

## East Bridgford Brickyards

This short article was instigated by Bill Barclay who was kind enough to involve me when he used some of my late husband's building stone geology notes in his article about local geology. My own background in archaeology and historic buildings is slightly different but also overlaps in some ways. When Bill asked about local brickyard locations he didn't expect the long reply I gave and suggested I write something myself. So I did a bit more research and here it is!

Across the country, as well as locally, the use of local clay for bricks is not well documented and although the Nottinghamshire Assize Rolls for 1330 record an accidental death in the parish whilst digging marl, it would not have been for bricks but probably as a constituent of cob for walls.

Brick for building was introduced into England from the Lowlands just before 1300, but was only used sporadically for ecclesiastical or public buildings for the next 200 years. After its use at Hampton Court in the early 1500's it became gradually fashionable among the elite and wealthy and was gradually taken up further down the social scale as landowners renewed their own houses and then turned their attention to other buildings on their estates; farms, cottages and agricultural buildings. Brick was at first only used where there was suitable local clay and, in general, early brick buildings are almost all found in the eastern counties. The earliest history of local brick production is not easy to trace as it is sparsely documented and initially it was often undertaken by farmers with suitable clay in their fields on a part-time basis.

Brick making was a long, seasonal business, digging the clay, tempering, moulding and then firing in clamps, often it would take several years to fire enough bricks to complete a large house. Bricks for houses were often made from clay and clamp-fired on the owners estate. Kilns were sometimes used, their greater capacity and predictability was offset by a high level of investment. It is unlikely that there were any in the parish as they would have left substantial structural remains. Local kilns were rarely used until technology in the mid 19th enabled large commercial brickyards to be operated in nearby Nottingham from around the 1850's; gradually the smaller, village brickyards ceased to operate. Enigmatically there is a record of the name 'kilnhouse green' in 1705, this was located behind the church where 'the rector's tithe barn stood'. The erection of Bridgford Hill and The Rectory in the 19th century seem to have removed it. Whether the land was owned by the church or was part of 'Mr Markham's manor', bought by the rector himself is difficult to discern, as is the type of kiln it referred to, was it a brick/tile kiln, or was it a plaster kiln or even a malt kiln?

The East Midlands landscape of historic brick built villages might suggest that local villages, including East Bridgford, always looked as they do now, but in earlier times the landscape was visibly very different. Use of brick in Midlands villages largely dates to the mid to late 18th century or later and coincides with dates when villages underwent massive changes relating to the Enclosure Acts.

So, what do we know about what East Bridgford looked like? How long have the brick buildings we see been around? The village is fortunate that early maps dated 1612 and 1614 still survive, both maps have little pictograms showing the location and size of buildings. However, these would have been of timber frame and cob construction with thatched roofs; indeed, notes on the maps tell us the number of 'bays' of buildings and this was a common way of denoting the size of a timber building where the space between main roof timbers was referred to as a 'bay', so it seems that at this time most buildings were probably timber-framed. There is no indication on these early maps of any areas being used for clay digging, and Poor Law accounts for 1744/50 mention cottage repairs of cob and and thatching for roofs, showing that

these were still common over 100 years later. In 1796 another map was made when the open fields were enclosed, this too has no mention of brickyards, and, as is common only shows the location and general scope of buildings. So, when did brick buildings first appear and where were the brick pits/yards which supplied them?

By the time of the early maps the village had a complicated manorial history and most was owned either by Magdalen College, Sir Francis Scrope or a smaller manorial estate belonging to the Hacker family. The records of Magdalen College show that a new house called 'Burnham House' was built in the 1540s on 'Hall Close' next to the 'site' of the old manor place. The early maps show two buildings next to each other, which may be both old and newer houses. Burnham House still survives now as 'The Old Manor' on College Street but is greatly altered, it is a Listed Building and its official description mentions both timber frame and brick suggesting it was originally timber with later brick alterations. It is, I think, the only house in the village to show use of flat clay tiles which were more common in this area before pantiles started being produced in the 18th century.

The first contemporary mention of brick seems to be a 1662 survey, a century later, of the estate owned by Francis Hacker which recorded the capital house as a 'decayed old house, tyled, part timber, part brick'. As it was old at the time, it may very well have dated to a similar time as the building of Burnham House, and being similarly built of both timber and brick. This house no longer exists as the Hackers rebuilt (possibly more than once) what is now 'The Old Hall' in Kneeton Road.

These records show that brick was being used in the village, at least in part, in the late 16th century. However, this was at a high social level and what little evidence there is suggests cob and thatch was used for farmhouses and cottages for over the next hundred years.

The next dated evidence is date-stones on buildings, there are a few in the village, mainly they are seen on large barns but some exist on houses. The Rev. Du Boulay Hill also recorded some which no longer exist. They range from 1712 through to the early 19th century, showing that brick was being used more routinely for new buildings in the early 18th century, but most belong to the later part of the same century and early in the 19th century. White's 1832 directory states that 'A considerable number of farmhouses and cottages have lately been rebuilt of brick and tile, but many of the old mud and stud buildings still remain covered with thatch, as indeed are some of the modern erections'. This shows that the process of rebuilding in brick and tile took place over a long period of time but with gathering momentum in the early 19th century.

It is probable that bricks for the earlier buildings were sourced from clay in the fields of local farmers. It was quite common for farmers to be part-time brickmakers. Historically it is known that the right to extract clay was guarded by estate owners and restricted by Brick Taxes which were in place from 1784 only being repealed in 1850, ensuring that new brick buildings were a form of 'visible wealth' showing that their owners could afford the tax. Across the county Enclosure Acts in the late 18th century led to a surge of new building as landscapes changed and holdings became nucleated. It seems that the same happened in East Bridgford where there seems to be a surge in building from the late 18th century.

