

## **PADDY DIXONS**

Bridford Quarry, as operated by the Devon Basalt and Granite Co, comprised three workings. The first, dating from 1904, was generally known as 'Paddy Dixon's', situated off to the left of Pound Lane about half a mile above Stone Lane. A little above is the adjacent 'Pond Quarry' opened in 1910 as were some lower workings on the other side of Pound Lane behind what is now called Bridford Piggery. The main quarry was also known variously as Bridford Quarry, Christow Quarry, or Great Hill Quarry, but Paddy Dixon's has proved the most enduring, despite the spelling undoubtedly named after its proprietor James H Dickson.

John (J H ) Dickson was the son of James , one of two brothers , John and James Dickson, themselves sons of an earlier John Dickson, a prominent railway engineer from South Wales. The two sons followed their father into railway engineering and general contracting and eventually found themselves as prime movers and contractors to the Exeter, Teign Valley and Chagford Railway. The 1893 contract, comprised an extension of the existing Newton Abbot to Teign House line, forking at Leigh Cross. The western fork was to go via Dunsford, Clifford Bridge and Fingle Bridge to Chagford and the eastern route was to link with Exeter St Davids via Longdown, Ide and Alphington. The contract value was £320,000 – all to be paid in shares in the new railway company. The Dicksons therefore had a particularly strong commitment to the success of the project, but at the same time they must have been acutely aware of the dilemma that all profits earned on the engineering contract would be at the expense of their interests in the railway company. In 1895 James H Dickson, son of Director John Dickson, was appointed the brothers' Contractor Engineer.

In addition to his railway responsibilities and, possibly taking a leaf from the books of the earlier mining 'Adventurers' who must have cut their speculative mining losses by having recourse to their more familiar and certain role of 'Merchant' and supplying the mine with plant and stores, James H Dickson of The Grange, Dunsford (Contractors' Engineer to the E,TV & C Railway and son of the principal shareholders) also became J Harvey Dickson, Proprietor of Trusham and Westcott Granite Quarries, main supplier to and valued customer of the new railway.

Unlike the grainier, quartzite granite of the moorland tors and crags, the eastern edge of the moor along the line of the Teign Valley comprised a black hard form of igneous rock known as basalt. Whereas the moorland granite lent itself to being cut and shaped into building materials, the shiny basalt could be crushed and graded into hard-wearing roadstone, aggregate and ballast. Although it had been known for some time that there were large reserves of very high quality rock, without suitable transport facilities these were valueless. The extension of the railway and the upgrading in 1892 of the original branch line from the old broad gauge to standard gauge provided the means for cheap bulk aggregate haulage and also a substantial local demand for track ballast and general construction roadstone. The Teign Valley Granite Co had been quarrying at Crockham, Nr Trusham, since 1895, and shortly after in 1899 J H Dickson took a lease on land adjoining Trusham station and opened Trusham Quarry in 1901 followed by Bridford Quarry in 1905. He traded originally as J H Dickson (latterly J Harvey Dickson) but was always known locally as Paddy Dixon, and in 1909 formed the Devon Basalt & Granite Co Ltd to take over the running of these two quarries plus Westcott quarry – location unknown, but probably nearer Christow.

By this time the original workings had been supplemented by two further excavations, one above and one below the original quarry. The formation of the company seems to have been prompted by the need to raise capital to improve operations. Up to that time the unbroken

stone had been carried by road at a cost of 9d per ton, down Pound Lane, to Christow station where it was crushed and shipped. In order to increase output and reduce per ton operating costs, a narrow gauge tub line was built linking the three quarries to a stone crushing plant just south of the Barytes mine. From there it was connected to Christow railway sidings by a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile standard gauge line, crossing the Valley Road at a level crossing just by today's vet's surgery. The narrow gauge line crossed Pound Lane just above Seven Views and opposite The Piggery and the 1 in 4 incline then passed under Stone Lane to the crusher plant by means of a small humped-back bridge which is still in place today, accounting for the weight restriction on the road.

In the mean time, in 1907, John Dickson (J H 's uncle) and another Exeter Railway director, Joseph Tiplady, had seen bigger possibilities towards Christow, in what ultimately became the extremely successful Scatter Rock quarry. John Dickson and Tiplady leased the land, but development was delayed a few years until 1916, probably due to conflicting interests and loyalties. The new quarry would obviously need access and sidings at Christow, which already had arrangements with Paddy's DB & G Co Ltd to service the new rail link. In 1911 the new Scatter Rock operators, Scatter Rock Macadams Ltd, having leased the land from Dickson & Tiplady launched an abortive attempt to get the railway to terminate Paddy's agreement and transfer to them the private sidings at Christow. Bearing in mind John was Paddy's uncle, and both John and Paddy's father James were Directors of the railway, the family conflict and commercial contradictions are self-evident.

Doubtless this was resolved behind closed doors and closer to the dinner table than the board table, with arrangements that would not be the subject of public record. Suffice it to say, John Dickson and Tiplady sold their lease to the new Company, a siding agreement was reached in 1912 and Scatter Rock opened in 1914. An aerial ropeway system with forty circulating half ton skips carrying stone direct from the quarry to Christow station was installed and as part of the planning consent the Company constructed a new road from Teign House to Christow station which was of benefit to all.

The new quarry however marked the end of Paddy's DB& G Co's operations, tonnage output having risen every year from 2000 tons in 1905 to 30,000 tons in 1913. In 1914, however, Scatter shipped 28,000 tons and Paddy's output promptly fell back to 22,000 tons and thereafter never exceeded 10,000 tons.. It appears to have ceased operations around 1927 and in 1929 the stone crushing plant and the link to Christow were sold off for use by the barytes mine. 'Uncle' John Dickson died in 1923, but Paddy, who now lived in Prospect Park, Exeter was a regular early morning commuter on the first down train to Trusham. The quarries themselves are now overgrown and the upper 'Pond' quarry flooded. The tub line and railway track are long gone and, as with the Teign Valley railway itself, now only live on as incongruously straight lines midst the tumbling contours of old-edition maps.