



No Stone Unturned
by Helen Watts
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www.helenwattsauthor.com

FACT SHEET

No Stone Unturned

Much of the modern-day action in *No Stone Unturned* takes place in the Warwickshire village of Wilmcote. Originally a tiny hamlet comprising just a few cottages, Wilmcote's population and size began to grow in the nineteenth century when the local limestone, which is central to the novel and which had been extracted via small stone pits for centuries, was first quarried on a large scale. One of the main reasons for the expansion of the quarry was the arrival of the Stratford-upon-Avon canal in 1816. The canal ran a full 26 miles from Kings Norton in Birmingham to Stratford-upon-Avon, passing through Wilmcote close by the quarry, and providing a much easier route by which to transport limestone. Transport connections were further improved when, in 1860, the Stratford-upon-Avon Railway opened, and we know that by 1871 there were 468 people living in Wilmcote village.

Just some of the places where limestone from Wilmcote quarry was used:

Kinwarton Dovecote, near Alcester
Ragley Hall, near Alcester
St John the Baptist Church, Aston Cantlow
Medieval bridge, Bidford-upon-Avon
Billesley Manor, Billesley
Houses of Parliament, London
Royal Courts of Justice, London
Ann Hathaway's Cottage, Shottery
Clopton Bridge, Stratford-upon-Avon
Market Hall, Stratford-upon-Avon
St Mary's Church, Warwick
Mary Arden's House, Wilmcote

The railway accident in *No Stone Unturned* is inspired by a true event that took place in Wilmcote on the morning of Friday 24th March 1922. Four men were killed while



Workers in Wilmcote Quarry in 1905.

repairing the railway line a short distance from Wilmcote. They were hit by a northbound light engine which had just passed another southbound goods train near a bend in the track. There were no witnesses, but at the subsequent inquiry, a farm bailiff walking in fields near to the railway cutting testified that he had seen some men packing the ballast on the line without a lookout, and that when the first train passed them, they did not stop working. The jury in the inquest returned a verdict of Accidental Death and no mention of the terrible accident that took the men's lives is made on their headstone. However, at their funeral, a special train was laid on to carry their bodies and more than 200 railway workers joined the many local people who came out to pay their respects. According to its log book for 29th March 1922, the village school also closed for the afternoon



Photograph by Helen Watts

The joint grave of the four rail accident victims – Edward Sherwood (age 43), Lewis Thomas Washburn (age 41), George Gustavius Booker (age 43) and William Thomas Bonehill (age 27) – in the churchyard of St Andrew's Church, Wilmcote.

'because of the funeral of those parents killed in the railway accident'.

In 1834, the Houses of Parliament were almost completely destroyed by a massive fire started by a stove overheating in the House of Lords. Ninety-seven designs for a new Palace of Westminster were submitted to a Royal

Commission. The winner was chosen in January 1836 – a magnificent Gothic-style building by the 40-year-old architect Sir Charles Barry, who would choose Wilmcote stone for its flooring. Born in 1795, Barry was known for his love of Italianate architecture, and designed many country houses and gardens and public buildings in Britain, including the north terrace of Trafalgar Square and its two fountain basins. For help with his drawings and with the execution of the interior design on the project, Barry teamed up with architect and draughtsman, Augustus Pugin (1812–1852). Sadly, Pugin suffered a mental breakdown and spent time in an asylum for the insane, dying soon after. Barry faced numerous setbacks during the project and overran on time and budget. The strain took its toll. After repeated bouts of illness, Barry died of a heart attack on 12th May 1860. The Palace of Westminster was not complete for another ten years.



Photograph by Helen Watts

The Mary Arden Inn dominates Wilmcote's village green today. However, the inn did not exist in 1839 when Sir Charles Barry stayed there in *No Stone Unturned*. The building was originally a private residence and did not become an inn until around 1870, when it was known as the Swan Inn.