



A Story of brickmaking in and around Rudgwick

In July 2009, Wienerberger Ltd submitted an application for a Review of Mineral Planning Permission in relation to their currently applicable planning permission at the brickworks in Lynwick Street, granted in 1993, (extending permission first granted in 1948) to 2042 for the extraction of clay for brick making on site. The Review allowed WSCC to monitor and possibly amend conditions laid down in 1993 for the satisfactory operation of the workings in both its environment and locality. Yet, in the recent recession, the brickworks was first mothballed, then put up for sale, with the result that no bricks will ever be made there again. The whole site, buildings, pit and surrounding farmland was eventually purchased in 2012 by R Harrison & Sons, dairy farmers at Woodsomes Farm next door and at several other Rudgwick farms, with the intention of using the farmland, restoring the pit to farmland and developing the buildings for business use. Some of these changes have already begun (2014). A positive outcome for Rudgwick, but not for those whose jobs were in brickmaking.

Two causes for concern arose recently. A short-term concern, when the pit was listed as a potential landfill site, was seen off several years ago (RPS objected vociferously - extraordinary, as the site was still in use!). We believed the site was clearly unsuitable, upwind of the village and on the side of a hill. It was worrying too when the company purchased Park Farm, Baynards, where one day they might have wished to extend operations northwards into Surrey, had it not been for the sale.

In 2009, RPS wrote to the Minerals and Waste Enforcement at WSCC, to raise concerns at the time. These included runoff and silting leading to flooding in Lynwick Street, working outside permitted hours, noise, light and air pollution, diversion of the Border Path, and vehicle movements. None of these were on a large scale, but together amounted to irritation as the conditions were there to protect the amenity of the locality, i.e., us, and were being pushed beyond acceptable limits, especially for residents of Lynwick Street. Since then, the pit has been fully restored to agriculture, done with care and enthusiasm by both owners and contractors. The

buildings, and new ones erected to replace the kilns and works, have been brought into commercial use. The site is humming with activity, including public access to both The Milkchurn Café and Firebird Brewery.

A little history of Rudgwick Brickworks:

Before the Second World War it was known as Hobbs Brickworks. Harold Tate, a Rudgwick builder and master brickmaker, bought the brickworks in 1928 from Thomas Aungier. Brickmaking had been carried out on the site possibly as far back as 1865 when bricks were made locally for Baynards Tunnel for the railway. Harold Tate was a Rudgwick man. He lived at Kismet in the village. He also led the Rudgwick Silver Band for many years, and sang in the church choir. It is said he sold his bricks only to architects. The claypit has removed features of our landscape such as Hobbs Barn and some fields and a copse, but has given employment, originally exclusively to local people, latterly also to people from further afield.

The Second World War saw the closure of the brickworks, which fell into disrepair. The glare was a risk from night-time German bombers. Very few houses would be built from 1939-45 during the war years. Harold Tate died in 1940 and his widow, Ellen, inherited the works.

In 1942 Ellen Tate granted a five year lease to Oliver Goldsmith for five acres of the Hobbs Brickworks site with the land to be used as agricultural land. This was probably in support of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign (but maybe a foretaste of things to come!).

Ellen Tate sold the whole Hobbs Brickworks site to two local builders Messrs Gamblen and Reynolds in 1946. They held the brickworks for two years until transferring it into a newly formed company, Rudgwick Clay Works Ltd, which was then sold to Bill Cox and Leslie Fawke. Leslie Fawke already owned Ludlay Brick and Tile Company and Cuckmere Brick Company in East Sussex. Bill Cox was to give up his part of the ownership a few years later. Cuckmere Brick Company was managed by Bill Laker and Leslie Fawke brought in his son Patrick (Pat) Laker, who at the time was in the Air Force, to run the Rudgwick works.

