

5. A Note on Midtown Limekiln near Howwood

Stuart Nisbet

The limekiln is situated about a kilometre east of Howwood. There is an arched main chamber 3 metres high and 3 metres wide, which leads into an apparently man-made bank about 8 metres high. This main chamber is 8.4 metres long with an entrance at the north end and a blank wall at the south end. On the east wall, two identical arched chambers branch off, each 1.83 metres high by 1.4 metres wide, (Nos.1 and 2 on plan). On the west wall, a single, narrower arched chamber leads off. It is 0.94 metres wide by 0.97 metres high, (No. 3). Chambers Nos. 1 to 3 are blocked almost to the top with a grey 'limey' soil. The structure is built mainly of dressed sandstone, with some rubble infill in the lower walls. The stonework is in good condition, although erosion has occurred on the earth banks outside. An iron stump, possibly the remains of a lifting hook, protrudes from the crown of the arch near the entrance.



Outside, the kiln and bank above chamber 1 are missing. The top of kiln 2 is partly visible as a few courses of rubble, topped with limestone fragments: grey carboniferous limestone, weathered to white on the surface, containing many shell and plant stem fossils.

There is much evidence of quarrying and tipping in the wooded area to the south of the structure. At the southern extremity, a cliff face, probably quarried, forms the southern boundary. In the cliff, a possible adit follows a limestone seam downward at an angle of about 15 degrees. Above the cliff, drainage channels collect surface water from the steep slope and divert it around the site to the west.

The main chamber is thought to be a common vault accessing 3 lime kilns. It was often the practice to provide shelter from the weather for drawing the burnt lime from the kilns onto carts. The probable date is late 18th century.

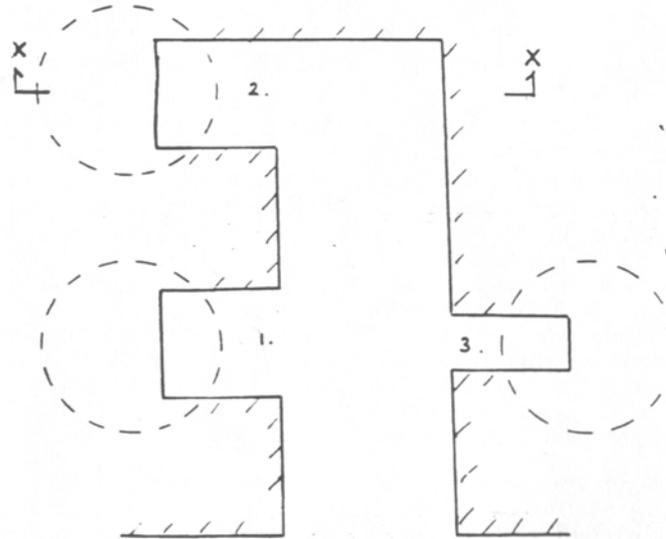
Evidence:

1. Maps: Ainslie (1796) shows a lime quarry in the area of the site. The 1863 6" O.S. (Renf. Sheet 11) indicates no kilns or workings, but does show a track which terminates at the mouth of the main chamber. The 1913 25" O.S. (Sheet 11.15) shows a single rectangular feature on the same orientation as the main chamber, described as an old limekiln. The remainder of the site is wooded.

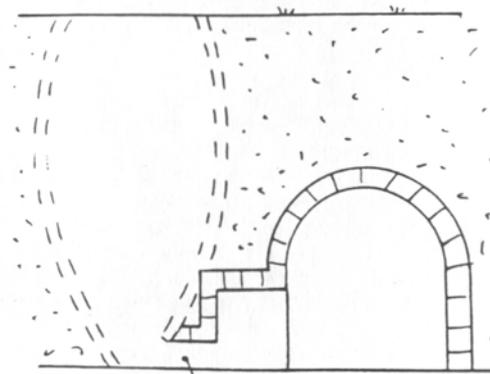
2. Geological: (there has to be some overlap between geology and industrial archaeology as it is only worth looking for limekilns if there is limestone in the area.) Geology texts (e.g. 'The Limestones of Scotland' British Geological Survey Mineral Report No.35) mentions "abandoned quarries in the Hurler seam between Howwood

and Milliken Park, about 2 miles S.W. of Johnstone". This refers generally to the large-scale workings on either side of the Johnstone - Howwood road, where the 1863 6" map shows at least a dozen limekilns.

The Midtown site is a much more localised occurrence of the Hurler seam, isolated by faulting. The Hurler coal also outcrops immediately below the limestone. This ideal situation of having limestone, plus the coal to burn it, in the same seam, made the Hurler an economic proposition in many parts of Renfrewshire. (Ref 6" Geology Sheet Renf. 11 SE, 1915; 1" Geology Sheet 30).



PLAN
1:100



DRAW-HOLE

SECTION X-X
1:100

(BROKEN LINES ARE SUPPOSED KILN OUTLINES)