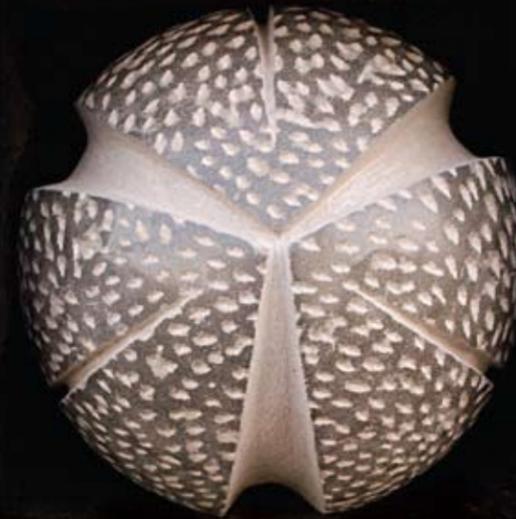




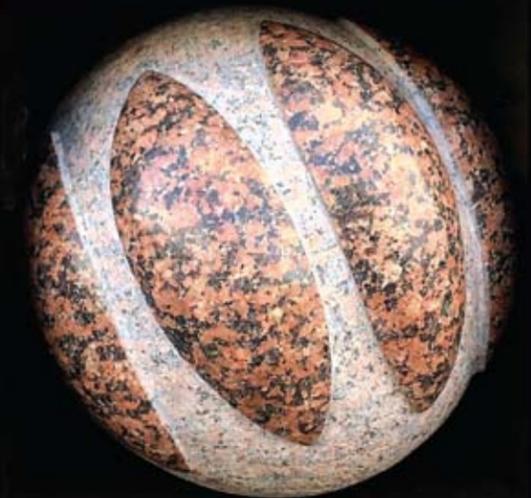
THE MUSIC



OF



THE SPHERES



# STONE WALLING . . . the Nature of the Beast

Since humans first began placing one rock upon two others to create a structure they have been at the mercy of the material available to them. Stone by its very nature is irregular, a random substance. The final aesthetic beauty of a stone structure depends on the physical effort, mental acuity, sensibility and skill required to transform a heap of raw material into a formal entity.

Stone—difficult to collect and move about, available only in awkward shapes and sizes, riddled with imperfections, dirty and dusty, requiring discipline and application to assemble—is not the perfect building medium. It isn't difficult to imagine the frustration caused through the ages by stone not being what the stonemason would desire. Dealing with the inherent characteristics of stone is what the waller/mason does; we all prefer good stone to 'bad' stone but must work with whatever we have.

For those who don't work with stone on a daily basis it may be difficult to understand the sheer pleasure of bringing order to a random pile of it—form from chaos.

Stonework is a fundamentally positive creative action: every additional stone set correctly is a source of satisfaction. There is democracy and harmony in articulating the pile of stone at hand—every stone has potential and a place within the whole. What a joy it is when that ugly duckling of a stone is placed and becomes the perfect partner for those around it.

As a stoneworker's skills develop, the accuracy and quality of his or her stonework improves. In Scotland, however, particularly for wallers, this only comes after many long, long hours between the stone pile and the wall, often in terrible working conditions. To stick at it takes character, will, dedication and, perhaps, financial desperation.



Malcolm Gladwell in his book *OUTLIERS* theorizes that it takes 10,000 hours to achieve mastery of a certain discipline. According to Danish physicist Niels Bohr an expert is "a person who has made all the mistakes which can be made, in a narrow field."

These concepts apply to anyone trying to gain a degree of competency in working with stone—it will take a long time and you will make many mistakes along the way. I make no claims to being either a master, but from personal experience I can vouch for the truth in both these statements.

