Moira Furnace Museum and County Park

you probably recognize the iconic

building behind us

as Moira furnace but today I’m here with

Steve Scottney one of the furnished

trustees

and he's going to take us to another

part of the site that's less well-known

morning good morning shall we go yeah

so what are we looking at here Steve

well Linda

what we've got here is what's called a

battery

of lime kilns that means a set of them

built together

and they're built into the bank of the

canal the canal is

just over there from where we are they

were built in three stages so they're

not

actually as solid a unit as they might

first look

the first one was the end one closest to

the furnace

and was built at about the same time as

the furnace and the same time as the

canal

they then built four more about

10 years later not quite that much and

finally

two on the end which were built 15 to 20

years later

they're built to burn limestone

to make lime quick lime and how did they

work

right well you need to understand the

shape of them which is a bit hidden from

here

if you imagine an upside down goblet

quite wide at the top there's probably

about 10 foot across

opening and it comes down into a little

grate

which is just behind here these tunnels

are access tunnels so you can get in and

out but if you went in around the corner

you could see the grate

and that's where they can remove the ash

after burning

they layer the inside of the kiln

that have some brush wood at the bottom

to get the fire going

then they would have alternate layers of

limestone and what they called slack

coal or

small coal which is sort of tiny little

lumps that weren't much use

for anything else that burns away and

burns for a couple of weeks

until all the fuel has gone and what's

left at the bottom

is the ash and that's called quicklime

and they would rake that out and it had

two different uses mainly

you mentioned quicklime what exactly is

that right

okay yes it's an expression they

they use the quicklime is the ash that

results from burning the limestone

two main uses i mentioned one is

for building mortar it's used as the

cement

in mortar you'll often hear people talk

about lime mortar

in old buildings the second is

agricultural

um quick lime is really good at breaking

down clay soils

and as you know tremendous amount of

clay soil around here

and also it neutralizes acid soils

so those are the two main uses mixed

with water

it forms lime wash which in the old days

a lot of farmers would use

to paint the walls of barns and sheds

as a disinfectant really isn't lime

dangerous though

yes very quick lime

is highly corrosive and

i understand that the best lime which

they used for the

building purposes they used to hand pick

how quite how they did it and quite what

kind of protective

clothing they had in those days I’ve no

idea

but i gather they had a short working

life

so what is the connection to the furnace

right well i think it probably changed

over time

i mentioned that the first kiln was the

furthest one nearest the furnace and if

you look at the dates

i think it was probably built to provide

lime for mortar in the building of the

furnace itself

but then it carries on after that as a

parallel

industry and in fact the Moira lime

works

belong to the Moira colliery company

but it's the demand growing demand for

agriculture

that i think keeps the industry going

also

the canal is right there so it's the

common factor really

you can bring limestone in by canal and

you can ship quicklime away

to other parts of the country the canal

was actually

slightly closer in those days it was

re-routed

at one point just by a small amount but

it meant there was a wharf

just above here so they were dropping

things off

and loading things directly alongside

the line kilns

and this one as you may remember it's

the earliest one

and you can see it's actually a slightly

different shape it's more

oval than round but you can see quite

how big an opening it was

and this is where they would have tipped

in the alternate layers of

small coal and limestone

the canal i can just see it just through

there

but as i mentioned it was even closer

originally so you can see how convenient

this was

this was a wharf for the lime kilns

running alongside the lime kilns and

Moira furnace

is this restored section of the Ashby

canal

the canal opened along its entire length

for the first time in 1804

it had taken 10 years to build

it was originally 31 miles long running

from Marston junction

on the Coventry canal right up to

reservoir pit on the Ashby Woulds

that's beyond what is now conkers it

served the Leicestershire and south

Derbyshire coalfields

connecting them with the main canal

network and allowing them to send their

coal out

all over the midlands and even as far

away as London

the coal was carried in narrowboats

and these were operated by men many of

whom had their families living and

working with them on board

children born in the tiny cabins

and growing up knowing no other home but

the boat

and very little chance to get to a

school

between the wars the this section of the

canal

fell into dereliction and disuse even

more so in the 40s and 50s

quite a bit of it was filled in but now

this section between Moira

and Donisthorpe has been restored and

the hope is

that eventually it will be reconnected

with the rest of the

main line of the canal at Snarestone

in the meantime the furnace museum here

offers its visitors boat rides in a

modified working narrowboat

the Joseph Wilkes but do check the

website for operating times

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