

Brick and Tile Museum – Bridgwater. Weds 24th January 2023

Thanks to Terry for organising and Marie at the museum for a fantastic guided tour and making afterwards! 15 of us went along with 8 making a tile. Here as usual are my jottings and some photos from the day. I would strongly recommend a visit to those who have not been before. Our tiles will be drying, before being fired. Marie will let me know when they are ready to collect. I'll pick them up and bring along to a relevant meeting – I'll let you know when I have got them.

- 1990s museum opened
- No 6 bottle kiln the only one left
- Brickworks were operated by Barnham Brother
- Roof tile and drainage products as well as bricks (see picture of brochure below)
- No 6 likely to be brick kiln
- Social services ran it before sw heritage
- No 1 kiln gone before 6 was built
- 1857 peak in Bridgwater (bw) and Somerset 1850 to 1900
- Cheap labour coming off land, brick tax removed in 1850, during tax bricks got longer as taxed per brick!
- 200 employees on site, 1 of 16 of employees in bw worked in brick yards
- Shut in 1965, last one in bw closed in 70s.
- Bw had good clay. Each works had own pit. Puriton had a railway eventually to bring in clay. But usually close to works
- Clay in bw is blue grey in ground but iron content, fires terracotta red
- 2 dredgers Bertha and Enid, Enid still at Exeter maritime museum.
- Shipbuilders in town produced ketches, last one, the Irene, in 1930s.
- Telescopic bridge over R Parrett.
- Somerset and Dorset line linked brewer and brickworks at low tide,
- Coal from Wales, Sand from Burnham, first pineapple came into bw in England
- Bricks and tiles used as valuable outbound ballast
- Sand used at wet stage and kiln dried for moulding
- Weather clay for 6 -12 months
- Then milled in pug mill
- Allow for shrinkage 10% (special rulers made to account for this).
- Seasonal work...can't dig, or dry in poor weather
- So workhouse populations would rise in the brickworks off-season
- Child labour from age 6, 7 days a week
- Also apprentices from age 8, fully qual at 15
- The moulder, more superior, but replaced by a moulding machine for bricks.
- But bw clay not so good in machines
- Types of tile, double roman patented in bw, pantile, Poole tiles
- Dies (moulds) all vary slightly...so hard to replace
- Bw 20 hole brick...cheaper less clay, faster fire...but more fragile.
- Air dry before kiln dry...but always some moisture remains after air dry hence kiln dry
- Drying shed would have louvred walls for air circulation
- Moulders, mould 1 day, dress next day
- Bricks dried outside
- Bw Bath brick only be harvested 1 mile from bw centre. It is silt, not clay and is good for cleaning. Collect silt, weathered, moulded, low fire to solidify, can use in brick, or as a powder – soldiers used it for cleaner weapons etc.
- Donkey stone for threshold
- Women made the Bath stones
- Over fired ones could be used for building
- 8 fire mouths in kiln, checked every 4 hours. 7 day burn, sometimes 14. 24 hrs monitoring
- To become watersound, 7 days...gentle steady increase to 1000 degrees for 4 or 5 hours then a gentle decrease. Water slowly released and evaporated and then slow crystallisation on cooling so small crystals – stronger (authors additions).

- Glazing fire is shorter and hotter
- Kiln man looks through spyhole and knows from colour of glow the temperature...skilled job, along with potters for chimneys etc.
- Loading into kiln through shed. Placers stack load so dry evenly, no pressure points. No idea how long, but vital and skilled job. Fill door with loose bricks and sealed with clay or silt.
- Inside kiln fire exits, no chimney hole now. Originally updraft kiln, converted to down draft...add chimney, baffles on kiln exit and recirculate heat.
- Unloading while still really hot, wet sheets on arms to prevent burns
- Chiltern trinity brickworks being excavated for tidal barrier.

Here's a link to the pictures:

[Brick&tile photos](#)