·DORNOCH·
HERITAGE·SOCIETY

'Dry Stane Walling'
talk by
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What we'll be doing tonight is just putting a few slides through, pictures, a lot of which you'll recognize because there are quite a few local ones here. A lot won't be familiar because they're in America or various parts of Europe or Canada. And if anything you want to talk about and a slide comes up, just ask a question or if it's really interesting, just say so and we'll stop and discuss it.

I'm not going to go into a big sort of pre-slideshow spiel but drystane *(Scotland*) drystone *(England)* walling or drystone diking is common all over the United Kingdom. In certain areas where you don't get much, for instance in the extreme southeast

corner of England. But for the rest of the UK, from Cornwall right up to Shetland, you have this very long history of drystone walling.

Drystone dykes really come into four different styles. The commonest style, and we'll see probably all four I think here tonight, the commonest style is what we call the double dyke. And that's the sort of thing you get all around here. It's two walls leaning on each other with a tight filling in the middle of small filling stones called hearting. The other one you get a lot of on the west coast and a lot of really good examples around Lairg, is just a single stone dyke That's only one stone thick, usually massive boulders, no filling at all, just piled on top of each other but really skilfully.

Third type is a mixture of the two called the Galloway. And that's my favourite, the Galloway dyke, and you'll see a lot here because I love them. The Galloway dyke is a double up to about this height and then it's levelled off with big through stones and then the top two or three courses or sometimes four are just single stones. And you get the effect of granite lacework or stone lacework when you see one of these going over a hill, fantastic things. And the great thing about them is like the single, they're the best stock proof dykes of all. So if you're planning on keeping sheep, build a Galloway because sheep don't like anything that they can see daylight through. They're not that stupid. If anything looks insubstantial, they're not going to climb it and you'll see a few. The fourth one is one I only came across about ten years ago and I was doing an instruction course on the island of Tyree and they built this massive big Galloway dyke right across the island and used all the stone.

So when it came to demarking crofts and boundary lines there were no small stones left, no filling, just shore boulders, that's all they had. So they may even have devised, I've not seen it anywhere else, they may have devised a system of building with a mixture of shore boulders and turf and that is a very useful way of building a shelter. It's not much good for keeping stock in because it's boulder and turf. The grass grows greener on top of the dyke than it does on the other side so you don't get sheep grazing on the top of it but it is a very good, very useful, if you haven't got any filling stone. So that's the four main types. You'll also see a few strange features, high cairns and arches and squeezed stiles and all these are very much part of the tradition as well.

If you take on a contract for a dry stone wall these things are going to be part and parcel of what you're going to have to do. So the association, *the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain* is really keen on training people up to cope with all these extra features. So there are four certification classes, the second one is the first professional one and that's where you really learn these extra things. At the first class the initial certificate is just prepare a hole in the dyke but from then on it's all top quality stuff, it's all professional stuff and so you'll see all that and there's even a couple of test classes on how an instruction course works.

I think with that much more ado we'll start through some pictures. Here we are. This is an old Cumbrian waller somewhere around Kendal in the Lake District in the 1930s.

The hammer he's using is one that we still use, it's just called a walling hammer or a diking hammer with a blade on one end, weighs about between three and four pounds and he's actually lifting a wall, the original wall you can see is rough stone at the bottom and he's actually lifted it another two feet by using Cumbrian, looks like Cumbrian green slate and then a coping on top, probably just to make it stock proof. A couple of guys in traditional dress. Once again it's the Lake District, very high wall that one.

Dykes and trees don't go well together. What happens of course is the trees, if they're close to the dyke, the roots go underneath the stonework and it's not them that does the damage, it's the wind blowing the tree and the whole ground gets to it, gently shaking up and down and you lose a wall. And that's really all you need, hammer, some string and a good eye and a little bit of experience and it's not a difficult job, I teach it in two days and after two days you can go away and build a wall that won't come down.

Lake District, top end of the Lake District, taken from the A6, the old A6 and it just shows people, maybe not you people so much, but I do this slideshow in America quite a bit and they think they've got all the stone walls there. But there's nothing like it, these fields are divided and subdivided and divided again and a lot of man-hours into building all those walls.

