



# Dry stone walling. Rural artisan enterprise in the urban economy<sup>\*</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Usually, dry stone walls are a feature of rural locations but this paper presents a case story of how two experienced dry stone Wallers were commissioned to build a dry stone wall in an urban location. Through narrative story telling using photographs, this work charts the progress of the construction of the Wall from the commissioning process in December 2021 from visiting stone quarries to search for appropriate stone in January 2022, to the building of the wall itself in May–June 2022.

The paper demonstrates how engaging in simple artisanal tasks, such as building a dry stone wall, is a source of fascination to the observer and also a process of discovery. Methodologically, it uses a Dramaturgical lens (Goffman, 1959) to capture the experience of both the construction of the wall itself and the lenses which the casual observer uses to understand the process of walling.

The paper explores the significance of what are perceived to be ‘rural’ ‘creative enterprise’ and artisanship but transported to an urban environment. It expands an earlier work of a case study of two dry stone wallers, based in North Yorkshire, a region of the UK (McElwee, 2022).

By so doing, it demonstrates how creative enterprise skills in the rural economy can be transported into the urban environment. By this simple process the paradox is that more actors are able to enjoy and appreciate a rural skill, than they would in a more ‘traditional’ environment. One further consequence of this is that urban-based actors are able to appreciate at first hand, the beauty of a well-constructed dry stone wall.

Importantly it points to the significance of the dry stone wall for the continued sustainability of rural regions. In the UK, the dry stone wall is perceived to be a ‘Public good’. Indeed, the UK Domestic Agricultural Policy (DAP) is centred around the idea of ‘public money for public goods’, which incentivises farmers for providing services that the public can benefit from i.e., countryside access, sustainable farming practices and increasing biodiversity (Defra, 2021).

## 1. Introduction

It can be argued that the discourse of ‘the cultural industries’ is centred primarily around clusters of production and consumption in urban centres. In contrast, cultural enterprise in the rural economy is less well understood and researched. Yet, creative enterprise has contributed to the living culture of rural society throughout history, and as the rural economy changes, creative enterprise has an increasingly significant role to play, both economically and in renewing the cultural life of rural communities. The article builds upon prior research on rural-based enterprise (De Rosa et al., 2019; McElwee, 2008; Smith and McElwee, 2015) and creative enterprise (Henry 2007).

The significance of artisan enterprise in the rural economy in terms of its contribution to employment, wealth creation, and visitor attraction is explored. Moreover, allocating resources to the long-term benefit of rural areas through a focus on ‘Public good’ can open up the relatively unexplored area of environmental gains.

Increasingly, the concept of ‘Public good’ in the rural will be a significant indicator of not only the economic health of rural regions, but also future sustainability of the rural. This term ‘public good’ is also known as environmental goods (Pappalardo et al., 2022).

The overall aim of the paper is to show how, what are seen as traditional rural crafts, can be incorporated into the social and built environment of urban locations. The second aim is to see how such

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crafts, in this case dry stone walling, has an impact on the observer.

Our contribution is to show that dry stone walls, even outside of their typical rural setting, can evoke a sense of belonging, well-being and nostalgia. People have intimate relationships between landscapes and nature and a phenomenon such as an 'out of context' dry stone wall can delight people.

In the context of the rural economy, enterprise has a vital role to play in enabling creative activities to thrive, and that whilst artisan enterprise is not well understood, it is increasingly significant in rural life. The showing at agricultural shows of rural crafts: basket-making; weaving, wood and stone carving; hedge laying and so forth are often the first opportunity for urban residents to see these skills being practiced. Seeing these crafts in an urban environment is unusual.

The article is structured as follows. First, it defines what constitutes 'the rural' and artisan entrepreneurship in a rural context. Second, a brief history of dry-stone walling in North Yorkshire, a county in the north of England, is provided. We provide this history for two reasons. As far as we are aware it is not documented and moreover, it is the region in which the authors work and live. Hence they are embedded in the region. Third, it provides a brief description of the construction of dry stone walling. Fourth, it describes the methodological approach taken and presents the case study.

