

Treleven Haysom

A Quarrying Family



Haysoms were quarrying in Swanage parish in the 17th and 18th centuries. By the early 19th century Francis, part-time fisherman, quarryman, publican, nonconformist Sunday school teacher, smuggler, worked quarries in the Durlston Bay cliffs and just south of where the cottage hospital has since been built. His son, John, left for London to work as a mason on the rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster in the 1840s. He returned to work as a foreman of masons on the stonework of the pier and the rebuilding of Swanage church, before working for one of the leading Swanage stone merchants of that time, Thomas Randal.

With the arrival of the railway branch line the merchants abandoned their shore-based premises and moved into or near the railway yard. In due course some amalgamated to form the Purbeck Stone and General Trading Company, with the masonry side of the business latterly managed by John's son William. They were cutting stone from a lot of different Purbeck quarries including block dug at both St. Aldhelm's Head quarries. These had been reopened by William David around about 1930. He had been a director of quarry/masonry businesses in the Forest of Dean, as well as Bath and Portland, before acquiring control of Seacombe quarry soon after the First World War. This venture, in spite of, or

perhaps because of, the expenditure of a lot of capital on machinery, had failed. David then gained permission to have a go on another Purbeck estate (Encombe) and reopened the quarry at the end of the Headland that had not been worked since the building of Kingston church in the 1870-80s; also the quarry where we continue to work. There had been earlier exploitation there, for it appears as a “stone pit” on an 18th century survey, but not much had been dug. The end of the Head had been worked much more. It is virtually certain that Encombe House was sourced there and that there had been earlier Elizabethan and even medieval activity.

William David provided the stone for the highest house in Purbeck, commissioned by the Encombe estate, but having no masonry facility got my grandfather to cut it in his Swanage Yard. David failed to pay and in settlement my father took over the quarry, with the wooden crane David had installed. Billy Winspit, left quarry-less by the Seacombe failure, took on as foreman. My aunt did the wages at the Swanage office. Sometimes she would take the bus to Worth before walking out to Scripture gate, where either Billy Winspit would collect them from her, or she hid them in a biscuit tin concealed in the wall.

This gave her time to walk back to Worth and get another bus back home. Some of the columns in Portsmouth, which was given cathedral status and enlarged at that time, were supplied then. The war soon followed and masonry work virtually stopped, but the quarry continued as a source of hard core for the military. Jewish refugees from Austria assisted in supplying stone for Stoney Cross airfield, Blandford Camp, etc. The Swanage yard was acquired by the Bournemouth masonry firm Templemans and sold to Swanage Town Council.

One of England’s finest medieval buildings, the Temple Church, had been

badly damaged in the London blitz, its Purbeck marble columns suffering particularly seriously in the intense heat. My father quarried new marble at Lynch for its restoration, taking it out to the Head, where he had installed a saw and lathe.

Brian Bugler is turning a column on the same lathe, which must now have quite a tally of important monuments under its unguarded belt, certainly Salisbury, Exeter and Chichester cathedrals. Other work of those post war years includes the reordering of the east end of Corfe church with its new windows. Recent projects include polished paving on several London projects such as Merrill Lynch U.K. St Paul's, Paternoster Square, The Royal Society, Westminster School. With regard to St. Aldhelm's Head as a source, my father made the remark: "There is just enough good stone to make you think it is worth carrying on". He opted for where we are now rather than the end of the Head simply because of the shorter road distance.

In 1948 the Government began to impose planning restrictions on quarrying for the first time. For decades they have been fairly nonprescriptive, but not anymore! Now free to charge for each site visit (with the number being of their own choosing) they are off the financial leash, such as it was. Whether Purbeck, or indeed English, quarrying (particularly dimension stone operations) shall withstand the burden, at a time when imports flood in, only time will tell.