

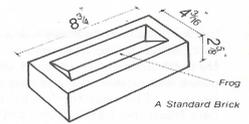
Hollybrook bricks

Stanley B Pippard

I started my working life with the Hollybrook Brick Company Limited, in August 1929, as office boy. My daily task first thing in winter mornings was the lighting of fires in the two offices. I might add that this was not done with the usual paper and sticks, but by carrying a shovelful of fire, from the Lancashire boiler, dumping it in the grate and putting coal on the top. With resulting smoke and dust, the offices had to be dusted, as there were no lady cleaners in those days. My main office duties consisted of answering the telephone, an old-fashioned instrument fixed to the wall, with a handle to be turned to call the exchange or another extension. The major part of the office work was the writing out on headed forms of invoices for the goods sold the previous day from all four works. Letters were also handwritten. About 1933 there was a great joy when a typewriter was purchased, and this made the work much quicker. My hours were 8am to 5.30pm Mondays to Fridays, and 8am to 12.30pm Saturdays. For my first year I was paid the princely sum of ten shillings a week, with annual increments of four or five shillings a week. This was the head office and four people were employed to cope with all the work. I am sure people today would not do the amount of work we did in those days, but in 1929 I was thankful to have a job.

In 1936 I was transferred to the Bedminster works, where I took over the running of the office and had the elevated title of Transport Manager. Every lorry taking bricks from the yard was issued with a ticket in three parts from a Lamson Paragon ticket machine. One part remained on site, another was returned to the office with a signature and the third was for the haulier to present with his monthly account. Various returns were rendered to head office each week and the time-sheet (not cards) from the time clock was taken off on a Monday and used to make up the wages. In 1940 I was called up for war service and returned in 1946, to the Bedminster office. I carried on with this work until November 1949, when, as I could see no prospects of promotion, I left to do a four and a half year stint at Frenchay Hospital.

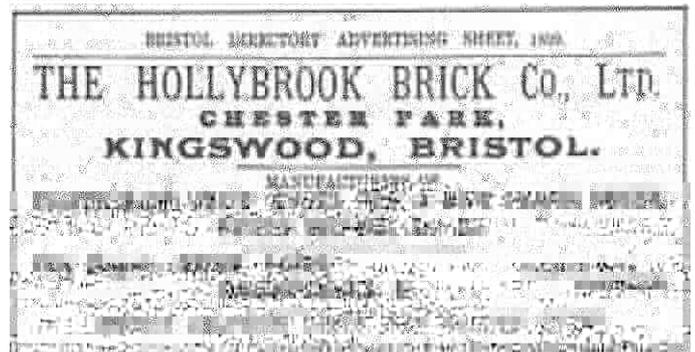
In April 1954 I took up duties at The Cattybrook Brick Company Limited at Shortwood Brickworks, as transport manager, with control of the office work, continuing until 1957, when I became assistant works manager. In 1966 the works manager, Mr L T Free, retired, and I took over the managership. Things went smoothly and successfully until 1969 when the country went into a depression and, with the cutting of a lot of public works, the brick industry declined. The directors then decided that one of the two works must close, and as part-modernisation had previously been carried out to the tune of quarter of a million pounds at the Almondsbury works, Shortwood was the unlucky victim. Production stopped 30 June 1969, followed by gradual emptying of the kilns from selling the stocks of bricks, so that by the end of October, activity ceased. It is interesting to the layman that when the kilns were lit up in 1946, after lying idle during the war the fires were not



let out until July 1969. The Shortwood works manufactured approximately 6,000,000 bricks per year, and the Almondsbury works 10,000,000.

At the request of the Directors, I then took to the road to maintain good relations between the company and customers, attend to complaints, and follow up leads from the trade journals which might bring in future business. In July 1971, the company secretary became very ill, and was not expected to live, so the managing director asked me to come back into the head office and take over the position. This I did, until July 1972 when Cattybrook was taken over by The Istock Building Products Limited of Leicester. As part of a large group, an accountant was brought down, from Leicester to put us in the new ways of running the office as a subsidiary instead of a complete entity as before.

A new modern works was built and was commissioned in April 1975 to turn out 30,000,000 bricks per year. I stayed on at the office until November 1978, when I left on an early retirement.



