

Ryedale Vernacular Building Materials Research Group
Report of Field Meeting held at Brandsby on Saturday 12 February 2005.
(New Report Format)

Main Aims.

- To identify main quarries
- To survey existing buildings and walls
- To identify any quarries for RIGS status
- To collect samples for Ryedale District Council

Background History.

The Brandsby Roadstone and Slate are members of The Scarborough Formation within the Ravenscar Group (Middle Jurassic). Both members have been referred to in the following reports and papers:

Fox-Strangways. 1881. Memoir of the Geological Survey - The Geology of the Oolitic and Liassic Rocks north and west of Malton. Pp. 8 and 9.

“ This formation, which is the equivalent of the Scarborough or Grey Limestone Series of the coast is better known in this district as the ‘Brandsby Roadstone’, it having been quarried for a great number of years at Brandsby as a material for mending roads, and from which place extensive collections of fossils have been made (now in York Museum). It is a hard siliceous limestone splitting up into large slabs, in fact some of the beds are so fissile as to afford roofing slates, for which purpose it was largely used in former years; the upper portion of the rock is a brown porous grit, very full of casts of *Avicula braambuiensis*. It is very frequently only in this upper grit which is exposed, the limestone below being decomposed into soft sand and not making any feature.

The total thickness of these beds is probably about 40 feet (12 metres), but of this there will not be more than about 20 feet (6 metres) belonging to the limestone.

The largest spread of this rock is on the summit of the hill about Yearsley, where it occupies nearly all the high ground between Newborough Park and Brandsby; it also outcrops in the higher part of Newborough Park and Park House...”

Fox-Strangways. 1892. Memoir of the Geological Survey - The Jurassic Rocks of Britain. Vol.1. Yorkshire. Pp. 248.

“In the Howardian Hills the Grey Limestone Series is much more flaggy ...having been quarried for a great number of years at Brandsby as a material for mending roads (and) is better known in this district as the ‘Brandsby Roadstone’. It is a hard siliceous limestone splitting up into large slabs, in fact some of the beds are so fissile as to afford roofing slates for which purpose it was largely used in former years” **and: -**

Pp. 463 (Economic Geology)

“Belonging to this same (Grey Limestone or Scarborough) series is the well known ‘Brandsby Roadstone’, which was formerly extensively quarried in the western part of the Howardian Hills between Brandsby and Gilling; but which since the introduction of the railways (mid C19) has been largely superseded by Whinstone (Cleveland Dyke)... the lower part which is that quarried for Roadstone consisting principally of hard siliceous flaggy sandstones.”

Hemingway in Rayner and Hemingway.1974. The Geology and Mineral Resources of Yorkshire. The Yorkshire Geological Society. Pp. 200.

“Two distinctive (rock types) are widely recognized - ‘the Brandsby Roadstone’ (first named by Phillips in 1829) and ‘the Crinoid Grit’ (first described by Richardson in 1912)... some of the sandy (Brandsby Roadstone) limestones are fissile and relatively tough, which in the past led to their past use as roofing tiles and Roadstone. In complete contrast ‘the Crinoid Grit’ is a coarse marine sandstone ... which at outcrop is limonitic (iron), decalcified and highly porous and is characterized by moulds of *Pentacrinus* (Crinoid or sea lily)” **and:**

Parsons. 1977. A stratigraphical revision of the Scarborough Formation. Proceedings of the Yorkshire Geological Society. Vol.41. Pp. 207.

“The (rock types) divisions described (in the paper) only apply to the east of Rye Dale and Rievaulx since elsewhere there is more limited (fossils types) control and far greater variation in rock types. It should be stressed that the scheme (proposed) is still provisional, as more work is needed, particularly on inland sections”

The only recent reference is from the Stone Roofing Association (via the Website- www.stoneroof.org.uk): A Tour of the Stone Slate Regions - Yorkshire.

“One group existed in the limestone belt south of the North York Moors. Known as the Brandsby Roadstone it lies at the northern most limit of the Jurassic limestones and is part of the Scarborough Formation (previously known as the Grey Limestone Series). Some of the levels in the quarries were fissile and the area became an island in a sea of clay pantiles.

Unfortunately by 1892 Fox-Strangways in his report on the Jurassic Rocks of Yorkshire had to report that The Brandsby Roadstone which was formally extensively quarried in the western part of the Howardian Hills between Brandsby and Gilling had since the introduction of the railways, been largely superseded by whinstone.

No doubt they continued to produce roofing, flagging and walling for some time but ultimately the industry died out and the roofs are now repaired or renewed with Carboniferous sandstone from Yorkshire or county Durham or clay pantiles. Many roofs now have one slope of Brandsby and others of sandstone, or Brandsby stone at the eaves with pantiles above”

Present records of Brandsby Slate.

- Abbey House, Malton - pantiles roof with lower courses of slate. Building to be re-roofed in September 2005. Former slates used on gardens to suppress weeds.
- Brandsby Church - roof intact.
- Burton Agnes Church, Bridlington - old slates in wall fill. Specimens in RVBMRG rock collection.
- Shandy Hall, Coxwold - roof intact.
- Sheriff Hutton Castle - historical records for slate roofs.
- **If members know of anymore localities please let me know.**

Locations Visited and Report.

1. Spring Head Wood. NGR. 597727.

- No stone face seen - all workings overgrown.
- Middle Jurassic sandstones found - below Brandsby Roadstone.
- Many examples of Roadstone found at the top of the quarry site and in the nearby field.
- Below site sands and clays found in Badger and Rabbit workings - indicating presence of Whitwell Oolite. Confirmed on copy of original ‘field slips’ of Fox-Strangways.
- Brandsby Potteries may have used the clays (= to Crambeck Potteries) awaiting excavation reports.
- A powerful spring line is associated with the Scarborough Formation across the North York Moors.

2. Peacock Plantation. NGR. 609729.

- No stone face seen - all workings overgrown with agricultural waste.
- Good example of dry stone wall in Roadstone running along side of Middle Rig Plantation.
- Large example of fossiliferous slate found in stream.
- Nearby house did not appear to have any Brandsby in its stonework - needs a fuller survey.

3. Snargate Hill. NGR. 608723.

- Exposure of Middle Jurassic Channel sandstones with associated fluvial structures.
- Photograph in Tees to the Wash Memoir, Plate.14. P78.
- Quarry would supply sandstone for local use and maybe Sheriff Hutton Castle (?)

4. Peel Wood Quarry. NGR. 587735.

- No stone face seen - all workings overgrown and filled with rocks from nearby fields.
- An example of ‘gingerbread stone’ (decalcified Roadstone) collected for RVBMRG collection.

5. Yearsley Bank Quarry. NGR.573738.

- No evidence for quarry site.
- Large spoil heap of Roadstone and Slate found along track - specimens of worked slate collected.

Further Research

- Remaining quarries to be visited in the Brandsby and Yearsley
- Brandsby and Yearsley Potteries - reports, site and museum visits.
- Brandsby Fossils in Yorkshire Museum.
- Roadstone uses in buildings and walls.
- Slate roofs surveys and historical records.
- Extend work further north and west - Sheet 52 (Thirsk)

Conclusions

- The industry at Brandsby has been extinct for a long period of time.
- The surveyed quarries were all small - max 100 metres in length.
- The use of Roadstone would have declined with the railways and the widespread use of Tarmac.
- The use of Slate also declined with the closer of the quarries and cheaper stone and roof tiles becoming available.

Thanks.

To members of the Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society for obtaining permission to visit the sites.

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