

The formative years

In 1938 Colonel Frederick Rainsford Hannay founded the Stewartry Drystane Dyking Committee with the aim of reviving interest in the ancient craft of drystane dyking. Rainsford Hannay was concerned to find post and wire fencing was being widely promoted as an economic alternative to the repair of drystane dykes. He believed "it is quite stupid to do such a thing" when the stones are there and skilled dykers available. However, he realised that the number of professional dykers had been in decline over the previous 20 years and something needed to be done to remedy this problem before it was too late. Rainsford Hannay had been inspired by the 1937 / 38 dry stone walling competitions held in Derbyshire and decided that organising a dyking competition in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbrightshire would encourage future generations to preserve this valuable feature in the landscape.

The initial committee consisted of five prominent local landowners and agriculturalists who were tasked with raising funds and organising drystane dyking competitions. The first competition was held on 4th October 1939 at Ford Farm near Castle Douglas. There were 28 entries competing for a silver challenge cup donated by Dr Gordon Munn of Croys and four silver medals provided by the Highland and Agricultural Society Scotland.

Rainsford Hannay took any opportunity to promote the craft of drystane dyking including a BBC radio broadcast (1940) and articles in the Transactions of Highland and Agricultural Society Scotland (1944) and Scottish Agriculture (HM Stationary Office 1947).

Although a training course was held in 1948 it was the competitions that became the focus of the Committee's activity. Further competitions were organised between 1941 and 1957 at locations near to the market town of Castle Douglas. Competitions were held at the farms of Dryburgh, Midkelton, Auchengibbert, Crocketford, Bridge of Dee, Netherhall and Mollance.



1955 Competition

Dumfries and Galloway Library and Archive Service

Rainsford Hannay continued to collect information about the history of drystane dyking and the different styles of construction both close to home and further afield. After years of research and editing he eventually published his seminal book *Dry Stone Walling* (1957) which is still available today from the Dry Stone Walling Association.

Colonel Frederick Rainsford Hannay died 11 September 1959 aged 81 shortly before the 10th drystane dyking competition at Netherhall Farm.

A new chapter for the Stewartry Drystane Dyking Committee would begin with the next convener, Mrs Elizabeth Murray Usher of Cally, Gatehouse.