

**Child Okeford Archive**

**Child Okeford  
Brickworks**

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## Child Okeford Brickworks

### Background

*“Nothing, perhaps, has done so much indirectly for the improvement of farming and the increase of food production as has efficient land drainage.”*

C S Orwin History of English Farming 1949

Water logged land creates numerous problems. Wet ground is heavy ground, difficult and sometimes dangerous for animals to walk through, and almost impossible to plough. Even if ploughing and sowing were possible, the evaporation of water from the surface cools the underlying soil and so delays germination, growth and eventual harvesting of corn crops. Excess water also dissolves nutrients in the soil which are soon washed away, more dung [nowadays fertiliser] is needed incurring more cost.

In the days of the open field, strip farming, some form of drainage was achieved by ploughing so as to form a convex shape with central ridge on each man's strip. At the edge of each strip was a furrow which acted as a drainage channel. The strips were arranged so as to point downhill, either directly, or at an angle, but at the ends of the strips there were baulks of land used for access and all too often these trapped the run off within the furrow.

Even if proper drainage ditches were provided, all too often the run off took away the nutrients, organic matter and the fine soil particles that supported the soils structure. This would accumulate in the ditch and then have to be dug out and redistributed over the strips and although this type of drainage dealt with surface water it did not deal with water welling up from below.

The first modern approach to the problem of drainage was described by Walter Blith in 1649: he advocated trenches dug to three to four feet down and filled with elder boughs or stones and then turfed over. These trenches were ploughed across the field in a straight course to meet a properly formed outfall ditch. Since ground naturally undulated, the depth of the ditch varied in relation to the surface and to ensure it drained away the declination to a properly formed outfall ditch was to be measured against a *“true exact water levell”*.

This more or less was the system of drainage that obtained for the next two hundred years although as ever its adoption was patchy. It avoided the problem of run off, as the field did not have to be shaped to effect drainage. There were some disadvantages to this system as organic matter such as elder, thorn and so on would rot away in time and if stones or slate were used soil particles would obstruct the passage of water.

The next big advance was in 1843 when a gardener, John Reade, developed the porous clay pipe of the type shown above. Buried deep in the ground it would become saturated with water which dripped into the channel and thus away to a ditch. Two years later Thomas Scragg patented a machine which made mass production of pipes easier.

However although mass production was now possible mass transportation was not, so the pipes had to be made locally and many towns and villages had their own brick factories.

The bricks used at the beginning of the nineteenth century were made either in other local villages or from as far away as Gillingham which was a centre of brick making. Child Okeford, like many other Dorset villages, is situated on a clay soil which is suitable for brick making. Making the bricks “on site” and eliminating expensive transport costs was an obvious money saver.

In England the first brick sizes set by statute came into effect in 1571. By an Act of Parliament in 1725 the minimum size of a brick was set at 9 inches long, 4.5 inches wide and 2.5 inches thick. In 1784 in order to pay for wars a tax of 2/6 (12.5p) per 1,000 was imposed on the industry. Unsurprisingly this was increased in both 1794 and 1803 to pay for the war with France.