## 2. Does rural exist?

There are multiple constructions of both the rural and rurality (Philo 1992). Rural has been depicted as 'global mediascape' (Appadurai 1996) and social construct (Little and Austin 1996) or cultural (van der Ploeg 1997) construct. Thus, the concept of 'rural' exists but is conceptualized differently according to the agenda of those who label it. Perhaps, nothing is inherently rural—naming it makes it so. Similarly, as argued elsewhere (Henry and McElwee 2015; McElwee 2012; McElwee et al., 2018), there is no discrete phenomenon as rural entrepreneurship. Rural entrepreneurship is entrepreneurship that happens in rural environments. However, by and large, there are some types of artisan entrepreneurship that can only occur in rural environments. As can be seen in this case study. Dry stone walling is one such example that can occur in urban locations. As Pappalardo et al. (2022) note, agricultural landscapes have always been characterized by the presence of historical and cultural elements that represent the evidence of traditional agricultural practices (Chabé-Ferret and Subervie, 2013; al., 2014). The landscape of rural North Yorkshire would look very different without its dry stone walls.

## 3. A short history of dry stone walls in North Yorkshire

We include this section as it is important to understand the context behind these structures. Dry stone walls have existed for thousands of years and have been constructed all over the world. In Yorkshire, the management of the rural landscape and organisation of rural space is relatively recent.

Dry stone walls are an iconic feature of North Yorkshire; indeed it is difficult to imagine the landscape without them. It is conservatively estimated by the National Park authorities that there are over 2000 km in the eastern part of North Yorkshire and 5000 km across the whole of the county. In England itself, there are 115,000 km of drystone walls, many of which are in a state of disrepair.

As active dry stone Wallers interested in the landscape of North Yorkshire we are fascinated by a number of questions some of which are easily answered.

- How are they constructed?
- How come they don't fall down?
- How long do they last?
- What subsidiary enterprises were associated with dry stone walling historically?

- Are there different styles?
- How much do they cost to build and maintain?
- Are they good for wildlife, ecology and the environment?
- When were they built?
- Who built them?
- How was the building of them financed?

The initial questions are easily answered and further information can be obtained in the work of Garner (2018). There is much uncertainty when it comes to the last three questions. The next section briefly answers these questions. Research about dry stone walling is extremely scant in the rural studies and social science disciplines. Whilst there is some technical literature and handbooks available, it is a profession where the research focus remains under-developed.

## 4. When were they built?

A more comprehensive history is provided in McElwee (2021), however briefly there were five stages of wall building.

In the Bronze Age, much woodland was cleared or grazed out from the high moors as early farmers started to settle and became less nomadic (Rackham, 1989). Transhumance, i. e the seasonal movement of livestock, created more clear ground that could be enclosed.

Perhaps the greatest influence on the landscape of the North York Moors was that of the monasteries and priories in the Mediaeval 12th and 13th centuries.

The Augustinian and Cistercian monks and nuns built dry stone walls around their monastic buildings and enclosed larger areas of land for livestock. These religious orders were successful sheep farmers, and over time, acquired more land and began to establish farms and pasture some distance away from their Abbeys.

In the Middle Ages, society moved from feudalism and common farming towards enclosure of common land and individual holdings. Farmers transitioned to become capitalistic entrepreneurs.

Sheep flock sizes increased; larger enclosures were built for pastures. There was also the creation of huge deer parks on manorial demesnes, which were encircled by large stone walls—an ideal choice. Stones were used as field boundaries, to stock-proof managed woodland, for shelter walls, and in stock handling.

The Enclosure Movement completely transformed the rural landscape of North Yorkshire between c. 1750 and c. 1870 with the implementation of the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts (Chapman, 2009).

Over 4000 Acts were passed, converting previous common land into private ownership. These acts not only changed the landscape but also created major social and economic changes.

## 5. Costs and labour

Dry stone walling on monastic estates was likely to have been undertaken by lay brothers. Wealthier landowners may well have used specialist builders, as the uniform construction of walls built appears to have been a product of estate management.

Walls on smaller farms during the Middle Ages were almost all built by the farmers themselves, and quite possibly, professional wallers were employed. Certainly, landowners were required to enclose their lands within specific time periods, and so teams of wallers were hired to build huge lengths of walling. At this time, labour was still very cheap. Some wallers were local, others nomadic, moving from project-to-project.

The capital outlay for some of the new wall build before enclosure would have offset the cost of repairing existing fences and hedges. Much the same as today, but with the added incentive now of there being recognised environmental benefits.

Labour was cheap and 'belonged' to the landowner as in other forms of early industries such as the extraction industry: coal; alum; jet and agriculture.

## 6. Rates of pay

From early accounts of walling in the 17th century and right up until the early 20th century, wallers were usually paid by the 'piece' or perhaps in exchange for rent reduction. As urban migration occurred during the industrial revolution, labour will have become scarcer and prices higher.

What is unknown is how much itinerant labour was used and even if there were gangs of wallers in the 1800's. Our hypothesis is, that contracts were drawn up between landowners and entrepreneurial gangmasters who employed significant numbers of people, just as migrant labour is used for fruit and vegetable farming today. This is an area for further research.

