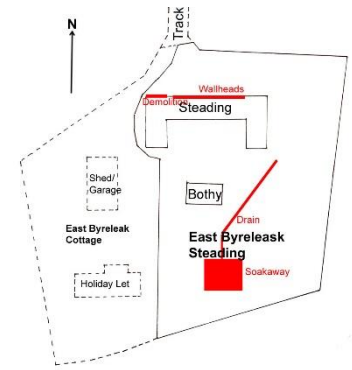


April 2016 – Build & Demolish

Having set Ric working back in March, he got called back to Cornwall for two weeks, so we arrived to an empty caravan. He had replaced the leaking water heater so, with a couple of supermarket visits, extra duvets, gas bottle refills and a 3KW electric heater, we set ourselves up quite comfortably. Ric was back a bit over a week after we got there.

Progress up to our arrival: Ric had done more on our surface water drainage. Most of the downpipe sockets are in place, he levelled-up the trenches from last September and dug out our 4m x 4m surface-water soakaway. On top of this, he had done extensive levelling and disposal of waste. He has built up the ground leading to where our raised-mound soakaway (from the septic tank) will need to be - the mound should blend quite nicely into the view from the steading.



The concrete tank: The creepiest discovery to date was that our 2m x 3m shed base below a thin layer of soil was actually the reinforced concrete lid of a ginormous underground tank. Ric chiselled his way through to discover it was 2.5m deep and had a concrete partition down the middle. It was fairly full of water, with a thick layer of sludge at the bottom. He used our dirty-water pump to get most of the water out and is talking of getting inside to clean it out – we are not quite so keen. Each half of the tank had separate runs of clay pipe

entering from the steading courtyard and at least one run of clay pipe drains out into the wide shallow ditch that ran right down the garden. It was probably tied in to the drainage of the now-removed silage clamp built against the north side of the steading building.

Ric talked us into running our surface water drain through it, so that we have a reservoir of garden water that we can pump out.

Gardening: We had ordered 4 more fruit trees beforehand – three apples and a plum – and even stopped in Berwick on the way up and bought two cherry trees from Morrisons. We took time out from our more physical jobs to extend the orchard. Jill also work her way all round our hedging, tidying up and weeding around each plant, marking & replacing the dead ones – a remarkably small number as it happens.

Capping the walls: We need to prepare the wallheads for a new roof (and protect them from the weather), even though the door and window openings have not yet been squared up. When they are, we will install lintels over the openings and bind them into the blockwork that will hold the roof trusses.



We checked that each pair of wallheads are 1) level, 2) straight and 3) parallel. The only real problem is the east, two-storey,



stretch, where one wall is straight, but the other has a 12cm curve outwards at one point. We will need tweak the blockwork so that the two sides end up parallel.

We chose start capping the north stretch, because it is low, level and parallel. We made up barrows of 1:4 mortar and slathered it over sections of wallhead, to produce a level, horizontal surface. After a day for the mortar to go off, we lugged 100mm concrete blocks onto the scaffolding and laid two courses, lengthwise across the wallhead, lined up with the inner face of the wall. Then two courses lengthwise along the wall. So the inner face of the wall is raised by 400+mm and the roof trusses will rest on top. Fate intervened and we had to move on to other work, but at least we have done some real building!

Demolishing the un-supported gable-end wall: The 'other work' was to take down the wall that is to have our garage door in it and which is without foundations at one end. We rescued the dressed-granite capping stones, put them to one side and picked our way down the rubble-build wall. Large stones got hoisted down, medium stones we lugged down by hand, small stones we threw down. It was slow to start with and speeded as we got lower. The last few courses we did not need the hoist, but the stonework got noticeably harder to prise apart. We pulled the unsupported section down by hand, from ground level and cleared it to ground level. We stopped at the point Ric thought he could get the digger in to finish the job.



We barrowed all the rubble over our hardstanding and out of our

way and dumped the loose lime mortar in a corner. The quoin stones (squared-off corner stones) joined the capping stones. All good healthy exercise that convinced me that we should probably buy an electric hoist when we need to re-build the wall.



Filling the soakaway: With the wall down, the next priority was to fill the soakaway with suitable rubble. We scoured the site for loose odds & ends, then got down to serious hard labour. We took all the broken hardstanding (i.e.



bits 10-15cm thick) we could find and smashed it up with a sledge hammer. After two days of barrowing, we got the mini dumper back and used that. When the breakable concrete in our big pile ran out we got Ric to pull up more concrete in the courtyard. So after 4 days we at last got all 16 cubic metres of soakaway filled. The rubble was very effective, it did not compact down and left plenty of voids. We ordered some 4m wide weed membrane, Ric will lay two layers of it over the rubble, put subsoil on the membrane and finish off with some topsoil. Job done, hopefully never to be seen again!



Running drains to the soakaway: Ric meanwhile ran trenches from the soakaway up to the current end of our pipework. We laid the drainpipe in gravel, projecting into the middle of the soakaway, levelled it up, then refilled the trenches. He did indeed run the drain pipe into one side of the big concrete tank and out the other side and connected to the system we

laid last year. It needs two runs across each end of the courtyard then will be finished.