

May 2017 – Ric on his own

Ric stayed on for a couple of weeks after our Easter visit...

Drains (almost) finished: Ric covered the soakaway with a double



layer of weed membrane then made good with subsoil and topsoil. He laid drains up each side of the courtyard for gutter downpipes. The last job will be to divert our field drain into the surface water drain, possibly next year.

Screening spoil: It was

getting difficult to move round the site for big piles of spoil from foundations and drains. Ric spent a good couple of weeks patiently running them through his soil screener, piling the stone for future use and spreading the screened subsoil across our courtyard and filling the area where our concrete ramp used to be. He aimed to raise the latter high enough to disguise our raised drainage mound, as and when we get it built.



Cobbling: In preparation for getting a floor slab laid later in the year, Ric started breaking up more concrete inside the steading. Most of

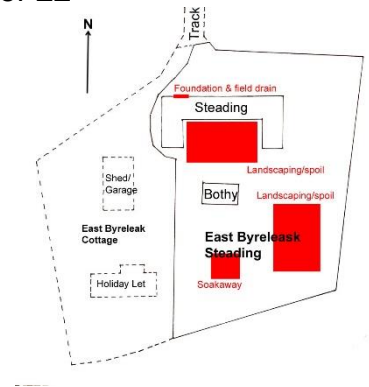
it had been laid over earlier cobbled flooring, with the cobbles separated out by the screener. We are giving serious thought to re-using the cobbles for paths, for example in the courtyard.

186 tonnes of Hardcore: We had a big pile of concrete and we needed hardcore for our floor slab. George got back to Ric to say that a mobile crusher would not cope with our bigger bits of concrete, he suggested getting crushed hardcore in, with the trucks taking our concrete back with them. It happened, we got 9 truck-loads delivered, all there was room for. We will use over half on



the floor slab and will look to get George to use the rest on the worst parts of our track. There is still a big pile of concrete left over, as well as the remaining hardstandings.

Foundations and field drains: Ric excavated the missing foundation for the north gable-end wall. In doing so he uncovered a second field drain running under the steading, a clay pipe, but bigger than the one we found last year. It looks as though it pre-dates the steading and that the brickwork under our gable-end wall had been put in place much later to divert our near-surface clay field drains into. This would explain the sounds of running water we heard when we bought the property. It went silent round about the time we had our mains water installed, which cut across & blocked the shallow clay pipes, leading in turn to our flooding problems. I now think it is this drain the architect knew about and wanted us to fix, our first one is a bonus.



July 2017 – Andy on his own

I took advantage of 8 days on my own to catch up on some loose ends.



North gable-end foundation:

The blockwork here is a bit fiddly because there is the double-leaf gable-end foundation & the adjoining wall foundation, stepped back by 22cm and also double-leaf. The existing front-door foundation & the internal

foundation, that will bear the upstairs floor joists and roof trusses, stairs and garage wall both need to tie in. I measured where the blockwork needed to be, from every reference point I could, then over two days got four courses, exactly, of blockwork laid, with the double-leaf sections filled with weak concrete. I back filled the inside with weak concrete and the front with soil. Now we just need the walls re-built!

Air-pipe for woodburner: We will need a supply of air for the woodburner. We will run a pipe under the nearest outside wall, up into the hardcore and up through the floor slab. All I needed to do for now was sort out the bit under the wall. I dug out, laid a concrete pad under the wall, put concrete blocks each side, slid lintels on top and packed them with dry-ish mortar. I used slotted (land drain) pipe for the horizontal run under the wall and laid a gravel channel back to our drain, to get any stray rain- or ground-water out of the way.



Protecting the wallheads: In April I laid mortar on one of our exposed



wallheads, to protect the them from the weather and to prepare for the blockwork that will support the roof trusses. I got much of the blockwork



done, but had to move on to other things.

I only had time this visit to lay the mortar on the remaining walls. It took 7 short runs of scaffolding, so most of the effort was assembling & dismantling. The mortar was quick and easy to lay and level, with some minor reconstruction work on the walls. I left two bits of wall which need to be partially demolished in the next 12 months.

Weeding: I was amazed how our hedging, orchard and shrub patches had been inundated with waist-high perennial weeds, since the April visit – mostly grasses, nettles, thistles and docks. I cleared it all and strimmed most of the rest of the plot. I noted: 1) the woodchip mulch is starting to break down into compost, meaning weeds can take root



above the membrane, 2) grasses creep over the edges of the weed membrane and grow roots through into the soil below, 3) many of the thistles are growing sideways under the membrane to find the slits, pulling them up is easy and 4) the stones we use to hold the membrane in place accumulate enough soil to allow weed seeds to germinate. We need a longer-term plan to keep control.