

*CALIFORNIA BRICK WORKS -
PEGG'S GREEN*



BY SAMUEL T STEWART - MARCH 2021

FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Intermittent burning down-draft type kiln

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- The Brickworks on Breedon Brand – Known Locally as Griffydam Brickworks
- A History of Coleorton Brickworks

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CALIFORNIA BRICKWORKS – PEGG'S GREEN

We first need to establish certain facts about the location and ownership of the land on which these brickworks were built.

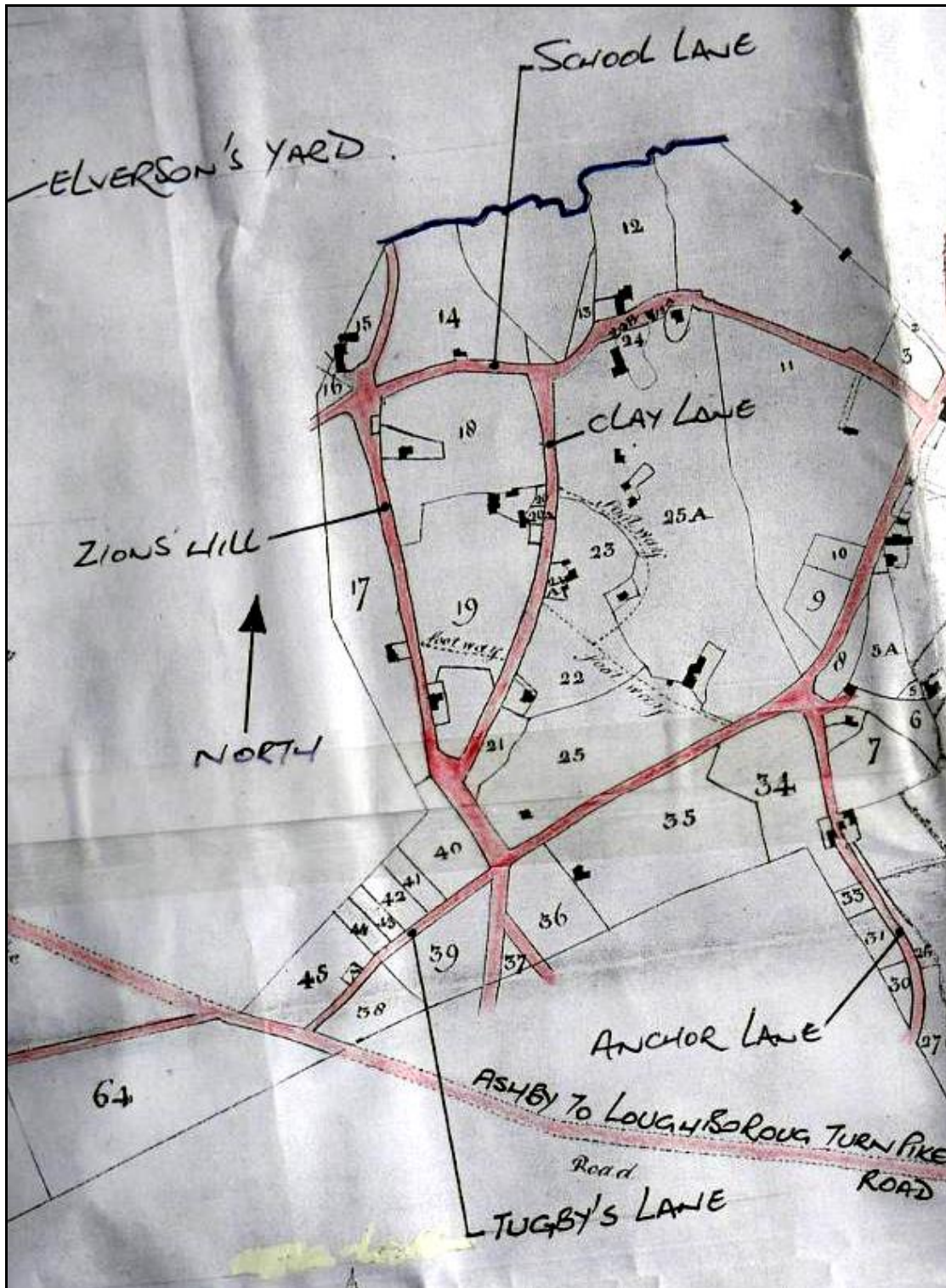
California Brickworks were built on plots 40 and 41 which are shown on the following extract from the 1807 plan surveyed and drawn by William Henry Smith and referred to in the awards made by the Commissioners of the Thringstone and Pegg's Green 1807 enclosure. The map has been annotated by the author with current road names.