The Hollybrook Brick Company Limited

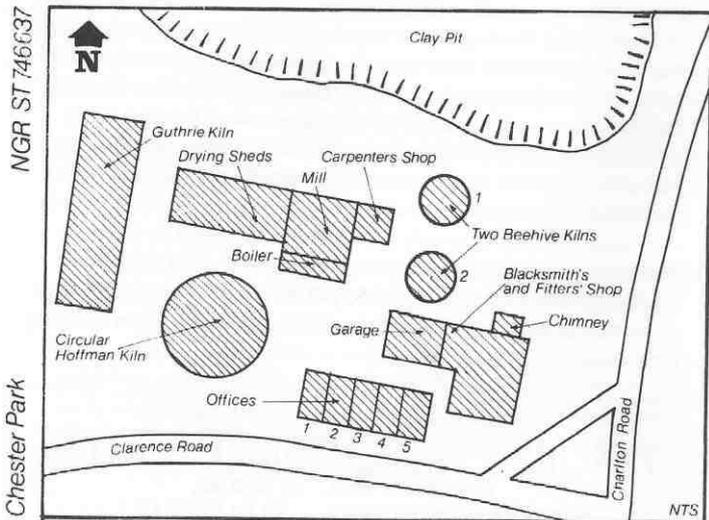
The Hollybrook Brick Company Limited manufactured bricks for many years, probably from the turn of the century, with its head office at Chester Park, Kingswood, Bristol and four works in various parts of Bristol and its outskirts. The company had been owned principally by the May family, the chairman being Thomas Hughes Delabere May, JP who lived at Somerset Place, Bath. He had two sons, Major May and Captain May, both late of the Indian Army, and both directors of the company. There was also a daughter Madame Boulanger, who had married a Frenchman and she was also on the Board. The managing director and company secretary was Percival Seaton Jones. Later in the 1920s an engineer was brought on to the board, Edmund T Burgess MIMechE, owner of an engineering and haulage business, known as Engineering Stores and Services Limited, of Queen Square, Bristol.

Chester Park

The Chester Park works manufactured wire-cut common bricks and a salt-glazed facing brick called a Hollychrome facing brick. The kilns were one Guthrie kiln and a circular Hoffmann kiln, both continuous kilns for the common

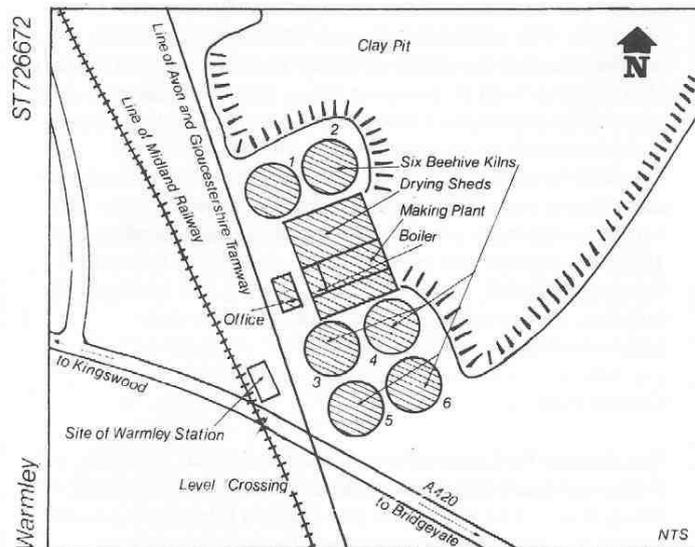
bricks, and two beehive kilns for the facing bricks. The salt, which made the surface shiny and vitrified was sprinkled through holes at the top of the beehives. The brick-making plant was powered by steam generated by a Lancashire boiler. The coal for the kilns was brought in by horse and cart from the East Bristol collieries in Speedwell Road, half a mile away.

The main building consisted of a mill, where the bricks were produced, the drying sheds, and the fitters' and carpenters' shops. Forty-five to fifty men were needed to run the works, consisting of the making gang, setters, drawers, burners, boiler men, fitters, carpenter and a couple of general yard men. The works lay-out looked like this.



The transport in the beginning was by horse and cart, but later in the 1920s the company purchased steam-driven Sentinel lorries. Steam in these was generated by the use of a special steam coal purchased from Lowell Baldwin's which produced a great heat inside the water-cooled boiler in the lorry. About 1935, petrol driven lorries were gradually replacing the old Sentinels.

