

THE BRICKYARDS

Barton-on-Humber had several Brickyards on the Humber bank when I was a youth and having got a bit peeved with working at, "The Elswick Hopper Cycle Co" I learned on enquiry that I could double my weekly wage if I was not afraid of doing heavier work.

I was however surprised at the antiquated methods still used in the brickyards. The tile making machines were a hundred years out of date and I pondered these machines for a long time, and it was many years later I got some answers due to an inquisitive mind.

To begin with the machines used to make tiles had not altered since they had been invented except for the receiver part but even that was to my mind now out of date.

So the whole lot should be scrapped and a completely new machine should be made.

One reason the old safe way to make tiles was that electricity and water don't mix very well, and someone could be electrocuted. Another was that since this old way worked so well why spend lots of money to alter it.

One day while talking to Norman, a local Garage owner, we got to discussing the brick yards and I suggested there were many ways in which to cut down on the labour yet get more work done.

"No one will listen, because while everything is running smoothly they just relax and let it keep going!" replied Norman.

Then Norman asked, "What would you do different Tom?"

I told him I was surprised he should be interested in my views on the matter but Norman said, "Out of the mouths of babes Tom! Some people are good at sums, others are excel with music, but there are a few quiet types like yourself who are dark horses and thinkers."

My view was that changing a wire or a guide for a cutting wire to cut the clay to shape was like trying to empty the River Humber with a bucket when the tide was full.

I suggested that Norman should look at the modern tipper trucks that now had two short but very powerful oil rams that could push up the back tray of the truck containing tons of hot tarred stones for the road works, and followed up with the suggestion that only one of those oil rams driven by an electric motor on a tile machine could replace the old huge heavy cast iron and heavy cog wheels and also a new automatic tile receiver where the clay on being forced out of the brass die where the, "Knobber latch" could be controlled to the open or shut position thus making a rough latch for the tile to cling onto the roofing lat of a house roof.

I also thought that the machine would be half the weight of the old machines and much easier to move since the tile maker on these old machines had to get help when he had to move the machine.

Also there would be no need for a lad to turn the handle of the tile machine to force the clay out.

And with an added clutch the electric motor would also drive the rear wheels of the tile machine since the front wheels would be steered automatically.

When the tile machine was empty it would be refilled by two doles of clay from a serving barrow that would be brought by the attendant from the dole house and the dole would not be contaminated by the warm summer drying breezes.

I could see by the look now on Norman's face that I had hit the bulls eye as the idea began to sink in.

Some months later I learned that a machine was being built by, "The Barton Engineering" at the Goods Brickyard on the Humber Bank.

But no strangers were allowed near it and it was kept from sight by being covered by a tarpaulin.

I was dismayed but elated at the same time because from what I heard the new machine had no cogwheels to transfer the power to the clay ram but was oil piston driven and the machine only needed one man to operate it.

To me that indicated the Boss was getting the same amount of tiles but was paying one man instead of two to get them which is fair enough if the tile maker is happy.

But then if one made a new machine the old receiver needed updating and the drying sheds stayed the same.

Then someone had the bright idea of making tiles with sand and cement.

The trouble with sand and cement tiles is that the maker cannot make a sand and cement tile to compete with a burnt clay tile.

One can prove this point by walking on a sand and cement tile and it will crack or break.

A burnt clay tile will not crack or break under the same pressure.

Some argue that the cost of the cement tile is cheaper because they do not need to pay for the coal to fire the kilns.

But there are different factors to be checked out.

One is price of cement and its transport, against the price of coal and the price of transporting the coal.

In days gone by Tiles were made by digging into a clay bank and piling the clay to make a huge Pie.

This Pie was left for a year to cure and when a tile was made the clay was squeezed out of a tile shaped die made of brass and the clay was under enormous pressure so there were no air pockets and the clay was strong and dense.

When the clay was removed from the clay pit it was tipped into what looked like a huge sausage machine that forced out the clay into doles of clay about fifteen inches square and these would be sanded and stored in the Dole House ready for the following year.

The dole house clay now as well as the original pie clay would be wrapped with sacking against the Winter frost that could ruin the clay if it got frozen.

When moved by a special shaped wooden fork who's tines were flat wooden and angled to the shape of the tile and covered with wet felt kept wet by being in a bucket of water at the side of the receiver of the tile machine, an experienced tile maker could take the tile off the receiver where it had been trimmed to shape by using a hand held wire and a slider knob cutter that also had a nail that made a hole through the knob of the tile so it could be secured to the lat on the roof of a house. The new tile would then be settled onto a lightly sanded wooden shelf in the drying shed to be dried by the summer breezes.

Since pan tiles have to be the same shape so they can fit snug together, any miss-shaped tiles that were spotted during the drying time would be removed and destroyed to save space in the firing kiln.

Clay for making bricks can be used from the clay that has been in a pie maturing for a year.

But the clay for tiles is pushed through a mesh and now cleaned is stored for a year in the tile dole house.

However! to end this little story I have finally resolved how to make a modern machine that will make a dense fired clay tile in any colour that will out class all other tiles made so far and one man can move it and operate it, and since the machine delivers the tile to the drying shelf every other tile now produced is the spitting image of the one before it and all the operator has to do is program it in the morning and switch it off at night.

I will not elaborate further except to say belatedly that sometimes it is folly to air ones views and ideas in public to fill someone else's pocket.

Tom Barker.