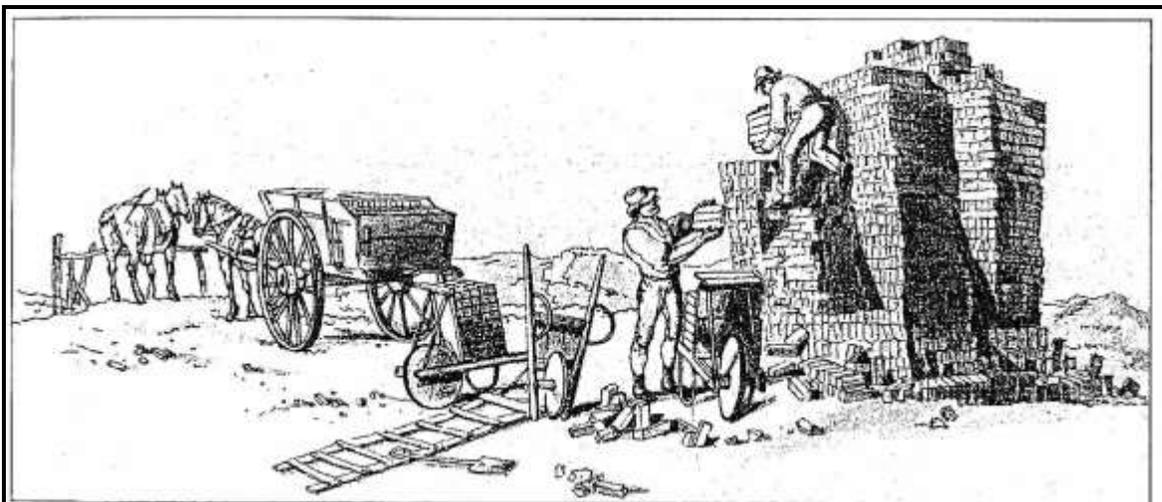


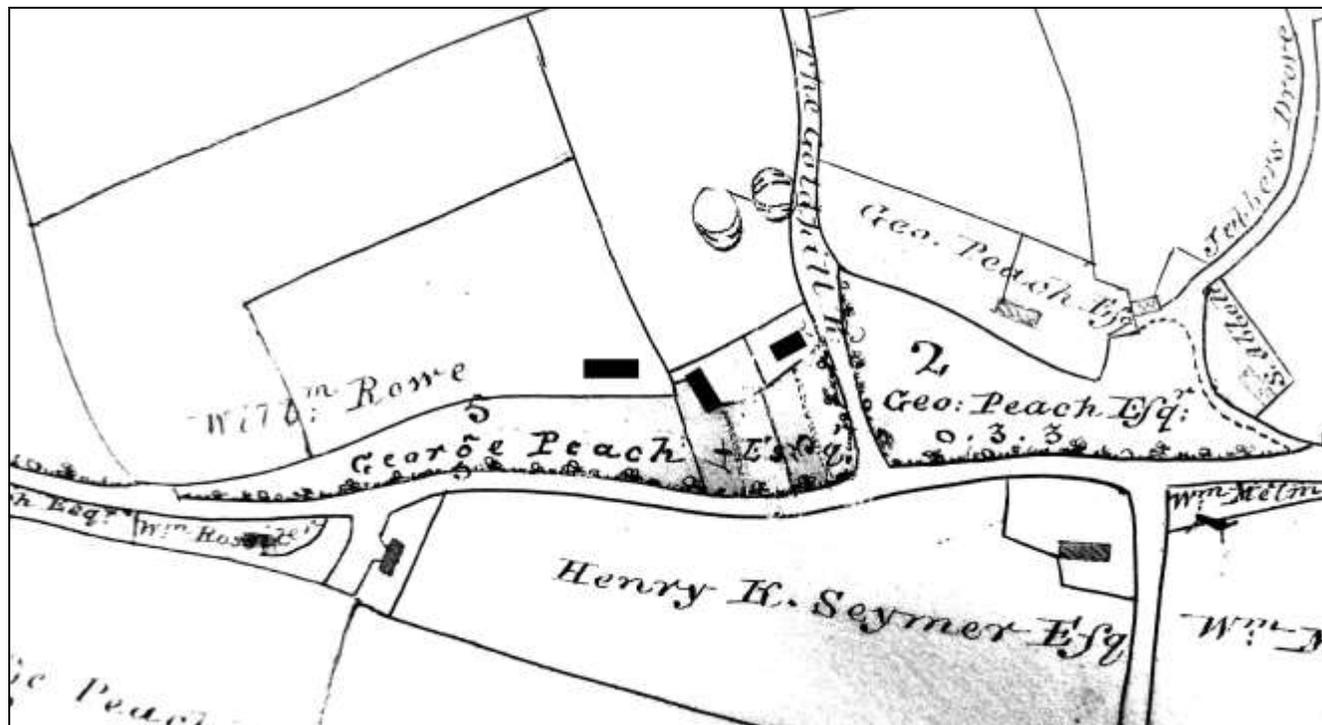
Fig. 1 Unfired bricks were stacked in regularly-sized heaps for assessment of duties by the officers of the Excise. This view from William Henry Pyne's *Microcosm of the arts, agriculture, manufactures* published between 1803 and 1806 shows, in fact, heaps of fired bricks being broken up and taken away in carts. Lying on the ground are the 'wasters', for which the Excise made an allowance of 10%, although the proportion of 'wasters' from a firing was frequently much higher (R. Lucas)

In the 1840's the cost of bricks was 34s (£1.70p) per 1,000 and transport around 9d (5p) per 1,000 per mile. The tax on bricks was abolished in 1850 to help fund the industrial revolution happening in the north. This made building more affordable in rural areas and the trade prospered.

