

Recollections of Charles Davison's Brickworks, Buckley by Ron Millward.

Recorded by Paul Davies

Born on Christmas Day 1918 Ron Millward was educated at St Matthews School, Church Road Buckley and in 1932 at the age of fourteen a request arrived at his school from Davison's Brickyards seeking boys with potential for employment as Junior Clerk.

Charles Davison's Brickyards in Buckley had been established nearly a century earlier in the 1840's but the owners of the brickyards at that time were Frank and Hal Hurlbutt. Their business was conducted at two premises i.e. Ewloe Barn (Davison's bottom works) and Old Ewloe, (Davison's top works). An earlier brickyard owned by Charles Davison at the Globe adjacent to Old Ewloe had closed down in 1912. The two yards although owned by the Hurlbutts continued to trade as Davison's and the main offices were at Ewloe Barn Works.

The criteria stipulated for applicants were;-

- That the boy should be clean and respectable and come from a good respectable home
- That the boy should be able to add correctly a column of pounds, shillings and pence twenty high.
- That he should be able to write to dictation a legible hand with not more than 2% of mis-spelled words.

Both Ron and his school friend Noel Catherall sat and passed the tests and attended a subsequent interview which resulted in both boys being offered a trial on half wages at seven shillings a week. At the end of the month the Hurlbutt brothers could not decide between the two boys and so offered both of them jobs as trainee Junior Clerks doubling their wages to fourteen shillings a week with effect from the 8th January 1933.

They worked from the offices at Ewloe Barn i.e. Davison's bottom works and Ron walked down the Buckley Railway Lines from Drury to work and back for some time until he took to cycling. In later years he was picked up in the 'Works Van'

A Mr Harrison was General Works Manager, John Thomas was Office Manager living on site, Gilbert Tarran from Buckley was Senior Clerk, Wilf Seaman from Mynydd Isa was a General Clerk / Despatch Clerk and John Mitchell was a Clerk who was also trained in shorthand typing.

The duties of the two boys included filing letters and correspondence, running errands and general office duties but the first job of the morning was to stand on an ash bank looking out for the arrival of their bosses. It was Ron's job to look out for Frank Hurlbutt coming along the road and Noel's to look out for Hal Hurlbutt and when they saw them coming they had to run to where they parked their cars ready to open the car door for them and if necessary help to put their working boots on.

The Hurlbutts were strict disciplinarians and had been known to sack workers for doing the slightest thing wrong which included smoking in the wrong area of the works. Imagine Ron's concern one day when after he had been using an Aladdin's lamp in a room where there was no electricity, to help him trace a block design and whilst leaving he tripped on the stairs, dropping and breaking the lamp.

Mr John Thomas the Office Manager told him he would have to own up to it and so the following morning Ron looked out for Mr Frank Hurlbutt arriving in his car. Ron met him to open the car door and put his rubber boots on as usual and as they started to walk the seventy yards or so to the office Ron said 'Sir, I'm afraid I've got something to tell you'. 'What is it my boy?' came the answer so Ron explained what had happened. Far from Ron being sacked Mr Hurlbutt put his hand in his pocket and gave Ron a half crown for being honest! This taught him that honesty was the best policy.

Clay for the brick and block making process was obtained from a quarry on site and was dug out by hand by workmen using a pick and shovel. There was a small magazine on site for storage of explosives that were used by a designated shot firer when necessary prior to which a siren would sound as a warning.

There were various types of clay in the quarry in strata, for example ridge clay, blue clay and yellow rock each having its own qualities. They were mixed together in proportions according to which type of brick was being made

The clay was shovelled into small tubs and was hauled up to the works from the quarry by a steam powered engine which was later replaced by an electric engine. The clay was taken to the 'stage' where it was put through a mechanical mixer and grinder and sent down hoppers to big mixing pan that was called the 'treader'. This name dated back to the early pre-mechanisation days when young boys were used to tread clay ready for brick making.

From the 'treader' it was sent to the pug mill where it was pugged to plasticise it ready to be made into bricks.

