses all three.
- Is it of archival value or just rubbish.
- Establishing a deed for acquisitions.
- Cataloguing the archive collection.
- Creating forms for accessions and acknowledging origins.
- Adopting a software package.
- Attending to copyright and permissions.
- Access - who can use the archives? If open access, pics of walls may breach privacy of land owners.
- Digitising records, photographs, certificates, etc.
- Creating then coping with.

Readers of The Flag Stone will be kept up to date with developments and the DSWAA website will eventually be the point of access to the archive.

# Who's Who in DSWAA

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## Membership

### Annual membership fee

Corporate \$80

Professional \$50

Single \$30 (\$80 for 3 years)

Family \$50 (\$130 for 3 years)

### Payment

**Cheque:** DSWAA Inc. and posted to DSWAA Membership, 33A Rothwell Road Little River VIC 3211; **or**

**Bank Deposit** at any branch of the ANZ Bank **or EFT:** BSB 013 373, Ac. no. 4997 47356

**\*Clearly indicate membership identity of payer\***

### New members

Please complete the online membership form on our website: [dswaa.org.au](http://dswaa.org.au)

Alternatively email or post name, address, phone number/s, and area of interest (eg waller, farmer, heritage, etc) to the membership secretary (above).

### Renewals

Annual fees are due on May 31 after the first full year of membership. We will send renewal notices prior to this.

## Photographs

Pages 1-6 J Holdsworth

Page 7 R Marshall

Pages 8, 9 J Cox

Page 11 (col 1) P McNamara

Pages 11 (col 2) M Filsell Bray; B Munday

Page 12 R Marshall

Page 14 (col 1) A Miller

Page 14 (col 2) B Windle; C Eblacker