

THE STONE COURT BRICK & TILE COMPANY IN PEMBURY

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BACKGROUND Insert ‘The Stone Court Brick and Tile company 1908’) and ‘Stone Court Brick and Tile Co back’

The Pembury Conservation Area Report of August 2007 noted that the settlement of Pembury can be dated back to a manor built circa 1120 and that in the 1600’s settlement of the area was scattered. In the 1700’s with the arrival of the turnpike road, coaching inns, blacksmiths and wheelwrights were established. A map of 1629 shows that the village green became the focus of the village. The homes built in the village during the 18th and 19th century were largely constructed of brick made locally.

The discovery of a seam of clay at Lower Green led to the development of a local pottery industry as well as a sizeable brick and tile works, noted on maps dating back to 1868. The production of paving bricks, used extensively throughout south east England was also important. The pottery closed in 1930 and the brickworks closed in the 1940’s.

As can be seen from the maps in this article the location of the brick and tile works moved about in search of clay deposits. Buildings were erected, demolished, and constructed anew as needed.

The making of bricks, as in most places, began as a small industry where bricks were made in small quantities as needed by hand and fired in clamps or small brick kilns. As the demand for bricks and tiles grew so

did the size and sophistication of the works, and the process of making these products became more mechanized. Eventually the clay deposits ran out or were depleted to such an extent that the continuation of brick and tile works in the village was no longer practical or economical and the industry died.

Research identified that there was more than one business involved in this industry. In the 1862 and 1867 directories there were no brickmakers –just two bricklayers who may have made their own bricks. The first brickmaker (by occupation) found in a directory was George Batchelor in 1874. In the same directory was Philip Peters (1841-1914), who ran the Royal Oak Public House, and who around this time also became a brickmaker . Philip Peters is found in directories up to 1913 as a brickmaker in Pembury, but also made pottery which he sold as “Pembury Ware”in his Monson Road shop in Tunbridge Wells. Mr Peters and his sons had a long association with the sale of pottery, ceramics and glass at their shop in Tunbridge Wells dating well past WW 1, and his son Sidney Richard Peters (1878-1935) gave his occupation as “brick and pottery maker” when in 1915 he enlisted for service in WW 1.

By 1911 a new company began to operate in Pembury by the name of The Stone Court Brick & Tile Company Limited with premises at Lower Green. The manager of this business was Ernest Seymour (1873-1940) from at least 1911 up to at least 1938. The London Gazette of June 4,1920 announced that this company had been put in the hands of a liquidator for the purpose of winding up the business. However, directories still listed this company under the same name in Pembury up to 1938 but was gone by 1940. The bathroom fittings manufacturing business of J.S. Downham & Co. Ltd moved into the

Stone Court Works premises and were still in operation there in 1972 but gone by 1974.

For a brief time from 1938 to 1939 a company by the name of Kent Glazed Tiles Ltd were at Lower Green, and made brick and tiles, and circa 1935 there was a glazed tile business in Pembury by the name of the Pembury Glazed Tile Company where the artist and writer Donald Maxwell (1877-1936) studied glazing.

Information about Philip Peters and his family and businesses can be found in my article 'Philip Peters China Shop' dated July 29,2012.

Another useful article by me is 'Brick Making in Tunbridge Wells' dated July 18,2012 which was updated October 12,2012. Both of these articles were previously posted to my website.

Shown above is a photo taken 1908 at the Tunbridge Wells Agricultural Show that had been held annually at Showfields on Eridge Road. In this image can be seen the stall of the Stone Court Brick & Tile Company perhaps manned by company manager Ernest Seymour. The back of this postcard,also shown above, notes that it was sent by the company to a Mr. H. Brooks, a builder in Staplehurst and the message relates to roofing tiles ordered from the company by the builder.

THE STONE COURT BRICK & TILE CO. LTD (insert 'Stone Court map pembury 1868')

The origin of the name relates to a large farm and estate called Stone Court Farm, which is shown on the map of 1868 opposite. The Times of London dated July 14,1888 gave an estate agents advertisement regarding the upcoming sale of "Stone Court, Pembury" described in part as being 195 acres with house, buildings, cottages etc as well as a

brick and tile yard. The farm itself was largely engaged in the growing of hops, as can be seen in the postcard below showing people picking hops in Pembury.

(insert 'Hops growing Pembury')

The 1874 Kelly directory gave the listing 'Major Henry Lempriere. R.A., Stone Court Lower Green Pembury. Before the Stone Court company was formed Major Lempriere had made bricks on Stone Court Farm and earlier still, the Dickenson family had made bricks in a small way on the same farm. Throughout this part of Pembury there was a clay deposit and farmers like Lempriere made bricks by hand in a small way for their own use.

(insert Pempury map 1897,1909,1936')

Given in descending order is a series of other maps showing the location of the brick and tile manufactures beginning with a map from 1897 opposite. The rest of the series consists of maps of 1909 and 1936.

