



Teachers Pack: Background Information

The History

In the 19th century Warwickshire had over 80 brick and tile manufacturers, many in the Nuneaton and Bedworth area. A large number of these were associated with coal mines. The clay was removed as mine shafts were sunk and used to manufacture bricks for the colliery buildings.

Often, brick making proved more lucrative than coal mining and the brick yards continued after the coal mines closed.

Most brick and tile making in this area ceased in the late 1960's. This was due to a number of reasons including:-

- A diminished supply of high quality clay
- Manufacturers unable to compete with more modern yards elsewhere in the midlands, such as South Staffordshire and Leicestershire
- The 1968 Clean Air Acts, which restricted emissions of smoke

The third factor was important for Haunchwood Brick and Tile Works as smoke was needed in the process of creating blue bricks, which was one of their main products

The Haunchwood Brick and Tile Works Company was established by James Knox in the 1860's. It is said that he noticed bands of high quality purple blue clay from the window of a train as he passed through the new railway cutting at Stockingford. He took over a number of existing brickyards and his company became one of the main producers in England.

Whittleford Park is the site of Haunchwood Brick and Tile Works No 1 Yard. Here the company produced Blue Bricks, rustics brickettes, floor tiles and chimney pots. No 1 Yard closed in October 1970 and was demolished in 1971



If we look at the Ordnance Survey Maps we can see how the yard expanded and where new clay holes were dug to ensure a continuous supply of good quality clay. The map to the left is from 1888, the middle 1914 and the map to the bottom shows how the brickworks looked in 1924 – all courtesy of Nuneaton Library.

Clay Hole No 1 - Clay Pool which still lies behind Woodford Close and the only clay home that has not been used for landfill. Now home to a variety of wildlife



Clay Hole No 2 - Land behind Stockingford Community Centre known as Vale View Open Space



Clay Hole No 3 - Now a wildlife area known as Hawthorne Common

Clay Hole No 4 - Land behind and adjacent to the Bucksford Public House (no longer standing due to fire)

No. 3

No.1

No.2



The Brick and Tile Making Process

Working the Clay

At Haunchwood No 1 Yard explosives were used to loosen the clay within the clay hole and it was then loaded into tubs by men using picks and shovels. In the latter years mechanical diggers were used, but vibrations from the machines caused the pure clay to be mixed with other material, resulting in poor quality bricks.

The clay was carried from the clay hole to the brick yard in tram tubs, which moved along a cable pulled double trackway, four at a time. The tubs were clipped onto the metal cable, which was about one inch thick. This was dangerous work as there were no guards to prevent feet from getting tangled in the cable.

On arrival at the yard the tubs were tipped via a 'Tippler' down a 45 degree slope into a hopper. This was then hauled up the slope into the Top Mill for processing.

Inside the Top Mill the raw clay passed through two sets of rollers where it was crushed into fine dust. This was then mixed with water to form a workable clay and fed down a chute to the pressing machines. Here it was cut into blocks using a wire cutter and then pressed into brick, tile or chimney pot moulds. Some of this pressing and moulding was done by machine, some by hand.



(Courtesy: BSN and Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre)

The shaped bricks, tiles and pots were then loaded onto boards and carried by barrow to the drying sheds

Drying and Firing

The floors of the drying sheds were made out of special tiles called 'molt tiles', which had lots of little air holes to allow warm air to rise up through the wet bricks to dry them ready for firing. The bricks were laid out on this floor end up.

Once dried, bricks were loaded onto barrows which had one wheel at the centre. They were carefully stacked to ensure the barrow was balanced otherwise it would be difficult to push. Chimney pots were carried two at a time on a flat barrow with four wheels. The barrow had a leather covering with a dip in the middle to support the pots and prevent them from collapsing



Gangs of four men worked together to wheel the dried bricks to the kilns for firing. Inside the kiln was a man called a 'setter' who laid out the bricks in sections with spaces between to allow the hot air to circulate. Dry sand was scattered between the layers of bricks to prevent them from sticking together.

