

# Brickmakers

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The earliest buildings in the Riverstone district housed timber cutters and farmers. Most would have been made of timber slabs, with tree stumps or sandstone blocks as foundations. Bricks would have been limited to chimneys and wells.

Two buildings that were built of brick prior to 1860 and are still standing are Hebe Cottage at Bridge Street in Schofields and the Box Hill Inn on Windsor Road. Hebe Cottage is believed to date back to the 1860s and the Box Hill Inn to 1841. Where the bricks for these buildings came from is unknown.

When the Meatworks was constructed in 1878/9 the bricks were made on site by Thomas Davis and Joseph Elliott. The clay was dug in the paddocks, formed into bricks and fired in a kiln located in the paddocks at the Vineyard end of the Works. So little was known of the area at the time that they made 15 000 bricks and placed them too close to Eastern Creek and they were destroyed in a flood.

The opening of the Meatworks led to a building boom in the town in the early 1880s, with the construction of houses, shops, churches and a school. The boom meant a need for brickmakers in the town, as with transport limited to horse and dray it was not feasible to move large numbers of bricks from other areas. Fortunately the district was ideal for brickmakers as it had large clay deposits and a handy supply of water in Eastern Creek.

Early records of the occupations of the townspeople are scarce, making it difficult to determine the earliest brickmakers in the district. The 1886/7 *New South Wales Post Office Directory*, listed Charles Northover and the 1889/90 Directory listed David Jenkins. The Electoral Rolls for 1886/7 & 1887/8 show three bricklayers, Charles Northover, George Norman and David Jinkins (sic).

Demolition of a number of chimneys and wells around the district over the years has revealed bricks stamped on the top with the following letters: GN which is believed to be George Norman, CI which is possibly Charles Northover and K Co. which has not been identified. <sup>1</sup> Examples of each of these bricks can be seen at the Museum in Riverstone.

The *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* of 11 June 1892 reported that George Norman was to close his brickyard and go to Western Australia and that another brickyard would be opened on Mr B. Woods land near the Never Fail Hotel.

A month later the *Gazette* of 16 July 1892 stated that G. Holden was to open a brickyard near Eastern Creek. George Holden three years later won a prize at the Hawkesbury Show for his bricks.<sup>2</sup>

There was a brick pit at Schofields Siding. The *Gazette* of 24 April 1897 in reporting on how drought was affecting the area, stated that *the brick hole at Schofields Siding has gone dry*.

The *Gazette* of 11 February 1899 stated that *a brick cottage near the Oddfellows Hotel is being improved and that bricks had been delivered by Mr G. Holden*. In July that year the paper noted that *Mr George Holden had a fine load of bricks ready for the kiln*.<sup>3</sup>

Brickmaking was mentioned in the *Gazette* in 1899 on a number of other occasions. On 18 March 1899 the *Gazette* reported that *a brick kiln was shortly to be started below the Royal Hotel* and that *it is intended to turn out a great quantity of bricks at this yard*. On 15 April 1899 there was a report that the Riverstone Brick Company had started operations. Nothing else is known of this company.

By early 1900 the only bricklayer listed in the Electoral Rolls for the Riverstone District was George Holden of Marsden Park. In the 1920s he was listed as living in Clifton Road at Marsden Park and according to the Birth Death and Marriages records he died in 1931.

In the book *And So We Graft from Six to Six, The Brickmakers of New South Wales*, Warwick Gemmell states that George Holden was handmaking bricks up until at least 1914. Throughout Sydney many other small brickmakers had been forced out of business by larger operations using brickmaking machines. However the lack of mechanised transport and the distance of Riverstone from these bigger operations meant that George was able to continue to operate well into this century.

The introduction of mechanised transport finally led to the larger companies supplying bricks to the District. One of the largest brickmakers in the Metropolitan area was Goodlet and Smith. When the Riverstone Meatworks was demolished in 1994/5 many of the bricks were found to have the GS stamp on the top.

The extensive clay deposits around Marsden Park resulted in the development of a number of huge quarries. One of the old brick pits is located in Burfitt Road at Schofields though it is no longer used as a quarry. (The pit is surrounded by a high fence and is not visible from the road.)

There is still one large brickmaking company in operation in the district and that is PGH Bricks in Townson Road at Schofields. The site was originally operated by Autobrick and was officially opened in 1962 by Premier Renshaw.<sup>4</sup> PGH took over from Autobrick in 1978 and still quarries clay on site for the production of bricks and pavers.

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Sources:

<sup>1</sup> *And So We Graft from Six to Six, The Brickmakers of New South Wales*, Warwick Gemmell, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> *Windsor & Richmond Gazette*, 25 May 1895.

<sup>3</sup> *Windsor & Richmond Gazette*, 1 July 1899.

<sup>4</sup> Phone conversation with Sylvia a former Autobrick employee.