Labour costs today are still contentious. Indeed, dry stone wallers are calling for increased subsidies for dry stone walling.<sup>1</sup>

There appears to be a growing recognition that the rates for Walling need to be adjusted particularly if more qualified and younger people are to be encouraged to learn the craft. Funding has previously been provided under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme for building dry stone walls.<sup>2</sup> However, the rates are very poor.

If farmers are to be paid more for 'public goods', the rates need to be economically realistic. There does not appear to be significant clarity around the new schemes. It may be assumed that there will be funding for dry stone walling-which might come under the 'Landscape recovery' section of ELMs.

## 7. The artisan rural enterprise

The artisan enterprise can be defined as a business venture founded on the production and sharing of artefacts and experiences originating from knowledge, imagination and cultural resources. This knowledge is contextual and is largely tacit.

The creative and cultural industries are said to be amongst the fastest growing sectors of the UK economy, accounting for 8% of national GDP in 2004 (UKTI 2007), rising to over 11% in 2018. DCMS (2006) defines the creative industries as including the following 13 industries: advertising, architecture, art and antiques, craft, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software, and television and radio. Naylor (2007) reports how these can be grouped into four generic types of creative business: creative services, creative content, creative experiences and creative originals. Little is said to be known about the impact of the creative industries on the wider economy, particularly their impact on other firms, although there is extensive research on the scale of the sector (DCMS 2006). What does seem remarkable is that, whilst there is increasing knowledge of rurality and of rural enterprise, just as there is of the creative economy, very little is known about the interface of these two subjects: the significance of artisanal enterprise in the rural economy.

It is apparent that in the aftermath of Brexit and the end of CAP support for UK farmers, the economic implications of the so-called public good will be significant. The representation of the idyllic landscape of a good deal of rural Britain is the dry stone wall—in itself a public good. Paradoxically, the role of the artisan craft entrepreneur in the rural may well become once again significant. Walling is both an artisan craft and a 'free' public good.

Creative enterprise has contributed to the living culture of rural society throughout history, and as the rural economy changes, creative enterprise has an increasingly significant role to play, both economically and in renewing the cultural life of rural communities. Naylor (2007) is one of the few writers to have explored creative industries and rural

innovation.

The presence and role of the creative industries in rural areas needs to be both more widely acknowledged and better understood in order to pursue innovation policies aimed at developing rural economies (Naylor, 2007. p.45).

Individual artisans work as arts and crafts makers, jewellers, painters, potters, instrument makers, and other crafts makers. There are designers and specialists who run niche, creative businesses from farmhouses, communicating with clients in urban centres via broadband. There are independent retailers and people running art galleries and tourist destinations dependent for their attraction on cultural production and consumption. They are there, in almost every village, yet we know little of them.

Of course, the rural creative economy is not new in most countries of the world. The creation and production of cultural artefacts and media have existed for thousands of years. The creation and production of rock art, textiles, jewellery, music and song, and many other aspects of cultural industry have long roots in the countryside Townsend et al. (2017). As well as giving meaning and pleasure to people's everyday lives, their production opportunities for their makers demonstrate their skill and creativity and give them cultural identities as a musician, craftsman and artisan, for which they were rewarded with recognition, sustenance, and in due course with currency, at which point the 'creative economy' came into formal being. For Mitchell (2013) rural spaces have as a consequence been totally transformed. As Mahon et al. (2018) argue that the creative industries can drive economic development of rural areas. They term this the 'new rural development paradigm (2017.272).

There has been increasing interest in the study of 'artisan industries', especially since the publication of, in the UK, the first creative industries mapping study (DCMS 1998) and the development of related thinking and policy (e.g. Leadbeater and Oakley 1999). The creative industries are recognised as being of global economic significance (Henry 2007) and often are embedded in the local economy (Tregear and Cooper 2016). However, the discourse of 'creative industry' has been located very much in an urban context, and in comparison, the role of creativity in the rural economy has been neglected. Moreover, the study of rurality, and of rural development, has also developed significantly in parallel with that of the creative industries over a similar timescale, yet there have so far been surprisingly few points of connection between 'the rural' and 'the artisan'. Pret and Cogan (2019) suggest that artisan entrepreneurship can be defined as individuals who produce and sell products or services that possess a distinct artistic value resulting from a high degree of manual input. Arguably, the dry stone waller fits this definition. Paradoxically, in this paper we take the 'rural' into the 'urban'.