Following the enclosure, Pegg's Green, including these plots, became part of the Township of Thringstone which in turn formed part of the ecclesiastical parish of Whitwick. These plots of land were not part of the Coleorton Beaumont estate and was specifically shown as such on the 1920 estate sale plans. The land on which the adjacent California (Coleorton No.1. Colliery) was built was however part of the Beaumont estate, and owned by Sir George Beaumont. This was leased from Sir George by William Worswick and Benjamin Walker when they developed the colliery.

In Kelly's 1899 trade directory of Leicestershire and Rutland, they refer to the brickworks as "Coleorton Pipe & Brick Company. California Brickworks" but the author has not found any other reference to "Coleorton Pipe and Brick Company" so the title "California Brickworks" is used in this publication.

By 1897, the owner of the brickworks was John H. Lager & Co, of Station Road, Swannington but whether they actually owned or leased the land on which they stood is not known.

Following a reorganization of local parish boundaries in 1936, Pegg's Green became part of the parish of Coleorton.



Extract from 1807 Thringstone and Pegg's Green enclosure map.

The author was surprised to learn what a short life the brickworks apparently had as they are not shown as being there on the 1881/2 surveyed, 1885 issued, 6 inch O/S map (plots 186 and 187) and are then described as being disused along with the California

colliery on the 1903 published O/S map. Therefore, assuming this evidence has been correctly interpreted, they would only have been in operation for a maximum of 15 years. The yard could certainly not have supplied bricks to the Coleorton Railway or St. Pancras Station, London which has been inferred elsewhere. The brickworks opened at least 10 years after the adjacent California colliery closed and from which they obviously got their name.

In Kelly's 1895 Trade Directory of Leicestershire & Rutland, they list Samuel Davy as being a brick manufacturer at the California Brickworks but infer wrongly that the address is Coleorton.

The following Coalville Times newspaper advertisement confirms that the brickworks were still in operation in 1897 under the ownership of John H. Lager & Co. of Swannington:-

Front page advert in Coalville Times Newspaper – Friday 30th July 1897

“Important Announcement”

Blue Bricks of First Class Quality can now be obtained at the California Brickworks, Pegg's Green, Near Coleorton, Ashby-de-la-Zouch. Also Red Pressed Facing and Floor Bricks etc. The most desirable bricks in the locality. For prices etc., apply to the Manager at the Works or the Owners : John H. Lager & Co., Station Road, Swannington, Near Leicester.

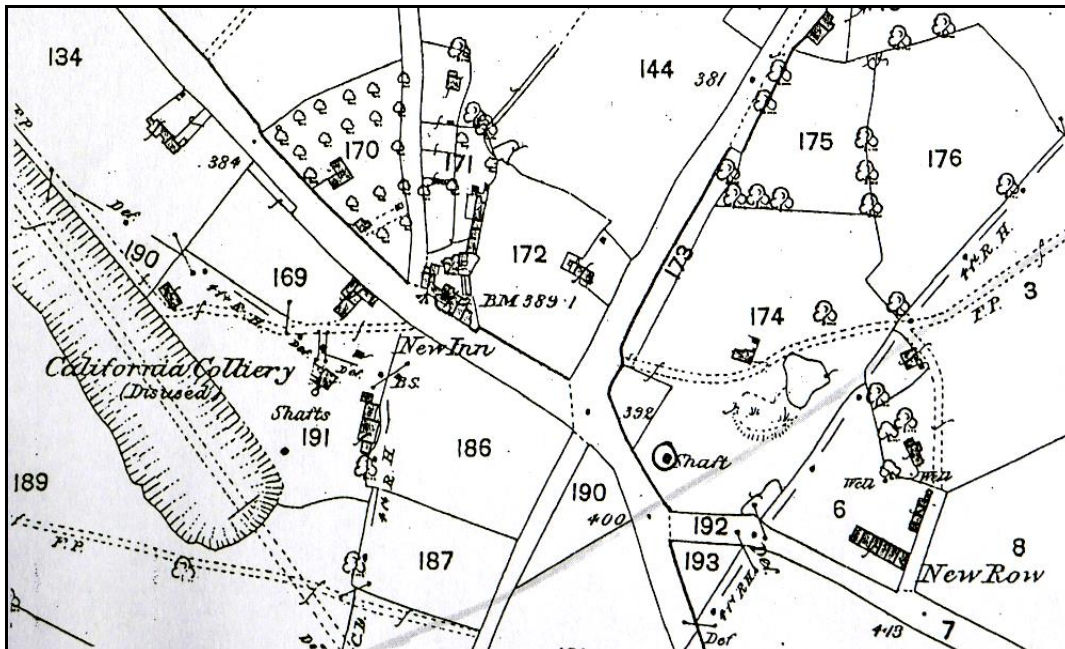
Looking at the layout of the site there must have been a significant investment made in its infrastructure and the brickworks probably never returned a profit on the investment at the end of its short life

The brickyard was significantly more modern than the brickworks at Coleorton and on Breedon Brand. The fact that it had three round type down draft intermittent burning kilns on the site suggests that the output was significant at some point unless they were all built at the beginning and the use of all three never materialised.

