
47 Furness Abbey

Theme: Heritage and mining

Location

47 Furness Abbey. 2 kilometres northeast of Barrow town centre [SD 217 718].

Description

On the outskirts of Barrow is Furness Abbey, a 12th century monastic settlement and once the richest in northwest England. It may now be a ruin, but the quality and sophistication of the architecture are breath-taking.

The Abbey is still the largest structure in Cumbria that is built of red Triassic sandstones. Not to be outdone, the Victorians constructed the monumental 19th century Barrow Town Hall of the same red stone. The quarries for the Abbey were said to be in the adjacent Vale of Nightshade; the stone for the Town Hall was local too, it came from Hawcoat. The building stones are from a set of rocks known as the St Bees Sandstone and their composition and colour is a product of the way they were formed — as sand in rivers which flowed across a hot desert plain 250 million years ago.

People have always used local resources for building and the incredible diversity of Cumbria's rocks is reflected in the variety of stone used in its buildings, from prehistoric and Roman times to today. The red Triassic sandstones used here are common elsewhere in lowland Cumbria. In the Lake District the houses are of Ordovician and Silurian slate and volcanic rocks. In the Pennines the farms and walls are of brown and grey Carboniferous sandstone and limestone. Even where there is no solid rock, people have used stones, rounded and carried from afar by ice and water, to build the boulder and cobble houses of the Solway Plain. The range of stone buildings in the county is as wonderful as it is unique.

Photographs

(Photo 47-1) 47 St Bees Sandstone of Furness Abbey.

(Photo 47-2) 47 Furness Abbey.



(Photo 47-1) St Bees Sandstone of Furness Abbey.



(Photo 47-2) Furness Abbey.