Some scholars argue that rural entrepreneurs, are not automatically less innovative than their urban counterparts but that they simply use different business models and technology (Deakins and Bensemann, 2019). Galloway et al. (2011) suggest that small firms in rural areas are often strongly focused on local markets and locally oriented trade. This is usually the case with dry stone Wallers, although teams of Wallers can travel. This type of Waller are often contracted to larger firms and are often commissioned to highly specialised work which require higher levels of expertise.

The focus of this paper is to provide a story of how two experienced dry stone wallers were commissioned to build a dry-stone wall in an urban location. It shows how urban actors are fascinated by the dry stone wall as a cultural artifact and reports on the emotive responses by observers of the wall building process and the finished product.

The next section provides a context to dry stone walls and the context to the story. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical lens used in the paper.

The methodology is introduced and responses to the key question is provided. The paper concludes with a summary and issues for further work.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-64254781>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/stone-wall-restoration-bn12#how-much-will-be-paid>.

The key research question is 'What is it about dry stone walls that fascinates people?'

## 8. Dry stone walling

The industrialisation of the rural economy, since the late nineteenth century in particular, has affected and often acted to threaten or impoverish (sometimes literally) the creative rural economy. Dry stone walling is one such activity that was once a managed process. They have been a feature of the British rural landscape for thousands of years, and those that are still standing are generally well over 200 years old; indeed, little large-scale new build has occurred since about 1850 (Garner 2018). In some areas of the British Isles, dry stone walls appear to be over 2000 years old.

There are significant regional differences in the type of dry stone walls, dependent on the stone, but the principles of construction and function are broadly similar. Walls tend to last much longer than manufactured barriers such as fencing and wire and are as iconic to the rural landscape as the hedge if not more so. Dry stone Wallers are either professional Wallers or skilled volunteers, who usually combine this activity with other rural activities. Experienced and professional wallers have developed a wealth of tacit knowledge over the years, honing strong craftsmanship. Farmers are often capable wallers themselves but often do not have the time to engage in significant wall repair or new build as the costs outweigh the financial benefits. Farmers often acquire knowledge to build walls informally, frequently from their parents. They might construct them to the best of their ability, and often, quite effectively. There is a distinction between the walls built by farmers and professional dry stone wallers. However, this may change as the proposed Policy move to offering environmental subsidies. For those interested in walling, the opportunities are available, from professional walling associations or informal learning activities provided by farmers. Some farmers are reluctant to do this formally as insurance costs are prohibitive.

Walls are built using local stone, so different regions and countries use whatever stone is locally available: slate, sandstone, granite, limestone and chalk. Here contextual knowledge of the area is often needed. In the case of North Yorkshire, it is predominantly sandstone. Walls mark boundaries and ownership of parcels of land, essential in stock proofing.

Whilst some research has been undertaken on green walls and their environmental and social impact (Collins, 2017) little has been written on dry stone walls in urban areas even though as we argue, the benefits are tangible.

Maintaining dry stone walls however is expensive and without support there are significant risks of losing these traditional historical and cultural artefacts.

This story is a Case Study about a Wall which was built in an urban setting in Beverley, in East Yorkshire in 2022. Beverley is a market town, which historically had significant links with the rural economy. These rural links are no longer as evident or economically important as they once were. The livestock market closed in 2001 and the local agricultural college tends to have an emphasis on equestrian enterprises. It is becoming a dormitory town of its neighbour, Kingston upon Hull.

The site of the Wall is on a 1970's housing estate which borders on a busy throughfare which leads into the town of Beverley itself.

In 2021, we were approached by a householder who asked us if it was feasible to build a dry stone wall for him on the boundary of his property. The wall was to be thirty linear metres and approximately thirty square metres in total.

At first we were reluctant to engage in the project for two reasons. The first being that there is no tradition of dry stone walls in Beverley and geographically there is no local stone which would 'blend in' with the environment. Dry stone walls are simply not a feature of the local

built environment. We recognised that we would have to source the stone from outside of East Yorkshire. The second reason was the complexity of the work. We normally work in North Yorkshire predominantly on agricultural and boundary walls, constructed and rebuilt to be stock proof and to provide a continuation of the dry stone wall tradition. Such work is generally subject to financial grants provided by government or governmental agencies. In this case, the wall would be more complex and time consuming to build as it would require a different aesthetic look. It would also have to be robust enough to withstand urban traffic and young people climbing on it-issues not as common in rural regions.

A price was agreed with the owner. Pricing up a new wall build in an urban area is different from pricing a job in rural areas where the work is usually field boundary work. Next we set about the process of 'sourcing' stone. This was more of a complicated process than initially imagined. We wanted stone that would 'fit' as much as possible into the local environment and be relatively easier to work. Building a wall for a householder requires a different level of complexity than constructing an agricultural wall.

