

South Australian Mining History Group

Quarterly Meeting: Thurs 31 August, 2017
Damien on Fisher, Fullarton
6.00pm for dinner at 6.45pm

Brickworks and Pugholes of the Western Suburbs

Presentation by
Greg Drew

Abstract

Due to the absence of timber suitable for building purposes brick making commenced in SA soon after the establishment of the colony in 1836. Hand-moulded primitive bricks were first made using red alluvial clay from the banks of the River Torrens through the parklands. After the banning of this activity in 1840, brickmaking moved to the low-lying area west of Adelaide including Torrensville, Beverley and Brompton which became the major brickmaking region of South Australia. For more than 100 years the history of the Brompton, Torrensville and Beverley areas was the story of pugholes - digging them out and later filling them in.

This area is underlain by red alluvial clay which is up to 100 metres thick and ideal for brickmaking. The clay was worked by hand from pits or pugholes to natural water level which averaged about eight metres in depth. Clay was shovelled into trucks and hauled up incline railways to the adjacent brickmaking plants. Brickmaking in the area began as a backyard industry and it was not until the early 1900s that the larger clay workings were developed. The industry was at its peak in the 1920s when about 30 individual brickworks contained four large Hoffmann kilns and about 100 smaller kilns, and employed 100s of workers.

By the 1960s, the traditional clay sources in the western suburbs were nearing exhaustion. This combined with the pressure from urban development and the preference for lighter coloured bricks, forced producers to develop new plants on clay deposits at Golden Grove. The last pughole closed in the late 1970s and most were subsequently filled with building and industrial waste and used for sporting activities of light industries. More recently, urban renewal projects have seen some contaminated sites excavated and refilled for housing. All that remains of a once significant brick manufacturing industry is the Hoffmann kiln at Thebarton and four small kilns at James Brickworks at Beverley. It is hoped that these kilns can be used to tell the story of the district's first manufacturing industry.