

Stone Walls

In the twentieth century, concrete walls gradually replaced traditional stone walls. In the past the building material for walls was stone, usually from local quarries.

Lime mortar

The mortar used to bind the stones together was made of lime mixed with sand and water. The lime was produced in a lime kiln. There were hundreds of these all over the country. The one shown here is at Lavistown, quite near to Kilkenny City. You are looking at the eye of the kiln.



Up on top there was an open pot where layers of fuel, usually coal and layers of limestone were placed on top of one another. The kiln was then set on fire and burned for several days. The very high temperatures in the kiln converted the limestone into quicklime and this was raked out from the bottom of the kiln. It had to be handled very carefully as it was caustic – in other words it could burn the bare skin. It had to



be “slaked” by putting water on it before it was used for making mortar. The lime was also used in the past for spreading on land and for white-washing houses.

Stone

For centuries, the chief source of building stone in Kilkenny City was the Black Quarry on the Bennetsbridge Road. Today, most of the quarry has been filled, but it is still possible to see part of the rock face on the right hand side of the road as you



go from town towards the roundabout. The rock is limestone. It is black when polished and was usually known as **black marble**, even though it is not actually marble. When looked at close up, you can often see fossils of creatures who lived 350 million years ago when the limestone was laid down on the shore of a shallow tropical sea.



Old walls

As walls got older and were exposed to the weather for a long time, sometimes centuries, the mortar between the stones became loose and fell out or was washed out, leaving cracks between the stones. Dust and the remains of the mortar, together with the remains of plants, left small pockets of soil in these cracks. Seeds of flowering plants and spores of ferns fell into these pockets of soil and over time plants grew in the soil. There is enough moisture from rainfall and dew for certain plants to survive. Not all plants are able to survive in these conditions, so the number of species of plants found on old stone walls is quite small. Around Kilkenny City there are many stone walls to be seen which are covered with plants like ivy-leaved toadflax, fingered saxifrage, pennywort, pellitory, spleenwort, rustyback and garden flowers like snapdragon and valerian, which have escaped into the wild and seeded themselves on our old stone walls.