

FROM THE ARCHIVES

An archive photograph of East Midlands geology from the British Geological Survey collection.

Rock Houses at Mansfield

These old cave dwellings were recorded by the Geological Survey photographer Jack Rhodes in April 1911. The cave houses lie on the north side of Rock Hill, the main road from the centre of Mansfield onto the A617 to Southwell. They form part of a series of rock dwellings that were interspersed with conventional houses; those shown in the photograph lie towards the eastern, uphill, end of Rock Hill.

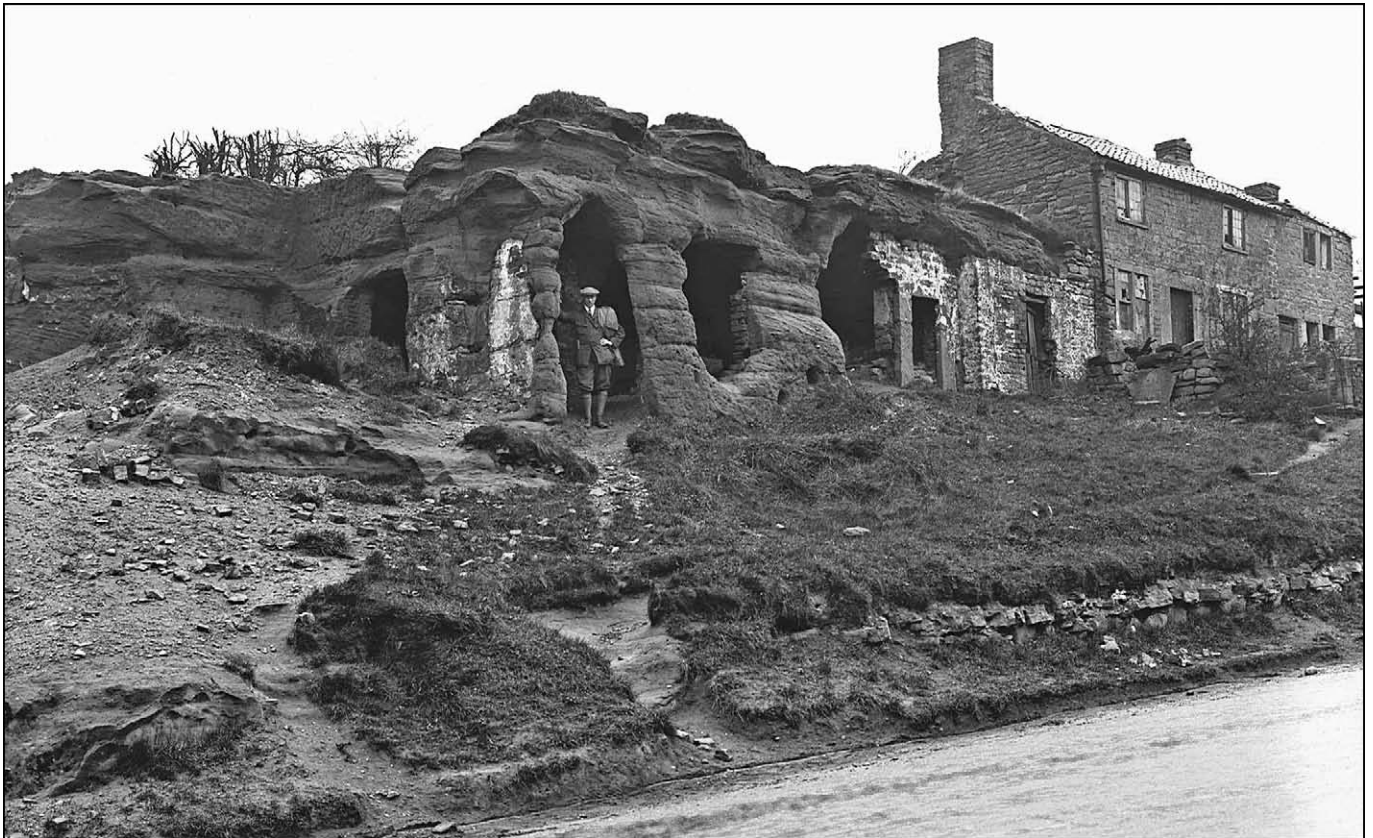
Like the caves of Nottingham, the Mansfield Rock Houses were hewn into the pebbly sandstone of the Nottingham Castle Sandstone Formation, formerly known as the Bunter Pebble Beds. As in Nottingham, the sandstone is friable and easily excavated, with widely spaced joints that enable cavity roofs to be self-supporting across substantial spans.

The original appearance of the rock houses at the western end of Rock Hill is well seen in a woodcut by J. Seddon Tyrer, dating from around 1868; this is on the website of the Old Mansfield Society at www.old-mansfield.org.uk/hudson1/hudson1f (which brings up

a photograph of the western end of the Rock Houses dating from 1900, click again on the photo to bring up the earlier drawing). The cave houses consisted of a series of individual rectangular rooms interconnected by arched doorways. Front doors and windows were also cut into the rock, with at least part of the frontage faced with either local Magnesian Limestone or brick, and with wooden doors and window frames. Holes bored into the sandstone roof were surmounted by stone or brick chimneys to ventilate smoke from fires.

Similar rock houses in Nottingham, notably at Sneinton Hermitage, were excavated from the Middle Ages onwards until the 18th century. It is uncertain when the Mansfield Rock Houses were originally created, although the Old Mansfield Society's records (published as *Bygone Mansfield* by Linney in 1987) note that they too were in existence in the 18th century, and that the trade of besom-maker was traditionally associated with the occupants. One of the last recorded residents was a Mr Bramwell, although it would appear that he vacated his house some time before his death in 1900. The sandstone roofs, pillars and facing walls of the houses shown in this BGS photograph, and in the images dating from around 1900, are in a considerable state of collapse, and must have been abandoned well before those dates.

Andy Howard, British Geological Survey



The Mansfield Rock Houses in April 1911 (BGS photograph # A1156 © NERC).