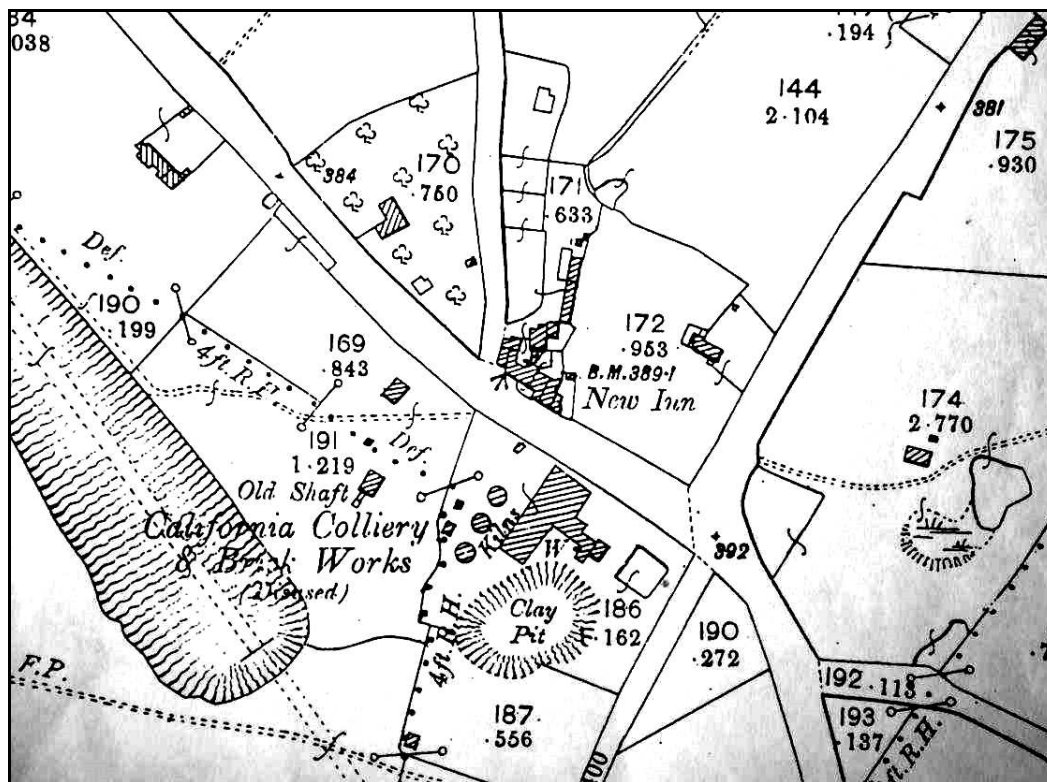
The layout suggests that heat from the kilns was also transferred by underground flues to heat the green brick drying sheds opposite the New Inn and out to the atmosphere by perhaps a common tall chimney of which there is some suggestion on the drawing.

Sam Leech in his memories recorded at the end of this article describes the clay hole shown on the 1903 map as being some 40 to 50 feet deep with a tramway exiting it and running alongside a derelict engine house.

Whether Clay Lane got its name from Clay being dug out of there for the brickworks cannot be proved, but it seems plausible.



