

BRITAIN & IRELAND'S WALLING TREASURES: THE PINNACLE AWARDS 3 - CUMBRIA SHEEPFOLDS PROJECT

In 1996 the Northern Arts Region was to host the UK Year of the Visual Arts. Steven Chettle, then Public arts Officer for Cumbria County Council approached Andy Goldsworthy about the possibility of his doing a project. Goldsworthy came up with "100 Sheepfolds for Cumbria" choosing 100 as an indication of the size and scope of the project rather than a definitive number.¹ Not long after what is now known as the *Sheepfolds Project* was begun, initially as a 5 year project but finally ending 13 years after its conception with the completion of a fold at Wigtown and encompassing 45 sheepfolds in total.²

At the outset Chettle pointed out it was about more than pure artwork with one objective to "*re-establish structures which would otherwise deteriorate and disappear*"³ and perhaps as is the case with all so called 'landscape art' commentators wax lyrically and philosophically about it as with James Putnam in the introduction to "Enclosure" - the book in which Goldsworthy relates the story of many of the folds; "*the Sheepfolds Project is not about the craft of the wall's construction but rather concerns its dialogue with the surrounding landscape and ongoing line and rhythm of dry-stone boundary walls.*"⁴ Obviously a non-waller, and I'm not about to go down an art appreciation route here, even if I do personally admire Goldsworthy's concepts. The stonework is good - at times outstanding, and the use of the pens as an art form is innovative. It is by far the most wide-ranging of the award recipients and certainly a worthy winner. But what is it?

The project has seen the restoration of many sheepfolds, washfolds and pinfolds, which would likely have been left to crumble completely. New ones have been created. The project began with 2 circular folds at Redmire farm, Mungrisdale. Here one was built on the site of a former fold which had completely disappeared. Another, completely new, was created where a circular fold was built amongst a pile of boulders, crafted in such a way that



1: Steven Allen looks down into Redmire field boulder fold

it is easily passed unremarked upon, just another pile of stone from modern field clearance/improvement.

As with a number of Goldsworthy's creations it fits seamlessly into the landscape, easily missed discovered by the inquisitive, inviting questioning.

The work here was carried out Joe Smith from Dumfriesshire, Joe having worked with Goldsworthy at his property there on earlier walling projects, working alongside Cumbrian Steven Allen who subsequently became lead waller on the Sheepfold Project, working on all but 2, along with a cast of almost exclusively Cumbrian wallers (listed at the end).

Redmire was a simple start, with a simple concept. As is Goldsworthy's way he takes an idea and explores this theme from a number of angles, so not surprisingly a number of themes were developed with several encompassing a number of folds, projects within a project. It would be impossible to look at 45 folds in detail here but I hope a look at some of the themes gives a good flavour of the project and its scope.

Not all the folds have an art theme attached to them now as several were renovated and some which had completely disappeared were re-instated for "Arch" a project where Goldsworthy constructed a sandstone arch at several locations along an old drove route between South west Scotland and Cumbria. As with much of Goldsworthy's work the art was only transient, but the folds remain with a number now functioning as working folds. An art project with a practical outcome, which provided work for many wallers and as Steven Allen observes "Cumbria is all about sheep and walls" and the sheepfolds project essentially concentrated on these.

An early part of the project was the start of the '9 Pinfolds Project'. Goldsworthy had planned to restore a series of 9 pinfolds each to contain a cairn - a pinfold was a pen or 'pound' where stray stock was im-'pounded' by the 'pinder', a fine had to be paid to have the stock released. This lay at the core of the project's raison d'être as Goldsworthy had at one time lived on the edge of Hartley fell and had long gazed upon and sketched the 9 cairns of Nine Standards Rigg - another of Britain and Ireland's Walling Treasures (visit http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/walling_wonderland to see more). Inspired by the Nine Standards Goldsworthy had explored the theme of cairns with his pine-cones in many projects around the world and this was extended within the sheepfolds project. Unfortunately the idea stalled slightly as the original concept to have 9 cairns

in 9 pinfolds around Hartley fell was not brought fully to fruition. It proved impossible to get permission to install cones in 3 existing folds, so only 6 were completed, all built by Goldsworthy himself.



2: Brough Pinfold cone © Ian Rennie

Small square pens in the corners of fields are a significant part of the Cumbrian landscape. Goldsworthy noted a particularly dense concentration of these pens around Casterton. Another part of the project evolved with a series of pens along Fellfoot Road, an old drove road to the east of Casterton. 16 folds were built in a distance of about 2½ Km, some were restorations, others new, one made use of an old derelict shepherd's hut. Each fold had a large boulder gathered from nearby as its centrepiece; Goldsworthy has christened these "Drove Stones". The boulders are completely enclosed by the walls of the folds, cantilevered step stiles have been built into one wall of each fold to allow human access as well as interesting viewing perspectives, whilst sheep can still get into each fold, presumably to keep down the grass, through a 'lunky'/'hogg hole'. Those folds along the track still in practical use at the time of the project were left untouched so you can never be sure what a fold will contain. Goldsworthy hopes that "*people may ask themselves how the stones got into the folds. It may appear to some that the stones have been captured, to others that they have been given a place of shelter and protection*".⁵

The idea of boulders within folds whilst removed from the drove theme was further explored at Underbarrow where boulders were once again transplanted into two nearby folds. Here the twist on the theme was to drill a hole into each boulder and plant rowan seeds in it from a nearby rowan tree growing amongst boulders and indeed at first glance looking as if it's coming straight out of one.

