

Brickworks in the Clyne Valley

Brick making was an important activity in the Swansea area with several brickworks in Clyne Valley, Dunvant, Killay and Blackpill during much of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

There were brickworks operating in Clyne Valley for nearly a century. As time progressed the works moved, but always in the same area as there was sufficient clay, water and access to transport.

The remains of the last brickworks are located north of the spine path, east of the former Killay station.

Timeline

Kelly's Directory 1875 – Essery & Starkey

Kelly's Directory 1884 – (Frederick) Pinn, Killay, Swansea

Kelly's Directory 1891 – (James) Howell & Co, Killay, Swansea

Kelly's Directory 1895 – (James) Howell & Co, Killay, Swansea

Kelly's Directory 1923 – (John Cleland) Napier, Killay, Swansea

Kelly's Directory 1926 – (John Cleland) Napier, Killay, Swansea

Clyne Valley Brick & Tile Co Ltd, Killay, Swansea

Evans-Bevan (Evans & Bevan Ltd, Cadoxton House, Neath) Clyne Valley Brick Works

Bricks marked with Clyne, Killay, Evans Bevan Clyne Works, E&B Killay and PR (**Philip Richard**, owner of **Rhydydefaid** and **Commercial** collieries, and of Dunvant brickworks) are still to be found.

Local memories vary about the closure date of the brickworks. Some indicate that the site was cleared between 1955 and 1957.¹ However, a planning application was granted to Evans & Bevan in 1962 to extend the clay pit at Clyne Valley Brickworks and other witnesses suggest that the works closed c1965 and that the site was cleared c1968.

Map records

There is no record on the 1843-5 Tithe Maps of fields for clay or bricks.²

The 25 inch Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1877-8 marks 'Brickkilns' and another larger building on a Brick Field (NGR SS 6012 9216).³ This area is now wooded and the ground is very rough. It lies alongside a track leading into the valley from Clyne Cottages (Clyne Valley Road). **Rhydydefaid** and **Clyne Wood** collieries are shown nearby on this OS map with coal pits, smithy, engine house and coke ovens marked.

On the corresponding map of 1899 the field remains 'Brick Field' and the kilns are still there but rebuilt. It sits to the north-west of the junction between the railway from the **Commercial** Colliery to the LNWR main line.

On the 1919 OS map the Clyne Valley Brick & Tile Works have moved east of the original Brick field and sit close to where Rhydydefaid Colliery was on the 1879 map.

On the 1958 OS map the brick works are in the same place but a railway track runs underneath the mainline to a marked clay pit and a disused clay pit is also shown (NGR SS

6025 9218). Neither of these pits appears on earlier maps though the bridge was there. The line of the [railway to Commercial Colliery](#) is still visible but the track had gone. The clay pit is on the 1964 OS map but marked as disused on the 1993 map.

The Cambrian newspaper carries advertisements for Killay brickworks in October 1875 when Essery & Starkey advertised bricks, roofing and flooring tiles etc from their works at Killay and Gower Road.⁴ In 1876, when the company was liquidated the sale advertised a 21-year lease from 30 December 1874.⁵

The works are listed in Kelly's Directory for 1891 and in the 1930-31 and 1938, Swansea Chamber of Trade Directories which named Killay brickworks and Clyne Valley brickworks.

Clay pits and railways

Over the years of operation, the railway system in the works grew and withered. Local clay pits were dug and when worked out clay was bought in from further afield by road (via Clyne Valley Road). Studying the Ordnance Survey maps will give a fair indication of the railway system.

A narrow-gauge tramway ran from the works south-west under the main line to clay pits. The clay pit is not accessible from the lower edge but can be looked down into by crossing the bridge higher up the railway (NGR SS 6009 9211) and walking up into the wood.

Many of the bricks made were used to build houses in Derwen Fawr, Sketty, Tycoch and Killay.

Spoil heaps remain close to the track on the north-east side of the track and faulty bricks were crushed and sold as hardcore for paths and tennis courts or used whole for cesspits or farm buildings. The bricks remaining at time of clearance appear in paths in Clyne Valley.

The clay pits lay on the far side of the railway from the works and the clay was brought in by rail under the main line, a route that is still visible along with spoil heaps. Waste bricks imprinted with the various names of the works can be found too.

In 1951 the Clyne Valley Brick and Tile Company was in voluntary liquidation. David Evans-Bevan (the owner) reported to the Central Land Board that 3 million bricks had been produced in the year to June 1949.

The works closed during the 1950s. There was a brief reopening at the end of the decade, when production was about 75,000 bricks weekly. This was the last industrial activity in the Clyne Valley. By this time there were no local coal sources left to power the kilns and this may have contributed to the brick works final closure.

