

Bursledon Brickworks

9th June 2011 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

Ann Slade gave an illustrated talk about Bursledon Brickworks and she answered the intriguing question as to why the brickworks are not sited in the village of its name but in Swanwick?

Mr Ashby had operated a brickworks at Chandlers Ford but the clay which was used for making the bricks was running out, so he was looking for a new location for his business. He found a suitable deposit of clay at Hacketts Marsh, Bursledon, and was about to move his works and machinery there, but then discovered an even better supply of clay at Swanwick. Therefore instead of setting up at Bursledon he moved his business to Swanwick while retaining the name Bursledon Brickworks.

The brickworks were built by the Ashby family at Swanwick in 1897, and operated for most of the last century. The bricks were used in many buildings in the local area, as well as sold further afield.

For the first 20 years of the brickworks' life the bricks were transported via sailing barges using the River Hamble. To transfer the bricks from the brickworks to the barges they were placed on open sided barrows, which were then hooked to an aerial ropeway. Bricks were also transported by rail from the brickworks' own siding and road using carts and later lorries were used.

Ann explained the brick making process that originally was a summer 'cottage industry' using the sun to dry the bricks. By Mr Ashby's time it was a mechanised all year round activity using drying sheds, initially fired by coal and later by oil. The fires had to be kept alight all the time so cottages were built in Coal Park Lane for the fire keepers. The business employed up to 300 people and the brick workers were paid on piece rate.

The brickworks were much larger than at present with two complexes, the southern one being the only complex remaining today. The brickworks had five prominent chimneys, known locally as the 'Five Sisters'.

Bursledon Brickworks closed in 1974 due to a combination of factors, including the owners, Redlands, wanted greater production but it was not cost effective to develop the site. It remained closed for well over a decade and the site gained listed building status.

In the early 1990s Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust purchased the site for a nominal sum and previous owners Redlands gave money towards the restoration of the site so it could be open to the public.

Today there are public open days, school visits and educational talks, as well as special events such as steam engine rallies. Although a local visitor attraction many people hearing Ann's talk who had not visited the brickworks made it their intention to go there soon.