

Extraction of Cotswold Slates or Tiles in the Bradford Hundred

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Cotswold stone slates are produced in two different ways. The first, dating from the Roman period, is to extract the stone from near the surface of the ground (a tile pit or quarry) and then split it along bedding lines within a few days while it still contains its natural moisture or 'quarry sap'. This technique was used with the local Forest Marble, a hard shelly limestone. The slates were then finished to as large a size as possible and one or two fixing holes were chipped in near the top.

Fig 1. *Local Forest Marble tile*

The second method produces Stonesfield slate, named after a village in West Oxfordshire. Limestone was extracted from small shallow underground quarries, and then stacked with the bedding lines vertical and left to weather. Rain seeped into any fissures and frost then weakened the stone along its natural grain with slaters completing the process. The result is a slate that is much thinner and more regular than the Forest Marble slates.

Both methods of production result in slates of varying sizes with many more small slates (6–12 inches in length) than large slates (24–30 inches). The largest slates are used at the bottom of the roof to throw water clear of the wall and the courses then reduce in size towards the top of the roof. Slates are hung from battens by oak pegs which are a tight fit in the holes made near the top of the slate. With regular maintenance a Cotswold slate roof can last between 100 and 200 years compared to 20 years for straw thatch.

Despite the presence of local tile pits in Monkton Farleigh it appears from the Manorial Court Rolls, dating between 1574 and 1600, that thatch was the more common roofing material in Elizabethan times.



Fig 2. *Location of Tile Pit field-names in the Bradford Hundred*

Field-names recorded between 1671 and 1841 show the location of some of these tile pits (Figure 1). There was also a 'Tylepit' on Whitehill, adjoining Kingsfield in Bradford in 1746, and there would have been many more pits which were only in use for a short time.