Although there was a small brickmaking machine at the works the operation was mainly for hand-made bricks all manually handled. Modern

brickmaking is a cyclical, capital intensive, heavy industry. In the mid 1960's Leslie Fawke decided to rebuild the Rudgwick works, introduce modern machinery, and increase the production from about 45,000 to 250,000 bricks per week. The bank financing the redevelopment was United Dominions Trust (UDT). The operation went well, but in 1969 when an application for a small further loan was made to finance brick pallets the bank decided that brick pallets were not a capital item and made their move to swoop and take over the business. They immediately appointed Keith Wickenden of Thornton Baker, accountants, as receiver and manager. This was the era of asset stripping and the bank transferred the whole business to a new company called Rudgwick Brickworks Co Ltd. The process was of very dubious legality, and Leslie Fawke, being a solicitor, brought legal action against the bank. Very shortly after the appointment of the receiver and manager the business became highly successful and the brick developed a considerable reputation with architects and builders for its quality and appearance. Pat Laker was appointed MD by the receiver and manager. One of the most significant changes under his management was to move from the use of coke in the clamps to butane gas in the 1970s and with this a connection to mains gas, a move that enabled Rudgwick to have a domestic gas supply too. It was Pat Laker who in 1972 patented the butane gas-firing method in the clamp. In 1977 Leslie Fawke regained control of his brickworks. His legal action was due to go to trial in 1982 but he died very shortly before it came to Court. By all insider accounts at that time he would have won his legal action. The business continued under the management of the Fawke family. Pat Laker, a loyal friend of the company and the family, retired in 1988. In 1998 the business was sold to Baggeridge Brick.

Note: the preceding paragraphs have been kindly supplied by Richard Fawke himself to correct some points in the original article, which the author readily accepts with thanks.

Brickmaking is a very cyclical industry, so it is unsurprising to find these ups and downs, eventually the undoing of Wienerberger's interests.

In 1985, the brickworks became well-known for its fossil 'dinosaur', excavated by Morris Zdzaiek (works engineer) and Sylvia Standing, both keen archaeologists. It was not an Iguanodon as first thought, but a small and unique Polacanthus, identified later by Bill Blows of St Barts, a



dinosaur expert, and given the name of our village, *rudgwickensis*. Although not a dinosaur, strictly speaking, you or I would say it was! *Polacanthus* means many spiked – see photo. Our intrepid local archaeologists also found two dragonfly fossils, a mere 130m years old. Their finders were honoured with the names *Libellulum standingae* and *L. zdrzaleki*. The brickworks provided Rudgwick with a product (stock bricks) to be proud of, and, to adapt a phrase, we are also ‘famous for fossils’, notably *Polacanthus rudgwickensis*.

Baggeridge Brick PLC, based in the West Midlands bought out Rudgwick Brickworks Co Ltd in 1998, and in 2006 they in turn were taken over by the Austrian multinational Wienerberger. The additional farmland, mostly on the Surrey side had been acquired in 2005. The site by now covered 36 acres. The 1m brick clamps were still built by hand right to the end.

The bricks were highly patterned by the three clay colours found at different depths, blue, red and yellow. Sand and coke breeze brought in added to the effect. Even the clay was running out, as the top layer of red clay was exhausted. Had the company remained in production we might have been faced by now with possible expansion into Surrey, diversion of

the Border Path and a real planning and environmental headache for all affected. WSCC agreed several years ago the site was not suitable for landfill of non-recyclables, so it is a great relief to know that Harrisons will soon be able to return the pit to agriculture, once environmental issues are overcome.

The two maps (25") below show, left, the site in 1912, and, right, the brickworks in 1974. [1974 extract: Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved].



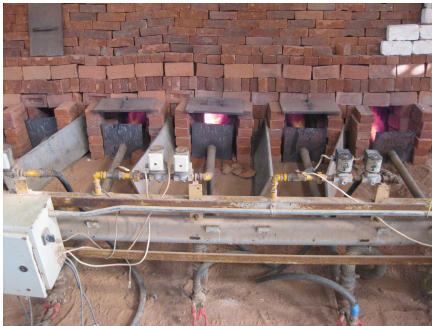
The removal of trees from Hobbs Copse indicates the site of the brick pit. A curious feature of both maps is the depiction of a separate working of the ground to the east at Hawks Hill. Might this be the early 20th century site referred to above?



