

Survey of Bedfordshire



BRICKMAKING A HISTORY AND GAZETTEER

BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MONUMENTS (ENGLAND)

operating at the time the map was drawn up, but merely that one had existed in that vicinity, possibly at a considerably earlier date. One also has to be a little wary about interpreting some of the names. The difficulties involved can be illustrated by taking just one example: "Brickhill" usually turns out to be a corruption of "Brick Kiln", but an exception to this appears to be Brickhill in Bedford, where the name "Briehull" occurs in 1276 and "Brikhull" in 1287, much earlier than one would expect a brick kiln to be in existence. A. Mawer and F.M. Stenton in *The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire* (1926, p.12) suggest, in fact, that this represents a compound of the British equivalent of the Welsh "brig" meaning "top" or "summit", and the English "hill". Certainly no definite proof exists of brickmaking in this vicinity, although strangely enough the Enclosure Award of 1795-1802, in the Record Office, refers to Brickhill Farm as "Brick Kiln Farm".

Any mention of clay pits, as in "Clay-pits Farm" or "Claypit Furlong", may suggest a brick kiln in that area but cannot be considered conclusive without corroborative evidence, since clay was also put to other uses, such as wattle and daub, clay lump buildings, and various agricultural purposes. As a deliberate policy, therefore, sites of old clay pits have not normally been included in the gazetteer when no specific link with brickmaking could be found. Occasionally a map, which has no names on it suggestive of brickmaking, may still indicate features or give names which can be used to identify sites of brick kilns mentioned only in written sources. Unfortunately all too often it has proved impossible to relate one source of information with another.

Before 1850 contemporary printed sources are scarce and of marginal use for the present purpose. For the period

after 1850 extensive use has been made of local trade and post office directories, especially Kelly's, and occasionally local newspapers may contain advertisements giving useful information about local brickyards. The publication of the first editions of the Ordnance Survey 6 inch and 25 inch maps at last gives complete large-scale coverage of the county. Apart from the many brickworks that are plotted, "old" clay pits are shown which often give a clue to the whereabouts of former brickyards. Manuscript material is much the same for this later period except that, where they survive, Poor Law Union Rate Valuation Books are a valuable addition and can indicate the operator of a particular brickworks together with the dates of operation.

Most of the sources consulted have been local, but one important group of national ones has been used - the returns made by local brickworks under the Quarry Act between 1895 and 1937. These provide, amongst other things, the name of the operator, the numbers employed, and sometimes the dates of commencing or ceasing activities, but only those works with pits greater in depth than 20 feet were required to make such returns. The details of these returns were kindly supplied by Geoffrey N. Webb and are based on the originals in the State Paper Room of the British Library.

Visiting Sites

In the majority of cases the actual brick kilns or works have disappeared, and at the most all that survives are some remains of the pits. It is possible that even where a site has apparently vanished examples of the bricks produced, particularly rejects, may be discovered, but failing this an inspection of nearby houses will often reveal examples of what the locally made bricks looked like. However, it should be stressed that most sites in the gazetteer are on private land and

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As mentioned in the main text, p.35, this was an important brickmaking centre before 1914, serving the Bedford area and producing a mixture of red and yellow bricks.

128 Brickworks to west of Graze Hill.

NGR: TL 059 536.
Date: Opened between 1894 and 1898. Shown on map published in 1901 but disused by 1917.
Op.: James Jones (who also had another works in Ravensden, G132 below).
Con.: No visible remains.
Refs.: Kelly's (1898-1914); Map OS 25(2) XI 8 (1901); CRO: Rate Valuation Books VLB 6/31, 7/31A; SMR 3014.

