



Journey through the Valley of Stone

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Fashions In Stone

The outside masonry of buildings show great variety, reflecting levels of quality and sophistication, and sometimes clues to when they were built. Main influences on change are availability of stone, advances in quarrying techniques and fashion.

Random Rubble

The earliest technique, rather crude and unselective, but continues on a small scale today. Locally the stone is often a mixture of gritstone and sandstone, whatever shape is to hand and therefore cheaper. Random rubble walling is mostly found in humbler buildings, or at the backs and sides of houses (away from public view) and in workshops, outhouses and walls.



Example of random rubble walling with angular uncoursed stonework

Early Coursed Stonework

A traditional pattern for early Pennine Farmhouses was courses or beds of local sandstones and gritstones, often in diminishing thickness upwards. Gritstone blocks and lintels are used for strength in quoin stones (corners), and doorway and window details.



Early farm building, Waggoner Tunstead, 1632 with distinctive mullion windows, Stacksteads



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Fearn's Hall 1696, with coursed stonework and massive door porch and lintel, Stacksteads

In parts of Rossendale the early quarries used the actual outcrops of flagstone where weathering had exaggerated the layering. Earlier farmhouses then tend to have a thinner coursing. Occasionally a property is raised in height and the later thicker coursing appears as an obvious addition.



Tong End Farm showing shallow coursing in an early property, Whitworth



Early barn at Tong End, thicker coursed work at the top indicates a raising of roof level, Whitworth



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Water - shot Stonework

A distinctive early style appears in Rossendale around 1740, known as water- shot coursing. The outer face of each course is tilted at a slight angle to the vertical so that the upper edge projects beyond the lower edge. In cross section this gives the wall a 'saw tooth' appearance.

Architectural historian W. John Smith records the local name for this technique - 'T masonry' in Rossendale, 'ramped' in Rochdale, 'overshot' in Darwen, 'weathershot' in North Yorkshire and 'Yorkshire tilt' in Saddleworth. Only the outer skin of the wall is laid with downward tilt but the technique seemed to work. Although sandstone is porous, any moisture in the wall would percolate to the ledge and be removed by evaporation.

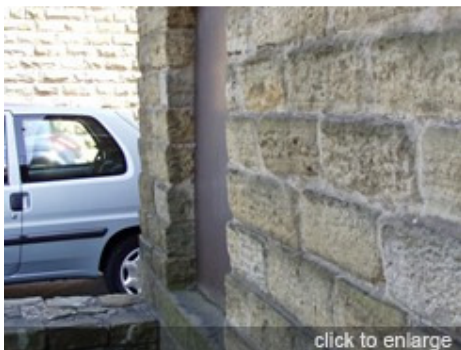
'Water - shot style was successfully used in farmhouses and early terraces for over a hundred years and then starts to fade out, becoming rarer after 1840. Some examples survive into the 1860s and 80s - older masons would stick to their tried and tested techniques.

Both techniques of coursing above would need squared or dressed blocks and these would be created and decorated by a mason's punch or slightly pointed chisel (sometimes referred to as **punch faced stonework**).



The stones are tilted to allow moisture in the wall to drain out.

Diagram of water-shot coursing



click to enlarge

Water-shot coursed stonework showing distinctive saw edged pattern



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Farm at Tunstead illustrating the outer shell only is water-shot stonework, the gable end is not

Pitch - Faced or Rock - Faced Stonework

A new technique was developed to exploit the harder lonky beds of the Rossendale Quarries. The timing coincided with the introduction of harder steel wedges and chisels and in particular a special kind of chisel known as a 'pitching tool'. The first pitch faced buildings appear by 1838 and come to dominate the Victorian town landscape with many mills and miles of terraces, because the pitching technique is much more cost effective and time saving.

All that is required for a strong good looking building is square edged blocks laid in courses on the front face of a building. In the older, slower techniques the blocks were squared with punch chisels. In pitch faced, the tops, sides and back of stone blocks were left untreated (controlled by the thickness of bed) only the front face was squared along a line or when more skilled, by eye. The pitching tool is more like a woodworking chisel with a blunt edge. When angled correctly, scallop shaped pieces or 'scapplins' are easily trimmed off leaving sharp square edges about a protruding textural feature.

The harder silica rich rocks like Haslingden Flags are most suitable for this technique, almost using the same properties as the stone age flint makers. Softer, coarser gritstones are much more difficult to pitch than Rossendale lonky.

Bay Windows

Are a late Victorian feature. Building regulations relaxed in 1894 so windows no longer had to be flush with the exterior wall. Houses with bay windows of one apparent type of stone would post date 1894. Unusually a large neighbouring quarry of Catlow, Nelson cornered the market in bay



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windows and many examples of Rossendale terraces with local stone but with added Catlow dressings and bay windows.