This is Wasdale in the Lake District, great weather. Once again, the thing I like about most of these pictures, I took them quite a while ago but even then, a lot of effort was going into putting the walls back, repairing them. Ten years before this, there were gaps everywhere and barbed wire and old beds and sheets of corrugated iron, the usual sort of stop gap. But you see less and less of that now because of all the financial help that farmers and crofters are getting to repair and restore the old dykes. That is, I think, a stunning picture. That's taken from way up Great Gable, looking down into Wasdale and once again, you can see all the divisions and the subdivisions, some very strange shaped fields there. But then you look into the middle distance of this hill on the right and you can see the dykes going up the hill. There's a few miles of wall there. I think the average Derbyshire farm's got about six miles of wall on it. In fact, I know that Kirkton Farm at Bell's Creek has about six miles on that. We measured it at one point, doing a lot of work there. This is just outside Old Weston in the south-west limestone area.

And I like this because not only do drystone dykes keep stock in and out but they keep them back and back. If you're pretty good at husbandry, you'll get that before the top of that hill is just covered. But it doesn't creep through. And of course, they're fireproof too. This is an amazing place. You probably know this. This is the Scuddy Peninsula. It's coming out of Ullapool on the Stornoway Ferry. You can see that cross. It's on the north side of the peninsula. About 25 years ago, I was asked to do a diking course there. Materials said there were plenty of them about. I didn't have to go searching for stone very far. Elfin Graveyard, which I've restored several times in the past. I think I rebuilt that corner.

The reason I took the photograph is for the mountain, which you all know is Sullivan. Anybody been up it? It's a shock when you do get up. If you look at the cull between the two peaks. To even start to climb that mountain, you've got about a five-mile walk before you even start to climb. It's got a dry stone dyke right across the cull between the two peaks. And a good one, too. It's a five-mile hike to get in there. Then you've got about 2,000 feet of climbing. Then you've got to build the dyke. Whoever did that wasn't going home every night. It used to have a really good gate. It has a fine gate end. Good stones, laid properly. Whoever built that really knew his trade. The gate's long gone. The stone would have all just come from around that. Anyone with any brains brings a stone down the hill. You don't take it up the hill. You always go looking above you for a stone to sled down. Maybe because they've been shaped. It's that sort of stone. It's amazing. Obviously, some of that was shaped, especially around the gate. Some apprentice would be sitting there all day with a hammer, just going chip, chip, chip, and getting the square corners.

To get a good freestanding end, you've got to have long tie stones. You can see both sides have got really good, long tie stones going back into the wall. So when they were grading the stone from the top of the hill, they would put all them aside and say, Right, that's for the gate. That's for the gate. And all the other stuff. You can build a wall with almost any stone, but you do need the good stuff for your gate ends and for your corners. When they built that, they kept going down to the right until they ran out of space. Can you imagine? It just takes my breath away.

You've got about 1,200 feet straight down to bedrock down the bottom there. And there comes a point where it's so steep that you just can't build anymore. The first question that comes to mind is, Why? I mean, some poor, luckless men and boys were sent up there. They'd be up there probably all summer, sleeping under tarpaulins. The apprentice would be sent back once a week down to Loch Inver for the bread and the bottle of whisky. And they'd just stay there until it was built. No one seems to know. There's all sorts of folk tales going about, but it looks to me, because it's quite a high wall, it looks to me like a marsh dyke between two estates where you can't decide who has what. You'd send the guys up there to build it.

Back in the Lake District again, that's typical Coniston green slate, which you see almost everywhere now. It's a shame, because you only get it in certain areas. And for me, jars of it when you're in a limestone area and you get a wall built of stone. It's very nice stone. It's nice to build with. That was a road-widening scheme, where the road originally went this way, and the farmer wanted his wall back. So they had to move the wall back about 10, 12 yards. But unfortunately, it's a great big rock in the way, so they had to build it over the rock.

Is that unusual, how the coping stones go on there? Is it not usually upright?

Good question, actually. I'm glad you asked that. A lot of people do, because in Cumbria, they put them on at an angle. No one knows why, from Cumbria into Yorkshire. Just as you're coming east into Yorkshire, the practice dies out. But you can always tell when you're in Cumbria, because they're always laid at an angle, usually about 45 degrees. One very good reason, I think, is that when you put a string on top to get your coat level, if they're at 45 degrees, you just keep moving them up until they all touch the string. Whereas if you put them up vertically, you're going to have different heights. But that's not going to matter so much. These traditions go on in certain areas. And it's just a staple. But they have been cemented on, because tourists steal them. They nick them for door stops and paperweights. So they've had to cement it.

Borders, this is right on the Scottish side of the border. If you go down the little road that goes down by Dale Muir, between Langham and Lockerbie, it goes right down. It's a single track road. And there are some fine examples of building there. And this is just on the Scottish side.

