

## September 2016 – Foundations & Caravan

This two-week visit for us and three weeks for Ric was a carry-over from July. George had spent a few days breaking more concrete. He had pulled up most of the reinforcing I-beams and chipped the concrete off them, the concrete ramp was no more and the wall across the courtyard was gone. The waste concrete pile by contrast was much larger and higher. A big improvement, but we do need to get someone in to crush concrete.

**Foundation block work:** We carried on where we had left off,



after draining green, smelly and midge-ridden water from those trenches that had flooded – thanks Jill! I learnt basic mortar skills and between us we got the blockwork finished to a presentable standard.

**Caravan:** We got the digger and dumper back on site.

Before we got drains dug out and made the site even more inaccessible, we decided to use the digger to pull the caravan round to the courtyard, where we had wanted it in the first place. Simple idea, not easy to do. It was just too bulky. We moved concrete from the pile to allow room to pull the it through the gap. No matter what we did, the caravan kept jamming. Ric got cross and really attacked the concrete and, after three hours trying, just got it pulled through.



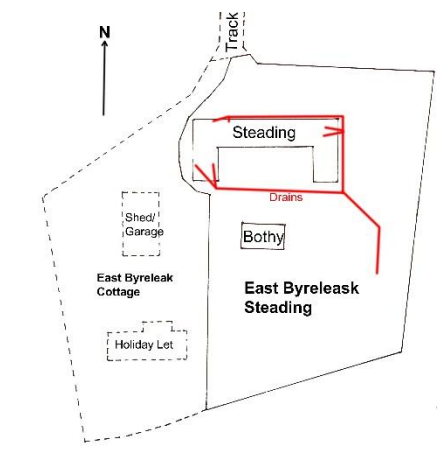
Then another hour to pull it round into place. We levelled it up and, by next day, Ric had all the services connected again. It had suffered, but is now in a better, more sheltered, location.

**More Concrete:** Ric start digging drains whilst we got the cement mixer out and ordered cement and 16 tonnes of aggregate. We got going filling trenches - to slab height less 30cm on the inward side and, for doorways, to a bit below ground level on the outward side, to support doorsteps. Where there were two leaves of blockwork, we filled the space between. We were to run drains through some of the foundations, we created the openings with blocks and lintels before filling. The relatively new standpipe was dismantled and run under gravel through the front door foundation, to pop up inside and above floor level in an insulated sleeve.



## September 2016 – Drains

**Drains:** The drains turned out to be slow work. The ground was difficult and we ended up with rather deeper and wider trenches than we wanted. Ground water was a problem at the lowest points. We had trouble finding space to put the spoil. The concrete flooring in the steading was much tougher than we hoped, but had to come up so we could run the drains inside. Ric plugged on, we got 25 tonnes of pea gravel delivered and all the drain pipe and fittings we thought we would need. We levelled up the trenches with gravel to 1-in-40 slopes. We moved



East Byreleask Steading Conversion – Newsletter 18  
 off plan by including a connection to the caravan, at some point this could be reused to run into the bothy. We put water pipe and armoured electric cable in to the caravan and electric cable down to the septic tank - we will need an effluent pump because the ground is not suitable for a normal soakaway. The runs of drain inside the steading needed hand-digging and a degree of precision to make sure connections are in the right place. Two drains did not have doorways to run under, we got shovel and breaker out and dug down by hand, under the walls. We placed blocks up each side of the tunnels, put lintels over and rammed dry mortar into the gap up to the wall above. By this time the site looked like some sort of alien moonscape and we were really running out of room to store materials and get vehicles on and off site. We got our septic tank delivered and made the site look even more exotic.

**Building Standards:** Drains should be inspected before they are covered. I made contact, knowing one of the two inspectors was on holiday. The other one asked if we were following the plans, I said yes. He said to take photos and fill the drains in – no visit needed. We started

laying inspection chambers and pipework.

**Other stuff:** The hedging was doing well. Some species were much more tasty than average and had been trimmed off at tree-tube height by rabbits/hares, others were growing out of the tops. It had been dry and some of the last plants we put in had perished. Probably 95% of plants were still with us, far better than I had expected. We did the usual picking glass and strimming. We hit the remaining Japanese Knotweed hard – double doses all round. At this point we bowed out and left Ric to carry on.

**The last week:** He was heroic. George appeared for half a day to dig a hole for the septic tank, Ric then got as much done as he could. He laid the entirety of the foul drain to the far side of the septic tank. He covered it with gravel and cunningly used the wider trenches to run the surface water drains above and to the side, neatly getting round the advice of the architect not to lay one drain above the other AND avoiding having to dig a separate trench. He connected the caravan to the foul drain, so we have a usable system for light use. He had to get another 20 tonnes of pea gravel and was pushing spoil back into the trenches at 10pm the night before he headed home. The surface water drain is incomplete – a job for the future.

**Afterwards:** Ric sent us around 100 photos of the drains, I stuck them on my cloud account, sent a link to the building inspector and waited for the response. In due course he came back with just one technical change, that means I will be digging a hole over Christmas and replacing some fittings. A small price to pay!

It was all much slower than we planned for and quite a bit more expensive, the first time we have been quite wrong with our estimating. We consoled ourselves with Ric's theory that foundations and drains always are a pain.



Jill & Andy Walker

