

The Weald and Downland Living Museum (WDLM) at Singleton, Sussex has a number of vernacular buildings each representing a period or style of construction. Not Manor Houses or Great Houses or Castles that are preserved by the National Trust (NT). These houses are of more common people and some of the buildings represent structures that were used in ordinary people's working lives, exemplified by cart sheds, granaries and chapels. The museum has furnished the houses appropriate to a set time in the life of the building. It also has in its archive collections the tools used by the people who constructed the houses.

When the road widening scheme for the A21 at Tonbridge was planned the buildings on the Burgess Hill Farm site; also known as May Day Farm; had to be demolished. The Museum was offered the barn and stable buildings for exhibits at the museum.

Joe Thompson the museums resident carpenter led the team that recorded, dismantled and stacked the timbers and was then tasked with the conservation and reconstructing the buildings at the museum. To do this the history of the building needs to be researched and how the structure changed from its original form to the form that existed at time of dismantling. Research to discover who built it and who owned and lived in it at each of its configurations is needed to explain its history, then agree the period to be represented.

Joe has the experience to recognise the carpentry details and put dates to them. This allows the form of the building and its changes to be understood. Most of us know from our own experiences how our houses have been altered by the addition of lean-to extensions and conservatories to suit growing families and changing life styles.

This article considers the bricks recovered from the site, their age and possible source of manufacture to see how they tie in with the dating of the timber frames.

The building's location from the earliest ordnance survey (OS) maps; post 1860's in most cases; will show their form and place in the community. The census records give the occupiers of the houses and tell how many families lived in them. We are fortunate to have some surveys that can add to these details. The 1838 Tithe Act notes the land in each parish by plot numbers, owner and tenant with use; i.e. arable; and the acreage involved. Later in the early 20th century we have the Finance

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Act 1910, which proposed a tax on land values. The survey for this carried out between 1910-1915 was based on the OS maps of 1909 using the plot numbers and the details of each property recorded in field books (TNA, 1910, R58, IR124/8/227)

The Other source of building details are the ‘Listed Building’ schedules previously held by English Heritage; now Historic England; that for the building’s grade give description, OS grid reference and some of the historic background to the structure (HE 1987).

Burgess Hill Farm is shown on the c1840 Tithe map as plots 2114 and 2116 and the schedule shows it was owned by James Alexander and occupied by Thomas Read (KAS 2017). James Alexander lived at Somerhill Manor and owned most of the local land.

Joe Thompson has dated the barn building’s timber frame to the late 18th century; approx. 1780-1830. The stable structure is thought to be early 19th century; approx. 1800-1838. Both buildings being weather-boarded timber frames on brick plinths and footings with clay peg tile roofs.

Some of the recovered barn bricks; listed in the ‘Brick table’ below; are handmade red bricks without frogs (ref B1). There are also handmade bricks with frogs of similar red colour that may be early 19th century manufacture (ref B3) and similar machine-made bricks of mid-19th century (ref B4).

An adjacent pig sty structure had handmade bricks with shallow frogs and crease marks to their sides. There are tamp marks to their bed face where their shape has been corrected after withdrawal from the mould. These bricks have signs of cinder particles in the clay and are estimated to be of early 19th century manufacture (ref B5).

The oast structure yielded red handmade bricks with frog and strike marks to the bed faces. They are thought to be of mid to late 19th century manufacture (ref B6).

The dating of the bricks is very speculative without the presence of brick marks in the frogs of the bricks. Brick marks came into use in the mid 19th century with the ability to transport them further by rail, canal or river. The marks were an identifier of the brickmaker and would enable the purchasers to recognise bricks of known quality. In essence they became an advertisement of the brick’s manufacturer. Prior to this

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period bricks were made locally and transported by road. A horse and cart with a load of bricks, approximately 1000 bricks, could only travel 5 miles (8 Km) out and back in a day.

The bricks seen in these buildings would indicate they are of local manufacture. To try to date them more precisely their sources and use in other brick structures would be needed. In an effort to recognise a local site the brickfields in the ancient parish of Tonbridge have been researched and the map fig 1 below produced.