After some research we located a quarry eighty miles from the site in Holmfirth, West Yorkshire. We visited the site to assess the quality of the material and also to look at examples of how local walls were erected.

We ordered twenty tonnes of Stone and this was delivered to the site in May 2022.

## 9. The process

Generally drystone walls are approximately 1.5 m high and 1 m in width at the base. Two experienced wallers can be expected, given weather conditions and topography of the land to be able to build up to 3 m in an 8 h day at approximately £90 per metre. Where old wall is to be rebuilt, the process of building requires demolition before building which is of course time consuming. Conversely, a 100 m of fencing can be erected in a day. The charge would be approximately £4 per metre.

The wall might be expected to remain standing for two hundred years whereas fence posts may need replacing after 5 years. Dry stone walls are visually more attractive than fencing. They support a diverse amount of flora and fauna and consequently are of greater environmental benefit. Clearly, wallers are highly skilled but are not particularly well remunerated for the work they do. For landowners and farmers to replace dilapidated stretches of wall, they need to be offered incentives in order to so.

## 10. Context

The first task was to dig out the foundations See Fig. 1

The stone was delivered from the quarry. (see Fig. 2)

Building a dry stone wall involves significant preparation to ensure that the wall, when constructed, will stand for many years. The most important part of the wall are the foundation stones which must be level. Once laid, these foundation stones are not readily seen by the casual observer.

The next stage on this job was to build two bespoke 'Batter Boards'. These boards ensure that the batter i. e. the slope of the wall is consistent across the length of the wall. In this case the base of the wall is 60 cm, rising to 40 cm at the top of the wall.

The line and width of the wall are kept consistent by the use of bricklayer's string.

The wall itself is built in sections usually of about 6 m in length (see Fig. 3). Once a length has been built, the first of the batter boards is dismantled and repositioned 6 m from the second. This process is repeated. Fig. 4 Shows this (see Fig. 5).

The job was completed in July 2022



Fig. 1. Foundations dug out ready to start.



Fig. 2. The delivery of Stone.



The top of the wall is finished with coping stones, called ‘Toppers’. Without batter boards, the slope cannot be easily gauged. Fig. 6 shows the topping stones.

Fig. 7 shows a typical field boundary wall which is being worked on in March 2023. The whole wall is 110 linear metres and has to be taken down and rebuilt.

### 10.1. The process

As soon as we arrived on site, it was clear to us that this was not going to be a usual walling job.

While digging out the foundations, we were constantly stopped by passing people who asked us, with interest what we were doing.

Upon the delivery of the stone, the inquisitiveness of the passing actors increased considerably. So we turned the building of the wall into a research project.

## 11. Methodology

The research question is: ‘What is it about stone walls that stimulates people?’ McElwee et al. (2006) demonstrate that there is extensive literature on entrepreneurship and the related field of rural enterprise, but there is very little written, which combines the three topics of the rural, the creative industries, and entrepreneurship. There is little on dry stone walling as artisan work.

The aim is to understand the ‘subjective’ experience of the creative industries entrepreneur – the dry stone waller - by listening to the ways in which people make sense of the world and ascribe and attribute value to their experiences.

McElwee et al. (2006) note that there is little research using phenomenological, social constructionism, or interpretative approaches in the rural entrepreneurship literature.

Indeed, it appears that there is some hostility to qualitative research into rural entrepreneurship; however, Dana and Dana (2005) so articulately suggest, ‘[Some] research which needs to be done cannot be conducted using mail questionnaires, surveys or brief interviews’. Interviewing artisans such as dry stone wallers cannot be done in ‘conventional settings’.

For Smith and McElwee (2015), such entrepreneurs are at the margins of conventional research, and qualitative research streams are often the most appropriate methods to gain insightful and interesting information about their ways of seeing the world.



Fig. 3. Erection of batter boards.

A very loose, unscripted qualitative approach is used. Our approach was informed by Goffman. Goffman's dramaturgical perspective has been used to understand urban-agriculture interactions (Robineau, 2015), 'farmers' motivations for voluntary unsubsidised practices that benefit the environment Mills et al. (2018), and urban redevelopment. We used insider positionality in order to elicit responses. For Goffman (1959), all of us are actors who position ourselves at different times and contexts as either major players, directors, producers minor and major actors, and so forth. In this context, the two wallers were acting in a play live in front of many theatre goers. Some very passive and others active observers who wanted to know more about what we were doing.

