

The Lime Kiln and Its Uses

Limestone used to be part of everyday life, was frequently found in many things mostly up until the 1900s and was 'part of a self-sufficient rural working economy'.^[1] Limestone was quarried and broken down into smaller pieces and transferred to the limekiln in the area. These pieces would be thrown into an unimaginably hot kiln and integrated with fuel. Different types of fuel were used in different areas, but it is apparent that Combe Martin used coal due to its regular engagement in its trade. The science behind lime burning is that the heat creates a process of *calcination*, meaning that moisture and gases are relieved from the stone. This process creates calcium oxide (CaO) also known as quicklime and the outcome of the product is that it remains the same size, however, is much lighter in weight and has changed in colour. The uses for quicklime can be split into three categories:

Agricultural

Quicklime was used mostly for agricultural land up until around the 1900's with nearly two-thirds of its production being used. The properties in quicklime give it many functions in the agricultural world, one being that due to its alkaline nature it reduces the acidity of the soil improving the quality land.

Craft

Quicklime was used in many craft items such as dyeing and bleaching cloth, linens and hides but also it was used in the making of items such as soap and paper.

Building

Quicklime was used for mortar, plaster and limewash which were integral to the construction of buildings. Up until around 1900s it was still being used inside rural homes for 'spring-cleaning.'^[2]

^[1] David Johnson, *Lime Kilns: History and Heritage* (Amberley Publishing Limited, 2018).

^[2] Johnson, *Lime Kilns: History and Heritage*.