Warmley

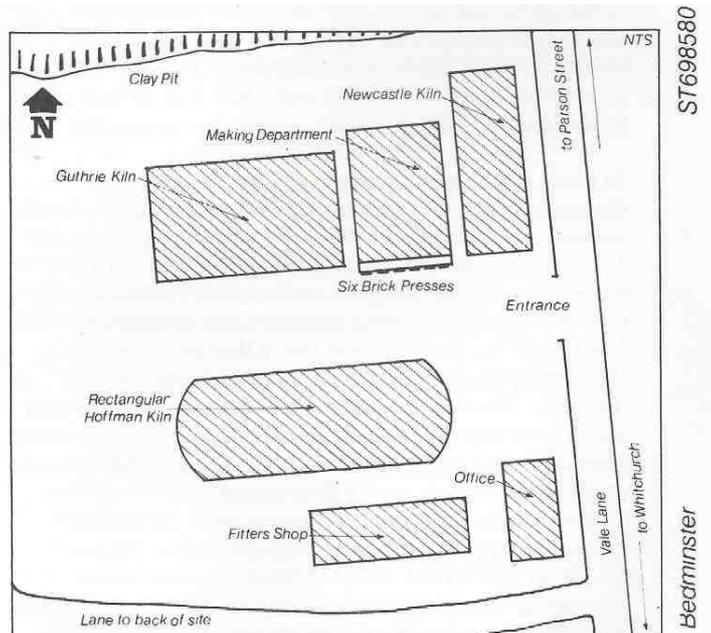


The second works was at Warmley, behind the old LMS railway station, and here they produced high-quality salt glazed sanitary pipes and fittings of various sizes ranging from 3 - 12 ins diameter, the fittings consisting of bends, junctions, splays, interceptors etc. A few bricks were also made of the common building variety. All the kilns were of the round beehive type, and were fired by coal. This works was also driven by steam produced by a Lancashire boiler and employed approximately 60 men.

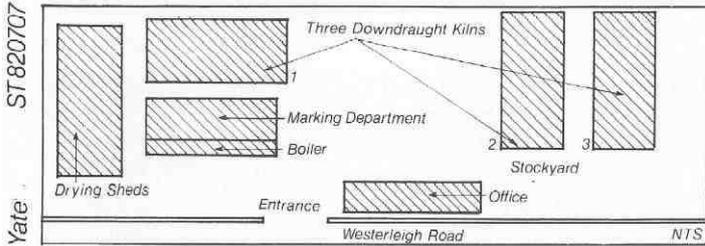
Bedminster

The third works was at Vale Lane, Bedminster, which produced solely a yellow dry-pressed common brick for internal walls of buildings. Here they had a Guthrie continuous kiln of 20 chambers, a sixteen-chamber Hoffman rectangular kiln and one Newcastle kiln. The method of making dry-pressed bricks was by a machine in which only two bricks were made at a time. The machine had a flat, waist high plate, in which there were two rectangular apertures, the dimensions of a brick. Under the plate was a small pit capable of holding sufficient dry particles of clay to make two bricks. The clay fell from a hopper behind the machine into the pit, at the bottom of which were two electrically-heated brick-shaped dies. When the required amount of clay fell on to the dies, two more heated dies were lowered into the apertures by the turn of cogwheels and cams, which compressed the clay particles into two solid bricks. These bricks did not need to be dried on heated floors, being suitable to be set into the kilns as they came from the machine, hence the name 'dry-pressed'. Each top die had a projection known as a frog, which helped to compress the clay into the four corners of the clay box, making the brick solid throughout. The frog made an indentation in the brick of some 3/4 - 1 in deep, which was also a help to bricklayers, as it made a key for the mortar.

This works was the only one of the four powered by electricity, apart from the kilns which were fired by small washed coal. 55-60 men were required to run the plant, there being two shifts, 6am - 2pm and 2pm - 10pm.



The fourth works was at Westerleigh Road, Yate, where high-quality engineering and facing bricks were produced. Various colours, including red, brown, brindle and blue, were obtained by the introduction of manganese into the clay. The works also produced 6 ins x 6 ins and 4½ ins x 4¼ ins red quarry tiles, hundreds of thousands of which were sent to London to tile the floors of the kitchens of Lyons Corner Houses. They also produced double Roman tiles and Broseley pattern tiles. This works also was powered by a Lancashire steam boiler, and the four down-draught kilns were fired with large coal on grates in special fireholes along each side. 45-50 people were employed here. The number of employees did not fluctuate greatly, as prior to the war years, the unemployment figures were high, and anyone who had a job, saw to it that he kept it.