129 Brickfield on western side of Kimbolton Road, near Cleat Hill.

NGR: TL 062 532.
Date: In operation by at least 1864. Shown on map surveyed in 1882. Disused by 1907.
Op.: Edward Masters (Bedford brick merchant and also at G16) from at least 1864; Mrs Elizabeth Masters by 1869; Samuel Foster between at least 1877 and 1906 (Foster was a Kempston builder and also operated a brickyard there, G82). But see also G133.
Con.: Only vague traces of pits remain, although largely filled in for the gardens of houses since built near the site.
Refs.: Kelly's (1864-1906); Map OS 6(1) XI NE (1887); CRO: Rate Valuation Books VLB 2-3/31, 7/31A; it is probably a photograph of this works taken about 1906 which appears as plate 30 in R. Wildman *Victorian & Edwardian Bedfordshire* (1978) and is reproduced here as illus. 31; SMR 2521.

130 Brickworks on the east side of Kimbolton Road, near Cleat Hill.

NGR: TL 063 532.
Date: Opened about 1885 and shown on map published in 1901. Disused by 1907.

Op.: George Chessum in 1885 (he was also in partnership with William Love at the Sandy Brickworks, G140); executors of George Chessum from 1886 until at least 1898; Albert Chessum in 1903.

Con.: Site now occupied by clubhouse of Mowsbury Golf Course.

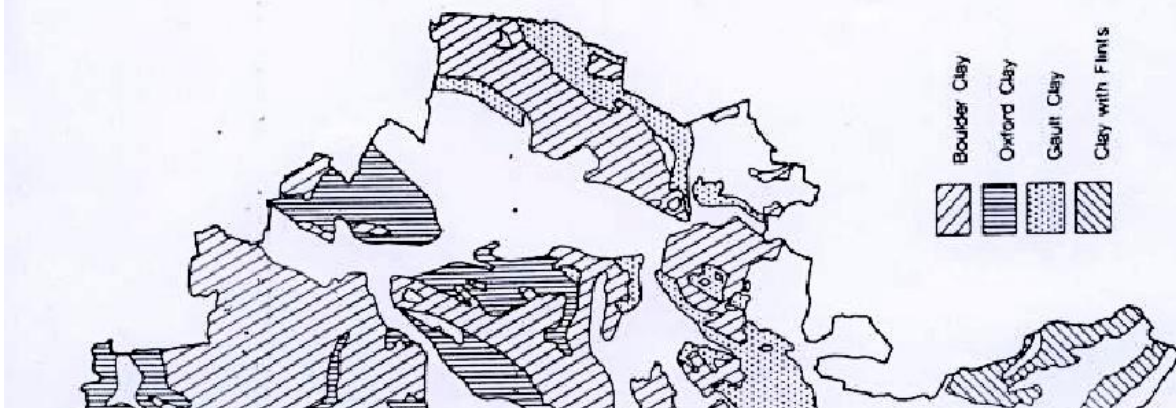
Refs.: Kelly's (1885-1903); CRO: Rate Valuation Books VLB 4/31, 7/31A; Map OS 25(2) XI 8 (1901); SMR 8351.

