

**Aggregate Industries and Quarrying in the Channel Islands
An Introduction**

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In Guernsey there was a quarry at St Germain at the Castel in 1639 and in Jersey there may be evidence of commercial quarrying in a 1651 reference to the *Clos de Carieres* in St John parish. Quarries, of course, contributed to the defences of either side in the Civil war which, however, saw the death knell of the castle as an efficient military instrument. Nevertheless, stone still had an important role in protecting the islands from foreign attack. A French invasion of Jersey was attempted in 1771 to which Fort George, Guernsey, begun 1780, was a belated response. A second, marginally more successful, invasion was attempted in 1781. In response to the repetition of this kind of attack, a series of circular towers, built in stone, began to appear in 1804. These so-called Martello towers were able, with a small force, to offer stout resistance to enemy attack. Fort Regent, overlooking St Helier harbour, built 1806-14, offered resistance on a more magnificent scale, at a cost of £375,203. Military roads were also built on both islands Whilst the islands could provide the stone for these enterprises, there was insufficient local labour, and 800 men were brought in from England. At the same time, with a due sense of propriety, the handsome Georgian parish church of Holy Trinity was built at St Peter Port between 1787 and 1789, for which 1,258 tons of stone were used, mainly from Les Vardes Quarry.

It is well known that Guernsey possessed the world's first pillar boxes, one of which is still to be seen in St Peter Port's Union Street. What is less well known is the Jersey tradition that tarmacadam was first laid in Jersey. This was at St. Brelade's Bay in 1820, considerably antedating the claim that it was first used in 1832 for the footpaths of Cheltenham. The word Tarmac, ubiquitous in modern use, was not registered as a trade mark until 1903.

Samuel Lewis, in his 1834 *Topographical Dictionary of England*, noted, when writing about Guernsey, that:

The quarries afford employment to a great number of inhabitants, a considerable quantity of granite and stone being exported. From November 30th, 1828 to November 30th, 1829 there were shipped five thousand, five hundred and eighty three tons of paving stones, six thousand and seventy feet of the same, and twelve thousand five hundred and forty-seven tons of stone chippings. In order to facilitate the exportation of the granite from the north of the island, the harbour of St Sampson has been rendered secure and convenient by a new breakwater and quay.

Lewis tells a similar story for Jersey:

The parish of St John is chiefly noted for its extensive quarries of a fine kind of sienite, much resembling granite in appearance and hardness, and highly esteemed for architectural purposes; it is procured from a cliff, called Mont Mado, which is entirely composed of it.

St Helier: The commercial intercourse with other countries having greatly increased, it became necessary for the protection of the vessels frequenting the harbour [of St Helier] which carry an aggregate burden of twenty thousand tons, to enlarge the pier, which was accordingly accomplished, at an expense of £61,000: it is entirely constructed of the sienite rock from the quarries of St John's, and is faced with blocks weighing nearly two tons each.

In 1840 John Mowlem, 1788-1868, the founder of the civil engineering firm, renewed the paving of Blackfriars Bridge with granite setts, and the repaving of London Bridge and the Strand followed. The rising demand for granite paving had led Mowlem, who had worked in the quarries of the Isle of Purbeck, before moving to London, to buy and develop a quarry in 1830 in Guernsey. His ships bringing the stone to the mainland used the improved harbour at St Sampson's and the granite for the Thames Embankment, 1862-74, came from Guernsey.

It is difficult to imagine the congestion on the roads around St. Sampson's, the harbour from which everything was shipped. All the stone came down by horse and cart, and there were sometimes thirty vessels, mainly sail, loading at the same time. . 175,000 tons were shipped in 1870, and the figure rose to a maximum of 450,000 tons per annum in 1910-13. James Marr tells how the stone was taken from the quarries to St. Sampson's harbour to be crushed, and then tipped straight into the ships' holds. The loading was so co-ordinated and expert that a ship of 800 tons could be in and out the same day. Whereas 2,000 tons of stone were exported in 1810, this had risen to 120,000 tons in 1854, and to 458,000 tons in 1910. An expansion of wealth and employment accompanied this growth in Guernsey's stone trade and caused the population of the northern parishes to double in 30 years.

Throughout the 19th century quarries were small and labour intensive. Joseph Barrette of St John was something of an exception, being described in 1881 as a landowner, farmer, stone merchant, and quarryman, who employed 14 men. More typical were John Dolbel, also of St John, described as a quarry master of Mont Mado. He had two boarders who were stone cutters, and James Fry from England, was described as a master quarry miner, with a stone dressing son. Peter Sebire, a 32 year old quarry master at St Samson's, originated from Alderney, and had a 15 year old lodger, who was a stone dresser. He also employed two nephews as stone breakers.