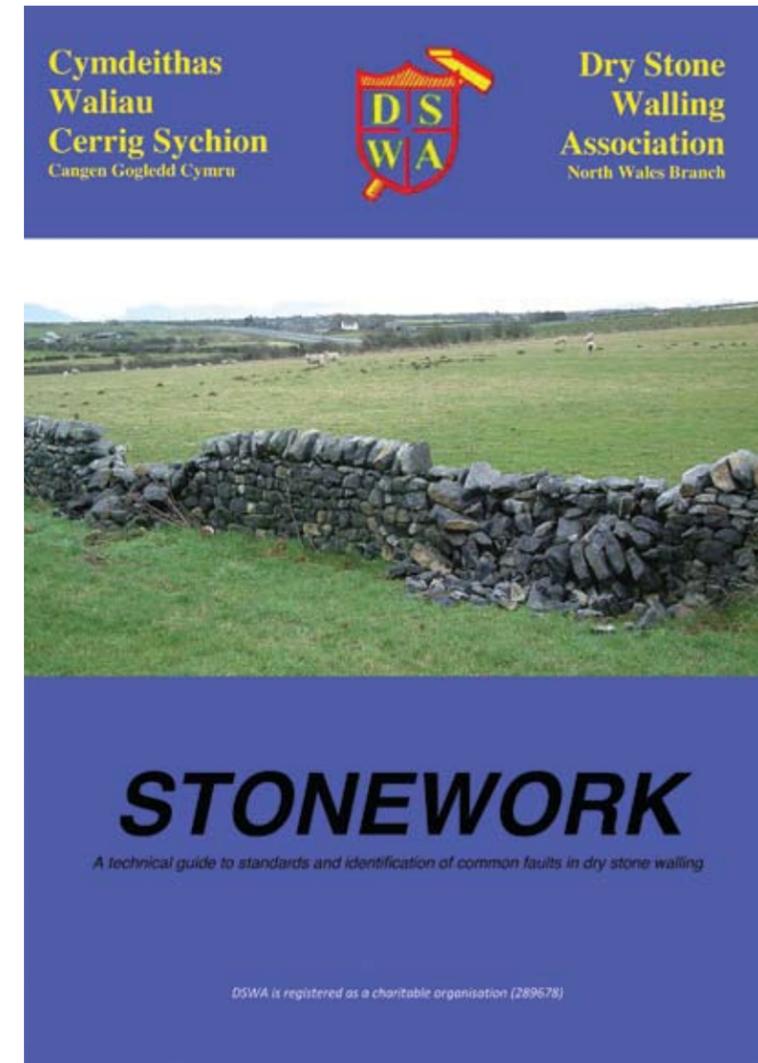
My work straddles two distinct fields of endeavor—craft and art. Craft tends to celebrate technique within a recognised and traditional set of parameters, whereas contemporary art places more emphasis upon freedom of expression and a deconstruction of perceived traditions

When I naively stumbled into stonework, stone to me was just another medium that I could use as an artist to fulfil my vision, I had

neither great knowledge of technique or a historical understanding of the craft. As my skills and experience have increased the craft has become more and more important to me—I want my work to be well constructed with regard to traditional standards. This has affected my approach over the years and what I created in the past I might not create today.

Projects are always approached with artistic intent. I never set out to build 'just' a wall (many could do this as well or better than myself), I always wonder what I can creatively make or do for the project? That is my task as I see it. In any field of endeavour there is a wide spectrum of adherents, from conservative traditionalists at one extreme to out-and-out mavericks on the other. This leads to lively debate, so too with stonework. In the craft-art continuum, my work tends towards the decorative but my aim is always to respect the craft. ■

David F. Wilson



## or: How NOT To Build a Dry Stone Wall

reviewed by John Shaw-Rimington

*STONEWORK*, Sean Adcock's well-written, well-documented booklet, is unofficially referred to in walling circles as the *How NOT to Build a Dry Stone Wall* book because it teaches more by examining faulty dry stone work than by giving the typical textbook diagrams and photos of acceptable work. The book is crammed with many clear, good quality color photos of things to be avoided. The author has gone out of his way to do thorough field research in order to come up with some of the best of the worst examples of stonework ever compiled. (It must be said that he includes photos of good work for comparison.)

These examples are analyzed and their problems pinpointed. Unorthodoxy due to regional differences in style (which may vary dramatically) or unconventional work that exists outside the scope of an overbearing reliance on standardization, or the occasional compromises made (which the waller in question has recognized and cleverly compensated for) is treated objectively and fairly.

Sean also takes into account the various limitations placed upon a waller due to the nature of the material available to him or her, but he still comes up with a litany of things that 'just don't work' in any dry stone wall application.

In his quest to help readers see what can go wrong if they don't avoid certain graphically illustrated problems, Sean tactfully (certainly more tactful than he would be in person) describes a variety of manifestations of questionable workmanship.

A waller who reads this book is likely to improve his or her game, not just from absorbing the in-depth descriptions of how stones are best built into walls—but by resolving not to do work that would be frowned upon for any structural reason (frowned upon by peers or even worse by Sean). Advised of potential errors, wallers will see to it that their walls will never be of such poor quality as to merit display in a book like this and be identified as 'inappropriate,' or 'unacceptable,' or 'ridiculous,' or 'far from ideal'—or worse. ■

*This valuable primer is free! It is available in PDF format at <http://www.dry-stone.co.uk/Pages/Header.html> (click on 'BOOKS' then on the cover shown above). A supplement to the book is available there as well. It consists of photos of various aspects of sub-standard walling sent to Sean from other wallers. A print copy can be ordered from the author: Sean Adcock, 2 Bryn Eithin, Waen, Penisarwaun, Caernarfon, Gwynedd, Wales. UK. Sean requests only £2 for postage and printing costs; I suggest sending him a US or Canadian ten dollar bill and a note of thanks.*