Goffman (1959) illustrates how complex, ceremonial rules operate in everyday interactions. As Ryan and Räisänen (2008) suggest, 'this entails individuals not only maintaining their own proper involvement in interactions but also ensuring that others present maintain theirs.' In this case our activity was outside of the daily norm of many of the passers by.

Our role as wallers is to present an image. Much of our practical work has been undertaken in rural environments, often in solitary areas where the public gaze is minimal. Our work may be seen by a limited number



Fig. 4. Building the Wall in 6 m sections.

of social actors: shepherds, farmers, land managers, and occasional hikers. But in this urban environment, building a dry stone wall, is both new to us new to the observer.

Impression management in a sense influences the variety of ways in which these observers responded to what we doing. After all, building a dry stone wall in a totally unexpected environment provides a different type of social interaction. As actors we were operating at the front of the stage.

People passed us on a daily basis as they went about their daily lives: walking the dog, dropping their children off to school, going shopping. We built relationships with these people in the months we worked on the project. Some were tradespeople, refuse collectors and postal workers who commented on the progress of the wall. Some actors stopped to talk daily; others stopped their cars to talk. For some 'regulars', the interactive process became scripted.

Everyone who stopped, we asked a simple question: "What is it about dry stone walls that fascinates people?"

We perhaps talked to and had conversations with more than twenty actors over a three-week period. These actors initiated the conversations. In a sense, they were 'interviewing' us, the 'researchers', rather than the other way around.

These actors learnt about the practise of walling and deepened their understanding of the process of building a wall.

Regarding the research process, collecting data implies '[getting] inside situations by empirically generating qualitative data through interaction with a number of key respondents', as Burrell and Morgan suggest (Burrell and Morgan 1979, p. 7). Actually identifying key respondents was not a problem, as the 'respondents' were 'passers by' who were more than willing to talk.

To make sense of the unstructured data, we applied dramaturgical



Fig. 5. The completed job.



Fig. 6. The completed job.

analysis. We used dramaturgical analysis to help make sense of unstructured data collected during the process of dry stone walling. In this context, the construction of the wall served as the centre-stage, and the dry stone wallers assumed the roles of actors performing a creative act, alongside the role of the audience when members of the general public took more centre stage. Dramaturgical analysis, with its focus on the stage and the social interactions of its actors, provided a sound theoretical and methodological framework to understand the nuances of this largely unconventional research setting. Rather than opting for the



Fig. 7. Rebuilding a boundary wall in Danby Dale, North Yorkshire. October 2023.

conventional thematic analysis often used in qualitative social science research, dramaturgical analysis was applied. This method allowed for a more rigorous exploration of the participants' responses and subjective lived experiences. Specific methods of thematic analysis are better suited, in our view, for analysing more [semi] structured qualitative approaches, with limited use when applied to wholly unstructured approaches. Subsequently, a reflective process was engaged in, contemplating the key themes that emerged from the research as and when members of the public joined each act. Thus each step in the process was an act.

In the next section, these themes are presented following our dramaturgical analysis of the social context. We reflected on the daily interactions with passers by and reflected deeply in relation to Goffman's theory. These social interactions were influenced by our insider positionalities. After extrapolating potential answers and relevant findings to the research questions we were interested in exploring, we engaged in narrative storytelling in conjunction with the single case research strategy. Photographs were also used to assist narrative storytelling. Photographs have been used in past rural studies research and illustrate the subjective realities of the research participants under study. We use photographs for illustrative purposes, specifically to 'reproduce the reality in front of the camera's lens, yielding an unmediated and unbiased visual report' (Schwartz, 1989: p.120). They are helpful in providing objective snapshots of the construction process in practice, evidencing that the researcher was there.

## 12. Results

The central exploratory research question guiding this study is: What is it about dry stone walls that fascinate people?

The responses to this question were complex but can be summarised under five categories identified via our dramaturgical analysis: nostalgia; dying artisanal trades; the rural in the urban; landscape; enterprise.

One observer said “Wait. I’m going to think about it and tell you tomorrow”

The next day, she returned and handed us a poem she had written for us articulating how much the wall meant to her.

### 13. Nostalgia

Others commented on the sense of nostalgia associated with both their childhood and for times lost.

“It is visceral for me. I just remember first seeing them in the (Yorkshire) Dales and Moors. That sense of untamed wildness”

“It’s in our heritage. I guess by that I mean it is almost innate”

“It is very emotional for me. It evokes memories of colour and light. Seeing the wall on a day to day basis is really haunting”

“Walls remind me of my childhood holidays in the country.