Sorry, can I ask you about the coping? Is it entirely structural? Or is it for a specific purpose? Normally, if you put coping stones on a brick wall, for instance, you're keeping the rain out and the frost.

Well, the idea is pretty much the same. You'll see a bit later on, the cross-section of a dry stone wall, twice the width at the bottom is under the cope. So you get narrower near the top, and your cope wants to fit perfectly on that, and just an overhang slightly each side. So you get an extra six to nine inches of height, but you're also getting the weight and the length of the cope to hold the two sides together. And then you pin them really tight. So it is actually structural.

I'm bothered with the fence.

Well, that's a good question. I don't know. Was it there before the wall? I wouldn't think so. Unless they raised the height of the wall, the fence was there first, and then they raised the height by putting a double line of copes on, because that's got two lines of copes. So it may have had just a single line, and they put the two strands of wire above it just to give it that extra foot in height.

And that's just the other side of the border. This is Cumbria. So you see what I mean? These two dykes are only maybe two miles apart, and yet they're completely different stone, completely different style of building and coping. We're in Cumbria, but there's slanting copes here. Let's go back to the other one just for a second. Once again,

they made a pretty good job of getting the cope level, because if you get a dip in it, sheep can spot that at 500 yards. They'll see a dip in the dyke. '*Come on, Doris, that's where we're going, over the top'*.

And this is Dornoch. I took that years ago, because I was fascinated by this very soft Dornoch sandstone. Lovely stuff to work with, because if a stone doesn't fit, with the lightest of hammers you can just chip it, and there's a beautiful one in the middle up to the right end, where the curve has been cut around the curve of the other stone. And you can do it. I mean, with granite, like in rocks, you're wasting your time, you can just never do that. But with that stuff you can. And also you can shape your cope stones. So just a few blows with a hammer, and you get a nice smooth cope.

This is Rose Hall, where I live and this is the finishing of a really big project, about 1,000 metres of dyke built there, in around 1989, 90, 91. It was a contract offer to me, but I was working in America all those years, so I handed it on to an old trainee of mine, a man who's gone into local legend. He's known as Lord Hoy, you know Lord Hoy from Rogart? He's a tearaway, he's never grown up. Anyway, he's gone away to somewhere down in England now, so they've got him. A good dyker, oh dear, head case, total head case, a bear, never grown up. On a good dyke, how far, you know, what distance would you need to do each day? One man, that height, a good dyker should do between four and five metres a day. You have to, that's the way you make a living. Because there are days when you can't work, there's days when it's snow and frost. So you really do work quite long days too. On a wall that high, is that what, four or five tons? That's just over a ton a yard, just over a ton a metre. So you're moving some stones a day. I used to be six foot four before I started!

Now, here we are, this is just a drawing of a 'How to Build' for you. You dig your trench, there's a top picture there, and then you lay your foundation stones in. In the middle, the gap in between, you place your 'parting', which is your small stones. And you go up a couple of courses, keep doing that, place the parting in. Then when you get halfway up, with a stone about the 20 inch, 22 inch mark, if you've got them, and you haven't always got them, you put a long stone right the way through, called a through stone, or a tie. And then you carry on to the top. And that's really what it looks like across section if you've got the top ones as well. That's another thing you don't get a lot of around here, is what we call the 'cover band', which is the top through stone. It's a practice that's used a lot in Caithness, and in Orkney, where they don't have big stones for coping. So if you've got that on, that does the job of tying the two sides together, and then you can get away with quite small copes on top of that.

That's a demonstration I did at a fair in St. Paul in Minnesota a few years ago now. But you can see the way the end goes up, exactly the same as the drawing we've just seen. Two going one way, one across. Two going long ways in, one across. Two going long ways in, one across. All the way up to the end of the top. I got back the next day, and the students had taken all the copes off. So there weren't those copes. So I went to the next door to a big building site, chatted with a foreman there, and he got some really big copes, and he said, take whatever you want, and I collected half a dozen of them. And I wheeled them around on a big truck, and I rolled them up on scaffolding planks. I couldn't lift them. It was really dense stone. This is a stone wall near Ulverston in the Lake District. I like that because you can see it going over the hill, but you can see the highlights of the through stones sticking out halfway up, all

the way. The evening sun's just catching them. You find that in certain areas. I've seen big stones going through the middle. And that looks beautiful.

