

Cave Hill Quarry

Cave Hill Lime Works

What is known as Lilydale lime being now so extensively used and so popular amongst builders induced us on Monday to pay a visit to the Cave Hill works, the property of Mr David Mitchell, and under the management of Mr H. Jordan, of whom it would be difficult to find a more popular man in Lilydale and the surrounding districts.

It has been a recognised fact for some years prior to Mr Mitchell's advent that limestone existed in large quantities in the Lilydale district, but the cost of carriage to Melbourne was so great prior to the opening of the railway line that although people were fully aware of the advantage to be derived from opening up such an industry, and the need which existed for the supply of a really first-class article, they were not prepared to risk the expense.

However, about nine years ago, Mr David Mitchell became the possessor of the property known as the Cave Hill, and at once saw the feasibility of establishing such an industry as that under review, and so confident was he of the ultimate success of the venture that he did not hesitate to lay out several thousand pounds with the object of developing thoroughly the stone in the quarry.

Success, crowned his efforts from the first and in a remarkably short space of time his brand of lime had become so popular that he had over twenty drays and waggons engaged in the carriage of lime to Melbourne alone.

Of course, when the railway was opened to Lilydale his expenditure was considerably reduced, while the quick transit and greater facilities for direct consignment were fully appreciated. Since then the popularity of the lime has undergone no diminution - in fact, Cave Hill lime has become in the building trade "Familiar as household words" and we are informed that trucks are consigned direct from the kiln to almost the farthest limits of the railway extension in the colony.

Indeed, it is the opinion of some of the building craft that two bags of this lime are equal to three bags of many other brands on the market. Some idea may be formed of the business done when it is stated that the average output ranges from three to four trucks per diem throughout the year, a considerable item when the annual total are made up.

Some time ago a sample of the stone was submitted to analysis, and the certified return showed the large average of 97 per cent of pure lime. This fact alone shows what an important industry lime burning must eventually become in this district, as from all appearances the supply of stone is practically unlimited.

To come more directly to the works, the advantage of systematic management is at once apparent, for everything is carried on with a minimum of profit. It must not for a moment be imagined that wages are cut down, for out of seventy hands on the estate we understand that Mr Mitchell pays the highest remuneration current for the class of labour he requires; but what we mean to infer is that everything available is utilised in some form or other.

There is, in fact, no waste and therefore, no loss. In the first place, the stone when quarried is drawn up an inclined road in trucks by means of horse power, and upon

the truck reaching the necessary elevation, its contents are “tipped” direct into the kiln destined to receive them.

The necessary quantity of wood is at hand and once the material is placed in position in the kiln it does not again come to the surface, but after undergoing the necessary preparation is loaded direct from what is technically known as the “eye” of the kiln into the railway trucks a branch line having been constructed to a position which may be described as under the furnace, the natural formation the hill facilitating the adoption of this ingenious mode of construction.

The kilns are kept going night and day throughout the week. To keep up this incessant fire an enormous quantity of fire wood is required, and it is estimated that upwards of 100 acres of land on the estate - which consists in aggregate of 1800 acres are cleared and brought into a state fit for agriculture every year, the timber being grubbed clear out of the ground and all of which is fit for use in connection with burning the lime is so utilised, while the refuse (which does not amount to much) is burnt on the grounds.

The proprietor is also open to purchase all the local firewood which can be supplied to him.

In connection with the carriage of firewood from the more distant parts of his own property, Mr Mitchell has had a very substantial tramway constructed, some two miles in length, and the wood is brought in on trucks, horses contributing the motive power. It has, however, been decided to substitute steam for horse power, and a metal road is now being constructed upon which a traction engine will run, the latter now being on its way from England.

We were nearly omitting to mention that two steam cranes will also in a short time be substituted for horseworks in the direction of hauling the stone from the quarry to the kilns.

What may be considered a feat involving the exercise of considerable engineering skill and ability was the laying out and constructing of a water race tapping the Olinda Creek some two miles above the works, and the water has been brought this distance right to the base of the hill upon which the kilns are situated.

The level must in the first place have been very accurately taken, as the water flows along the race with a fall of only twenty inches in the two miles. The flow thus obtained is utilised for turning a water wheel used for driving chaff cutting, threshing and bonecrushing machinery. In order that there should be no question of interference which riparian rights, after the water has served its purpose at the wheel it is conveyed through a brick and cement tunnel, some four feet in diameter and a quarter of a mile in length, back again to the creek - the take-off and return both being on Mr Mitchell's private property.

In this tunnel alone there is ample evidence of the foresight of the proprietor and the managerial abilities of his overseer, inasmuch as the major part of the clay excavated for the tunnel was prepared on the ground and returned in the shape of bricks. Attached to the pit wherein is situated the water-wheel is a hydraulic “ram” by means of which water is forced into a tank placed upon the hill some 100 feet higher, and from this pipes are laid over the works and the manager's private establishment.

An ample supply is thus provided for domestic purposes, and also for the stock engaged about the premises - leaving the works particularly appertaining to the

preparation of the lime, the farmyard and works next attract attention, and here the same system of strict management is carried out.

The estate proper, as already mentioned, consists of some 1800 acres, but, of course, only a moderate portion of this has as yet been brought under cultivation. Still, however, there are at present time in the stockyards some 300 to 400 tons of oat crop, which will eventually be threshed or cut into chaff and forwarded to the Melbourne market.

Provision is made for a supply of manure, and there is erected on the ground a “steamer” and bonecrusher, so that it may be said that the arrangements in the farm department are about as complete as they can well be. A goodly number of cattle depasture in the paddocks adjacent and the distance from the town gives every opportunity for watching the fluctuation of the Melbourne market, with facilities for sending stock in just at the right time, the advantages of which must be very great. Taken altogether, the condition of the Cave Hill estate is a convincing proof of what can be done with landed property after a judicious preliminary expenditure, to which is added careful management.

In conclusion, the existence of such an extensive industry in our midst must tend to considerably increase the business of our local tradesmen, in the shape of stores, saddlery and harness, blacksmith’s work, etc. as everything possible is procured locally. The expression “extensive industry” is amply borne out by the fact that the wages sheet alone, without taking into consideration other items of expenditure, totals up the nice little sum of between £400 and £500 per month.

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