

THE SANDSTONE CAVES OF NOTTINGHAM

Jennifer C. Walsby; British Geological Survey, Keyworth, Nottingham.

Beneath Nottingham City is a bed of pebbly sandstone which was deposited by a vast river about 254 million years ago, during the Triassic Period. The sandstone spreads far beyond the city and is recognisable in many parts of the country. Known to the north as Nottingham Castle sandstone formation, it forms the Castle rock and other smaller cliffs in the city. Normally present beneath this is the somewhat softer Lenton sandstone formation.

Within these two sandstones, but particularly the Nottingham Castle formation, are the hundreds of excavations that comprise Nottingham's caves. The age of the earliest excavations is unknown, but these man made caves have been present or at least a thousand years. During this time they have been used for such diverse purposes as wells, cess-pits, storerooms for grain, wine, fish and meat, as malting, breweries and tanneries, dwellings and hideaways, routes of communication, decorative follies, shelters in time of war and as a source of building sand.

The caves are a great source of interest in Nottingham, giving insights into the history and geology of the area. However, they present a major problem in the modern City. Save redevelopment requires the possible presence of such cavities to be considered and suitable investigations undertaken. The British Geological Survey report, A Register of Nottingham Caves, includes an information sheet for each known cave site and location map at 1:2500 scale, forming a basis from which developers, planners and future researchers may start more detailed investigation.