Masterclass: Fat Tony and the Art of Coursing: Part 2.

Sean Adcock. Photos and diagrams © the author.

Part 1 ended with the promise that "Fat Tony" would finally make an appearance here-in. Before he does we need to first look at some of the issues that can occur with jointing within a coursed wall.

One of the guiding principles for good walling is to set 1 on 2 and 2 on 1. For better walling (or the ideal) we develop this to say half on half. Of course this works for bricks but not necessarily for random stone.

If we have a stone with a longer face we can only sit half on it with two more 'longish' stones, in order to maintain the ideal crossing the joints of larger stones needs similarly large stones, and that stones of a similar dimensions tend to want to flock together, 'mushrooming' within the wall (these principles were introduced in planning part 2 and developed in part 3)[1] and can be seen in Fig.1.

Fig.1. Here attempting to sit ½ on ½ has lead to a 'mushrooming' of longer stones towards the centre of the section shown and a unbalanced structure compared to either

This problem is easier to solve in a random wall where you can often work around jointing issues by 'jumping' up a layer or dropping down with either a blockier or a thinner stone respectively, or even by using shapes to vary the layer's thickness. In a coursed wall you are constrained by the imperative of closely matching the course height. Consequently in achieving the sufficient crossing of joints is how you vary actual face widths of relatively similarly sized (in terms of height/course depth) stone.

The ideal of 1 on2, ½ on ½, would only really be practical if we have many stones of very similar dimensions. So in practice we have to have variations amending the 'rule' to aiming to sit half on half, settling for sat on ⅓ and avoiding anything less than ¼.

However where the contact is nearer ⅓ than ½ we often end up with short gaps, but in order to maintain the coursing this often means the gap is taller than it is wide. As with many things this is a problem which can be avoided by planning.

The Canadians I was working with called these stones (such as a and b in Fig.2) "fat Tonys". No one seems to know exactly why. Could it be derived from an Italian masonry habit or perhaps after a singular waller who did it? Many years ago in North Welsh walling competitions there was one local (now emigrated)

Fig.2. Meet 'Fat Tony'

who was a good waller but much to his own annoyance he invariably ruined his stint with at least one bad running joint which he had just not noticed in the heat of competition. His surname was 'Stringer' and for a while running joints hereabouts were referred to as 'stringers', it worked on many levels but (sadly in my opinion) never gained wider acceptance. A Canadian friend Andre Lemieux suggests 'Fat Tony' could come from an Italian penchant for pinstripe suits... pinstripes on a fat Italian guy gets you the fat Tony. As he suggests: 'So simple it's got to be in the running'. Nick Aitken,

inveterate collector of walling terms suggests the term might have been coined by Canadian Stonemason Bobby as a somewhat derogatory term following a disagreement with someone... you'd have to ask him exactly why!

Fat Tony's (herein after referred to as FTs) are essentially a variation on "soldiers" or bookended/pitched stone- stones stood on end to fill a gap. Thinner soldiers are a weakness as in themselves they lack stability, and are usually reliant on the stones either side to stay upright. In a flat-layed wall it should be obvious that an over-riding principle is laying stone flat! Many of the principles and intrinsic strengths of the specific method are predicated on that. Would you consider standing a stone on edge and trying to build around it? Unless you are building to an overall method designed for this practice (for example cloddiau and wedge walling), then hopefully not, it should be obvious that it doesn't really want to stay where it is and won't if anything below it moves. In a flat layed wall each individual stone should be intrinsically self-stable (with the usual proviso... with 'a minimum of wedging'). The fact that a soldier would fall over without its neighbours should tell you that it isn't as stable as it should be. However as I noted in "*Stonework*" *"provided the stone is tight with its long axis into the wall it is not entirely unacceptable",* and that *"This is a practice which is probably acceptable every few weeks rather than a few times every day/square metre. It is easily avoided just by ordering the stone better, and points to bad technique"*. I also noted there that they can create jointing issues and often lead to the problem of 1 on 3.[2] We shall, see that similar problems are encountered with FTs.

Whilst FTs are essentially soldiers their name does suggest there is (literally) a little more to them. Whilst they are taller than they are wide, they area also "fat" and so generally still have a good footprint. Not necessarily as stable as flat-layed stone they are however less likely to topple than soldiers. Essentially if a FT is to be employed then it should not be reliant on its neighbours for stability, and not topple if these were removed, then any problems are likely to be less about structure and more about a perceived aesthetic.

In Fig.2 the use of 'a' and 'c' facilitate the generally smaller building stone of that that course in breaking the joints of the larger/longer faced stones used below and avoid tracing, although' is more of a soldier than a FT. 'a' has a good footprint and is relatively stable in its own right.
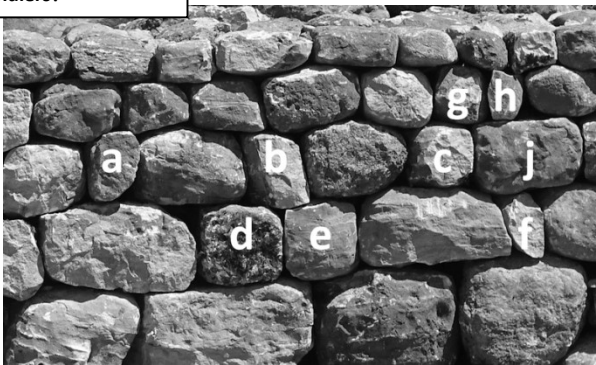
Fig.3 shows a mixture of FTs and out and out soldiers in a short section of wall. Whilst a FT might conceivably be a reasonable solution to a problem in a coursed wall,it has been a little overdone here, probably party due to poor planning and the knock on effect/mushrooming that often occurs from the initial use of an undersized/oversized stone.[3] It is a good illustration of the problems that lead to the use of FTs.