Formal brickyards in East Bridgford make their appearance in the record in the early 19th century. The conditions of the 1801 Enclosure Act for East Bridgford were still being completed in the 1840s showing that the changes took place over a long period of time.

The Rev. Arthur Du Boulay Hill writes in 1932 that old men in the village remembered 4 thriving

brickyards in the village in the 1830s, and indeed this is borne out by Sandersons map of 1836 which shows 4 brickyards, the Foss Yard on the old A46 - later to become Ash Close Farm; Brickyard Lane; Straws Lane and Trentside on the river at The Potteries.

From census returns and historical directories it can be discerned that the Trentside yard on the river belonged firstly to Samuel Hall in 1832, by 1844 it was owned by Francis Poole, maltster and wharfinger. It seems Francis Poole's main business was as maltster, he and his son were recorded as such in successive directories until the 1850's after which the family are no longer linked with brick making.

The yard in Brickyard Lane was Doncaster's - the land here, described as 'land at Ludgate Close' was bought in 1833 by John Doncaster who came from a family of bricklayers in Bingham, but it was managed by John Upton and his son who lived in the village and came from another family of bricklayers. It got into financial difficulties in the 1870s and was sold in 1876, however the adjacent plaster yard was worked into the next century. Many of the older houses in the village use solid plaster for their upper floors, the 1832 description of the village seems to imply that this practice was well established and applied both to older timber buildings as well as the newer brick ones. Gypsum pits were located in many fields in the village mainly near farmyards, as well as being associated with the brickyards, these are even less well recorded than the brick pits, but some, like that in Moss Close feature on 19th century maps. Du Boulay Hill says in the 1870's there were 6 or 7 men getting plaster in winter.

The yard on Straws Lane can still be seen in outline on the 1901 O.S.map but had finished working by then and is shown as orchard around the pit. The site was a farmhouse and land on the north corner of Straws Lane, opposite the blacksmiths later known as the Gawp Shop, where Stable Close now is, it encompassed further land containing a plaster pit on the opposite site of the corner. It was owned and worked by Samuel Herod, brick and tile maker and gypsum dealer and later his son William. Sam Herod was born c.1778 to a family of brick makers, he was married three times, at his second marriage in Southwell in 1803 he was described as a widower of Thurgaton, but by 1816 was in East Bridgford where the corner of Straws Lane was called 'Sam Herrod's corner'; known locally by this name it was presumably well established and pre-dated Doncaster's yard. When he married again in 1833 he was described as 'of East Bridgford', he paid Poll Tax on his house and land in 1841, featuring with his wife Mary on the first two census returns of 1841 and 1851; he died here in 1855 age 77. By 1851 there were three generations of brickmakers, Sam at 73, William his son age 44 and George his grandson age 14. The yard was still being worked in 1861 but after that George is found working as an agricultural labourer, presumably it ceased in the 1870's around the same time as Doncaster's. Herod's obviously supplied bricks for the many wealthy owners investing in new brick buildings early in the century; in 1836 he was paid for 550 bricks for the gate pillars of Thomas Beaumonts new house (East Bridgford Hill) and it seems probable that he had already supplied bricks for the main house which was started around 1792.

The Foss yard seems to have been the largest yard but is the least documented. I haven't been able definitively to identify the owner of the Foss Yard, bricks from there were said to be used to re-model Flintham Hall in 1798, and it may have been the oldest yard. In 1612 the land is one of the fields enclosed in 1609 and tenanted by William Mayfield; on the 1796 map the land was labelled as 21a and was part of a large amount of land owned by Thomas Smith; that it was annexed from the larger field may mean it had a different use. Thomas had inherited his estate which included Gedling House from his grandfather, the wealthy banker Abel Smith who had a number of successful businesses. Thomas re-built Gedling House in the 1780's but he used local bricks from Gedling for this and by 1803 had sold the house and all his estate, but it is not clear who bought the East Bridgford land. In the 1830's the Foss Yard was said to employ 9 men and 12 lads. The Manchester family are listed in census records as brick makers in the

village from 1851 to 1880's, in 1881 Thomas Manchester's address was given as 'Top Brickyard' which possibly suggests the Foss Yard. Whether he owned or managed it is difficult to say as the Manchesters were also recorded in the village itself, by the 1890's they were agricultural workers, suggesting the yard had ceased working.

In fact all the brickyards seem to have finished working by the late 1880's, by which time large commercial brickyards had opened around Nottingham. Whether they ceased through economic circumstances or whether the clay was worked out is not known.

This research has made me look into more aspects about the historical development of the village landscape, particularly regarding land ownership and tenure as well as the visible aspects of brick buildings in the village and hopefully I will put together some of this information for a further article.

Beryl Lott  
Beryl.lott@bopenworld.com

I have put this together from a mixture of sources, my own manuscript notes from the production of the booklet 'Life and Landscape in East Bridgford' (1985); 'East Bridgford; The story of an English Village', Arthur Du Boulay Hill (1932); 'The Nottinghamshire Heritage', Chris Weir (1991), and publicly accessible online sources including a variety of record offices as well as documents on the East Bridgford Local History Group website and the two books produced by them, 'Images of East Bridgford' (2000) and 'Life in East Bridgford' (2003). It is very possible that further research could be undertaken by visiting original records.