This 6" map is dated 1961-2. It shows that the re-opening of the pit in the post-war era had still not eaten into Hobbs Copse.



Right, green bricks in a nearly finished new clamp.

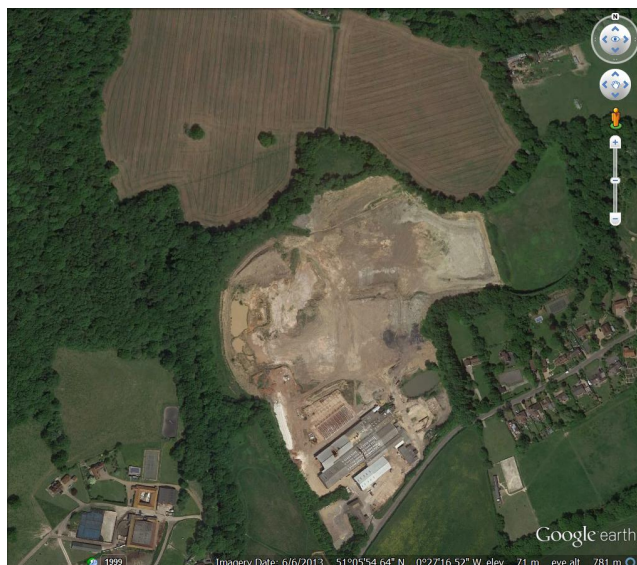


Left, the gas burners – each one is moved leftwards to a new hole when the skilled operative judges the heat to be enough.

Below, the brickworks and pit in the 1970s, just pushing its way into the woods on the hill above.



The brickworks, about 2000, showing the brick pit at its maximum size. The field on the hill top right is the farmland purchased in 2005. Woodsomes Farm is just off the photo to the left.



The Google Earth image was created in 2013, capturing the brief period between the removal of all things brick, before Harrisons began work on the buildings. The newly sown grassland to the north was one of the first changes made, with access for the cattle from Woodsomes Farm, bottom left.

Bricks have been made at numerous sites and for varying lengths of time in the Low Weald of Sussex. In the 20th century, brickmaking was fast becoming a business, replacing the small workings, near woodland for fuel, that characterise brickmaking in the 19th century, when Rudgwick and district saw brickmaking at:

- Marles Lane (TQ085298) in The Haven (about 1875-1914 – Edward Sayers, 1887, and Charles Parnell, 1895, known brickmakers), at Naldretts Farm (about 1819-1850, under the tenancy of Frederick Churchman, then Michael Botting).
- Lynwick Farm (TQ076338), where there was a kiln in Brickkiln Plat (1844), kiln and a pit marked on the 1876 map; possibly worked by James Puttock, “farmer & brickmaker” at Woodsomes next door (1858). Map, 1876, below.
- Brickkiln Farm (TQ055326) over the border in Loxwood. Brickkiln Field & Brickkiln Plat in 1842, worked by Stephen Knight who gradually moved his business to Pephurst, leaving numerous shallow delves in the woods just to the north of Pephurst, and around Brickkiln Farm, now itself demolished.

- Pephurst Brick & Tile Works (TQ056319), had the first deep pit in the area, though not that deep! Worked 1842-1900s. Alfred Phillips who lived variously at Farnfold, Lonesomes, and Pephurst was brickmaker in 1891, 1895 and 1901. The pit, kiln and brick works are seen on the 1875-1912 maps, but the pit was filled in c1950s when the sharp bends on the road were straightened. Map, 1876, below.
- Gaskyns, Rudgwick. Here all the bricks are said to have been made on site for the house built in 1890!