Evans-Bevan had been a substantial colliery owner, but he kept only a few smaller coal mines when coal was nationalized in 1946, and the brickworks in Killay got its coal supply from one of these remaining smaller mines, possibly in the neighbourhood of Skewen. It smelt of sulphur and consequently could not normally be used as house coal.

The evidence of oral history

We talked with Peter Edwards (PE) about his memories of the Killay brickworks. He remembers Phil Wilson (PW) who was the last worker there (PW's wife did the church flowers) (PE knew PW's daughter – she was only a couple of years older than him and died tragically young). After production stopped in 1966, the site was manned by PW and Dan Morris, covering the two day shifts. Previously there had been three shifts including a night shift.

There had been about 30 people there in the 1950s and 1960s, some from Killay, also from Upper Killay, Dunvant and 'town'. The clay pit was still being worked, accessed by the track under the railway (now bike path). Originally there was a tram, which transported the clay 'up and around to be dropped into a hopper'. In the late 1950s and early 1960s a truck was used to replace the tram. It was bought new and never registered for road use. The track

was ripped up but the little engine was kept on a siding to the north of the works. PE showed us the siding clearly marked on the 1958 OS map.

In the early 1960s PE remembers two inhabited stone-built cottages in the woods which were located on the farm track linking Sketty Park Estate and the Clyne Cottages. This was close to the former site of the junction of an [old branch from the main railway](#) which served the Commercial drift mine (behind the *Commercial Inn* in Killay). The southern end of this railway line also flanked the brickworks, the latter furnace complex having been constructed partially on the remains of its embankment.

BP told PE of the walking stick at the *Railway Inn* presented to Lewis Gill when the Commercial colliery closed. PE told us that Lewis Gill was one of the last burners at the brickworks along with Dan Morris and Phil Wilson. Lewis Gill lived in what was the old Killay police house and when he retired, the vacancy was taken up by Cliff Arthur.

PE said there was a 'pill box' where the explosives for the brickworks were kept – this was on the east side of the tram track at the brickworks where the steps now go down to the river path and canal.

Dan Morris lived at 482 Gower Road. There was no electricity in the house – it was probably lit by gas as late as the 1960s. Cliff Arthur lived at 3 Dunvant Road and he, Dan Morris and Phil Wilson were the last three burners at the brickworks. Cliff Arthur as a young man once worked at the Dunvant foundry. Dan Morris was 'a big man', a recluse – his brother died just before the war and his neighbour, Mrs Bowen, used to cook for him and put the food through 'under the hedge'.

PE and his friends used to go to 'the cabin' where the brickworks men heated up their tins of soup for lunch – they just threw the cans out of the window: there was 'a huge pile' of empty cans. There was an open fire in a hearth which the men would let go out after lunch but PE would get it going again. There was only a very dim light bulb in the cabin. PE described the night shift as 'creepy'. He showed us where the cabin was on the 1958 OS map. He also pointed out the site of the office building.

George Sturgess also often visited the burners and would spend hours sitting and chatting in the cabin. Originally from Northampton, George was a retired post office worker who lived in the semi-detached house next door down from the old Killay church school house on Gower Road. The school building was demolished in the 1980s and sited on the bend between PE's house and the *Railway Inn*.

The local coal merchant was Aubrey Williams who also branched out as a haulier. His home was opposite Lewis Gill's. One of his trucks was always used for collecting and delivering all the bricks. It was usually an old Commer truck and accessed the brick works on what is now the track in past the Clyne Valley Cottages. There was a conveyor belt at the works which dropped the bricks into the truck for delivery. Lewis Gill's son Des often used to drive the trucks for Aubrey Williams and take them to Cardiff, Maesteg and all across south Wales. PE's first ever visit to Maesteg was with Des Gill and a load of bricks. Once the London Brick Company started up the local works couldn't compete.

PE said that production stopped 1966. The site was manned by the burners as caretakers for a year or 18 months after closure. Phil Wilson was the very last man off the site. He had spent virtually the whole of his working life at the Killay brickworks.

After closure, PE and two friends used to go there to play but were not really allowed on: the police were aware and he remembers being warned off by them.

References

Interview with Brian Jones (Jones Bach), the *Railway Inn*, Killay, 17 August 2011, by Barbara Parry.

Peter Edwards (PE) and his sister Catryn met with Jane Sherrard-Smith (JSS) and Barbara Parry (BP), 5 September 2011.

Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Historic Environment Record, [Primary Reference Number : 02109w](#)

1. West Glamorgan Archive Service (WGAS), D/D Jas/4234
2. WGAS, P/115/3/1,2 (Oystermouth); P/123/18/1,2 (Swansea St Mary)
3. Ordnance Survey. Glamorganshire, sheet xxiii.ii (1881)
4. *The Cambrian*, 29 October 1875, p.5
5. *The Cambrian*, 2 June 1876, p.1