From the pug mill clay was barrowed to the area on the factory floor where each moulder was working, wooden moulds for the purpose being made on site in the joiners shop. Mould making was a specialist skill and moulds had to be made oversize to allow for shrinkage in the kiln, this varied according to the type of clay being used.

Hundreds of various moulds were stored in a cellar at the works, none standard sizes having been designed to customer's requirements. Specialist mould makers and moulders made the big blocks supplied by Davison's and all their bricks and blocks were made by hand until later mechanisation introduced impact pressers that used semi dry clay which speeded the process up considerably.

Mould making in the Joiner's shop was a specialist trade that Ron's son Stuart was to pursue as an extremely successful career resulting in him being awarded the British Empire Medal. The certificate text that accompanied Stuart's medal is reproduced below.

Buckingham Palace

I congratulate you on the award of the British Empire Medal which you have so well earned.

I send you my best wishes for your future happiness.

Elizabeth R.

Stuart Millward, Esq., BEM

Pattern Maker & Plaque Carver, Butterley Brick Ltd

Mr Millward has served Butterley Brick Ltd for 29 years as a pattern maker and plaque carver at the prestigious Lane End Works which produces a unique Jacobean range of facing bricks. His responsibilities involve the design and production of moulds and the manufacture of special bricks and on numerous occasions his advice has been sought by architects and contractors for guidance on

appropriate types of special bricks to be produced. Requests have been made for suitable plaques to adorn or to be built into many prestigious projects which serve as a lasting tribute to his skills. Special carved plaques have been designed by him and produced to mark HM Queen's Silver Jubilee year and the Investiture of The Prince of Wales and individual plaques have been presented to the current Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon John Major MP and to The Lord Hanson. The uniqueness of the product from this works has resulted in his sculptures being used in projects as far afield as Japan, South Africa and Qatar, with further plaques for projects in France, Belgium and the Republic of Ireland. The skills involved have brought wide acclaim throughout the construction industry.'

Stuart retired in 2003 when the Lane End Works closed down

Once a brick was moulded it was left to dry for a couple of days before being carted to the kilns for firing. The firing cycle from the time a kiln was 'set' was eight days to when it was drawn.

There were three kilns in the bottom end of the works known as 1, 2 and 4. There was never a No. 3 kiln whilst Ron worked there; Kilns no 5, 6, 7 and 8 were in the bottom end of the works, number 8 being constructed during the time of Ron's employment there.

Coal for firing the kilns was brought to the works from the Point of Ayr Colliery via the Buckley railway, then, from the railway trucks it was shovelled onto a horse drawn cart and taken to the kilns. Horses deployed there belonged to Peter Thompson of Aberllanerch Farm but a gentleman called Lockett Bradshaw was in charge of the horses who knew their way around the works without prompting. All this was to change in the late 1950's when the kilns changed from coal to being oil fired.

Tramps were a regular visitor to most Buckley Brickworks, Fred Brock being one who used to sleep in the warmth of the drying room. A few others also slept there but they were all cooperative and moved when asked to do so by the workers.



Chequered Tiles, 9" x 9" x 1"

VIEW OF FOOTPATH IN SOUTHPORT
PAVED WITH

C. DAVISON & CO.'S BLUE VITRIFIED "ADAMANTINE" PAVING TILES.

As supplied to the Southport Corporation for the last Thirty years; where they are now better liked after this long experience than when first adopted.

THEY HAVE A BRIGHT CLEAN APPEARANCE, AND ARE VERY DURABLE.

Products made at Charles Davison's works included fire bricks, paving bricks, acid resistant bricks and they specialised in making rotary kiln lining blocks for use in cement production kilns. Pipes had been produced some years earlier but this had ceased by the 1930's when Ron commenced work.

The paths of Southport were paved with Davison's bricks and many streets still survive there today paved by Buckley bricks, local residents having objected to Council proposals to replace them with concrete slabs.

Narrow gauge shipping boxes were loaded with bricks to be exported via Connah's Quay docks and conveyed on the back of shipping waggons to the dockside for transfer into the holds of sailing ships.