You can only do it where you've got long stones. Certain areas around here, you just can't do it. A good place to see them is Kirkton Farm, just outside of Golspie. On one side of the road, on the west side, it is all granite, boulders, glacial granite. But immediately on the other side of the A9, it's all sedimentary sandstone. So what they did when they built the granite walls, they carried the sandstone up, and they put them in as through stones. So you get these long sandstone through stones, all around Cumele Farm.

This is at Cullis Farm in Easter Ross, very near to Nigg. A few years ago I did this. We were just starting to build the end there, putting the hearting in. We have got the strings up. Very important to work with strings. You can build without them, but you make a much better job if you follow the string, and also you're a lot quicker. Once again, a nice big cope on the end. Whenever I'm doing anything, certainly in a public area, I like a big massive cope on the end, and then kids can't pull it off. You've got to think about that, they're going to climb it. And if there's just a lightweight cope, it could easily come down. So if you get any of my walls, you always get something really massive. See we've got the strings in there. You just build up to the level of the strings, as level as you can, and then you put the rest of the copes on behind. That's quite a good stone again. A lot of it came out of an old demolished barn.

This is a job I did in Minnesota. This guy met me at that fair when I was building there, in St. Paul, and basically employed me as an instructor. He put a big advert on the paper, dry stone walling courses. Because nobody in Minnesota knew what a dry-stone wall was, nobody turned up! So he then employed me at my full instructor's rate, with my full keep, board, any beer from a local microbrewery I wanted, and any malt whiskey of my choice. Well, you can't turn that down! It's a nice stone. It's called ‘buff and blue’. You get it from a quarry on the Mississippi. It all comes from the same quarry, but the buff goes into the blue. The blue actually is quite dense and quite heavy. The buff stuff is much more like a sandstone but it is a limestone, local limestone. The local paper printed a picture of us, because it had never been done before. It was about three pages, with one of me and the owner carrying a stone to put it on the wall. A bit further on was a picture of me carrying a stone twice as big on my own because it was the buff one I was carrying. It really was quite a weight difference.

That's what he wanted. We argued and argued. His name was Ross Muir, he was a third generation Scot. He was a doctor. No, he was a lawyer at the Mayo Clinic, the famous Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and he wanted this Scottish dry-stone wall around his baronial hall. Hadn't the heart to tell him his baronial hall was actually a very nice stone-built English country cottage. I was too kind to tell him! He even had a cannon outside. Inside and the whole place was full of plugs and chargers and bikes and claymores that he'd been collecting for years, With a loaded gun in every room and a disturbed teenager in the house, I didn't sleep too easily at night. But it was a well-paid job, and I did sort of enjoy it. I liked working with the stone. It was very good to build with, but he wanted it four feet thick. I said, look, the way a dry stone wall is, if you have it four feet thick across the base, it's got to be at least two

feet across the top. Now, I'm not bad at my job, and I'm not lifting two-foot stones for the best part of 200 yards of wall. So we compromised on three feet, which I still thought was too thick. But it did make a very nice wall.

I went to visit it 14 years later. He'd passed on since then and there was only one stone out of place. Somebody had vandalised it and pushed one cope stone off, or stolen one cope stone. I remembered I had left some stones so I went foraging in the bush, and I found another cope stone. So I hope the new owner didn't think I was vandalising his wall by replacing a stone.

When it's on a curve like this, you can't use string. You just do it by eye, right? You do it by eye. All you can do is you can keep putting posts in. Most of us, when you've been building a wee while, you build it by eye. This is at the top end of Strathallan. That's our guy. And that wall is 7 feet high at this end and 4 feet at the other end. And it's an old kirk. It has been taken over as accommodation for fishers on the river. The specification was they wanted the wall 7 feet high so the locals couldn't see in the windows. And it was all boulders too, as you can see. I think there's 3 of us working on that. That's still it. That's the one I was on. That's one of the first ones I did in Rosehall. That's where I lived. It's a house that's now owned by a certain Mr L Fyatt, and it's empty. I'm not very happy about that since he's just applied for planning permission to build 6 new houses in a field just up the road from me when he's got 6 empty houses in the village and they're deliberately kept locked and shut, so it makes the lodge exclusive. We are fighting this one out at the moment. He'll probably win, he's richer than me.

This is how to build a wall uphill. You keep everything level and you dig into the ground steps. So sometimes your walls are actually quite high. And then when it comes to coping, the book says you cope from the top, so that each one is sort of self-supporting and doesn't fall down the hill. But it's difficult to do. I tend to cope from the bottom and then really pin them tight.

