

- Key
- |                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Clay Pit         | 6 Guthrie Kiln     |
| 2 Moveable Tramway | 7 Drying Shed      |
| 3 Main Shed        | 8 Old Tile Kiln    |
| 4 Main Drying Shed | 9 Offices          |
| 5 Hoffman Kiln     | 10 manager's House |

Based on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 scale, 1965 & 1974 Editions.

Fig. 1 Copied from an article on the Shortwood brickworks by Martin Doughty and Owen Ward in the 1975 BIAS Journal

Fig. 2 Tracing from the Tithe Redemption map of October 1843

BRO/EP/A/32/30

# The Manager's House of the Shortwood Brick and Tile Works

## A Unique Collection of Shortwood Bricks and Tiles

Mike Jenner

The brick and tileworks and the associated clay-pits at Shortwood were probably operative from about 1850. They closed in 1969. The works were established by the Shortwood Brick and Tile Co. Ltd., which was acquired in about 1903 by the Cattybrook Brick Co. Ltd. Three years after closure of the works Cattybrook became a part of the Ibstock Group, which is shortly to restart clay extraction from the site.

A timely and splendidly full description of the industrial plant and processes was contained in an article by Martin Doughty and Owen Ward in the 1975 issue of BIAS. Their site plan is appended here. The information in their article was taken from the then existing buildings, and from information supplied by the last works manager. Shortly afterwards all the buildings were demolished with the single exception of the manager's house, and that in turn was demolished in March 2000 to make way for the expansion of the quarry. The BIAS article contained no information on the house, which was of no architectural or technological interest. It is, however, worth a brief description because its walls, roofs and paving formed a unique and fairly extensive collection of Shortwood bricks and tiles. Since most of the bricks were wire-cut (rather than pressed) and were thus not capable of being given identifying marks, and since the tiles were also unmarked, the preservation of as many types as possible for future reference was important. Demolition made it possible for a complete range to be placed in Bristol Industrial Museum with the kind agreement of Andy King the Curator. Another, slightly less full range, is stored at the Doulton Young Building at Tower Road in Warmley, through the good offices of Steph Gillett. The present paper does not repeat the information contained in the earlier BIAS article, but gives a few further facts on the Company, and what can be deduced about the history of the manager's house.

Remarkably little is known about the Shortwood Brick and Tile Company and few original documents appear to survive, so that Doughty and Ward's article is by far the amplest source of information about it. It has not been possible to establish even when the company began<sup>1</sup>. Shortwood is in the parish of Pucklechurch, which is in the Gloucestershire

coal measures. An 1815 rent book of the manor<sup>2</sup> reveals that it was then receiving rents from several coalmines, but none from brick-making or quarrying. The sequence of surviving maps of the district provide most of what little can be gleaned about the early history of the company. The first snippet of information comes from the Tithe map of 1843<sup>3</sup>, with its accompanying schedule of apportionment awards, which, in addition to other information, gives the use to which the land was then put. It is clear that the brickworks were not then in existence. However a short spur of the nearby Bristol and Gloucestershire Railway line is shown, with dotted lines connecting it with the field on which the brickworks were to be built. The line is in exact accordance with what was later built. It seems reasonable to assume that the rail link was made shortly afterwards and the brickworks opened at about the same time, but much searching has failed to find evidence of when that happened. Unfortunately the next map to survive, of 1870<sup>4</sup>, which shows Sir J.H. Greville Smyth's landholdings in the area, is not helpful because he did not own the land on which the brickworks were built. The next is the first edition of the Ordnance Survey<sup>5</sup> of 1882 (surveyed in 1881), which does at last reveal that the brickworks, including the railway link and the manager's house, were then in existence.

The Bristol Record Office has no documents relating to the Shortwood Brick and Tile Company, but in the Gloucestershire Record Office there are four separate and unconsecutive half-yearly company accounts and reports to shareholders ranging from 1879 to 1886<sup>6</sup>. This proves that the Company was trading in 1879, and contains no suggestion that it was then newly in business. All that can be established with certainty therefore is that the brickworks opened at some time in the period between 1843 and at least a few years before 1879, with the strong probability that it was nearer to the earlier date, when the railway link was at a sufficiently advanced level of planning for the railway company to have built a short spur, and for the further connection to be drawn on the tithe map by dotted lines. In the 1880s the company was making a regular loss and in July 86 the directors were forced to ask for an additional 'credit of nothing less than £500' to keep going. They offered to resign 'if the Shareholders think that any other gentleman would fill the position without the necessity of a grant of money'.

