

CARDALL'S CORNER

June 2016

Cementing Relations in Southam

By Helen Morris



People through the ages have been interested in the limestone found around Southam. The material, known as Blue Lias, was laid down during the Jurassic age 180 million years ago, and was first of interest as a source of lime used by farmers. In recent times it has been used for making cement, and locals may remember the landscape being covered in white powder which used to spew out of the chimney at the Long Itchington cement works.

Although cement making was mentioned in 1854 it wasn't until 1875 that Kaye & Co Ltd opened their Portland Cement Works to the north of Southam producing 90 tons per week. By 1907 this had become 600 tons per week. John Frearson, a local historian, has listed the staff of the company from an Oldham family deed dated 1887 and many familiar Southam names appear on there and on the census records.

The company had its own dock built on the Grand Union Canal from where shipments of cement were sent to London. Railway enthusiasts will know that the L&NMR opened a branch line between Weedon and Leamington which served the cement works site in 1895. Some of the narrow-gauge engines which served Kaye's site were named after prehistoric periods studied by geologists at the quarry. Another interesting fact is that a study of the evolution of the oyster was based on evidence found in the quarry.

The business was weakened during WW1. Aerial photographs were taken of the site in 1932, and the company went into receivership the following year. In 1934 the site was bought by Rugby Portland Cement Ltd and much of it was rebuilt. Limestone, shale from the lower Triassic layers, and grey chalk were quarried. During WW2 the camouflage department provided a large machine, the smoke from which would prevent enemy aircraft using the site as a route marker on their way to bomb Coventry.

In 1979 the business was owned by the Rugby Group and, during this period, chalk in slurry was pumped from a quarry in Bedfordshire along a 113km pipeline! In 2000, RMC took over when clinker manufacture stopped. Cemex bought the works in 2005 and the buildings, except for the chimney, were demolished. However, material from the quarry continues to be sent by road to Rugby for processing. In 2011 Andy Duckett shared his fond memories of working at the cement works in a recording for Southam Heritage Collection's Oral History archive.

Many other items, photographs and fascinating facts can be found in our latest exhibition all about the local cement industry. The exhibition opens from 10am to 12 noon on Tuesday and Saturday mornings at Vivian House on Market Hill. Group visits can be arranged outside these times. An illustrated talk on the local cement industry is planned for the evening of 28th June.

For information about the cement industry exhibition, please contact Linda on 01926 814214. You can find out more about Southam Heritage Collection by visiting our website www.southamheritage.org or our Facebook page, telephone 01926 613503 or email southamheritage@hotmail.com

KAYE'S CEMENT

One of the oldest English makes. Made of Best Cement Rock from the Lower Lias Formation by the most modern methods of manufacture.

SOUND, STRONG, DURABLE, UNIFORM.

ALSO

KAYE'S BLUE LIAS LIME

Powerfully hydraulic.

Manufactured by

KAYE & CO., LD.,
Southam Works, RUGBY.

545

ESTABLISHED 1854.