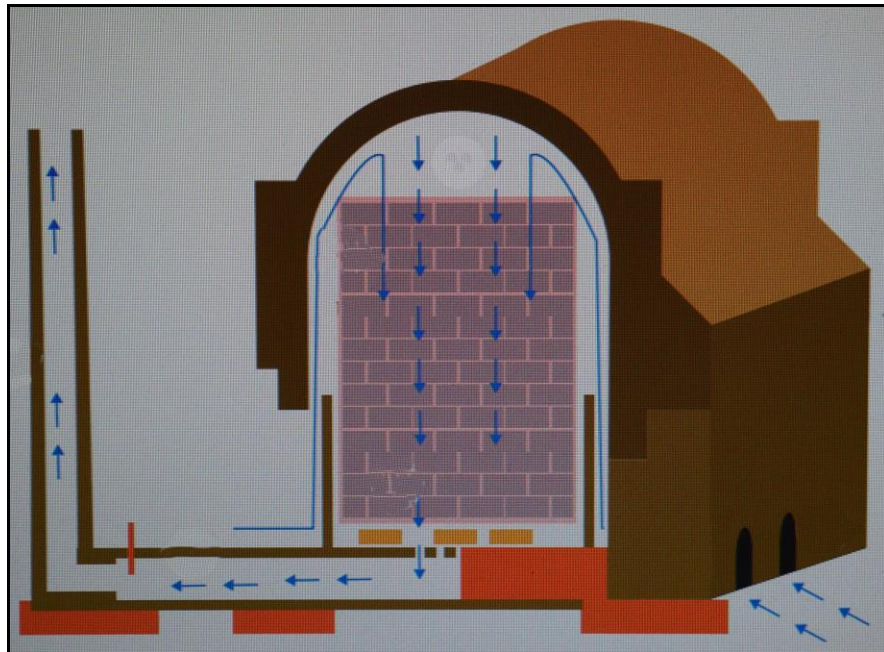
Extract from the 1881/2 surveyed 1885 published O/S map –
no brickworks are shown on plots 186 and 187



Extract from 1903 O/S Map showing brickworks on plot 186 and 187
as being disused



Intermittent burning down-draft type kiln



Principle of intermittent down-draft kiln

REMINISCENCES BY SAM LEECH

The Other California in Peggs Green, Coleorton

Reminiscences by Mr Sam Leech of Pentire, Nottingham Road, Peggs Green,

I was born in 1913 at the above address opposite to California Brickworks on which is built the house now known as California Cottage. My father and grandfather lived at Pentire and I had ten brothers and sisters.

My first memories are of the Zeppelin raids on Loughborough in 1918 and by 1919 I well remember the brick works which was probably leased from the Beaumont Estate about 1860. This had finished making bricks about the time I was born and had been sold to Mr Joseph Morley who was landlord of the New Inn at the time. A derelict steam engine still stood in the engine house and there was a rail track running alongside down into the clay hole which may have been 40 -50 feet deep. At the side, opposite the New Inn, I remember the brick drying shed. Next to the brick works there were the engine foundations and other remains of California Colliery (probably named after the 19th century gold rush) which closed in 1873 and the entrance to the tunnel of the Coleorton Railway, deep in a cutting behind the colliery. In the 1926 miners' strike, coal was worked in the cutting and tunnel until someone was killed and the cutting and tunnel entrance were filled. The tunnel was finally filled in the 1950's.

A start was made in filling the clay hole with ash and local rubble and in 1923 the engine house was made into a house, called California Cottage, for Joe Morley's son, Andrew. He lived there with his wife until he died in the 1930's when the house and the section of the land on which it stood passed to another son, Bill Morley. Other sons owned sections of the land. The part beyond the clay hole at the back of the site is still owned by Joe Morley's great great grandchildren. Bill built on a kitchen and bedroom and bought all the sections fronting onto Zion Hill in the 30's. Water came from a well near the present garage and night soil and other refuse was tipped into the clay hole. He continued to fill the clay hole with any material until it was filled roughly to its present position after the war. It was very rough and only nettles grew in it and a hole about ten feet deep was left at the back to dispose of any rubbish. Land round the clay hole was used to grow vegetables and fruit trees although there is coal and fireclay just below the surface and the land is not very fertile. Bonfires on the original surface had a habit of setting fire to the coal underneath which burnt for several days.

The brick drying shed was about 60 feet long by 20 feet wide and stood about where the present garage stands. It had a honeycomb brick floor (still under the lawn) and I was told that a furnace was built near the colliery site and the hot air came from this and circulated through the drying shed.

Bricks and floor tiles were made, many of which can be seen around the village. Bill Morley used the shed to keep machinery, carts and a brake with which he and his father had transported villagers since before the First World War. The shed either fell or was knocked down during the 1940's and the derelict base was visible until the 1970's. In the 1930's an open sided shed was erected near the front hedge where local consumptives slept all year round in the fresh air! Later there was a fish and chip shop on the site. The land around the sheds up to the front hedge was used to grow vegetables.

At the Nottingham Road side of the workshop was the reservoir for the steam engine. This was a brick tank about 8 feet deep. It was full of water and children used to swim in it and on one occasion a horse and cart fell into it. In the 1940's it was filled with rubble until it was a nettle filled depression.

NOTE

The brickworks were not leased from the Beaumont Estate and were not in operation before 1881.