About 1935, the company was sold to a firm of accountants, Morgan Brothers and Company of London, and a new board of directors was installed. T H D May and his sons and daughter retired, as did Mr Seaton Jones, and a new company secretary, H J Sier of London, was appointed. At this time the company was re-named Hollychrome Bricks Limited, after the successful Hollychrome facing brick.

During the second world war in the early forties, the Yate works closed never to re-open, and over succeeding years was gradually demolished and the quarry partially filled in. On the site now stands Cooper's factory.

The other three works stayed open throughout the war years, the bricks going to the Bristol Corporation for building air raid shelters in the city. Around 1949 a part-modernisation plan was introduced at the Bedminster works by the then general manager, Harry Driver. A wirecut producing plant was installed which gradually took over from the dry-pressed production.

After the war when the clay reserves were getting short at the Kingswood Chester Park site, a move was made into the builders' merchants trade. The first step in this direction was the taking over of George Davies and Company of Haverfordwest, West Wales, including of course the acquisition of the builders' merchants licence. Next to be taken over was F H Milliner and Company, builders' merchant at Weston~super-Mare, and the head office was transferred to Chester Park, Kingswood, on the site of the defunct brickworks. Milliner's itself was later taken over by F J Reeves Limited (now Graham-Reeves Limited) of Gloucester, and is still on the same site.

The Bedminster works gradually ran down and went out of existence around the 1960s. The Warmley works was sold to the Hepworth Iron Company Limited and ran for a number of years before finally closing in the 1970s.

Chester Park (ST 746637) The clay pit has been filled and grassed over as a public playing field. All the kilns have been demolished as have the central working area, drying sheds, mill, boiler, carpenters shop. However, the office block, garage, and blacksmith/fitters' shop, with its 20 ft high chimney, survive. The garage, which was useful to service the Sentinel lorries, continues today to service company vehicles. The chimney attached to the blacksmiths/fitters shop looks too substantial to have been used exclusively for a blacksmiths' shop and may have been connected in some way with the beehive kilns, but Mr Pippard cannot be certain about this. When Mr Pippard started work at Chester Park in 1929 only offices 1 and 2 existed, single storey brick built offices, each with an individual pitched roof, about 6 ft x 12 ft. No 1 office had two windows overlooking the Hoffman kiln. Mr Pippard worked at the one nearest Clarence Road. When Morgan Brothers acquired the company, they added offices 3, 4 and 5 of a similar size and construction. Office No 5 was the company boardroom. John Cornwell, nearby resident, believes the works closed in 1954. His 6 ins OS map of the site in 1909 also shows a number of other brickworks further down the branch line towards the Atlas Locomotive works and Speedwell and Belgium pits. There was an additional works above Charlton Road and below Cossham Hospital, described as 'old brickworks'. This latter works does not appear on an 1890 map which features Chester Park. The writer has an undated rhubarb pot stamped Hollybrook Brick Co. Chester Park. Mr Pippard does not recall such pots being produced during his time at the works.

Warmley (ST 726672). The site has been completely cleared and the clay pit filled as part of a refuse tip. The footings of three beehive kilns can still be seen at the time of writing.

Bedminster (ST 698580). The Vale Lane works has been completely cleared, as has the adjacent works of Scourse and Kingston who manufactured a dry-pressed white-glazed facing brick. The two sites have been largely redeveloped with small factory units since the 1960s but part of the face of the clay pit can still be seen at the back of the site. At the Parsons Street entrance to Vale Lane, the name W J Foster, a firm of builders' merchants, can still be seen on a building which marked the entrance to the Scourse and Kingston Works.

Yate (ST 820707). Some brick-built sheds survive, some of which may have been drying sheds. Part of the clay pit survives as an attractive amenity an acre or more in extent, and is used for a variety of purposes, not least as a swimming pool for company employees. Our thanks are due to H Cooper and Sons, Westerleigh Road, Yate, for permission to inspect the site of the former Yate works.

Mr Pippard continues to live in the former manager's house at the Cattybrook Company site at Shortwood. Appropriately for such a residence it contains a pleasing variety of bricks and tiles used in paths, outbuildings, garden walls etc. An account of the Shortwood Brickworks by Martin Doughty and Owen Ward can be found in *BIAS Journal 8, 1975*, in which Mr Pippard's help was acknowledged.