

Jane Marchand

Keeping the quarry dry.

One of the major problems with the quarry was that the only way they could continue to extract the limestone was by quarrying deeper and deeper, and that's having expanded the quarry as far as they could width wise; but this increasing depth, which actually ended up at a level lower than the river itself meant that it continually filled up with water, and this flooding had to be controlled by pumps which were powered by the two waterwheels this side of the river and we can still see the remains of the wheelpits of these. We do have a photograph of one of these waterwheels and this shows very clearly how the system of pumping worked and this worked the flat rod system which transmitted power across the river to operate the pumps which kept the quarry dried of water, and behind the finger dumps you can see the stone embankment which actually supported the water launder, which was made of wood and which carried the water to work the wheel. The water which fed the launder came from leats and the leats were supplying a small holding reservoir from where the water flowed over the launder onto the waterwheel. As the quarry became deeper more power was required to work the waterwheel and so a second holding reservoir was built, and you can still see that one, they stand next to each other. So really in all the hydraulic engineering that was involved in actually quarrying the limestone was really quite remarkable.

Of course by the 20th century we know that the quarrying had ceased here and the quarry must have very rapidly filled up with water and become a pool, and we know that pool is now 40 metres deep, that's about 130 feet in depth, and I think the depth of that gives us a very clear picture of the depth that they actually went to, to extract the limestone.