That's a day at the lodge at Loch Callan where they commissioned a ha-ha. Now ha-has are not that well known in the Highlands you get them a lot in England and all it is really it's just a retaining dyke but it's almost vertical and this side where we are is a shallow trench with a very shallow bank and it's just to stop cows and sheep wandering into the garden and not having the view blotted by a fence. You can see the grading and the view from the house and the fence. I'd just finished it with turfs along the top and before we even put the tools away the gardener was mowing it and they'd opened the gardens that day for visitors! I was wandering back, still collecting stuff and I heard a couple of people say ‘Oh look George, a ha-ha’ and George nodded his head wisely and said ‘Hmm yes, a lot of the old Scottish houses had them castellated copes’.

This you get all over the country and it's called ‘Cock and Hen’. If you don't have enough copes obviously a lot of this game is looking at piles of stone and assessing what you can do with it and what you've got. First thing you do is look at the cope stones and if you think you're going to be short, this is a solution a high one, a low one, a high one, a low one and it still acts as a pretty good stock deterrent. There are quite a few castellated copes, different stones coming up. That's what I call my stegosaur high up in the hills of Halifax in Yorkshire and it was a settlement up there that was never finished because they were still building it when they opened up the

mills down in the valleys and the people just left. The whole thing is just as they left it but that's a pretty frightening wall.

Why did you have to build it there when the people had already left?

Oh no, they built it and then they left. They built it towards the end of the 19th century and they were building this complete settlement with all sorts of buildings that were never finished. And then they opened the mills and all this work down in the valleys so the people just left and the whole lot is just like a ghost settlement that was never finished.

This is a slice of slate and then a boulder a piece of slate and then a boulder..That's a nice bit. It's the same one we saw before but you can also see the through stones in it about a third of the way down. There. That's where it's about 7 feet high.

Now we come to the Galloway Dykes that I mentioned in the introduction, four main types. This is the second type and you can see quite clearly it's a double dyke like we've seen. All the way along, so far up to halfway mark and then you get all the through stones and they're all side by side. And they really finish that bottom bit off and then you've got three courses of single stone single boulders. Once again you look at your stone and you think well there's not a lot of hearting stone so it's going to have to be a Galloway because you only need hearting in the lower bit and you can get rid of some horrendous ugly shapes in that top bit that you probably couldn't build with in a regular dyke. So it's all a question of assessing what you can build with the stone they've developed

That's another Galloway in Ayrshire and that's done in quite small stones as you can see. That's about 5 feet high. Once again you can see quite clearly the double at the bottom and then the line of single through stones and then the courses on top. I built that and it was agony. Really hard work. I still don't know what that stone is it's a very dark grey green and it's incredibly heavy. It comes from the west somewhere. It was all dumped in a big heap above Loch Craggy and the Ledmoor Road.

Why the big stones at the top and the small stones at the bottom?

Well if you look at the big stones it would be very difficult to fit a lot of those into a regular dyke so you'd have a lot of wastage. So this way the small stones at the bottom and some of those can be funny shapes as well. But the massive weight on top, these big ones are seriously heavy stones, there's probably a good ton and a half a yard in that wall. It's much heavier than a regular single dyke but it works very well indeed. And if you lose the odd small stone from the bottom, the thing is so massive and you've got these big through stones, you couldn't replace it because of all the weights at the top.

Cattle are going to find it quite difficult to dislodge them. The other way around, it's not ideal to put small stones up a dyke but you see a lot of these if you go around certainly the West Coast, There's a massive one that goes right across on the Stour Road out to the Lighthouse. It's about 7 miles long that one. There's another lovely one ahead, quite a good one, It crosses the road. I really like Galloways, I'll always build a galloway if I can get away with it. They are inherently more stable.

If you go down below Glasgow, all the way down to Carlisle and especially on the old roads the old A74 or if you can get on to it the old A6, well not the A6 because that's in England, all the dykes you see are old galloways really well built. And they're quick. I can do a good 5 metres of gallery on my own, probably 6. So when you charge you get a bit more money and you can actually drop your price because they're not so fancy. A regular directional wall has to look good as well. The galloway if you can get it to stand up, it's going to look good so you can actually get quite a bit more money building one of these.

