

# Case Study

## Conserving our cultural heritage: Flint walling at Stanmer Park

### Background

Flint has been mined on the South Downs ever since the Neolithic period. When combined with lime mortar it was found to be an excellent material for building stone walls because it's one of the hardest and most durable of all building stones.

Craftsmen through the centuries have been creative in their use of flint to leave a rich heritage of different styles of flint work, of which many require great skills and techniques. The fortifications at Cissbury encompass some 65 acres of land that was used both for farming and mining flint for walls and buildings across the National Park.

Flint walling is associated with a wide range of building types around the South Downs, from the simplest to the grandest, and contributes greatly to local character. Alfriston flint cottages and boundary walls are a lovely example of flint walling. Lewes county town has some prime examples of flint walls and buildings, as well as most small Downland villages around the National Park.

Sadly many of these flint walls are now in need of repair. Due to the impervious nature of flint, its unwieldy shape and small size, walls can be poorly bonded together and this can lead to loss of stability. Potentially serious problems can be avoided with regular maintenance and prompt remedial action. The flint wall at Stanmer Park is around 250 years old so flint construction can stand the test of time, albeit most of the wall does now need repairing/rebuilding.



*Volunteer Rangers restoring the flint wall at Stanmer Park*

### The project

The historic flint wall at Stanmer Park runs for more than three miles around the western and northern boundaries of the estate. It's believed to have been built by French prisoners of war in the 1760s. The prisoners would have spent the bleak winter days picking flints out of the nearby arable fields as the actual laying of the stones could only take place in the warmer months. Lime would have been supplied from Lime Kilns just north of Stanmer and sand would have come from either the coast or quarried just north of the Downs. The wall stands roughly 1.7m high with an average overall thickness of about 450mm. It is comprised of an outer skin consisting of rough, unshaped large flints and a rubble core.

South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Ranger, Mark Hayward, has been working with volunteers in Stanmer Park to rebuild/repair sections of the Estate's flint wall, highlighted within the Historic Landscape Plan for Stanmer Park. The project started in September 2012 in collaboration with Brighton and Hove City Council who own the wall. The priority for this project is to stabilise adjoining standing sections of the historic wall, before attempting to re-instate the missing sections from ground level. Another aspect of the project is to train others in this important rural skill, including staff, volunteers, staff from local government and other UK National Parks and partners.

The main costs for the project are for materials, including sand, lime and grit. The flints are all reused from the existing wall. The cost per year is approximately between £1,500 and £2,000. Staff costs are involved, with Mark as the main instructor. In the past, SDNPA have brought in a trainer from Plumpton College to deliver training for staff and volunteers.

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“The volunteers have done an amazing job. They have rebuilt parts of the wall from scratch and repaired many metres over the last five to six years. I’m sure this task will last me out until 2030 and retirement, if I ever get to 67!”

Mark Hayward, SDNPA Ranger (Eastern Area team)

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### The outcome

The Stanmer Park Estate wall will probably never be finished - once you get to the end you start all over again! Mark spends three to four weeks a year, week and weekend days working on the wall with SDNPA staff and volunteers. Working at this rate, it’s estimated that it would take the next 20 years or so to complete.

Around 45-50 metres of the wall has already been restored, with a further four metres built and five square metres repaired last autumn. Parts of the sections at the top of Stanmer, near Coledean Lane, Old Boat Corner and Ditchling Road have been completed.

Established beech trees have knocked down parts of the wall and are now growing in the subsequent gaps. This has caused a few problems and make it rather difficult to repair, but we’re not going to let a few trees dampen our spirits.

### The future

The SDNPA will continue working with volunteers to carry out essential on-going stabilisation, repairs and rebuilding of the historic wall at Stanmer Park.

A large section of the wall, on the opposite side to current restoration works, is very badly damaged. This will be our area of focus that we will tackle over the next three/four years.

For further information regarding the Historic Landscape Plan for Stanmer Park, please see:

<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/planning/heritage/stanmer-conservation-area>

**The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19** sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

**This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:**

**Outcome 4:** The condition and status of cultural heritage assets and their settings is significantly enhanced, many more have been discovered and they contribute positively to local distinctiveness and sense of place.

**Outcome 7:** The range and diversity of traditional culture and skills has been protected and there is an increase in contemporary arts and crafts that are inspired by the special qualities of the National Park.

<http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf>

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