### 14. Dying artisanal trades

Others commented on the loss of dying trades

“You’re real artisans. And it must be a dying craft”

“What a wonderful skill you have”

“Well – it’s something that has been done for thousands of years. All different types across the country. Scotland, Derbyshire, but it’s Yorkshire for me”

“Just seeing how you turn that (the pile of stones) into that (the wall) is a work of art”

“A true jigsaw puzzle”

### 15. The rural in the urban

One commented on the astonishment and wonder of seeing something unusual.

“Bringing something of the countryside into the town – it’s amazing”

Four people asked if we offered dry stone walling courses. Two of these live some distance from the wall itself and had heard about it on social media. Interestingly many people photographed us at work and took images of the board with our names and contact details, which we had strategically placed for that purpose.

“Do you run courses?”

“I’d love to build a dry stone wall”

### 16. Landscape

“That wall changes the character of not only the house but also the road – great!”

“It epitomises Yorkshire doesn’t it!”

“Nothing like it anywhere in Beverley”

“It’s wonderful to see a dry stone wall being built here. I think it adds to the landscape”

### 17. Enterprise

“I think you are really interesting entrepreneurs”

What is clear is the number of emotional responses to unexpected rural stimuli in an urban environment. One observer suggested that we should get the local media to interview us. In a rural context, passers by likely would not ask as many questions, nor might they regard wallers as being particularly ‘entrepreneurial.’ In the urban context however, the transfer of skills from one context to another is perceived as innovative and novel in the context.

The emergent key themes then are: nostalgia, artisanship, skill, rural, landscape and enterprise.

### 18. Contribution

The contributions of this paper are three-fold.

First, to show that any social situation can be used as a research platform to understand, in this case, artisanal practise. Secondly, see how actors’ responses to ‘out of context’ experiences, provide emotive and visceral connexions.

Theoretically, the working paper is undeveloped other than seeing how the building of a wall became a play which actors – the passing public – became active observers.

When the wall was completed, the owner told us that he had noticed a man parking a series of Classic cars next to the wall and taking photographs of them. Our client asked him what he was doing was surprised to learn that he owned a Classic Car business and was using the wall as a prop. Apparently, the iconography of the dry-stone wall helped to sell classic cars and it was cheaper to photograph the car in the urban environment than driving many miles to the nearest dry stone wall in the countryside. An unexpected business benefit.

Our findings highlight several key points in relation to the literature mentioned earlier. We emphasise how ‘rural’ skills can be harnessed and applied in urban environments, indicating the blurred boundaries between urban and rural contexts (Philo, 1992). Previously, scholars have argued that rural and urban contexts are distinctly separate, our findings indicate overlap. These findings shed light on the transfer and sharing of contextual knowledge with local communities. The work also underscores the under-researched nature of dry stone walling in rural studies literature, emphasising the cultural and social significance of this artisan skill (Naylor, 2007), especially when applied to urban contexts. Additionally, it highlights how, through classical sociological theory (Goffman, 1959), the construction process itself can be utilised as a research platform to learn more about the significance of this practice. Furthermore, we contribute to a greater understanding of the historical and cultural significance of dry stone walling (Pappalardo et al., 2022). Here, we outline a contextual discussion that supports our study—something not covered in other pieces of literature.

### 19. Conclusions and implications

Whether the walling business is strictly speaking a creative enterprise in relation to the DCMS (2001) criteria may be questioned as it is foremost a part of a visitor experience; people do not, as a rule, travel to see dry stone walls, unless they are built as land-based artwork created by artists such as Andy Goldsworthy. Interestingly, such artists provide more work to specialists and other artisans – thus providing what Mitchell (2013) terms ‘creative enhancement and of course further economic benefits. His (<https://hangingstones.org/>) project in Rose-dale, North Yorkshire, is one such project.

The integration of rural artisan work into urban planning is a growing issue (Hardman and Larkham, 2014). A more environmentally aware population which values the importance of ecological value systems is becoming less tolerant of urban policies which do not take into account environmentally sustainable projects. A dry stone wall, in an

urban environment not only enhances citizens' wellbeing, they are more sustainable than fences or brick walls, providing homes to a myriad of invertebrates, small animals, insects and mosses and lichens.

As remarked, very little academic research and few policy-related studies have explored the topic of creative rural enterprise, and so it is suggested that this article has advanced the limited knowledge available and can initiate further exploration. The following three conclusions are offered.

First, the article demonstrates that this a demand for and an interest in, different types of what are termed 'rural' creative enterprise in the urban context, in which the interests, motivations and lifestyles of the entrepreneurs play a fundamental role in orienting the enterprise.