19th century census returns speak of quarrymen, stone cutters, stone dressers, stone crackers, and stone miners, as well as stone merchants, and as the demand for stone grew so labour had to be imported. Normandy and Brittany were obvious sources, but so too were England and Ireland, and even Scotland from whence, for example, Thomas Young settled in Jersey as a stone dresser, with his Scottish wife and four young children. James Gallinari travelled even further, and came from Italy, acquiring a French wife en route, and settled at St Sampson's as a stone breaker with his 15 year old son following the same occupation. Some deep sea fishermen, like Henry Baker of St Sampson's, became quarrymen. Margaret, his wife, was born in St John's, New Brunswick, where, it is not dangerous to assume, she met Henry, ashore from a Guernsey cod fleet. The traffic, in fact was two-way, and by a strange coincidence the two Caplain brothers from Alderney went, via Devon, to Bardon Hill Quarry, now a major quarry of Aggregate Industries.

There are two pictures in the collection of the Jersey Heritage Trust which illustrate the quarryman's life. Diana Stanmore's water colour depicts a quarryman's hut, small and thatched, and precariously perched on a rocky outcrop against a grassy cliff. Malcolm Arbuthnot showed in oils something of the physical rigour and isolation of the quarryman's life. A painting in the Guernsey Museum and Art Gallery depicts Baubigny Quarry. Horses have displaced oxen in hauling carts of stone, ladders give access to the quarry floor, a manually worked crane has been introduced, and everywhere labouring men (and women) are to be seen like ants

All three pictures imply the danger of the quarryman's life in which fatal accidents were commonplace. On 6th January 1911 the *Jersey Evening Post* carried an account of the death on the previous afternoon of August Marie Perrot at Ronez Quarry, St John. He had been killed by a fall of rock, which struck him in the chest and caused him to fall to the bottom of the quarry. The fall fractured his skull and broke his legs, 'the left foot being almost torn from the leg'. He was 28, and married, with 2 children. There was little social security in Jersey in 1911 and though 'the company undertook to assist the widow', the assistance would have been more than modest.

Company records tell of another fatality in March 1928 at Ronez, though the inquest gave a verdict of accidental death. A minute notes that the company was not held responsible, that the victim had no dependants, and that it paid the cost of the funeral. There were, of course, less serious accidents and injuries, and one wonders, for example, whether 58 year old Thomas Esnouf of St John, a stone cracker, who was described in 1881 as handicapped by deafness, was born so, or was this a consequence of the noise of quarrying? In 1886 the *Stone Crackers' Union* was formed to defend the interests of quarrymen and in 1911 it was superseded by a branch of the United Union of Quarrymen and Settmakers established in Guernsey. In 1937 it was incorporated into the *General and Municipal Workers Union*.

By the end of the 19th century Mowlem's Guernsey operation had a steam crusher, and all the paraphernalia of weigh bridges, storage yards, workshops, stables, blondins, and offices, and in addition to the quarries they owned, also had some they leased. At the same time other companies were being established elsewhere on the islands. By 1869 the Jersey Granite Company had commenced

operations. In 1902 the similarly named Jersey Granite Quarries Ltd secured the suspension of the licence granted to an oyster fishery in 1882 in order to establish and exploit Ronez quarry. A further suspension was acquired in 1908, and by that date small steamers were using the quarry's jetty to take on stone.

The company however did not prosper and went into liquidation, which enabled the Croft Granite, Brick, and Concrete Company of Leicestershire to acquire the Ronez Quarry in 1911 for £4,800. A lawsuit ensued in 1913 between the Crown and the Croft company over foreshore rights relating to its Ronez Quarry, and the outbreak of the Great War a year later prevented working of the quarry from commencing. However, once the war was over, production resumed, and nearly 300,000 tons of stone were attained from Jersey as a whole in 1925. But from then onwards the rapid decline of the market for granite setts, the major part of pre-war export, coupled with growing competition, particularly from Cornwall, brought about great decline in production, and only 100,000 tons per annum were exported in 1933-8.

The industry underwent a similar decline in Guernsey, and whereas 188,438 tons of stone were exported in 1928, by 1938 the figure had dropped to 110,737 tons. In 1929 Mowlem closed its Guernsey activities. Even so, in the early 1930s there were still 268 quarries in Guernsey, though their modest average size is reflected in the fact whilst the industry was still labour intensive, it only employed 310 workers.

The German occupation of the Channel Islands from 1940-45 saw the requisition of the islands' quarries. On Guernsey, Mowlem's plant was brought back into use and produced the crushed stone used in building the Guernsey portion of the Atlantic Wall. The Occupation files in the Jersey Archives relate some of the details of the occupation as they concerned Ronez quarry. With the war over, the industry on both islands had to undertake a long and expensive process of reconstruction. Several quarries did not reopen; their rehabilitation being uneconomic. The Germans had worn out plant and machinery for which replacements were unobtainable and maintenance disregarded. The haphazard exploitation of the actual quarry faces simply for the immediate gain of the easiest stone had also taken its toll. These events occurred in what is still living memory, which means oral history comes into its own. There would be nothing to vex or tire in the recorded recollections of those who worked, or whose parents worked, in the islands' quarries under enemy occupation, a unique situation in the history of British quarrying.

