

## **Building stone quarries in Cradley**

### **Geology**

The geology of the area between Storridge and Cradley follows the succession from the Wyche formation (Llandoverly) into the St Maughan's formation (Lower Old Red Sandstone) by way of the Wenlock and thin horizons of Aymestry Limestones and the Downton Castle Sandstone. Patches of sand and gravel from the terraces of the Mathon river also occur within the parish, including one large patch forming the knoll upon which the Parish church stands.

The 1904 map of Cradley shows over thirty quarries in Cradley and Storridge.

### **Quarries**

Cradley stone – a pale greenish grey lime cemented sandstone from the St Maughan's Formation of the Lower Old Red Sandstone was extensively quarried until at least 1913. The stone was worked into ashlar blocks and was widely used in Malvern for houses, St James' and the Abbey School, the Priory and Malvern Hospital.

The main quarries were at Ridgeway Cross on the north side of the A4103 which were extensive by the time an 1892 Directory was published. Quarry Farm and Quarry Cottage attest to this.

Stoney Villa; the home of the operator of the Ridgeway Quarries built of the last stone extracted from the site, is located next to the churchyard, 1.5 miles from the quarry.

Limestone was also extracted, particularly from the Wenlock Limestone at Whitman's Hill quarry. It was mainly burnt for lime or broken for dressing roads. If used for building it would be as rubble only. Littlebury's 1876 Directory mentions good quality limestone from this source.

### **Masons and quarrymen**

The earliest reference to masons in Cradley is the name Apperley which appears on an eighteenth century headstone in the churchyard.

By 1834, Philip Holt, a mason is recorded as occupying Little Westfield, a double cottage near the Crown Inn, then called Butts.

A mason lived at Common Garden (now Eskbank) in 1851. A post office was run in the other part of the house. In December 1902, the same building was wrecked by a fire and explosion when 20 pounds of gunpowder, stored on a shelf in the shop window ignited in the early hours of the morning. Was the gun-powder used for blasting in the quarries?

In 1851 William Hopkinson, a stone mason, born in Yorkshire was lodging in Great Malvern with his wife and three sons, Edwards, Frederick and Hiram.

By 1855 William Taylor, also a mason lived in Little Westfield and Philip Holt, had moved across the road to Turner's Cottage, employing five men, in 1861, he is listed in the census as a builder. Various pieces of carved stone and part of a churchyard cross were found in the garden and later incorporated into a kitchen extension. Charles Hughes, a quarryman lived at Coleman Slade near Ridgeway House. 10 men in total in the village worked in stone.

In 1881, William Hopkinson, by then the Quarryman and Stone mason and employing 9 men lived at Quarry Cottages with his youngest son Arthur living with him and Hiram living next door. George Brough, Timothy Gittins lived nearby and worked as stone masons and quarry labourers.

Philip Holt is described in an 1891 Trade Directory as a builder and stonemason

In 1891 at Storridge William Thomas and John & William Morton are recorded as stone masons. William Morton lived at Quarryfield. Edwin Davies lived in Buryfield Cottage and Tom Gittins and his son, labourers in a stone quarry, lived at Pound Bridge.

Arthur Hopkinson and his brother owned the Ridgeway Quarries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Arthur Hopkinson, born in Great Malvern in 1852, he is still listed as a stone quarryman and dresser on the 1911 census. His wife worked as a laundress and a 20 year old daughter still lived at home. His house in Buryend Lane had 5 rooms. Their quarry was still working in 1913, but according to his grand-daughter, Mrs Prudence Wood, the quarries closed as they became un-economic with the beds too deep and the stone too expensive to extract.

### **Quarry accidents**

George Philpotts, a Cradley resident, worked as a foreman in Mr A.E.Lewis' North Malvern Quarry. He was killed in the quarry in early July 1906. He was working lifting stone with a crowbar when stone from a higher level in the quarry slipped down, knocked him over and after he fell 15 feet, fell on top of him, cutting his head. When his fellow workers picked him up, he was reported as saying "I'm done for, I'm killed" The inquest into the accident was reported in the Worcester Advertiser. The quarry company provided no compensation, leaving his mother with several small children to support, including his son Albert. Albert recalled in around 2000 that he lived at Pound Bridge as a child and the family received financial support from a number of local individuals and loaf of bread once a week from a church charity.

**Ridgeway quarry at Cradley, still working and photographed by Arthur Bennet in 1913, re-photographed by John Payne**



**Abandoned face at Ridgeway Quarry, Cradley, photographed in 2012 by John Payne**



**Documented uses of Cradley stone.**

A long term Cradley resident, Mrs Minovi, recalled in around 2002 that her grandfather had dressed the stone from the Ridgeway Quarries for St James' School in West Malvern and the old Malvern Library; later Barclay's bank. Cradley stone was also used for the Priory at Malvern and the Abbey School, as well as for many private houses.

The re-building of the church by Reverend Renn Hampden, completed in 1869, probably employed local craftsmen and certainly used local stone.

Stoney Villa, previously a timber framed house called Churchstile Cottage was re-built in stone by Arthur Hopkinson, the owner, with his brother of the Ridgeway Quarries.



**Stoney Villa, previously Churchstile Cottage. Photographed in 2016 by Kate Andrew**

## **References**

Much of the above extracted from "Cradley, a village history" by Wynnell M. Hunt, published in 2002 in association with the Cradley Village Hall Management Committee.

Data from 1851 to 1911 censuses

Un-checked reference Builder Magazine 1870 covered the re-building of Cradley church.

Worcester Advertiser, July 14 1906