The source of the Burgess Hill Farm bricks is not known from any written records seen to date, but the time period being mainly early 19th century would suggest local manufacture rather than bricks imported into the area by railway or barge. The Railway came to Tonbridge c1842. The ownership of the Farm in 1840 was part of the Somerhill Estate (James Alexander) the same as the Castle Hill brickworks (site ref No. 15)¹. There were other brickmaking sites on the Tithe Map owned by James Alexander, which could also be sources for the bricks, (Sites ref Nos. 1, 6 and 10 map fig 1).

The Somerhill manor asset list of 1664 (KA 1664, U214 E19/28) contains a reference to Tyle House which may be the earliest local tile and brickmaking yard. The use of the name 'Tile House' continued into the 19th century and site ref No10 brick works is in this area. Tile House Farm area was approximately south of Priory Road, west of Lavender Hill and south of Primrose Hill to what is now the Tonbridge Bypass. This would appear to be the oldest local brickfield and was built on as Primrose Hill, later on to its south was Quarry Hill Brickfield. Not to be confused with Quarry Hill Brickworks, which was further south on Quarry Hill, site ref 11. In 1870-1882 it was still known as Tile House works, Pembury Road in the directories and run by George Punnet later George Punnet and Sons.

All these brickfields have easy access along Pembury Road to Burgess Hill Farm. Castle Hill Brick Yard is only 300m away, while the Tonbridge brickfields are up to 2.5km away. Comparison of the bricks found during the excavation of Castle Hill

¹ 'Brickfields in the ancient parish of Tonbridge includes Southborough and Tunbridge Wells areas', data taken from the 'Brickmakers Index' and prepared with the help of the Tonbridge Historical Society publication 'Tonbridge Industrial Heritage' published 2005 p15 and p40-45. The map uses the same site references numbers from C10 to C22 as sites 10 to 22. The other site location numbers have come from data in the index and in the Tithe maps and their schedules. The map now recognises 34 brickmaking sites.

Burgess Hill Farm bricks continued.

Brick Yard may help match those from Burgess Hill Farm once the report is made public by Oxford Archaeology.

These sites would be a likely source rather than the two Tonbridge brickfields (Primrose Hill Brickfield site ref 14, Pembury Grove Brickfield site ref 12), which are close to the railway that was constructed c1842. Quarry Hill Brick and Tile works (site ref 11) is of a latter date and not in production when Burgess Hill Farm was built.

The construction of Somerhill in 1611-1613 and its major restorations in 1879-97 (Huntingford, 2009) and again in 1988-1991 may have exposed bricks of known construction date or used bricks from the estate brickfields, which could confirm the estimated dates if they were available or recorded.

The history of Castle Hill Brickworks will confirm it was working up to the 1920's closed by 1930, although shown on the 1940's OS map. The date it was established is not known but it was scheduled in the c1840 Tithe map as a brickyard, so was working at that time. Further research of the estate papers and directories may help in providing dates and products it was producing.

The Post Office Kent Trade Directory of 1855 has three 'Tonbridge' brickmakers listed but not more specific addresses. Melville's directory of the same date does not note 'Castle Hill Brick yard'. Bagshaw's Directory of 1840 does not note Castle Hill Brick yard but does give James Alexander and William Alexander at Somer Hill. Perhaps the Castle Hill brickyard had been only an estate brickyard not run as a commercial enterprise.

Seeking earlier brickmakers the Pigot's Directory for Kent 1828/29 was consulted but it does not note any brickmakers in Tonbridge. It does give James Alexander at Somer Hill. Holden's 1811 Directory of London and Country does not list Tonbridge.

The OS map sheet 80 published in 1819 does show Castle Hill and Burgess Hill on the Pembury Road and notes Somerhill Park. No buildings are shown to Burgess Hill Farm nor is the brickyard called up.

