

Q Quarrying for Stone

The outcrop of the sandstone known as the Rough Rock occupies much of the western end of the Porter Valley. It was worked extensively at Brown Edge Quarries and other sites between Ringinglow and Brookhouse Hill, in Fulwood.

In 1715, the Duke of Norfolk licensed two local men to work the quarries on his land at Brown Edge, with no more than two workmen at a time, for a rent of 30 shillings per year (£1.50). We do not know why he imposed such a strict limit, unless it was to avoid competition with another of his interests. By the 1880s, however, the scale of operations had grown and 40 to 50 men were reputedly employed at Brown Edge. These quarries seem to have largely ceased working by the early 1900s.

The main product was "stone slate", i.e. thin flagstone, which was highly prized for roofing and paving, before the railways brought cheap Welsh slate as a lightweight substitute.



By the 1990s, there was only one quarryman left in the valley, "Pip" Fletcher, who enthralled generations of schoolchildren with his patient demonstrations of stone getting, near Fulwood Booth (cover picture)

Q The Rock Face in Brown Edge Quarries



There is still plenty to see in the deep Brown Edge Quarries, at the western end of the disturbed moorland, which is pock-marked with smaller quarries.

B Brickmaking

As Sheffield expanded, brick was used in addition to stone for house building. Bricks were fired on site, using locally dug shales. Sometimes the coal required to fire the kilns was also found in association with the shales. As the houses went up, so the brick fields were obliterated, as at the bottom of Ecclesall Road.

However, the evidence for one large brick pit remains at Banner Cross. John Gregory and Son dug the shales behind St William's R.C. Church, and the strong sandstone at the top of the face ensured that the cliff has remained. Bricks stamped "Gregory" are common in the local suburbs, although the works closed at the time of the Second World War.

The Hangingwater Brick Company ran another brickworks from 1901 until 1915, and the quarry face can just be seen behind the houses off Hangingwater Road.

The Fairbank Collection at Sheffield Archives hold the records of a fireclay mine in Endcliffe Wood, dated 1825, but there is no vestige of it today. Fireclay is a high-alumina clay which is used in making refractory bricks – vital to the Sheffield steel industry, ancient and modern.



Air photograph of John Gregory's brickworks at Banner Cross c. 1945. Old sandstone quarries on Brincliffe Edge are also visible. (Sheffield Local Studies Library)

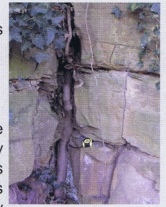
Q Greystones Cliff in 1890

The Crawshaw Sandstone and the Loxley Edge Rock were worked sporadically for building stone in the Greystones area. The map shows the quarries in 1890, along with the local coal mines. The quarries were later enlarged and glimpses of the old faces may be seen behind the houses on Highcliffe Road and Highcliffe Drive.



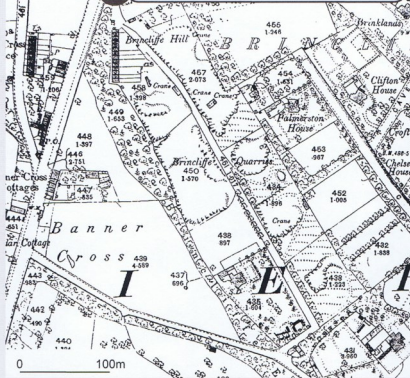
Q The Rock Face in Brincliffe Edge Quarries

Quarrying on Brincliffe Edge is recorded as far back as the 1530s, when quarries were known as "stone delphs".



By 1858 the quarry complex was producing 14400 tons of stone per year. The stone was used for grindstones for the cutlery industry, building stone and gravestones, many of which may be seen in the General Cemetery down the road. Today, one of the quarries overlooks the car park of the Omega Restaurant, and the rock can still be examined.

Q Map of Brincliffe Edge in 1892



Q 'Plug and Feathers' Sculpture



Blocks of rock were prised from the face and were first split into rough slabs using a plug and feathers. An oversized sculpture of these is placed at the entrance to the new apartments at Quarry Head Lodge.

M Coal Mining

M Flooded Bell Pit at Ringinglow Moors

Several coal seams were worked in the valley, on a small commercial scale, or for local use. The main seams were the Ringinglow Coal, worked at Ringinglow, and the Ganister Coal, mined in the Greystones area.

Three main methods were used. The most primitive was the bell pit, where a miner dug a shaft several metres deep, then worked outwards in the seam, hopefully stopping before it fell in! Later collapse resulted in hollows, now often flooded, with a circular mound of overgrown waste on the rim.



M Sough Tail at Hell's Bank (NB Private Land)

The Ringinglow Coal seam contained only about one metre of poor coal. However the coal contained pyrite (iron sulphide) and this was used to manufacture copperas (ferrous sulphate) at Copperas House nearby.

In the 1860s, a drainage sough was driven from "Hell's Bank" in the Porter Valley towards the Ringinglow mine workings and water is still flowing freely from the sough tail.



M Bell Pit on High Storrs Roughts

The Ganister Coal crops out lower down the valley and was worked at Greystones, High Storrs and Dobbin Hill. As well as the coal itself, an underlying ganister was probably also worked for making refractory bricks. (Ganister is a silica-rich sandstone, representing the ancient soil in which the coal forests grew).

Records go back to the 17th Century, and in 1683, one Thomas Fisher was ordered to "cover his pits at the Greystones Cliff Topp before Candlemas next, so that passengers may pass both day and night without danger". Again, the 1.3 metre seam of coal and ganister was worked by bell pits, shaft mines and drift mines.



M Greystones Mine Adit in 1912 and 2005

The Greystones mines closed between 1907 and 1929 and have now collapsed, although some local people can recall playing in the adits as children! An old photo shows what one of the adits looked like in 1912.



The best evidence of former mining occurs at the head of the Limb Valley (just outside the Porter catchment). The mine closed in 1912, but in 2006, the Limb Brook suddenly disappeared into the old workings. The Coal Authority has now backfilled the site.



Amazingly, the same adit was exposed during house building in 2005, complete with a 2 foot gauge railway track emerging from the hillside!



So, although we think of the Porter Valley as consisting of the "unspoilt" rural bits, there is much history in the built-up areas within the catchment. Even urban dog walkers should keep their eyes open for evidence of a fascinating past.