

T H E I O N A M A R B L E Q U A R R Y -
AND THE GLOUCESTER ENGINE IN SCOTLAND.

Chris Bowen's brief article in the JOURNAL for 1981 (pp 72-3) drew attention to 'A Gloucester Engine in Scotland', a product of Fielding & Platt.

Readers might like to know that further information can be found in an article of mine published in the first issue of the AIA Journal, the Industrial Archaeology Review, vol. 1 No. 1 Autumn 1976, pp 18-27.

Along with other archaeologists from Cirencester, I had the opportunity of studying the surviving remains of the Marble Quarry on Iona in the Inner Hebrides in 1972-73 as part of a wider study of the archaeology of the island. In fact, we had intended to excavate one of Iona's well-known Christian archaeological sites, but plans had to be changed and the opportunity was seized to undertake some I.A. on the island.

Quarries all over the west of Scotland provide a fascinating and under-researched subject, and the Marble Quarry proved to be similarly disregarded. On-site measured drawings and photography plus background research in the archives of the Oban Times quickly produced the evidence for working the marble in a restricted outcrop in the south-east of Iona. Evidence for its use extends back into the medieval period, and a fine altar table of Iona marble is mentioned by several 17th and 18th century writers.

Intermittent quarrying to satisfy specific demands seems to have been the pattern until the re-establishment of the quarry after a period of abandonment. This too was short-lived - from c. 1907 until the outbreak of the First World War - but during this time machinery was installed in the quarry in order to facilitate the cutting of quarried blocks into thin slabs of marble veneer.

The 15 h. gas engine from Fielding & Platt ran on producer gas and powered a cutting or sawing frame manufactured by Andersons of Arbroath. Although the Oban Times records the installation of this and other equipment on Iona in 1911, the Fielding & Platt company records are missing for this period, and no additional records could be found.

Gas engine, cutting frame and other ancillary equipment still survive in the marble quarry, remote from the island's only road and far too difficult a removal task for the scrap man. Thus they languish and rot, and the survey was undertaken not least to compile a record before even further deterioration results.

David Viner

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"The Iona Marble Quarry" was published by the Iona Community; copies available from David Viner, 8 Tower St., Cirencester, @ £1.00 + 20p p & p.