## Child Okeford Brickworks

We do not know precisely when the brickyard in Child Okeford was built but the map produced for the Inclosure award of 1845 is of some interest. The road running across the picture is the road through Gold Hill from the village [right] to Manston [away to the left]. Ridgeway lane extends upwards but was then called the Gold Hill road.

It will be seen that one William Rowe occupies a large plot of land which, on the tithe map five years earlier, was occupied by Thomas Tuffin.



The three black buildings shown above 'George Peach' are believed to be [from Left to Right] four cottages which are now combined into the Saxon inn, Greenbough, originally two cottages and no's 1 and 2 Gold Hill which are similar to Greenbough but remain divided into two separate dwellings.

Rowe first appears in the 1841 census when he was thirty years old, married to Mary, aged twenty seven and with a daughter aged four months called Mary Ann. He was born in Bourton, Dorset and his occupation is given as a Brick Burner and although the inclosure map shows him occupying land at Gold Hill, his position in the census suggests that he was living in the village itself.

Child Okeford's brickworks were built in the fields behind what is now the Saxon Inn and were, at this time, on the outskirts of the village. To produce bricks it is necessary to have clay, water, sand and fuel. The clay in that area is of a type suitable for brick making and water was available from local wells and springs. The fuel used was either coal or wood and both would have been imported by cart.

The other raw material used is sand and we can't discover where the manufacturers obtained the quantities needed. Perhaps it came by cart from the coast. Perhaps Sandy Lane, a track running along the base of Hambledon Hill, is significant?

On 21<sup>st</sup> September 1844 the Salisbury and Winchester Journal ran the following advert.

<p style="text-align:center"><i>TO POTTERS</i> <i>A Person who understands the above Trade will find employment by</i> <i>applying to Mr W Rowe, Child Okeford, Blandford.</i></p>
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By 1851 William Rowe had five children and is described in the census as a "*Brick Tile and Pottery manufacturer employing eleven labourers.*" The census for 1851 lists a number of others in the village working in the brick trade. John Hayter was lodging with Rowe in 1851 and is shown as a "*Brickmaker*". In 1861 he was living in Fontmell Parva but still working at the brickworks at Gold Hill. By 1871 he had moved to Hazelbury Bryan, although he was still making bricks but where is not known.

The 1851 census also lists James Shepherd [age 19] as a "*Tile maker*", Samuel Harvey [age 24] "*Brick and Tile Maker*" and living with them was Phineas Evers [age 16] who was a "*Tilers Labourer*". Living at Gold Hill at the time were Francis Coombs [age 30] who is a "*Potter Journeyman*" together with his wife Eliza [age 37] who is listed as a "*Potters Assistant*" and Francis and Eliza's son William [age 15] who is also shown as a "*Potters assistant*". Elsewhere in the census we find Henry Harvey [age 34] a "*Brickmaker's labourer*" and Daniel Bench another "*Brickmaker.*" The remaining two labourers may have lived outside the village.

William Rowe disappears from the story by the 1861 census, indeed none of the family can be traced after 1851 and for the first time we get direct confirmation of the existence of a brickyard in the village. Frederic Coombes [age 37] is listed as "*Superintendent of Brickyard*". He has a wife Rebecca [age 38] and they had eight children of whom two, John [aged 14] and George [aged 12], are "*Labourer in brickyard*".

Also working at the Brickyard are Francis Coombs, "*Potter*", [note the difference in spelling of the name] aged forty nine, who is living at the Wesleyan Meeting house. Whilst living at a separate address it is likely that William Coombs [age 25] "*Brickmaker*" and Methodist preacher was related to Francis.

Others working in the yard include James Chambers [age 22] a labourer and William Goddard [age 13] another labourer; Samuel Harvey is still working in the yard, as is John Hayter, and another labourer, George White [age 15] was lodging at the Sawyers Arms, Gold Hill. Finally there are George Fudge [age 45] "*Brick and tile maker*" and his son, the youngest employee of all, George Fudge Jnr [age 8] another labourer.

The Salisbury and Winchester Journal of 20<sup>th</sup> February 1869 ran two adverts, the first is for the sale of the brickyard at Child Okeford. [NB no 'e' on Child].

