

## Brick and tile making

Most villages have a history of local brickmaking and Clophill is no exception. Before the time of the internal combustion engine the only means of local transport was horse-drawn. Bricks are heavy and are required in large quantities to build a house. It was much more economical to make bricks locally with the best materials that could be found than transport them. Although Clophill nestles below the Greensand Ridge there is overlying clay to the north suitable for brickmaking.

The brickmaking-process started with the digging of the clay in winter which was then left to weather. In the summer the clay was mixed with sand, by hand at first and later in a pugmill. The bricks were moulded by hand in wooden moulds then left undercover to dry.

A brick clamp is one of the oldest methods of firing bricks. The unbaked bricks are stacked with fuel under or among them and then the fuel set on fire. The outside of the clamp may be insulated by packing earth or mud around it.

Later updraught kilns known as Scotch kilns were used. These were permanent structures with one or more firing chambers around the circumference.

The local clay in Clophill produced a soft red brick which can be seen in many buildings around the village. There is also a yellow brick that was made in the Arleseay area.

Sometimes the fire was too hot and the exposed ends of some of the bricks overheated and started to vitrify, turning a dark shade of blue. These were not wasted but used to produce patterns in the walls.

In 1979 Alan Cox published the results of his extensive research into brickmaking in Bedfordshire. He found that the earliest reference to a kiln in Clophill is in an inventory of the belongings of William Burden in 1619 that lists a "Claphill tyle kiln".

There are many references in the records to brickmakers living in Clophill right through to 1850 when Slaters Directory lists George Crouch as a Brick and Tile Maker.

Mary Phillips in the "Clophill Story" says that Susan Heath, widow of the brickmaker Tristrum Heath, lived at 2 Mill Lane in 1666.

Cox supposes that there was a tile and possible brick kiln north of the village, to the north of Kiln Farm. This may have been in the field behind 6 Old Kiln Lane. Many fragments of tile have been found in the corner of the field. There is a steep bank at the rear of the property showing that the ground level has been lowered due to the extraction of the overlying clay. On the 1719 Estate Map the field is called "Tile Kiln Close". Cox says it might have existed until 1740 or later.



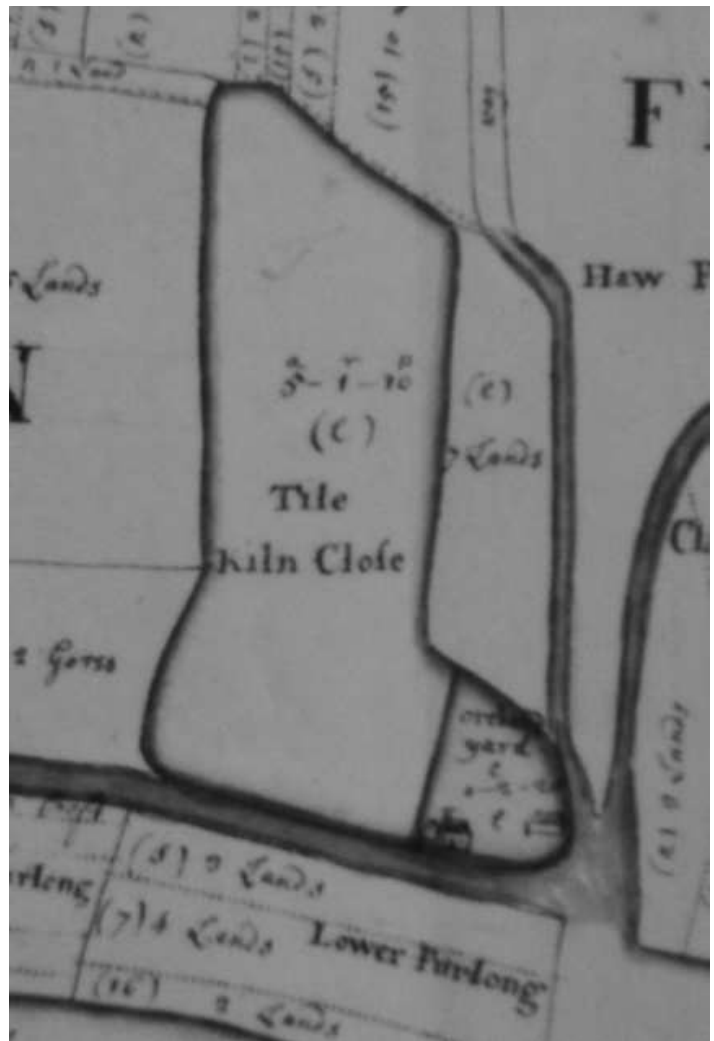
*One of two brick kilns at Great Lindford, MK*



*Brick pattern called Flemish Bond using burnt headers*

A second, later, kiln was where Kiln Farm now stands and may have existed from 1740 until 1850. The remains of a Scotch kiln has been found below outbuildings at Kiln Farm.

It is remarkable that Clophill, being close to the Greensand Ridge and its deposits of Sandstone has so few buildings made of the material. The old and new St Mary's churches and the Stone Jug public house are the only surviving examples, though there are many boundary walls made of the stone.



*1719 Wrest Park Estate Map showing Tile Kiln Close north of Old Kiln Lane.*