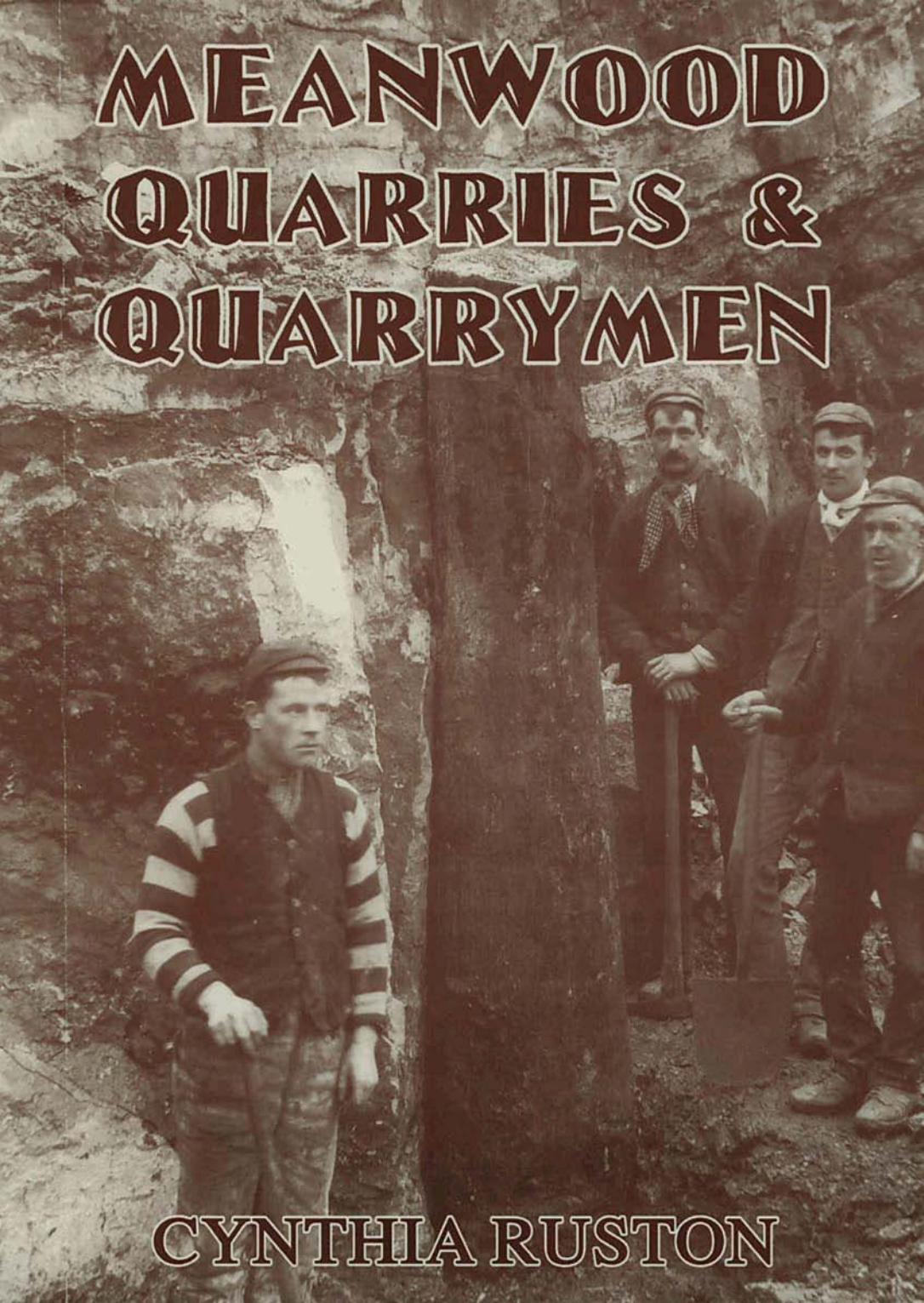
MEANWOOD QUARRIES & QUARRYMEN



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This book is dedicated to the
Quarrymen of Meanwood and their Families

INTRODUCTION

This book owes its existence to a drystone wall and to the Local Heritage Initiative (LHI).

I had, for quite a few years, passed the dilapidated stone wall on Parkside Road, which runs along one side of the cricket ground, and visualised it in a restored state. In 1999 the *Yorkshire Evening Post* ran an article on how communities could mark the Millennium. I applied for the necessary forms, but unfortunately could not pursue the project at that time due to personal commitments. However, in 2002 the *Yorkshire Evening Post* ran a four line insertion which read 'Heritage Grants up for Grabs'. The time felt right and I applied. I received quite a thick application booklet and an equally thick explanation booklet. That delivery of post started the most eventful three years of my life. I have met and spoken to people I would most probably never have encountered. I have been to places I am sure I would not otherwise have visited – The National Archives at Kew, the Special Collections Library at Leeds University, West Yorkshire Archives Service in Leeds – these are a veritable Aladdin's cave of history. I have dealt with, amongst others, Dover Pier Authority, Chatham Dockyard Museum, the British Library and West Yorkshire Drystone Walling Association. As a consequence, my sincere thanks to all the people who made this project possible and particular thanks to the Countryside Agency for all their support and help.

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quarrymen of Meanwood and their families.

Chapter 1

THE EARLY QUARRYING INDUSTRY

Quarrying can be traced back to medieval times when stone roofing slates, or 'thakstones', and millstones for grinding corn were extracted from the ground.