This is really interesting by an American friend of mine. Very good stone wall. I told him about galloways. He's never seen one but he found this in a Vermont wood. It's the only old galloway I've ever seen in America. So no prizes for guessing that a good bit of this is a hedge. Once again I've never seen one until I saw this. I've seen a couple since and that was down in Ayrshire, not far from Prestwick Airport. It's a galloway dyke with a thorn hedge behind it on a place which is pretty flat. The shelter behind one of those is quite good that must be 9 or 10 feet high to the top of a thorn. Eventually of course, with the wood in the wall, it would actually speed up its demise but we are talking about a very long period of time and it would have done its job over and over again.

Don't laugh if you turn up anywhere as a dry-stone dyking inspector to do a course, you have no control over what stone is on the site. This is in North Uist and when I turned up, there was a man and his son and they wanted just a dyke to keep sheep off the garden. That's all he had got to show for boulders. A fair bit of head scratching from yours truly. I really found it quite difficult because I'd done a bit of single building just on my own, I'd never actually taught it. The funny thing about this, my dog was with my wife down on the shore while I was building this and the retriever found a dead seal and climbed inside it! It was a fraught day building this thing!

Once again it's an efficient use of stone if that's all you've got and the trick is to build vertically. If you put stone in vertically you can hammer wedges in and get it tight as a drum skin. If you lay them horizontally there's always a tendency to rock and shove

about and push off. But vertically you can get it really tight. This is what they were doing on the croft before I went and did the early building. And this sort of wall doesn't work. It looks insubstantial and it will keep stock in for a while but even the wind will blow these small ones off. So the trick is reverse them. As we saw earlier get the big ones up on top and then you can walk away from it.

This one, I love this one this is at Balloan House and, when you look at it from where we're sitting, that looks like a really good boulder dyke. Nice double boulder dyke in courses. When you get a bit closer it is one stone thick. And I just really admire the skill of the builders here. I mean with jaggy stones you can build a single stone dyke, jam them together and because they're jaggy they sort of bite on each other. But these are granite boulders and they're about 100 years old and the only one that's come down is where they've allowed the field to flood and the foundations have got a bit wet.

I just take everybody anywhere to see dry stone walls. The ones around here are double. Somebody crashed into that last year and I fixed that. The other side is a very primitive turf and boulder, the fourth type I wasn't talking about at the beginning.

This is on Alan Lewis new market in Stirling and it's not exactly stockproof but it does offer some kind of shelter. I've since seen better examples. Tyree has got much better examples than that but once they start to grow they just set like concrete.

This is a world away. You know where this is? This is Ulrich Farm they did a lot of courses there. I hate this stone it bores me absolutely. It's rigid there's no challenge, you just pile them up with good boulders like you've got around here. You put a course of stones in you've got a foot or 15 inches. You put a course of these in you've got an inch and a half. I do a construction course up there. I would never take a contract in one of them.

I've got a book, you can have a look at it when we finish, but I've been doing regular courses for the Castletown Heritage Centre in Castletown. About three years ago I was up there and I had done all the walls. We had got a lot of stone left over and Muriel Murray said *'I'd like a flower bed'*. I said what about the shape of a boat and I thought we could do better than that, we could actually build a boat. So I built a dry stone boat coming out of this wall with a prow and everything right up in the air. It looks great. I don't have a slide of it on the show but I do have a picture in the book.

This is another type of dyke, basically it's a double but it's called a consumption dyke and it was built to consume the stones off a farm before they could plant and farm it. Consumption dykes you get all over. They're very common in Aberdeenshire and all areas that are very stoney. You can plough the ground for a thousand years and you're still picking off stone every spring without fail. So what do you do with it well, being Aberdonians we don't give it away do we. They can be very thick up to about nine feet thick and five feet high as at Rosehall which was first farmed by Aberdeenshire folk in the back end of the 19th century. The

biggest I've ever seen is five feet high and fourteen feet thick. There's a really famous one, I've never seen it but I've got photographs at home, and it's the Money Musk Consumption Dyke and it's five feet high and twenty seven feet thick. And they're still adding to it. It just shows you thousands of years of farming and you're still picking up stone.

I'm in Stornoway again but we're just going out of Stornoway on the road down to Tarleton Harris and this was a training scheme I took on with the Western Ireland Council. I was doing that for quite a number of years with a different bunch of trainees every time I went out. And we completely rebuilt everything in front of the council depot just out of Stornoway. This is going south anyway all the council depot, all the machinery all the piles of waste, it was a real unsightly mess and it had a white painted concrete block wall in front of it. It was absolutely dreadful so we demolished that and with the trainees we built this, We put a turf top on it and I really like that on the two pillars there. Of course turf, once it starts to grow it's almost as good as a coat because it just grips the top stones and it grips adjoining turf so you finish it with this long strip of turf that's just holding your top stones in place.