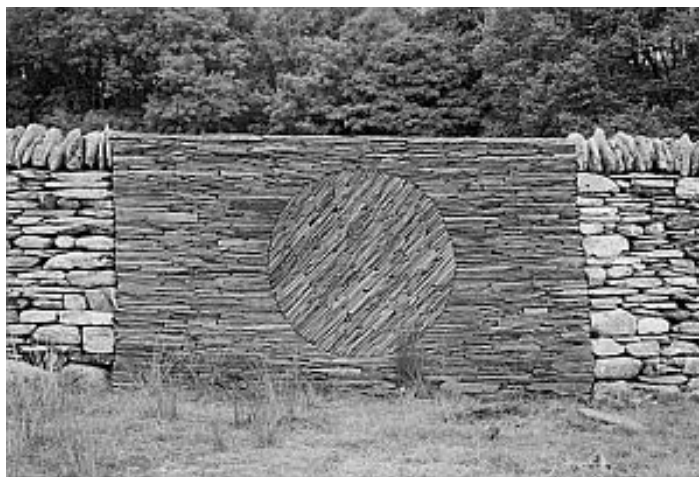
There appear to have been some dramatic moments with the boulders. Some of them are enormous, too big for the machines moving them to lift, when being encouraged downhill with the odd nudge one or two 'escaped' demolishing the odd wall en route. As Michael Jenkins who farms the land at Underbarrow explains "*The second, larger boulder took from noon until after dark to get in*



3: Rowan sapling in boulder at Underbarrow © Ian Rennie

place, finally waltzing down the steep hillside, straight through a dry stone wall – not the gap I'd prepared for it!"⁶ More work for the wallers!

Whilst considering themes, it is worth bearing in mind that Goldsworthy carries themes through many works over many years in many countries. His cairns are a testimony to this, in some respects in dry stone terms almost a signature. They are however run close by his slate circles a motif which entered the sheepfolds project at Tiberthwaite. The nearby Tiberthwaite slate quarry is in fact where Goldsworthy created his first slate circle.



3: Slate panel at Tiberthwaite © Ian Rennie

The panels inserted into the walls at Tiberthwaite are in their way unique amongst the sheepfolds although Riverstone Fold, Deadman Gill, Brough has been constructed in such a way that it incorporates a set of balanced river cobbles. Goldsworthy explains that "All folds have memories and feelings as well as forms embedded in their walls" adds "this one will contain some of mine".⁷ The idea here being inspired by his time living in the area and stone balancing river cobbles along the self same stream.

The rationale behind much of Goldsworthy's work is often somewhat esoteric; any reason will be completely hidden from the uninitiated – essentially those who have not read the relevant book. Perhaps that is the nature of art, although I struggle with the concept that when there is a logic behind something its reasoning still remains essentially hidden. "Megan's Fold" in Bretherdale is one



5: Deadman Gill Touchstone Fold, Brough
© Ian Rennie

in particular which probably has a particular relevance and perhaps even a degree of poignancy within these pages, and was alluded to in Steven Allen's short piece in the last issue. This fold is a simple square in the middle of a field. If you look closely there is apparently a running joint from base to top in the centre of the back wall, and Steven played a leading role. Terrible, shock

horror!! There is of course a perfectly good explanation even if it is one which doesn't spring immediately to mind. This is one of 4 folds built to 'bridge' the millennium. One half of each pen was built in 1999 and the other half in 2000 hence the join. This pen is actually on a farm owned by Steven's uncle, and Goldsworthy asked Steven to name it. Steven chose to name it after his recently born daughter Megan... who had arrived in the early hours of 1st January 2000, 9 weeks prematurely. Steven had literally been applying the final touches to the copes on Megan's fold just finishing it before the midnight deadline when he received the call from the hospital that his wife had been rushed in to Lancaster. You couldn't make it up. It's perhaps as well to remember that dry stone walling and 'walling treasures' are perhaps often much more simply placing one stone on top of another.

Sean Adcock

THE WALLERS

Kevin Alderson, Steven Allen, George Allonby, Michael Appleby, Colin Bulman, David Gardener, Stephen Harrison, Keith Hogg, Malcolm Hogg, Wilson Law, Andrew Loudon, Andrew Mason, Graham Milburn, Max Nowell, Andrew Pratt, Joss Robinson, Joe Smith, Dan Sumner.

PHOTO CREDITS

1 author; 2&3 Ian Rennie <http://www.flickr.com/photos/irOne/>

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www.sheepfoldscumbria.co.uk

¹ Chettle *et al* p.19

² Enclosure p.52

³ Chettle *et al* p.9

⁴ Enclosure p.13

⁵ Enclosure p.74

⁶ <http://www.sheepfoldscumbria.co.uk/html/news/news02c.htm> extracted 11/10/2010

⁷ Enclosure p.132