Fig.3. Too many Fat Tonys and Soldiers?

In Fig.4 a, b, f, h are arguably soldiers rather than FTs and c, d, e are essentially square and so only marginally FTs g is perhaps the only true FT. Between them tehy illustrate a range of jointing issues,and each tends to be a situation where FTs are used to 'solve' the problem.

The stone below a and c are relatively long compared to their height. Consequently overlapping joints to their centres on the next course has proved problematic given the shallower course height and they have been used to enable the stones either side of them to sufficently cross the joints below, without

minimising the overlapping. The same seems to be the case with f.

Meanwhile b is solving a jointing issue caused by the relatively narrow faces of d and e. Crossing this joint necessitates another small stone (and potentially mushrooming the problem- avoided here)[4] or a `1 on 3` (such as j above f) and all the problems that entails (more on this next time)[5]. Whilst the use of j above f has lead to a similar problem as that encountered below a and c.

g illustratesa problem similar to b in that there is a smallstone in (c) in the course below. Here it would have been better if g,h had been one stone, however this is not always possible in terms of achieving good contact with the stones below. This contact is often more easily achieved with a smaller stone, especially where there is a small difference in height between the lower stones as seems likely with the joint at c.j.

Hence if you use FT to solve a problem it will almost inevitably cause another in terms of being able to get two stones to sit on it in the

Fig.5. extract from fig.12 The art of coursing part 1

subsequent course, whilst the narrower it is the greater that problem will be.

Even if you solve the problem you might not be able to cross onto the adjacent stones as much as would be ideal and that in turn is likely to have repercussions.

One final variation where the jointing problem on top of FTs has been solved can be seen in Fig. 5.

Here the multiplication of a problem/stone shape can be seen with a series of FTs on the 3rd course. This is the knock on efffect of the smaller stone on the course below and the problem of fitting larger stones on smaller stones.[6]

This will always be a problem in a coursed wall where the stones in a lower course have a face width which does not really exceed the face height/ depth of the subsequent course. As noted in part 1 here this is specifically a consequence of the need to level off on top of some larger footings. Whilst the subseqent course(s) are stones that are, by and large, not really FTs we do have an agglomeration of smaller face lengthed stones within the wall. Essentially the face length has remained the same for most of the stones, it is only their bed depth/course height that has changed.

In fig.5 could the problems created by the seconfd course have been mitigated by using thinner stone, some of which might have needed to be traced? Does any of this matter if the FTs are tight, have good length in and internal contact, and maintain the coursing? Walling is full of compromises, is this worse than any other? Maybe here we have an excessive amount of FTs but in general as far as I am concerned the jury is still out.

Walling is full of contradictions and compromises and most things are acceptable in moderation. Should the wall which fig. 5 is an extract from be instantly condemned? Assuming the FTs have good length

Fig.6. Are well placed FTs a problem in a well built piece of wall?

in isit that bad a crime, and should the wall shown in Fig.6 be criticised solely on the basis of having 2 or 3 well fitted FTs?

My gut reaction is that I dont like them and with planning they ought to be avoidable. In Canada I by and large avoided them but this was possibly at the cost of other compromises and I might be forced to concede they have more of a role to play in coursed walling than random walling, with the qualification that an excess probably does still point towards poor technique and faulty planning. Defining an excess might of course prove more problematic.

Do you know Fat Tony's by another name... if you do please let me know! As FT is a bit of an arbitrary name I did experiment with a Fat Tony alliteration game in the interest if political incorrectness- 'pregnant Priscillas', 'rotund Rolands', 'obese Olivers', and 'wide Wendys' maybe, one thing is certain though we should draw the line somewhere and not tolerate 'long tall Sallys'.
Next Time we will look a little more at building on FTs, revisit the problem of one on three, and look to close the gap.....

NOTES
[1] see *Stonechat 27* (Winter 2012-13) and *Stonechat 28* (Spring 2013) .
[2] *Stonework.*DSWA North Wales Branch(2012). p.17
[3] *Stonechat 28* (Spring 2013). Masterclass: Problems and Planning part 3
[4] *Stonechat 30* (March 2016). Masterclass: Problems and Planning part 5
[5] one on three is best covered in *Stonework* p.17 see also*Stonechat 18* (Summer 2009), -Masterclass- Random walling part 2 and *Stonechat 28* (Spring 2013), Masterclass – Problems and Planning part 3 .
[6] *Stonechat 29* (Summer 2013).   Masterclass – Problems and Planning part 4