You use it a lot when you're building shooting hides because obviously you don't want to scratch the guns on stone so you use turf tops. It also gives you a bit of extra cover. I like the old turf top but it's hard work though, because you've got two for every one you see. There one underneath that's upside down which the upper one goes on and it's exactly the same width as the wall. It will be slightly narrower when your next turf goes on top of that and it's longer and it comes around like a bonnet.. The underneath one gradually feeds the top one.

How about that then? Excellent. This was my first arch I always wanted to build an arch. It is not that difficult to do. Of course there's a frame, a simple ply frame and you make sure that your abutments either side are really big stones that are not going to go anywhere. There is one in Rosehall just by Cassidy Farm and it's now completely covered in thick moss, I tried to photograph it the year before last and had a job getting to it was completely overgrown. The burn was right down to a trickle but in the winter it comes hurtling down the hill so it needs to be about four feet high and here you get a good chance to see what we call the keystone which is the triangular one at the top of the arch. The idea, of course, you've got your building frame and you put your side stones on the wooden frame. Then you take your keystone and drop that in and a few gentle taps with a hammer and the whole lot will just bite. Your frame is actually sitting on four little wooden chocks. You pull the chocks out and the frame drops about two or three inches and then you can get it out.

I've done a lot of arches, one outside my own house just single stones, not double. That is another skill that's a very old one but once again if you haven't got a keystone you can fan it out with wedges and the minute you get the weight on top of the actual stone in the wall it just sets like concrete. It's just never ever going to come down.

This is another case. The wall on either side has fallen down but the arch just locked together. So it's a squeeze style also known as fat man's agony you get a lot of those in the Yorkshire Dales in the Lake District. There is a specific size for working with Yorkshire chivas sheep. I'm not sure they would work too well with some of the smaller breeds 7 inches at the base wide, and 14 at the top. They say that sheep

won't get through that I'm not too convinced by that, because this is Hardwick country and Hardwick sheep are fairly small in the Lake District. Little sheep and nothing like as big as chivas.

I don't know what's better than sheep information plinths. I do a lot of these. I went home to Strathnaver a few years ago to all the archaeological sites in the Strath. That was funny. I took the job on and then they told me I couldn't use any of the stones on the site. That was going to make it quite difficult. So I was in rivers, hauling stones out of rivers and going up the hills. But I got them all done and this was actually quite a good local stone, welded quartzite. That's the old cabin in Rosehall with welded quartzite. I did them all around it, one of the last jobs I did before I actually hung up the hammer. it just sets it off doesn't it it fits into the landscape.

I always feel with stone walls that you're using part of the landscape to enhance the landscape. Which is why I like to use local stone every time. I hate it and it really upsets me where sandstone has been brought in by the builders for use under a limestone cliff. Limestone is a cracking building material. It's one of the best, so I'm really puzzled by that at the old mill at Alastair Macrae's. I like the stone work in the mill race and everything all dry stone. It's an undershot mill and it's still there.

It's a beautiful building, oak wood. It's about eight and a half feet tall and once again you can build it dry and it will stay forever. But if some idiot vandal with a bar just prises one of those bottom stones out and the whole thing becomes history. So I have to say that is mortar and the trick is, as you are building up, you mortar it from the back. You mortar every single stone so it's caught from the back and you don't see the mortar at the front. So you're still building a dry stone wall. You've got the security of knowing that 30,000 people can look at it. But just one idiot with a bar can bring it down.

I've got one well where it comes up a hill overlooking the sea and another one broader to climb over the farm that's even higher than this one . I didn't build that. I'll show you where that one is. It's at Dundonald, Brock and Strathmore just up from the Harbour.

There's all that's left of it. The ones at Callaway probably the best I think on the mainland. I've actually not been to the Dundald ones they're supposed to be pretty good but I've seen the one in Mousa in Shetland and that is the most complete. It's about two-thirds and that would be about 2,000 years old they reckon. Most of these were built around 300, 80, 300 they're not really quite sure. But it's about that and quite often the thing that intrigues me is some of the stone is not local. That's good flag stone brought in from somewhere. The doorways are always long for obvious reasons, if your enemies do succeed in getting in they've got to bend double so you can have the head off. And the reconstructions, some of our members have actually built part of a brock down in Stirlingshire. The reconstructions, they all look a little bit like cooling towers, they widen out at the top so you can pour boiling porridge down on your enemies as they were besieging.. You look at

that stone again that's the Lindal stone that's a stunning stone lovely. It's not bad is it 2,000 years old.