The areas with ample reserves of stone, however, were not fully exploited until the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Until then timber had been the common building material. Farming was the predominant occupation, but by the reign of Queen Elizabeth I the fledgling textile industry had begun to make a significant impact on the local economy. Prosperous wool merchants invested their wealth in fine houses built of local stone, many of which still survive, and are regarded as some of the finest in West Yorkshire.

The success of the textile and other industries led to a growth in population and increased demand for stone. The population in Leeds increased from six thousand in 1690 to twenty two thousand by 1790, almost quadrupling in one hundred years. Overcrowding did, however, become a huge problem.

Quarrying became a major industry in many areas, and by the middle of the nineteenth century there were literally hundreds of quarries. This was certainly reflected within Meanwood village and between 1840 and 1880 quarrying and its associated trades were the main industries, followed by tanning, paper making, textile trades and farming.

There were many quarries in Meanwood. In part of the area

we now call Parkside Road (the section from Church Lane to Meanwood Grove), for example, there were at least six quarries. None appear to have had specific names, but seem to have been known by the name of the person who owned them. This was not true of the quarry to the west of the cricket field, which was always referred to as the 'massive Meanwood Quarry'. It goes without saying that, where you see stone houses or cottages on Meanwood Hilltop, you will also find geological evidence of a quarry.

The only quarries with names that could be found in the Weetwood/Meanwood area were the Victoria and Bateman Quarries, which we now know as the 'Hollies'.

The District of Meanwood was formed out of the Chapelries of Chapel Allerton and Headingley, in the Parish of Leeds, and was constituted an Ecclesiastical District under Sir Robert Peel's Act on 10 August 1847. On the consecration of the Church on 6 October 1849, and the subsequent approval of the Church by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, the District became a Parish under the same Act. At the same time it became a Vicarage under the Leeds Vicarage Act.

The medieval origins of Meanwood, provide a clue to its name. The two woods of Meanwood (Chapel Allerton township) and Weetwood (Headingley township) are situated on either side of the township boundary. It is possible that at one time the name Meanwood, which means 'the common wood', was used to describe both woods and that the portion of the wood in Headingley township did not originally have a distinct name. In the late-twelfth or early-thirteenth century *le Meenewude* was granted to Kirkstall Abbey by Thomas le Peitevin. At the time this charter was issued Chapel Allerton township was held by Samson de Allerton and there is no evidence that the Peitevin family held an interest there. It would appear, therefore, that *le Meenewude* referred to in Thomas's charter

lay in Headingley township and, if this is the case, the name was used to describe the wood subsequently called Weetwood; in 1240 Robert de Bemingham claimed unsuccessfully that he had been disseised of common pasture in *Wetwude/Wetewode* by the abbot of Kirkstall. The jurors stated that the wood had been given to the monastery by William le Peitevin, in which case Thomas's charter will have been a confirmation of his father's gift rather than a new grant. William had given the monks *le Norwde* in the twelfth century, possibly a third name for the same wood, although in the early fifteenth century, the manor of Northall centred on the adjoining township of Leeds itself. This manor originated in a grant made by Adam de Birkin to his brother between 1175 and 1185, but since there is no other evidence for Adam having an interest in Headingley township, it is unlikely to have formed part of the knight's fee which he held from Henry de Lacy in 1166.

In later centuries, a large part of Meanwood (and its quarries) was owned by the Killingbecks. By 1776, ownership passed to cloth merchant Jeremiah Dixon of *Gledhow Hall*. He became the Lord of the Manor of Chapel Allerton, which included Meanwood, and was responsible for the folly known as 'King Alfred's Castle', which he built in about 1770.

The following announcement appeared in the local newspaper *Leeds Intelligencer* on 25 June 1776:

Grit stone quarry – this is to inform the public that John Prince has opened the stone quarry at Meanwood belonging to Jeremiah Dixon, Esquire, where all persons may be served with blocks of a most excellent and a very durable grit stone of any dimensions for columns, pedestals, troughs, cisterns, ashlers for mills, dams, arches or any other work scalped at the quarry.

On 3 February 1834, twice Mayor of Leeds, Christopher Beckett

of the influential banking family, bought a large part of Meanwood from the Dixons. Nearly all this property and the *Meanwood Hall* site remained with the Beckett family until 7 October 1921 when 658 acres, including Meanwood Woods and its quarries, were sold to Leeds City Corporation. During the whole of this period the quarries had served their community well, providing employment for one quarter of its inhabitants, and material for cottages, churches, mills, tanneries, farms and schools, some of which we are lucky enough to observe in the village of today.

Our village forefathers must have experienced quite gruelling times in the Meanwood of yesteryear, not just from the very cramped living conditions and lack of amenities – which were usual for working people – but the battle with the elements must have been quite a problem in such an exposed landscape. One such occasion would have been the Adel Beck Flood of 1829, reported thus:

On the night of July 11th a dreadful inundation occurred in Leeds and the neighbourhood occasioned by the bursting of a reservoir situated at Black Hill near Addle, about 7 miles NW of Leeds, which broke down its banks. The reservoir is situated nearly at the head of the stream known by various names of Addle Beck, Woodhouse Beck and Sheepscar Beck, through which places it passes on its course to Leeds. The dam occupies an extent of from 20 to 25 acres, and is rather formed by natural than artificial means the only embankment being at the east end, which is about fifteen feet high, and it was the breaking or giving way of this embankment, which caused the flood. A breach having been made the water rushed through with dreadful impetuosity, swelling the small rivulet of Addle Beck to a mighty stream, and carrying ruin and desolation along with it, until it emptied itself into the River Aire at Leeds.