These were not allowed on the main line beyond Buckley Junction because they only had a brake on one side! A system to tell the railway engine driver

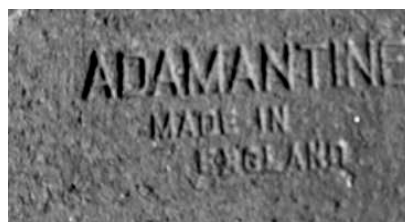
to call at the works involved the use of a small wooden signal at the end of the siding where it joined the main branch line.

Bricks for export to far distant locations were mainly transported by road to Liverpool docks.

The former Potter, Ollive Hayes provided transport for odd jobs between brickyards using a lorry he purchased for transporting pottery from Old Ewloe Pottery. Kelly Bros. of Liverpool Road provided main haulage facilities.

Brand names of products made at Davison's Brickyard during Ron's career there included the following;

Adamantine this was a strong engineering brick used for firebricks for lining furnaces and for hard wearing paving bricks, stable blocks etc..



Liverpool shipping companies using these bricks in boiler rooms on board vessels were supplied through a Builder's Merchant which Ron recalls was A.B. Dalzell 10 – 12, Beckworth Street, Liverpool. An agent for Irish Shipping Companies was Brooks Thomas & Co Ltd. Sackville Place, Dublin.

A regular specialist order for block tiles weighing over a hundredweight each was for West Norfolk Farmers Manure and Chemical Corporation Co Ltd., Kings Lynn, Norfolk and firing them was a job that required specialist attention by the kiln men.

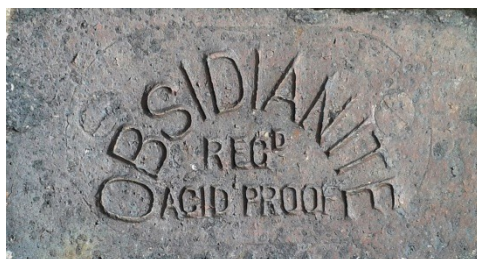
Alumantine this was a specialist brick or block designed to sustain very high temperatures and was used mainly in cement kilns. Alumina fines imported from America was mixed in with clay in the ratios of 40%, 45%, 60%, 70% and 73%, the percentage figure dictating the volume of alumina finings mixed in with the clay according to the temperatures the bricks or blocks would be exposed to in furnaces and kilns.

Regular customers included Tunnel Cement not just locally in Padeswood but also Ribblesdale and Purfleet. Other cement work customers were Portland Cement at Rugby and Rochester, Chinner Cement and Lime Works, Associated Portland Cement Works at Northfleet and Swanscombe, Kent, Penarth, Glamorgan, Cement Ltd. Ireland, F.L Smidth Co Ltd. Horseferry Road, London and Kelton Portland Cement in Lincolnshire.

Alumantine was a main product for Davison's and they specialised in producing various sized blocks for rotary cement kilns. Circles were 10 – 12 inches x 7 inches depth and 4 inches thickness, side arch



bricks were 12 inches x seven or eight inches or nine x seven inches x 3.66 or 3.44 inches. Large stocks of these side arch bricks were kept for the Associated Portland Cement Company in various qualities. Countries to which Alumantine blocks were exported included Ireland, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, Australia, New Zealand and the Sudan. Ron recalls a consignment for the Sudan being held back because of an uprising. This uprising led to the order being cancelled and the blocks being used for other orders.

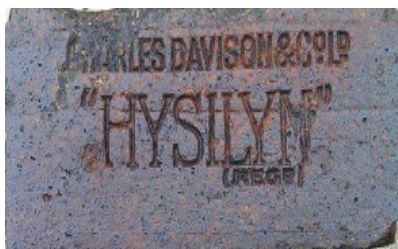


Obsidianite bricks got their name from Obsidian i.e. molten lava set solid from a volcano. These bricks were acid proof and would withstand exposure to all acids except fluorine. Ron recalls orders for obsidianite bricks by cement manufacturers to line the top of chimneys where acid formed and eroded traditional bricks.

Grid slabs, grille slabs and patent packers were manufactured from Obsidianite for use in the process of cleaning acid.