Interesting that that all that's left of the broch of Glen Cassley is a heap of stone, all that is left of the big stones, then all the way to the right is single stone vertical. A couple of hundred years ago when the shepherds came up from the borders and they built single stone dykes they robbed the broch. They weren't that foolish, they used the back wall of the broch and all the rest of it is just single stone in some places seven feet high. If you put a gate on it you could use it tomorrow. It's tight as a drum It's what I was saying earlier about t vertical stone being able to lock solid and they won't move.

Glen Cassley heap of stone
Historylinks Cat. No.2005_064_263

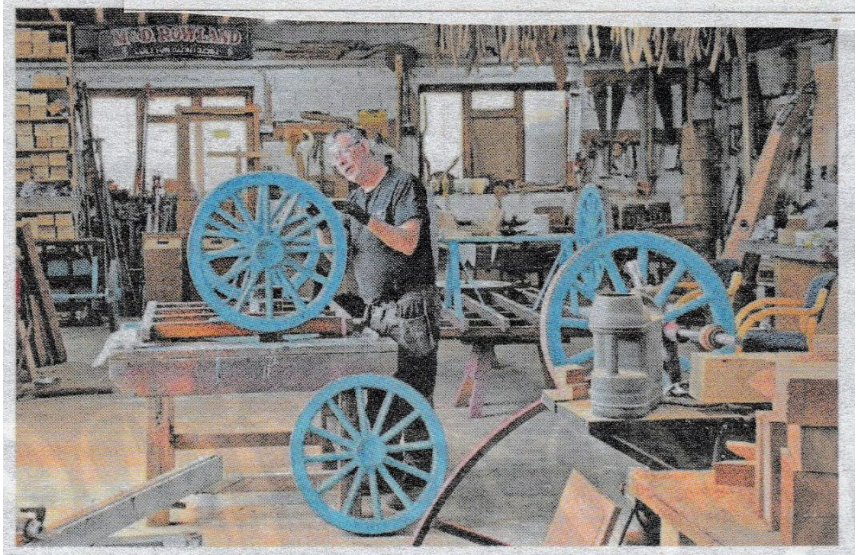
This provides a good example. You can only use what there is. You can't make stones, you can't stick them together. I enjoy working with a lot of people because, it doesn't matter what country you're in, you've all got this one thing you really enjoy doing which is working with stone. The crack is excellent and there's always a bottle of something interesting at the end of the day!

Postscript:

The Daily Telegraph Saturday 30 August 2025 'Review' supplement included an article 'Four Crafts We Must Preserve'. Prominent was he inclusion of Dry Stone Walling second in the listing of crafts. Included in its short paragraph there was the remarkable highlighting:

"The United Kingdom is home to more than 120,000 miles of dry stone walls - enough to encircle the Earth's equator five times."

The complete extract is shown on the following page



FOUR CRAFTS WE MUST PRESERVE

BELL FOUNDING

Bells used to be manufactured all over Britain. If you know a Bell Lane, Bell Meadow or a pub called The Bell, a bell may once have been cast there. The John Taylor Bell Foundry in Loughborough is the last major such founder in Britain, and has the country's only bell-tuner. It's said that nearly a third of our population hears a bell ring every day.

DRY STONE WALLING

The United Kingdom is home to more than 120,000 miles of dry stone walls – enough to encircle the Earth's equator five times. Like most traditional crafts, they vary greatly by area: the walls of the Cotswolds are made from neat courses of golden limestone while in some parts of Scotland they're fashioned from granite boulders.

RUSH WEAVING

Rush weaving fell out of fashion in the 20th century; it was almost extinct by the 1990s, when a young woman from Bedfordshire decided to revive it. Felicity Irons still spends her summers punting down the Great Ouse and Nene harvesting rush with a scythe. She supplies mats, baskets, furniture and accessories to customers all over the world, and even made the flooring for *Game of Thrones*.

LETTERCUTTING

Britain still leads the world in this exacting craft. Walk through any town or village: you'll see inscriptions on public buildings, war memorials, gravestones. Today's most celebrated lettercutters hail from the Cardozo Kindersley workshop in Cambridge, a family business that traces its origins back to controversial artist Eric Gill. The firm has carved inscriptions all over the country, including at the National Gallery *(below)*.

Craftland: A Journey through Britain's Lost Arts and Vanishing Trades (Bodley Head, £25) will be published on Thursday