

## Limekilns on Mendip

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The limekilns in Avon (see *BIAS Journal* 17) are contained naturally by the Bristol Channel to the west, the Severn Vale to the north and the Cotswold Hills to the east. To the south, however, the natural boundary is the southern edge of the Mendip Hills, and as the Mendips are only partly within Avon, the remainder in Somerset, this article is intended to complete the picture.

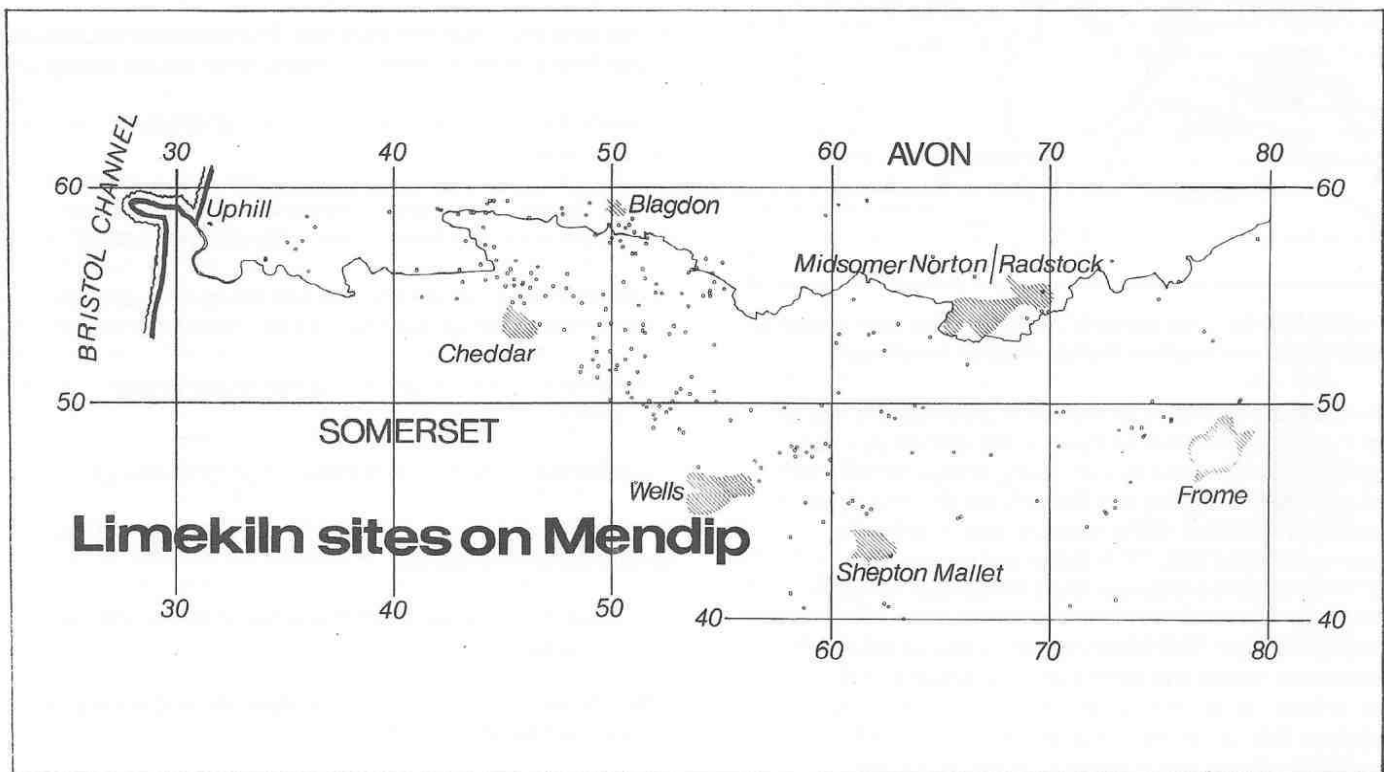
There were probably more limekilns in the small area of Mendip than the whole of the rest of the county of Avon. Most of these were small agricultural kilns built to supply lime to a few neighbouring fields, and burning limestone outcropping close at hand or dug from a very small adjacent quarry. Occasionally stones picked from the fields were burnt. The major use of the lime was as a conditioner to reclaim poor quality ground covered in scrub and fern, and once this had been achieved the limekilns fell into disuse as less lime is required to maintain good grassland than to achieve it. The majority of these small kilns are shown on the First Edition 25 inch to 1 mile Ordnance Survey maps c1886, and few appear to have been built after this time. Even on these maps many are referred to as 'Old Limekiln'. Kilns built after this tended to be larger and much more substantial, and were worked on a more commercial basis to serve a wider area.

