



# Journey through the Valley of Stone

... a living history



**You are here:** The Journey > History of quarrying

## History of quarrying

From small beginnings typical of local Pennine areas, the Rossendale Quarrying industry grew out of all proportion to its neighbours. Here we explore the reasons for the enormous rate of growth of the moorland quarries of Rossendale.

**You are here:** The Journey > History of quarrying > Early quarrying

## Early quarrying

Stone has been quarried in Rossendale since at least the 14th century and probably long before that. There are records of stone being sold in Rossendale in 1341 and of rents being paid for quarries in the middle of the 15th century.

A 1552 quote paints a picture of small quarries in wild country,

"There were mynes or delfes on the King's waste ground at Balladen wherein slate stones were got. They were scarcely worth letting by the year for 20/- because there is slate enough to be had near adjoining on other men's land and because it is in a wyld savage contrey farre from any habitacion."

Before about 1770 most of the quarrying was on a small scale and took place close to where the stone was wanted. However, from the earliest times some Rossendale stone was in great demand both locally and further afield. This stone split easily into thin sheets suitable for roofing slates and these were a valuable commodity. This led to quarrying for slates, with "sclatt pittes" (slate pits) being worked as early as 1600. It is said that that almost all the old houses in Rossendale were roofed with tiles from the Heald slate quarries. Records show that in the 17th century slate pits were big enough businesses to involve disputes about rent and other payments.

Much early quarrying was for local needs. Farmers who wanted stone for a building or the countless drystone walls that criss-cross the landscape would find an outcrop of stone nearby and take stone from there. Similar outcrops were used by early quarrymen seeking stone to sell. The effect of weather, particularly the effect of frost, would probably have loosened the exposed stone, making it easier to break away from the outcrop. Because of Rossendale's geology, these rocky outcrops are usually high on the valley sides near the edge of the moorland. There are few places in Rossendale that are far from such outcrops and the stone would have been quarried and shaped close to where it was needed, probably just a short journey away by horse-drawn cart or sled.

These tiny quarries were sufficient for local needs, but as the growing towns of the industrial revolution demanded more and more stone, bigger quarries were developed. Many of the small quarries were obliterated by these larger workings, but some continued to be worked to supply stone locally. It is still possible to find their remains, sometimes no more than a few metres square, dotted around Rossendale usually at the brow or crest of a hill.



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... a living history



Although long disused, the remains of small quarries still exist on Fecit Hill. In this example the quarry face is about two metres (6ft) high and some four metres (13ft) wide. It is positioned on the brow of the hill where an outcrop of rock comes to the surface. Waste earth would have been simply thrown to the side or down the slope. It is too recent to appear on the 1850 map, showing that small quarries were created and worked after that date.



The first edition of the Ordnance Survey map shows an example of an "old" sandstone quarry on the edge of Fecit Hill, near Turn Village. This map was surveyed around 1850, so the quarry was "old" at that time. The track down the hillside to Fecit Farm indicates that this is probably where the stone was taken. Fecit Hill is common land and commoners, farmers with rights to graze livestock on the common, have a right to quarry stone for use on their own land.

**You are here:** The Journey > History of quarrying > Quarrying on a grand scale

## Quarrying on a grand scale

### Growth from the 1780's – 1830's

The demand for stone increased hugely through the 19th century and Rossendale quarry owners responded to this by developing larger and larger quarries.

Poor rate books and documents from the Lloyd estate in Whitworth suggest the industry was growing from the 1770's. Lots of the wharfs on the Rochdale canal were selling 'Rochdale Flags' and it is believed these were transported from the Whitworth quarries probably down Rooley Moor Rd. The 1848 map illustrates several large quarries throughout Rossendale but most in Whitworth. The map also indicates early mechanisation with several stone rubbing mills near streams.

### Faster Growth in Late Victorian Times

Industrial development grew tremendously through Victorian time and with it the demand for strong building stone. Local growth was rapid and the coming of the railway in the 1840's provided a major impetus, and the stone could be marketed more widely to large Victorian towns