*“CHILD OKEFORD, DORSET.  
TO MANUFACTURERS OF POTTERY – BRICKS,  
TILES AND DRAIN PIPES.*

*TO BE SOLD, by PRIVATE CONTRACT, all that FREEHOLD PREMISES situate at Child Okeford, in the County of Dorset, comprising,  
All those Two Houses and Offices communicating with each other, situate at Child Okeford in the occupation of Samuel Short and James Moore, [both agricultural labourers].*

*All those Two houses under one Roof with offices communicating, situate in the Brick Yard at Child Okeford in the occupation of the owner.*

*Also Cottage, Stable, Waggon House, Store House and Shed, Mill House, Drying Sheds, Heating Apparatus, Machinery, Shelving, Fixtures, Moulds, Dressing Blocks, Tables, Ladders and Racks, Large Drying Sheds &c together with an abundant supply of Clay from Land containing about Three acres [more or less] in the present occupation of the Owner.*

*For further particulars and to treat apply to Messrs Rossiter and Rowden, Auctioneers, Surveyor and Estate agents, Sturminster Newton, Blandford.”*

As has can be seen this was a very extensive operation.

The second advert relates to a sale of machinery and the like at the Brickyard at Iwerne Minster.

IWERNE BRICK YARD

Midway between Blandford and Shaftesbury, Dorset.

T M PARK will SELL by AUCTION on Monday March 1 1869, without reserve -  
The undermentioned valuable Machinery and manufactured Stock of BRICKS,  
TILES &c

Comprising :- A brick making machine by Clayton and Shuttleworth, Clay  
Grinding Mill, Brick and Tile machine by Whitehead, Tile machine by ditto, about

65,000 of well made building bricks

600 of 9in. Paving ditto

1500 Large Covering Tiles

700 Shelving Bricks

600 Clinkers

800 D Brick

500 Barrel Drain Brick

100 Fifteen Inch Coping Brick

600 Clent Do

400 Twelve-inch Gutter Do

400 Circular Chimney Brick

100,000 Two and three inch draining pipe

12,000 Stained Plain Tile

200 Hip and Ridge Do

Quantity of 12- inch flower pots and smaller sizes ditto, 26 various wheelbarrows,  
moulds, moulding benches, potting boards, wheeling planks, large chest, iron plate  
and stove, ladder, steps and water boxes etc etc

Sale at twelve o'clock

The whole will be put up in convenient lots.

The sale must have been successful for the 1871 census the following are working at the brickyard; Frederick Coombes, now reduced in the record simply to "*Brickmaker*", Walter Lowman "*Brickmaker*", Herbert Chambers "*Brickmaker*"[who is living at the New Inn, Gold Hill], Samuel Harvey, George Fudge Snr,"*Brickmaker*" but his son George Fudge Jnr has left the brickyard and is now recorded working as an agricultural labourer.

There may have been more workers though for there are no labourers shown as working at the brickyard in this census. In 1879 another curious entry in the Salisbury and Winchester Journal of 22<sup>nd</sup> February seems to indicate that at some time in the decade the brickyard had undergone closure.

*CHILD OKEFORD BRICKYARD now open  
with a good supply of BRICKS and PIPES in hand,  
Apply Mr Packard, Shroton.*

Alfred Packard was the owner at this time and remained so until his death in 1901. In the census he is recorded as a "*Brewer and Maltster*" living in Shroton [Iwerne Courtney] "*Near the brewery*" suggesting there was a brewery in the village.

By 1881 Frederic Coombes has now been restored to his former status as "*Foreman of Brickyard*" and is joined by his son Christopher who, at 18, is employed as a "*Labourer in brickyard*". George Fudge Snr is still working as a "*Brickmaker*" and is now joined by a relative, Theophilus Fudge also a "*Brickmaker*".

The 1891 and 1901 censuses record just two people making bricks. Christopher Coombes has now become the "*Manager of Brickyard*" and his father Frederic has left and is now a general labourer. The other person is Theophilus fudge "*Labourer in brickyard*".

The final record of the brickyard comes from 1901 when Alfred Packard [81] has died and the yard has come up for sale.