The OS Map of Kent dated 1801 shows Somerhill, but does not recognise Burgess Hill or Castle Hill on the Pembury Road. Quarry Hill is noted leading into Tonbridge. The map scale is only 1 inch to 1 mile, so little building detail is noted.

Burgess Hill Farm bricks continued.

All the brick entries used to produce the Brickfields map of the ancient parish of Tonbridge including Southborough and Tunbridge Wells are extracted from the 'Brickmakers Index' (Cufley 2019) which is compiled from various records.

Burgess Hill Farm being close to Castle Hill Brickworks is the obvious source for the bricks but there are a number of older sites of which site ref 10 is most likely the 'Tile House' that was mentioned in Somerhill estate asset list. The other sites ref 1 and 6 are also on the Somerhill estate so could well have been the brick source. There is another site down in Southborough, site 4, on St Johns Road that was known as Southfield Brickyard in 1840, which is also a possible candidate for the brick source but it was not of Somerhill estate ownership.

The Tonbridge Industrial History book (Wilson 2005) lists 12 brickfields mainly covering the period 1838 to the 1940s. The map produced from the 'Brickmakers Index' sources lists 34 sites in the ancient parish of Tonbridge. Both lists commence with the Tithe map sites that could have been brickfields previously. The Tonbridge Library local collection has the original tithe award schedule with amendments in pencil that show James Alexander had changed to Frederick D Goldsmith. James died in 1848 and Frederick took over from his father in 1859 (Huntingford, 2009) so these amendments date from after that time. The Library do not have the tithe map for the south part of Tonbridge ancient parish. They did have the northern part and the Town. The KCC archive has digitised the maps and copies are readily available.

In checking the Census records there seems to be a lack of 'brickmakers' for the sites known to exist. Perhaps they are listed as labourers, the general term rather than the seasonal term 'Brickfield Labourers'. Brickmaking was carried out between April and October and only the key workers were employed out of season to excavate and prepare the clay. The Industrial book (Wilson 2005) notes 300 brickfield workers in the late 19th century at Quarry Hill Brick works. So far, the numbers found are not as many as that. The brickmakers worked in groups of six known as a berth or stool to make the bricks with additional workers to tend the kilns, act as carters and minders of the machines and steam engines. The 1923 sale particulars for this Brick and Tile Works; site ref 11; show it was highly mechanised although they still had six stool benches with moulds that could indicate a moulding

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work force of 36 brickmakers. This brickfield is later than Burgess Hill Farm buildings so not really relative to the source of those bricks.

The conclusion is that the bricks date from late 18th to early 19th century and they were made locally. The most likely source is Tile House Brickyard (site ref 10) although the Castle Hill brickyard (site ref 15) may also have provided bricks to the farm buildings as well.

Bibliography.