Bricks of all the various types for export were packed in wooden bacon boxes probably previously used as containers to import Bacon into the country. These boxes were capable of carrying 6 to 7 hundredweights of bricks. In later years bricks and blocks were transported on wooden pallets and when strapped and packaged 1 to 1 ½ tons could be carried on one pallet.

Hysilyn was used in cooler zones and was a step down in heat resistance from Alumantine i.e. used for intermediate temperatures. Clay from the general quarry was used to make Hysilyn



In 1937 General Refractories took over and the works traded as Davison's Branch. In 1939 Ron was called up for Army service and joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers where he advanced to the rank of Platoon Sergeant. In January 1946 he was demobbed and returned to Davison's as Despatch Clerk then Office Manager.

After the War Ron remained at the works until his retirement in March 1976 having worked there for 43 years. Between times G. R. Stein who (part of the Hepworth Group of Companies) took over the works and Ron witnessed the destruction against his advice of the last century or more's company records, brick moulds and other artefacts onsite in a large bonfire. This was a trigger for him to finish work there and to look for alternative employment.

After visiting Shotton Steelworks and the aircraft factory in Broughton looking for work, he secured a second career as a Store man in the Training School in the aircraft factory where Comet parts were stored. He retired completely some six years later.

A family man Ron is the father to six children, two girls and two lads some of whom are now retired themselves! As a result he has fifteen grandchildren and twenty six great grandchildren. In the last ten years Ron has been an active contributor to the Buckley Society Community Multi Media Archive group who meet at Buckley Library on alternate Wednesdays. At the age of 97 years Ron still attends the sessions regularly at which his memory of names and dates, particularly in matters relating to Drury and district has been invaluable.

During his working years Ron was very active in sport and played for the following teams

Football

School. St. Matthew's - in goal.

Cricket

Captain. St Matthew's. Highlight: scored a hat-trick to win against Buckley Board School at Buckley Cricket Club

Football teams after leaving school

Drury Rangers 1933/4 - played 28 won 27
Drawn 1 against Burntwood Juniors.

John Jonathan another Drury veteran played for Burntwood in that match. Drury Rangers only played one season. When they went to see the farmer about the ground for the next season his reply was - "You can have the ground if you've got somewhere to put it".

Their changing room for that one season was in a loft of a barn in amongst all the straw bales and believe it or not, they started off with a ball which they got by saving Oxo cube coupons.

Other teams operating in Buckley in the 1930's were:

Main Team Buckley Town - in the West Cheshire League. (Ron did play a few games for that team towards the end of the 30's when they were short.) At that time he played at full-back for Nant Mawr in the Flintshire League.

Other teams of the 30s either the Junior Leagues or even friendlies: Burntwood Rovers, Burntwood Vics, Nant Mawr, Brook Street Juniors, Albert Hall, Buckley Square, Church Lads' Brigade, Buckley Amateurs.

After the war, Ron was approached by Mr. Bob Roberts, known better at that time as Bob Blackin, to play for Buckley Wanderers, which he did for about four years until age began to tell. But he did play for Rhydymwyn for a season until the formation of Buckley Rovers of which he was a founder member. He honestly thought he was to be a committee member but was thrown in at the deep end to play as Captain at Centre Half and managed another couple of seasons.

Cricket

After being de-mobbed from the army in 1946 Ron was also approached by an army mate who played for Broughton & Bretton, asking him to play for them, which he did for one season. During that season they won the Boughton Hall Knockout Competition at Chester which was quite a big occasion. However during the close season, his brother-in-law, John Beavan, a well-known cricketer and footballer, persuaded him to join Buckley Cricket Club. they had a top-grade side there and Ron was among friends, neighbours and workmates.

In 1950 they won a very major trophy "The McAlpine Cup" played for by the entire top Wrexham Area Clubs with the semi-finals and finals played at the Wrexham Barracks ground. Unfortunately, at this time, Ron is the only one left from that great team.

Buckley did win the trophy again, a few years later but he had finished playing by then, having lost his right eye, which ended Ron's playing days.