*MR A PACKARD, DECEASED  
GOLD HILL, CHILD OKEFORD  
1 ½ Miles from Shillingstone Station*

*Messrs. Senior & Godwin beg to announce that they have received instructions to sell by Auction [to close the Estate] at the Baker Arms, Child Okeford on Thursday the 5<sup>th</sup> Day of December 1901 at three for half-past three o'clock in the afternoon, the freehold Brick and Tile Yard with Kiln, Sheds and 5 substantially- built cottages situate at Gold Hill Child Okeford.*

*Lot 1.- The FREEHOLD BRICKYARD with the Kilns, Drying Sheds, Orchards and Managers Cottage Cart shed and stable being no's 106 and 107 on the Ordnance Map, containing by admeasurement 2a 1r 12p more or less. There is an abundant supply of good Clay on this Lot and a lucrative business has been carried on here for many years past by the late owner.*

*Lot 2.- A FREEHOLD DOUBLE COTTAGE, brick built and tiled, with GARDENS, adjoining Lots 1 and 3 as now pegged out with a frontage to the highway of 74 feet containing by estimation 23 perches more or less now in the occupation of Mrs PERCY and THEO FUDGE at the aggregate annual rental of £10 10s. Together with the PLOT of GARDEN GROUND, containing 13 perches more or less situate at the North- West of the entrance road to the Brickyard.*

*Lot 3.- A FREEHOLD DOUBLE COTTAGE, brick-build and tiled, with GARDENS as now pegged out adjoining lots 1 and 2, with a frontage to the highway of 74 feet, containing by estimation 30 perches more or less, now in the occupation of Mrs Harvey and PC Mager at an aggregate annual rent of £11 5s.*

*To View Lot 1 apply to the Manager Mr Christopher Combes on the Premises and Lots 2 and 3 the respective tenants; and for all further particulars to the Auctioneers Sturminster Newton and Gillingham; or to WM E Brennand Esq Solicitor,*

*Sturminster Newton, Blandford and Bournemouth 11<sup>th</sup> November 1901.*

In lot 2 were living Mary Percy a 44 yr old widow using her home as a laundress together with her son Bertram [age14 ] a domestic groom and her daughter Edith [age 8] who was presumably at school.

Next door to her was Theophilus Fudge, his wife and four children.

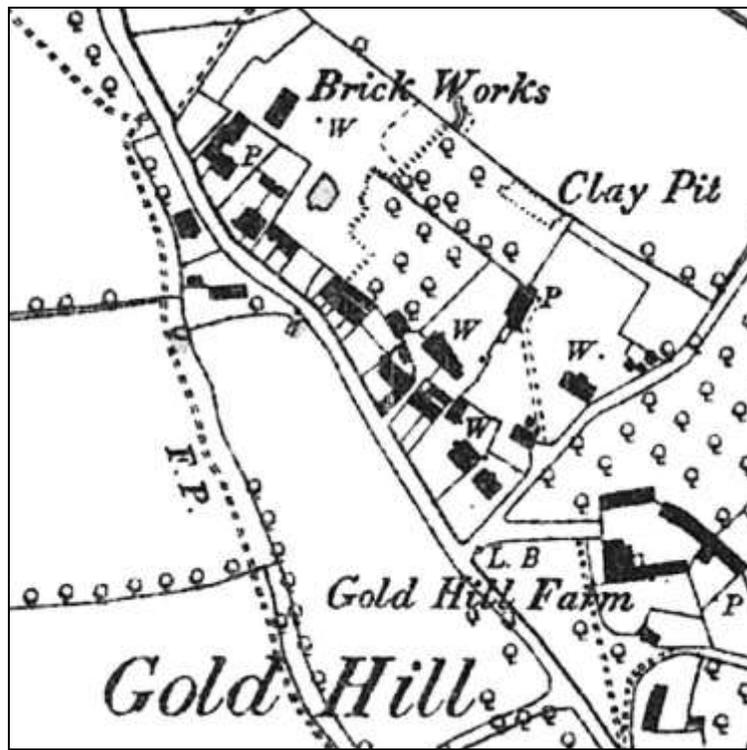
In Lot 3 were living Dinah Harvey another widow [age 46] and her three children.

No more is heard of the brickyard thereafter. In 1911 Christopher Coombes is to be found at Chisel Farm as manager there. By this time too, Dinah Harvey has now moved to Sturminster Newton and we cannot be sure who is living in the cottage. However in 1901 in another part of Gold Hill there were two brothers, George and Rufus Harvey, who were farming in the village and in the 1911 census their address is given as Brickyards Farm.

Part of field drainage pipe made at the Child Okeford Brickworks donated to the village archive by the family of the late Chris Giles..



The brick works and clay pit show on the 1888 6" to the mile OS map.



The brick works show on the 1902 6" to the mile OS map but the clay pit has gone and there has been a change in the buildings at the North of Gold Hill.