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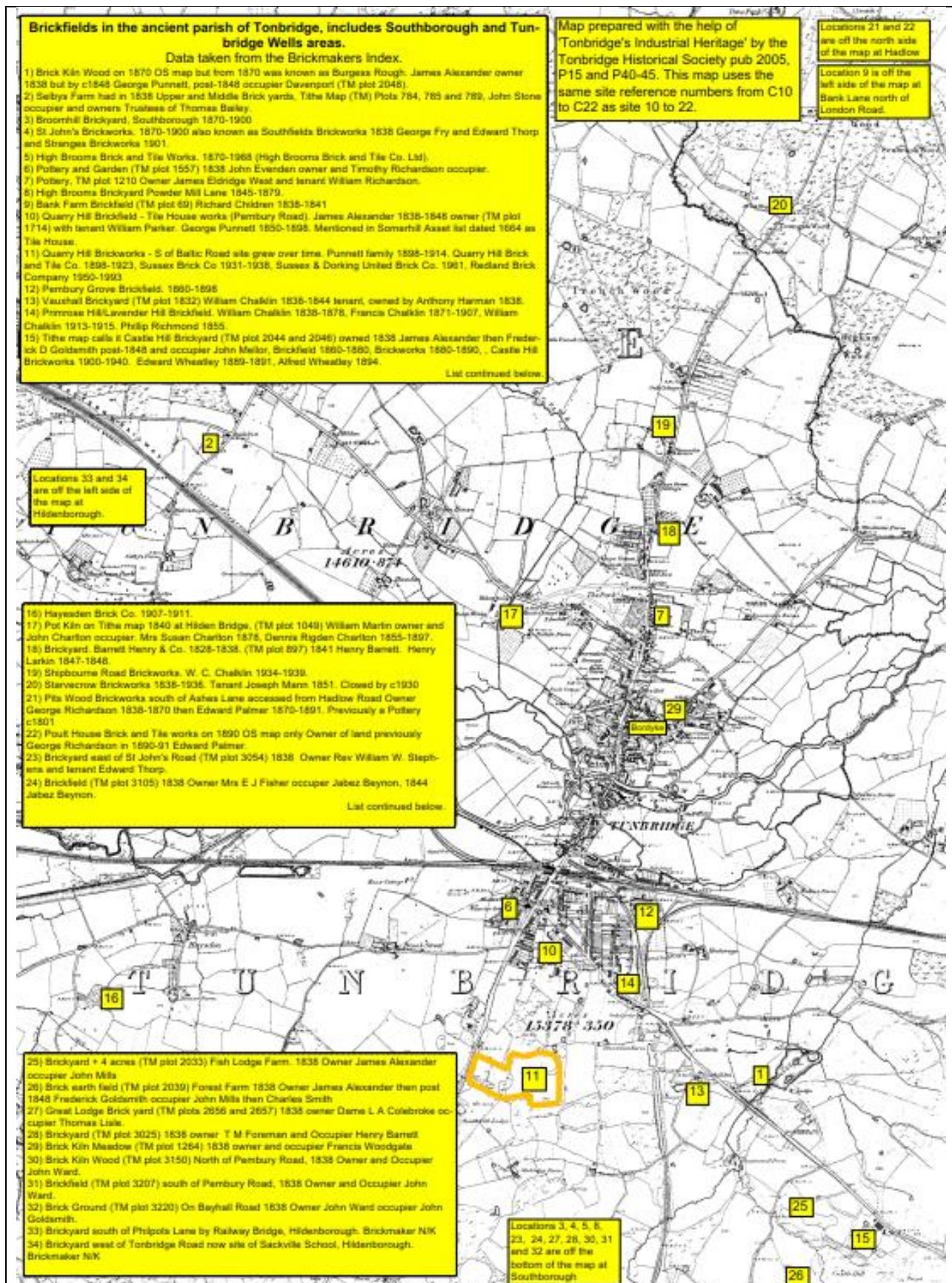


Fig 1 Brickfields in the ancient parish of Tonbridge.

Brick Table

Brick ref	Notes, Dimensions etc.
Barn brick, no frog. Type Brick B1.	65mm thick 225mm long 107mm wide Colour: Red Manufacture: Hand made Strike marks on bed-face
Brick with frog. Type Brick B3.	65mm thick 237mm long 110mm wide Frog section curved profile 50mm wide x 170mm long x 15mm deep Colour: Red Manufacture: Hand made Strike marks on bed-face Best guess date: Early 19 th century
Brick, no frog. Type Brick B4.	70mm thick 235mm long 115mm wide Colour: Red Manufacture: Machine made Best guess date: Mid-19 th century Remarks: Heavy/dense
Pigsty Brick with shallow frog. Type Brick B5.	65mm thick 225mm long 110mm wide Frog 10mm deep x 65mm wide x 160 long. Looks to be scrapped, uneven end dims 30 and 35 on scrapped end. Edge has tamp marks correction when taken off mould. Colour: Red Manufacture: Hand made with crease marks to sides. Possible cinder particle Best guess date: Early 19 th century.
Oast (phase C2) brick with frog. Type Brick B6.	70mm thick 235mm long 112mm wide Colour: Red Manufacture: Hand made Strike marks on bed-face Best guess date: Mid/late 19 th century