Second, creative enterprises and the cultural industries are increasingly important and dynamic aspects of rurality, although their relative significance varies across rural areas. They are significant in a number of respects. They valorise both cultural and economic capital through 'measures of happiness' and through their economic contribution to GDP. They generate employment, recruit from local labour markets and in some cases employ graduates, thus contributing to graduate retention in rural areas. They attract people to the countryside, forming an important aspect of the tourism economy, and generate income for other businesses both in the service and hospitality sectors. Culturally, they contribute in no small part to the 'placemaking' and cultural regeneration of the identity of rural communities.

In this example of a wall in the urban environment it is becoming well known and thus a signifier of place and indeed difference.

Third, there is a 'blind spot' in both academic and policy-related research in relation to the creative rural economy in the urban, with a few exceptions such as [Naylor \(2007\)](#).

However, rural development focuses on the natural environment, socio-economic policy and policies to help mitigate the impact of significant climate change. Support for artisans, including Dry stone wallers can play a part in enhancing the natural environment, the unique landscapes of upland areas. As we have seen, the restoration of dry stone walls fits well with policies designed to aid local nature recovery.

They can also help as natural barriers to help with disaster resilience, reduce soil erosion and flood prevention. Walls, as shown in this paper, strengthen urban-rural links. As the OECD suggests 'Urban and rural areas enjoy different and often complementary assets, and better integration between these areas is important for socio-economic performance.' Our wall is such an example.

This research highlights the importance of creative enterprise in both urban and rural environments. Dry stone walling practice has various important economic, environmental, and social contributions, making it a significant policy concern that links to environmental conservation, cultural heritage preservation, and sustainable agricultural practices. Public goods in this case dry stone walling subsidy for farmers, is largely absent in the current Environmental Land Management Schemes funded by the UK government.

Funding for dry stone walling is a particular concern. The current Countryside Stewardship payment of £31.91 per metre is low and may discourage landowners from hiring skilled Wallers who charge higher rates. Increasing payment rates could be an option. Additionally, while the Countryside Stewardship accounts for the restoration and maintenance of dry-stone walls, there is a lack of clarity on how dry-stone walling aligns with other schemes during the rollout of Environmental Land Management (ELM) and the replacement of Countryside Stewardship. If farmers are paid realistic grants, as suggested above, it may be the case that diversification into walling may be a realistic option.

Through agricultural policy transformations and the loss of Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) payments, farmers may also consider switching to cheaper alternatives, such as fencing. This could have a negative effect on the cultural significance of dry stone walling and also possess negative environmental effects. Fencing requires input materials such as wood, wood rot treatment, metal fencing, barbed wire, machinery that uses red diesel, and post-knocker attachments. Arguably, alternative

boundary controls and stock proofing management techniques, such as fencing, emit more carbon than dry stone walling. Therefore, dry stone walling could play an important role in meeting governmental legislation to achieve net-zero ambitions by 2050.

Dwindling farm business incomes following the removal of BPS for farmers in England could result in farmers initiating belt tightening (i.e., cost cutting) strategies. These economic factors associated with post-Brexit agricultural policy could result in several unintended consequences, such as farmers choosing to make do with current farm infrastructure, such as walls, barns and buildings in states of disrepair until things become clearer. This undoubtedly impacts how the countryside looks and count contribute to other issues, such as livestock escaping. While there are payment rates for wall restoration and maintenance, a critical issue that persists is skills development.

Issues surrounding skills, education, and training remain. Although there are numerous opportunities for the restoration, maintenance, and construction of dry stone walls, this depends on people's willingness to learn the craft. Policy initiatives should support training and apprenticeships, facilitate networks, and engage with dry stone walling associations. Furthermore, entrepreneurial opportunities may arise for those learning these skills to apply them in urban environments, as demonstrated in our case study.

As there are an estimated 200,000 km of dry stone walls across the UK, with an estimated 90% in need of repair, this could present an entrepreneurial opportunity for those skilled in this area and for farmers who engage in contract work, utilising their skillsets off farm and even in urban environments.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Gerard McElwee:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing - original draft. **Peter Gittins:** Conceptualization, Writing - review & editing.

#### Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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### Further Reading

- The handbooks on artisan rural crafts produced by the conservation volunteers in the UK (<https://www.tcv.org.uk/>) are an excellent resource for both professionals and volunteers alike).
- Scott Beveridge photography. <https://scott-beveridge.photography/dry-stone-wallers>.
- Jack McCallum is a professional waller based in North Yorkshire. His work can be seen at <https://stoneofarc.com/about-us/>.