These small early agricultural kilns were built to the simplest of design, as they were not expected to last very long. They were constructed from local stone (many were

dismantled after use to be used as walling stone), and very few had any form of fire resisting lining. This alone ensured that the kiln had a short life, as it was itself burnt away to lime. The draw hole or eye of the kiln was occasionally constructed of brick or of an imported stone to use as a lintel over the hole. The access arch around the draw hole roughly followed the shape of a section of a cone, which meant that the shape could be constructed without the necessity for load bearing arches or lintels.

The kilns were fuelled probably the same way as limekilns in other parts of the country, by coal if it could be obtained cheaply enough, or by wood. Even the use of peat and bracken has been recorded. Limestones not properly burnt would not slake down properly on the fields, and would have to be picked up again before ploughing.

Lime is still burnt on the Mendips at Cheddar, but by a modern gas fired rotary kiln rather than by the traditional solid fuelled vertical structure. (A brief description of the modern limekiln at Cheddar is given in the *Journal of the Somerset industrial Archaeological Society* No.1). The last coke-fired limekiln ceased working in the mid-1970s at Francis Flower's Lime Works, Gurney Slade. The kilns, possibly the largest on Mendip still stand in an excellent state of repair, but before these kilns ceased to work a modern bank of three steel-bodied kilns at Callow Quarry, Shipham, were demolished in 1971.





*Callow Rock Quarry 1971. Demolition of the three steel bodied limekilns, which were fuelled by producer gas manufactured on site.*

**A Selection of Limekiln Remains on Mendip**

Grid ref	Location	Description
364581	Upper Canada, Hutton	Single kiln with front shelter. N side of track, excellent condition.
462585	Rowberrow	Small kiln, N side of track.
488587	Burrington	Small kiln with charging ramp, hidden in trees.
459546	Cheddar	Preserved front of double kiln at entrance to Bartscombe Quarry(home of modern gas fired kiln).
494536	Cheddar	Small kiln.
486546	Cheddar	Single kiln fairly modern in old Black Rock Quarry, now part of nature trail.
429548	Axbridge	Single kiln visible from Axbridge by-pass behind row of cottages on hill side.
430561 440564 431556	Axbridge	3 single small kilns on Shute Shelve Hill.
443588	Star	Small single kiln.
420589	Sandford	20th c bank of kilns
430587	Sandford	Small kiln on hill side.
436589	Star	Two small kilns one each side of Malperton Lane.
498515	Draycott	Small single kiln.

Grid ref	Location	Description
491475	East Horrington	Single kiln with remains of front shelter.
591480	East Horrington	Small single kiln.
588454	Dindor	Single kiln in woods.
439470	Wells	Bank of three kilns at entrance to old Milton Quarry.
565504	Green Ore	Single kiln on Tower Hill.
509585	Blagdon	Single kiln.
508582	Blagdon	Single kiln.
523551	Charterhouse	Small single kiln.
505572	Charterhouse	Small single kiln.
655477	Stoke St. Michael	Front only remains of kiln opposite old Fairy Cave Quarry.
626494	Gurney Slade	The large kilns of Francis Flower's Lime Works.
642498	Downside	Single kiln with remains of front shelter.
602528	Chewton Mendip	Single kiln, free standing.
726449	Holywell	Single kiln in quarry S side of A361.
774529	Laverton	Front only of small kiln at side of road.

All grid references ST