131 Brickfield just to the south and west of Ravensden cross-roads.

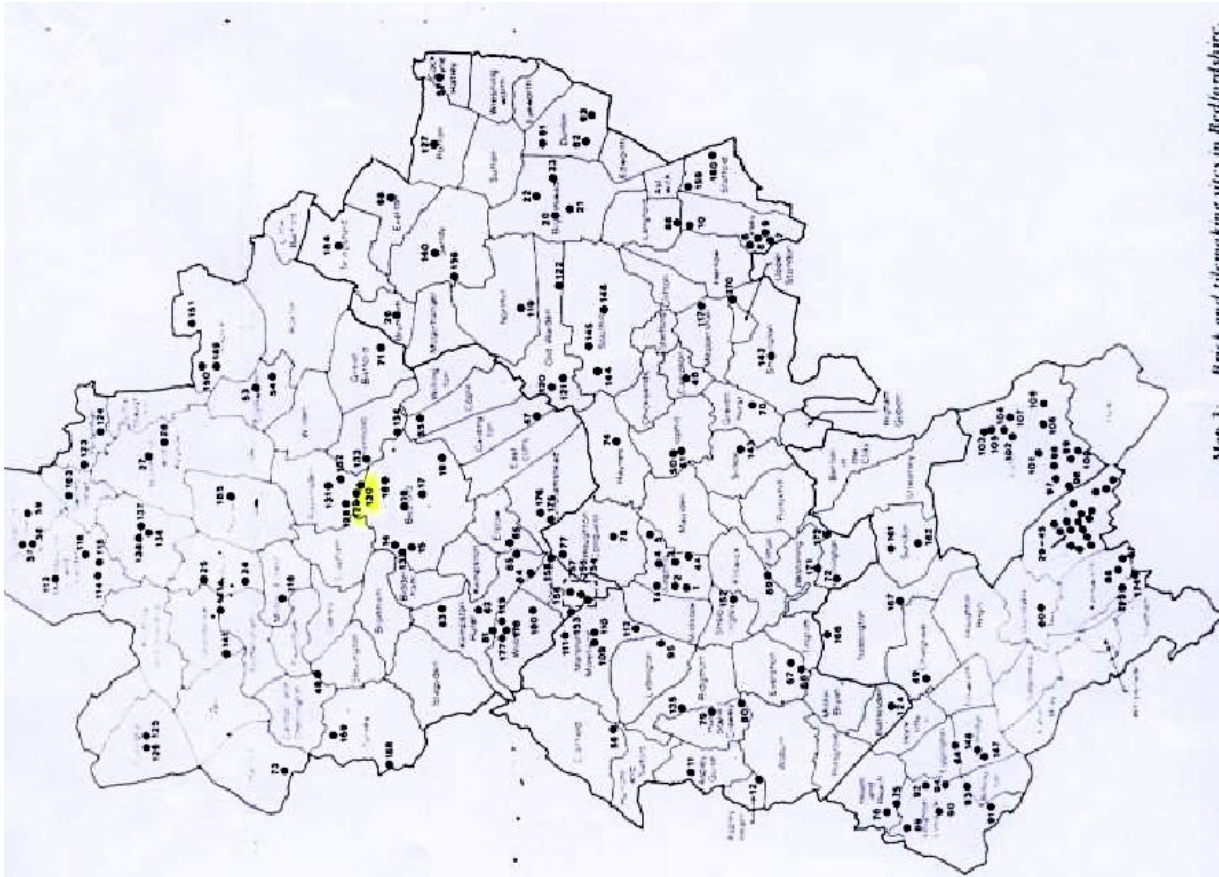
NGR: TL 064 543.
Date: In operation by at least 1858. Shown on map surveyed in 1882. Closed down shortly after 1890 and shown only as "Old Kilns" on map published in 1901.
Op.: Owned by the Wythes' family of Ravensden House. Operated by Francis Wythes from at least 1858 until 1875; then leased to Benjamin Litchfield until at least 1881; by 1885 being operated by Francis Aspinall Wythes who continued until at least 1890. (See also G133).
Brick: Yellow brick as used in the nearby Blacksmiths' Arms.
F.Inf.: In 1875 described as "a very Valuable BRICK and TILE YARD, with 2 Kilns".
Con.: The last kiln is said to have been demolished about 1965 but the south edges of the pits are still visible.
Refs.: *Memoirs of the Geological Survey etc.* (1858), see note 113 for full reference; Map OS 6(1) XI NE (1887)/XII NW (1885); CRO: Rate Valuation Books VLB 2-6/31; Kelly's (1869-1890); Advertisement in *Bedf. Times* 25 September 1875; Map OS 25(2) XII 1 (1901); SMR 3010.

132 Brickfield to south of Oldways Road.

NGR: TL 067 541.
Date: Probably in existence by 1866. Shown on map surveyed in 1882. Probably closed down in the late 1890s and not indicated on map published in 1901.
Op.: John Green between at least 1866 and 1894; James Jones from about



Map 2: Clay deposits in Bedfordshire.



Map 3: Brick and tilemaking sites in Bedfordshire.