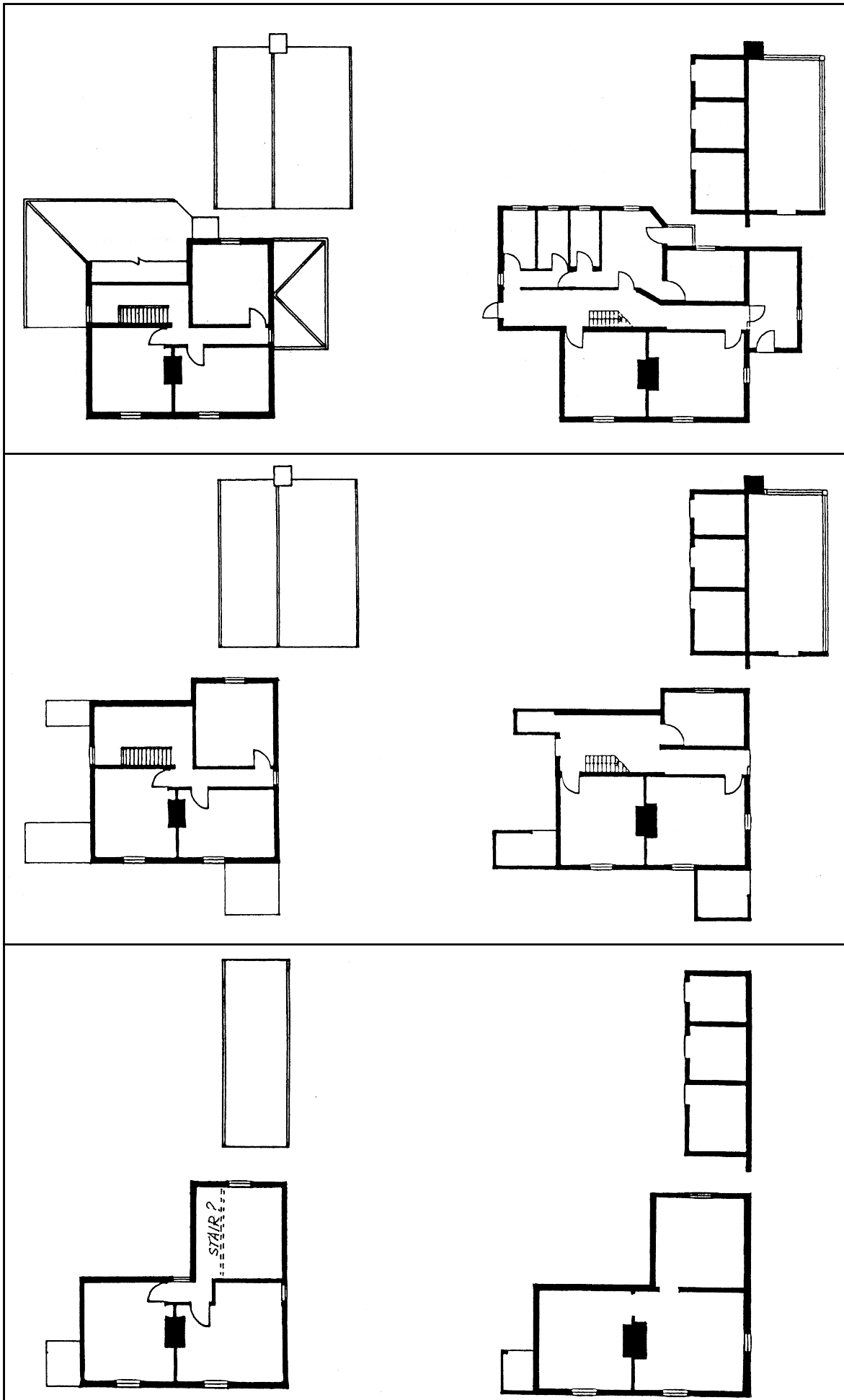


Fig. 5 Floor plan, 1935

Fig. 4 Floor plan, 1914

Fig. 3 Floor plan, 1881



plate 1 South elevation

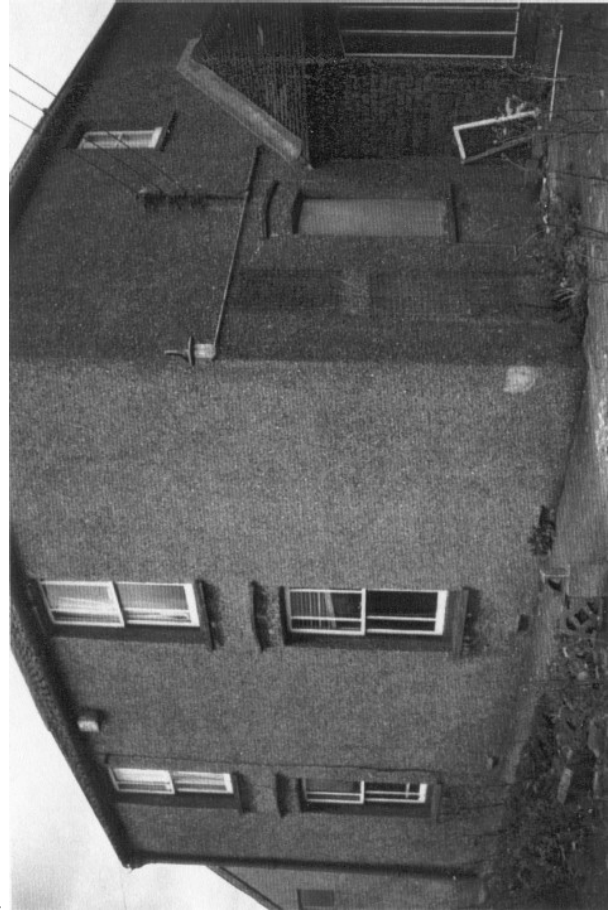


Plate 2 South-west corner

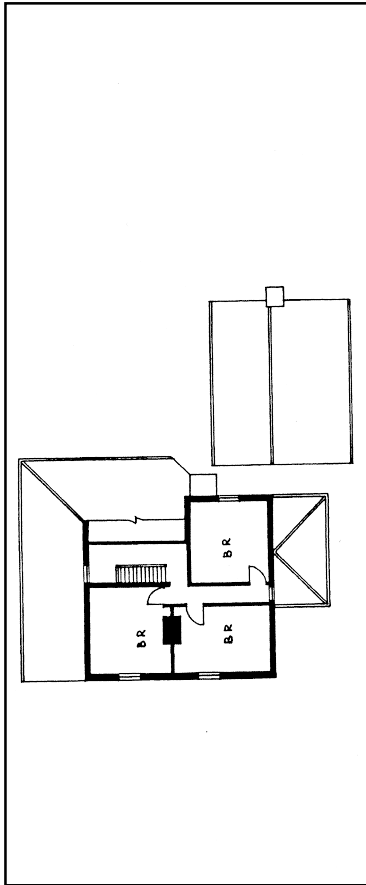


Fig. 6 First floor plan, 1999

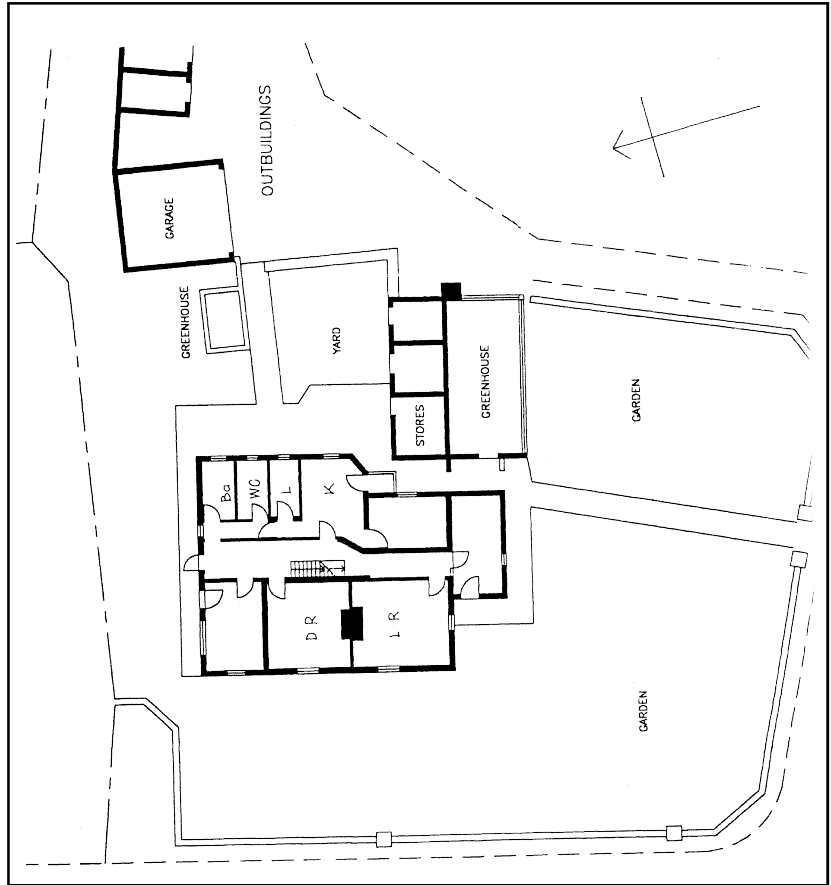


Fig. 7 Ground floor plan, 1999

Whatever the share holders decided things didn't improve much, because they sold out to Cattybrook a few years later. It is hard to understand why the company was doing so badly because, quite apart from the demands arising from the usual building activity in Bristol and Bath, it was in these years that the nearby construction of the Severn Tunnel was taking huge quantities of bricks, in 1884 over two million a month, a million of them from Staffordshire and 100,000 from Cattybrook<sup>7</sup>. (Doughty and Ward in the 1975 BIAS article reported that the Shortwood production was never more than half a million per month, even when it was approximately doubled in the 20th century by the building of a second continuous kiln).