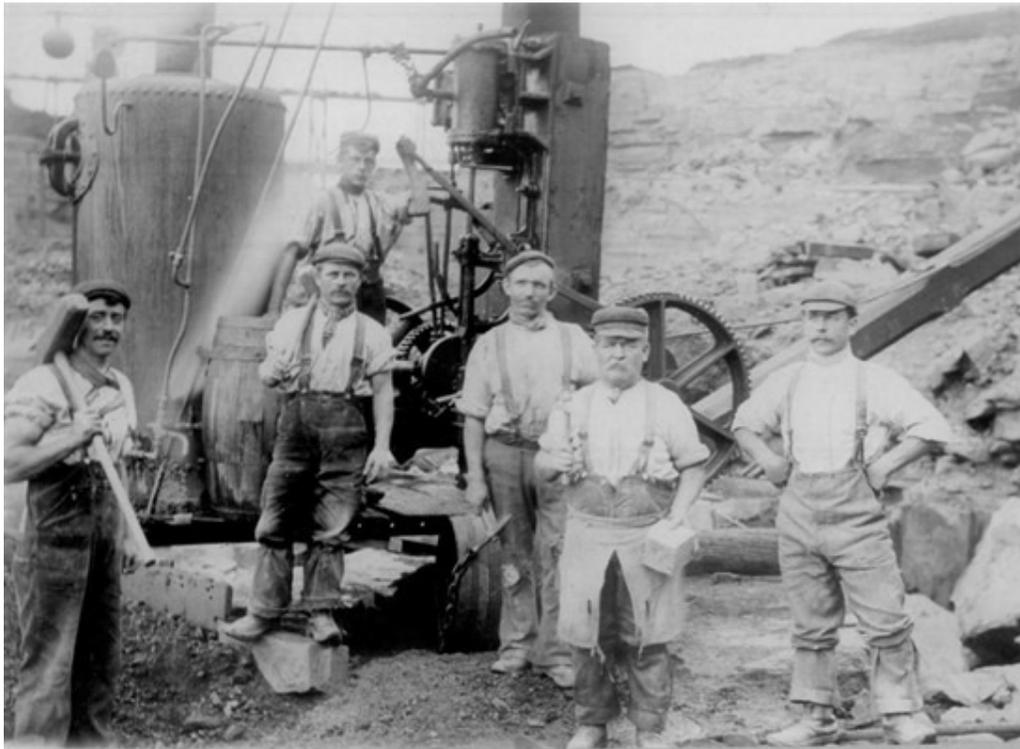
# Journey through the Valley of Stone

... a living history



and cities. Destinations included Manchester, Preston and Liverpool, Part of Yorkshire, Birmingham and London, including Trafalgar Square. Thousands of tons of paving stones were transported out of the valley every year. Other products in demand were building stones for terraces, mills, churches, kerbs, setts, engine beds, flags for house and mill floors, pavements, railway platforms and dock sides.

The Rossendale stone industry mushroomed and the main entrepreneurs were the large companies of Henry Heys, Brooks and Brooks and Siddalls. They created a highly organised industry on the moor edge and moor tops.



Quarrymen with steam crane and thier tools

Bacup Chronicle April 1902 "The stone industry of Rossendale has marvellously developed during the last fifty years, but at no period of it, more so than in the last decade, especially on the Brandwood side .....So that a good portion of the hillside and moor, extending over a radius of five or six miles is studded with gib cranes and refuse heaps." (Messrs. Heys) has a huge stone sawing machine or 'cutter' here (Back Cwm), a facing machine and polishing machines at Facit...Near the Cwm quarries Messrs Heys have also a coal pit, the mineral from which is mainly used for their own steam cranes and engines. This firm have also quarries at Hapton, near Burnley, and it is very probable that they are among the largest quarry owners of the North.

The scale of the activity was so intensive that these large companies drastically altered the landscape of the moor top, a bustling mass of cranes, workshops, tramways and workers.

Bacup Chronicle April 1902 again "On this side (Stacksteads) the whole face of the landscape has been greatly changed within the past few years, and one is bound to say not for the better from



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... a living history



an artistic point of view. The rubbish first tilted down the gullies is now being heaped up to a height which gives the landscape an awfully weird and unattractive appearance."

In 1888, a Bacupian visiting Back Cowm received: "one of the surprises of my life...Not having visited the place for over 30 years, I went the other day, but could not find a single landmark of my youth. Standing on the slope of the hill, looking across the valley at the magnitude of the undertakings there, I tried to count the number of steam and hand cranes, but it was impossible."



Massive scale of activity in Siddalls Quarry, thought to be Back Cowm

It is estimated that at the peak around 1890-1900, 3000 men were employed in the Rossendale quarries, an enormous scale of activity and the third largest employer in Rossendale after textiles and footwear. In the heyday 3 stone trains a day left Britannia sidings, and it is estimated 2000 tons of stone a week left Stacksteads.

## **Henry Heys (1815 - 1889)**

Quarry master Henry Heys is credited as the first man to successfully work the hard 'lonkey' beds - a rock so hard that previous quarrymen had failed. Excerpts from his obituary notice in Bacup Times emphasise this.

"Mr Heys overcame what appeared to be physical impossibilities and uncovered untold mineral wealth which up to that time had been considered impossible to make into a saleable commodity .....he had gradually increased that employment.....Mr Heys has developed the stone quarrying business of this district in excess of anything ever anticipated.....Mr Heys was the first to introduce steel wedges, which have been such a boon to quarrymen, not only in this district, but in other districts, enabling them to overcome the resistance which the mineral had hitherto offered to iron wedges. Previous to Mr Heys' time strong rock had been got with 'plug



# Journey through the Valley of Stone

... a living history



and feather', a very unsatisfactory operation compared with the clean splitting steel wedges of the present time".

Although Heys could not read and signed his name with a mark, he had the remarkable ability to calculate and estimate yardages of stone to complete buildings. At India Mill, Bacup, he correctly assessed and measured up the stone requirements in a couple of hours. An astonished surveyor hired by the mill owner, said it would take three weeks to do that sort of measurement.