

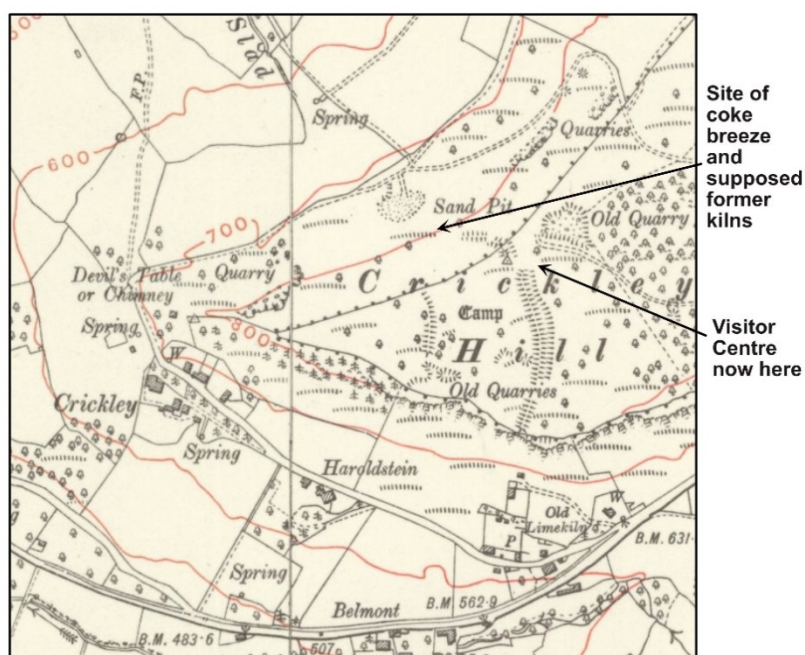
The mystery of the Crickley Hill lime kilns

Stephen Mills October 2025

We were contacted by Steve Peacock, author of *Geology for Walkers*. He is researching the geological history of Crickley Hill and wonders if any members have information about several lime kilns that once operated on the hill.

The Gloucestershire Geoconservation Trust's leaflet on the area mentions that there were two vertical lime burning kilns on the hill in the 1930s (operated by Cheltenham Gas Works) and prior to that, two stone kilns, but Steve has been unable to find any documentation relating to either, nor photographic records, despite extensive 'Googling'.

The kilns were located close to the Main Scarp Face (at SO 928 163 – 926 162). The Geoconservation leaflet notes that on the right below the path is an area of black, powdered coke that originated from Cheltenham Gas Works. During the 1930s, there were two vertical lime kilns below the escarpment here, and the coke was used as fuel for the kilns to produce lime for the building trade. Previously, two stone-built kilns had been used at the foot of the slope. Investigation of the site has revealed that there are what appear to be remnants of coke breeze present, but there is no trace of remnant infrastructure of any vintage, either on-the-ground or on satellite imagery, and extensive internet searching has thrown up absolutely nothing about kilns at this location.



Steve did find several interesting snippets from the British Newspaper archives:

Cheltenham News 14/04/88. – From reader, AM Langford

The country park at Crickley Hill until some 40 years ago was the scene of industrial quarrying with lime kilns at work on the hill serviced with coal brought up from the valley below. Sealey Industries was the company which operated the kilns which must have been a most prominent landmark.

Cheltenham News 08/08/91. From reader Derren Brown.

Until the last war, lime kilns stood on Crickley Hill. They were clearly visible if you travelled out of town through Shurdington, especially at night when the glow and sparks gave a spectacular free show. Built of an iron construction the kilns had a firebrick lining and were fed from the top with alternate layers of limestone and coke. The burned limestone was then drawn off at intervals from the bottom and used for agricultural and building purposes.

When the war came, the kilns were shut down as it was feared that their position, visible at a great distance from the air, would provide the Luftwaffe with too useful a marker *en route* to GAC at Hucclecote. Oddly enough the kilns were of a German design.



Any further information from GSIA members about the kilns and their working lives would be greatly appreciated.

Update November 2025

Members will recall from the October newsletter that we were contacted by Steve Peacock, author of *Geology for Walkers*. He is researching the geological history of Crickley Hill and wondered if any members had information about several lime kilns that once operated on the hill.

A little more has since come to light courtesy of comment from Tim Grubb, archaeologist at Gloucestershire County Council Heritage Team, and *Know Your Place*.

Steve notes that the Interestingly the Know Your Place maps do include a community-sourced photo along the scarp face near the old sand quarry purporting to show an old lime kiln. However, the background to the photo does not look like the Crickley Hill scarp, and a second community photo geolocated just along the scarp from it is clearly mis-located, so I guess the confidence that the kiln photo is correctly identified must be subject to some doubt also.

Steve came across an interesting memoir by John Townsend who recalls growing up in that area and using the quarries as a playground. A couple of his reminiscences:

"In about 1940 when the two steel lime kilns were still working at Crickley Quarries, a German bomber must have thought they were steelworks or something and dropped a load of incendiary bombs right across both sides of Crickley Hill. My father who was an ARP man said the whole hillside was on fire."

"Around the lane from my house there was a quarry, in the 20s and 30s, vast amounts of gravel was excavated by Packers Ltd of Gloucester. They built two large steel lime kilns, and lorries would

take the gravel and lime to Gloucester and come back with loads of slack coal for the kilns. They used old Sentinel Steam wagons. My brother always said that two old wagons were buried in a tip under the old waste lime heaps". The gravel quarry he describes may be the 'sand pit' shown on OS maps of early 20th century vintage at the end of Cold Slad Lane, right at the base of the Crickley Hill slope.

"The quarry was our playground. There were old machines to climb on, gravel slopes to slide down on sheets of tin and old lime heaps to ride over on our bikes."

Steve is now fairly convinced that the kilns must have been located immediately east of the old sand quarry where there is an anonymously flat area of probably sufficient size to have been the site (see photo) and surrounded by the former 'sand pit', the remnants of slack coal, and a pathway running up to the old upper quarries that appears to show remains of brick paving. Whether the kilns were operated by Cheltenham Gas Works, Sealey Industries, or Packers of Gloucester is still a mystery, as is why there is essentially no physical trace of their former existence or old photos of them.

Any further information or reminiscences from members would be gratefully received.