Post war reconstruction was long and expensive, and at Ronez, for example, engineers came over from Croft to rebuild the plant and to build a new jetty. This gave opportunities for the rationalization and technical advancement. Horses and carts and steam cranes gave way to huge bright yellow excavators, dumper trucks and loading shovels. Electricity took over from steam, and the renewed quarries became powerful scenes of dramatic industrial activity.

In this process the numbers employed in quarrying dropped considerably, but production through mechanization remained much the same as it was before the war. The new technology also offered the islands the occasional spectacular as when, in December 1952, there took place at Ronez what the local press was happy to record as the biggest quarry explosion on the Channel Islands ever. Twelve thousand pounds of explosives brought down 100,000 tons of rock before an invited audience of the Jersiaise good and great. The tradition of quarries having their own vessels revived. In 1957 the MV *Marshlea* carried her first load of stone from the jetty at St John. Originally sailing under lease, in 1972 she was purchased by the company. Later, she was succeeded by the loyally named MV *Ronez*, a 1,000 ton self-discharging, bulk freighter, a far cry from the sailing vessels which in late 19th century congested the harbour at St Sampson's waiting their for their cargoes of stone.

In 1961 the Jersey Granite Quarries Ltd commenced operations on Guernsey, initially by making concrete blocks and asphalt, the aggregates for that being supplied by two local quarry operators, A & F Manuelle and W Griffiths & Co Ltd. Then, in 1962, Les Vardes quarry, full of water, and over looked by four German gun emplacements, was leased from Manuelle's, and brought back into use. In 1969 the quarry was purchased, as were Griffiths' Yard, Bordeaux, and Mont Cuet quarries. L'Etacq quarry in Jersey was also acquired.

The demand for paving and dimension stone had disappeared and the installation of a new primary and secondary crusher at Les Vardes in 1974 reflected new commercial emphases. The MV *Marshlea* took

her last cargo of stone from the jetty at St John in 1971 and in 1978 the Jersey Granite Company entirely ceased to export stone, the MV *Marshlea* being converted into a bulk cement tanker.

Ronez's role was now largely domestic, assisting the Channel Islands in their evolution as a centre of international finance by providing them with an appropriate physical environment. In Guernsey for example, it was heavily involved not only in the Longue Hougue reclamation scheme of 1982 and the North Beach development of the Town Harbour at St Peter Port of 1984, but also in the provision of the kind of accommodation thought appropriate by these new banking houses.

In 1996 CAMAS took over the Croft Granite, Brick, and Concrete Company of Leicestershire and thereby acquired the Jersey Granite and Concrete Company which now emerged as Ronez Limited. A year later, in 1997 CAMAS and Bardon Aggregates merged to form Aggregate Industries, employing 140 on Guernsey and 180 on Jersey.

There is a tradition that when Christopher Wren was building St Paul's cathedral, he was walking around the half finished building, asking the various craftsmen what they were doing. The stone masons, the carpenters, the plasterers, the glaziers all gave proud accounts of what they were achieving with stone, wood, plaster, glass. He then came across a man sweeping up the rubbish on the floor, and he asked him what *he* was doing in this great enterprise. He replied: I am helping Sir Christopher Wren build St Paul's cathedral.

Guernsey stone from a quarry at Cartaret, Cobo was used for the steps of St Paul's, steps which have been trod by monarchs and statesmen for centuries. Interviewed in his native *Guernesiais* in 1956, when he was 80, Adolphus Bichard, son of a stone dresser, recollected that the stone dressers' shelter at Cartaret, in which the stone was trimmed still stood and that in the 19th century (he was born in 1876) the owner of the quarry, one Pierre Duquemin, leased it to Mowlem's. Thus, there are those on Guernsey, perhaps themselves working for Ronez, who can claim that their ancestors helped Sir Christopher Wren to build St Paul's cathedral..

We speak now of operatives, personnel, and human resources, but in the 1880s, when Adolphus Bichard was a boy, there were cutters, trimmers, knobbers, crackers, (both men and women), blacksmiths, carpenters, and, of course, horses, all known individually by name, and their drivers. Cutters were paid 22 to 24 shillings for a six-day week; trimmers were paid by the ton, and had to provide their own hammers. Their stone paved cities, bridged rivers, restrained the tides, and contributed to civic and national pride in places as far away, it is said, as Odessa.

Today the demands made of the quarry are different. Largely what is asked for is crushed stone of different grades for aggregate, concrete, and tarmacadam, and something desperately pedestrian is suggested by the very word *block-making*. But the sum of the parts, give as a whole, motorways, airports and their runways, hospitals and universities, all of which are ingredients of modern civilization. Moreover, it is not only disused quarries which become nature reserves: there is often a symbiosis in the working quarry between those who drive the dumper truck and operate the crusher and the protected species, be it animal, bird, or plant, and many a working quarry offers sanctuary to a precious SSSI. To work in a quarry is to play one's part in the history of a very long and very honourable occupation.

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