

Beautiful, but how long will they last?

MANY STONE WALLS BUILT SHODDILY

By SEAN ADCOCK
Daily Post contributor

MUCH of the strength of stone walls and cloddiau is internal and beauty is often only skin deep: many of the techniques used to make a wall look good actually weaken the overall structure of the wall.

The best craftsmen can produce a wall that is strong but also looks good. Sadly many walls are built with an apparent disregard for structural integrity, often in an attempt to speed up building.

The key component of all stone work is to have good stone-to-stone contact. Stones should be bonded similar to brick work with all joints crossed.

Some times, however, stones are "stacked", with running joints on either side of a series of stones.

This should be an obvious fault but was commonplace on the new walls built on the A55 dualling, side roads which link it to the old A5.

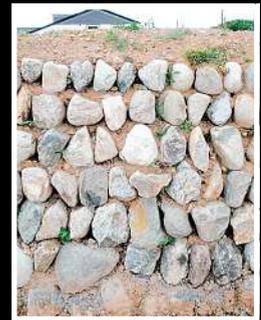
It seems likely that those inspecting the work were unaware of the problem. Many sections of these walls have since failed and are now being repaired with mortar.

Those commissioning the work have questioned the suitability of dry stone walls rather than the process which allows walls to be built poorly. Too often the process of competitive tendering and cost-cutting gives way to inadequate implementation.

At times there seems to be an assumption that almost anyone can build a wall. For many it seems a wall is little more than an organised pile of stone and that almost anyone can tell how well it is built.

Similar problems exist with cloddiau. These structures are so "Welsh" that there is not an equivalent word in the English language, which has to make do with the term "stone-faced earth banks" instead.

The importance of this style is such that it represents North Wales in the "Millennium Wall" at the National Stone



Sections from the same wall. On the left, large stones have placed almost 'willy-nilly' and gaps filled with smaller stones – a faster but far less solid approach. On the right, a well-built wall, with large stones fitted in the bottom, producing an arguably more pleasing finish

A poorly built cloddiau along the A55, with little stone-to-stone contact



Long running joints are a major weakness in dry stone walls, as shown here.



The importance of clawdd walls is such that it represents North Wales in the "Millennium Wall" at the National Stone Centre, Derbyshire

Master craftsman Sean Adcock (bottom left) took these photos to illustrate common walling faults Adcock picture: ARWYN ROBERTS

Centre at Wirksworth, Derbyshire. This length of wall shows the typical styles of regions from around the UK.

This clawdd was built from glacial stone from Cefn Graianog Quarry, between Caernarfon and Porthmadog, a stone ideally suited for the purpose.

Yet these structures are rarely built to the traditional coursed book-ended pattern.

There is a lack of understanding of, and training in this specific craft. The method was developed to suit the stone, and it can be built at least as fast, if not faster, than more standard dry stone work.

However, unskilled craftsmen have difficulties maintaining a pattern. As a result, more standard looking walls tend to get built and filled with earth, so failing to promote what is a key component of the heritage of much of the west coast of Wales.

Around 20 miles of cloddiau were

built alongside the A55 across Anglesey when the new road was built.

Anglesey limestone was used for these walls, even though there is no tradition of this on the island: the more typical glacial stone was refused on the grounds that it wasn't from Anglesey.

A team of builders was then imported from Cornwall and built the bank in a style far more appropriate to Cornwall than Anglesey.

This style was imposed on the whole length despite Llanfairpwll being arguably more local to Cefn Grainog than Holyhead.

So much for Welsh heritage and local tradition.

The North Wales Branch of DSWA recently received approval for a grant from the Countryside Council for Wales to help promote standards of workmanship.

The money will cover improved display facilities and material and the de-

velopment of a website for both the North and South Welsh branches.

The centrepiece of the project is the production of two bilingual booklets, one dealing with dry stone walling, the other cloddiau.

Both booklets will be the first of their kind, containing information on how to assess work, and the key aspects to producing good, long lasting work.

It is hoped that the standards promotion will promote awareness of dry stone walling and help improve the standards of work being carried out.

With luck, it will show that dry stone walls are a viable and durable option if properly executed.

Hopefully it will also reduce the potential for private and public funds to be wasted on sub-standard work.

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