Since the Shortwood works were situated some distance from the nearest available existing houses it is probable that the manager's house was erected at about the same time as the kilns, or not long afterwards. As the house isn't mentioned in the company reports the only certainty is that it was built some time between 1843 and 1881 (when the 1882 map was surveyed). One might suppose that its architectural character would give a clue to its date. It doesn't. It is unusual amongst houses of this class in having no architectural graces or character, and no datable features inside or out. To some extent that may be due to the fact that it was much altered on several occasions. This is apparent from vertical joints in the exterior walls in several places, from the different tiles on various parts of the roof, and from the thickness of some of the interior walls which suggests that they were once external. Working from these indications, and from the changes in overall shape shown on the sequence of OS maps, it is possible to reconstruct with some degree of certainty the plan of the house as it was in 1881, 1914 and 1935. The internal layout, particularly of the earliest version in which the position of the stair can only be guessed at, is speculative to some extent, as are the details of its now demolished extensions.

There is one printed source of information prior to the 1975 BIAS article: a long feature which appeared in the Bristol Times and Mirror on 5th January 1923<sup>8</sup>. It described the processes and products in some detail. Although at that date the works were part of the Cattybrook Company, the source of clay was the same as it had always been and the original Hoffman kiln was still in use (and remained so until the end in 1969), so production could not have been very different from what it had been in the earliest days of the Shortwood Company. After describing

the brick-making processes and machinery in some detail the article then said 'The Shortwood works specialise in the production of plastic and adamantine red tiles, extensively used in paving factory floors, garden paths, and paving generally. They are made of finely powdered clay, compressed in panel presses and afterwards burnt in a special kiln. Handmade antique Brosley roofing tiles, made to match the multi-coloured bricks at Cattybrook, double Roman tiles, pan tiles, ridge tiles, and red fire surrounds, and other products of these works (sic)'. Doughty and Ward wrote in 1975 that 'floor and roofing tiles were produced in the early days', which implies that they were not made in the later days remembered by the last works manager, their main verbal source.

Since walling, roofing and paving materials were all produced on site, it is in the highest degree unlikely that any were brought in from elsewhere to build the manager's house, even, after 1903 from Cattybrook, which was about 10 miles away by winding country roads. It can be taken as nearly certain that all the bricks and tiles used in the construction of the house, its garden and paved yard were of Shortwood manufacture.

Most of the house was roofed with Roman tiles, a small part of one of its extensions with pantiles, and another with plain tiles<sup>9</sup>. All the walling, most of it hidden by render, was of red brick. Most of the windows had shallow arches made of plain tiles and most had external sills of the same material. A few had external sills of bull-nosed bricks which, being moulded rather than wire-cut, were stamped with the Shortwood name. Outside there were various paving materials, including the hard quarries mentioned in the newspaper article, and a few of what are usually - and here obviously inaccurately - called 'Staffordshire' blue stable paviers. In the garden walls there were also many over-burnt bricks which had fused together. These, of course, were kiln waste and not sold commercially.

#### Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the help given to him by Robert White, the manager of Ibstock Brick Cattybrook Ltd at Almondsbury.

#### Sources

1. Although Pucklechurch was included in Mathew's, and later in Wright's, Bristol Directories, the Shortwood brickworks made no appearance in their pages. Although the managers of the Pucklechurch colliery were usually included among the residents of note each year, the manager of the brickworks never did. The reason may be related to the fact that the brickworks never advertised in the Directory,

- whilst the colliery sometimes did.
2. Gloucestershire Record Office (GRO) D254 M2
  3. Bristol Record Office (BRO) EP/A/32/30
  4. BRO/AC/PL135
  5. Copies of the 1915 and 1936 editions of the OS maps are in BRO, and a microfiche of the 1882 first edition is in Bristol Reference Library
  6. GRO D254, E1
  7. Walker T.A., The Severn Tunnel, 1891, p.222
  8. Bristol Reference Library (ref.12364).
  9. The earliest version of the house, dating from before 1881, was roofed with Roman tiles. Plain tiles were used only on an extension dating from between 1914 and 1935. The small area of pantiling occurred on an extension which was also built between 1914 and 1935.



Plate 3 East elevation



Plate 4 North elevation