When the kilns were full to the top, piles of loose bricks called 'baggins' were stacked between the bricks and the fires to prevent the flames from reaching the new bricks. The coal fires were lit and

the entrances sealed with loose bricks and daub (sandy clay mix) to seal the gaps. The fires were lit and tended by specialist 'Firemen'.

Drawing and Stacking

The bricks were fired at a temperature between 950 degrees celsius and 1150 degrees celsius. The time taken depended upon the type of brick but it was usually between one and a half and two days.

Removing the bricks from the kiln is called 'drawing the kiln'. First the entrances were knocked down to allow the heat to escape. When it was cool enough, the men went inside to remove the bricks. They wore special leather hand protectors as the bricks had very sharp edges. If any bricks had stuck together a rubber mallet was used to tap them apart.

The bricks were then loaded onto barrows once more and wheeled across the railway cutting via a wooden plank to the 'Bank' where they were stacked ready for distribution by lorry, railway or in the early days, horse drawn cart.



(courtesy of Yvonne Everitt)

The Park

Whittleford Park is a 43 hectare open, green space which sits between the Stockingford and Camp Hill areas of Nuneaton. This wonderful open space was once the home of both coal mining and brick and tile making but in recent times has been reclaimed by nature and the local community.

The site is owned and managed by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and with the support of the Friends of Whittleford Park are slowly working towards this becoming the Borough's leading urban country park.

The majority of the site is dedicated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) – these are areas of land and wetland of local importance for the conservation of semi-natural habitats including mosaics of heathland, unimproved grassland, scrubland and plantation and/or habitats which support rare local wildlife species.

Whittleford Park is mainly scrubby woodland and neutral grassland, but there are also areas of tall herb, standing water, swamp, willow carr and acid grassland.



An entrance point to the Park, decorated by a gate designed by artist Martin Heron with the help of the local community. The bricks in the background represent the industrial history of the park, which sits alongside the natural history.

What will you find at Whittleford Park today?

Lakes, pools and brooks.....

- Clay Pool, a pit formed when clay was extracted for brick making and filled with water
- The balancing lake which was created to help absorb run off from local housing estates and relieve the localised flooding problem
- Bar Pool Brook which runs the length of the site east to west
- Marshy areas located to the west of the site close to Kingfisher Avenue



Trees, scrub and grass meadows.....

- Gorse Valley , which sits on the opposite side of Queen Elizabeth Road to the rest of the park, is a habitat rarely found in Warwickshire and is likely to be one of the largest extents of gorse scrub in the whole county.

- There is a small area of mature woodland, including oak, birch and hazel which is thought to be a remnant of 'Haunch Wood' – a once extensive woodland dating from at least the 14th Century.

All of these habitats support a large variety of both flora and fauna, including 166 plant species.

Butterflies, birds and reptiles.....

There are over 20 species of moths and butterflies in the park including the Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Peacock, Small White, Green-veined White, Chimney Sweeper, Latticed Heath, Burnet Companion

Dragonflies and Damselflies flit through the skies above the water ways including Emperor, Broad bodied Chaser, Southern Hawker, Brown Hawker, Common Darter, Black Tailed Skimmer, Azure Damselfly, Ruddy Darter, Common Blue Damselfly

The Common Toad and the Common Frog can be found taking advantage of the water ways whilst many birds soar through the park enjoying the open space and plentiful food supplies. Swans nest at the Bar Pool Balancing Lake whilst the Little Grebes take full advantage of the lakes and pools as they dive for food.

There are also several species which are rare to Warwickshire, including the Common Lizard and Bee Orchid.



Common Spotted Orchid



Swans nesting on the balancing lake



A Burnet Companion Moth

Photographs courtesy of Yvonne Everitt

For more information, images and links to other projects please visit

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/whittlefordpark