The earliest known appearance of the Stone Court business is noted in minutes of a meeting in 1907 although no listing for it was found in the directory of 1907. It did appear however in a 1911 directory. The manager of the business was Ernest Seymour who is found in the 1913 Kelly under " Stone Court Brick & Tile Co (Ernest Seymour, manager), Lower Green. The directories of 1916 and 1919 gave the listing " Stone Court Brick & Tile Co. Limited, Lower Green, indicating that the company had become incorporated in 1915. Incorporation records for the company were not located by directories reflect the change in name at that time. Who the directors and shareholders of the company were is also not known. As you will see by reading my article about

Philip Peters, Mr Peters moved to Pembury after his marriage in 1869 and apart from his role as the proprietor of the Royal Oak public house he is noted in directories from 1882 onwards as also being in the business of making bricks, tiles and pipe and also pottery. The operation of the Stone Court business overlapped with that of Philip Peters and so there was local competition in this market.

The London Gazette of June 4,1920 gave an announcement regarding the voluntary liquidation of The Stone Court Brick & Tile Company Limited. Members of this company were to hold a meeting at 84 Calverley Road in Tunbridge Wells on July 12,1920 at noon to receive a report of the liquidator showing how the winding up of the company had been conducted and its property disposed of and to hear an explanation by the liquidator and to pass an extraordinary resolution as to the disposal of the books,,accounts and documents of the company. This notice was dated June 1,1920 with the legal firm of W.C. Cripps,son and Daish of Tunbridge Wells acting as solicitors for the liquidator. So the business was sold along with the use of the name to new owners in 1920. The 1924 directory listed both Philip Peters and the Stone Court Brick & Tile Co. Limited in competition.

The Kent County Minutes dated May 15,1907, under the heading of "Extraordinary Traffic-Pembury to Borough Green" stated " That when the cost shall have been ascertained by the County Surveyor the Clerk of the County Council be empowered to cause any necessary legal proceedings to be taken to recover the extra cost incurred by the County Council consequent on the damage caused by the extraordinary traffic conducted by or in consequence of the order of the Stone Court Brick and Tile Company, of Pembury, in the haulage of bricks for the

erection of a paper mill at Basted, Borough Green."

The last directory listing for the business was that of 1938 and most accounts report that the business closed for good in 1939. No listing for the business was found in any directory from 1940 onwards.

From the time the business began, until it closed, the company made a wide range of both machine and hand -made bricks and tiles, but their best known product was hard paving bricks which can still be seen in parts of London and south east of England

Until the outbreak of the second world war quite a number of men were employed at the local brick and tile works, adjoining which was a flourishing pottery whose wares were sold throughout the south east of England.

All the works were paid by the hour and only for the time that they actually worked, so bad weather and holidays mostly meant real hardship to them.

So what is known about the companies manager Ernest Seymour? Well Ernest's was registered in the 2nd qtr of 1872 in Tonbridge. He was one of at least five children born to Archibald Seymour who was born 18456 in Westfield,Sussex, and Phoebe Seymour,nee Fray (1841-1900) who was born in Speldhurst. The 1881 census, taken at Vauxhall Inn, Tunbridge Wells gave Archibald Seymour as the publican. With him was his wife Phoebe and their five children including Ernest. The 1891 census, taken at Henwood Road in Pembury gave Ernest as a boarder with the Henry Nash family. Henry was a general labourer and Ernest was working as a grocers assistant. It was while living with the Nash family that he met Henry's daughter Gertrude who he later married.

The 1901 census, taken in Pembury gave Ernest living once again with the Nash family in Lower Green. Henry Nash was at that time a school attendance officer and Henry's wife was a school teacher. Ernest was at that time a "Potter, barman, worker".

The 1911 census, taken at Frestview, Pembury gave Ernest as a boarder with the Henry Nash family. Henry Nash at that time was working as a bricklayer who had been married 25 years and had 3 children. Ernest Seymour at that time was given as "manager brick works, worker".

In the 4th qtr of 1918 Ernest married Gertrude Nash, the daughter of Henry Nash of Pembury. She had been born 1886 . Her death was registered in Tonbridge in the 4th qtr of 1946. At the time of the 1911 census Gertrude was living in Pembury with her parents and siblings and was working as a school teacher. Ernest and his wife are known to have had two children namely Shella in the 3rd qtr of 1919 and Denis in the 1st qtr of 1923. Ernest Seymour passed away in the 2nd qtr of 1940 with his death registered at Tonbridge.

(insert 'Pembury Brick 1')

As one can see from my article about brickmaking in Tunbridge Wells, the making of bricks and tiles was a hard job, requiring heavy lifting and long hours often in very hot conditions. The firing of bricks and the production of hops were two industries that went hand in hand for in Pembury were large stands of Chestnut trees from which poles required as supports for hops growing were made. It was the twigs cut from these poles which made the brush faggots used in the brick kilns.

Shown opposite is a photo from Mary Standen's book of the staff at the brickworks. The legend with this image reads "Top Row; G. Towner, C.

Bailey,J. Collins.Clark,J. West,H. Boorman Senior., H. Boorman junior. Middle Row-G. Bennett, E. Moore, F. Brown, F. Austin, J. Malthouse, A.Fry, T. Austen, T. Greener, R. Archer, B. Morphett (Burner). Front Row-A. Hewlett (Engineer), C. Kemp.F. Kemp, A. Mileham, S. Clifton, H. Nash (clerk), Ernest Seymour (Manager), C. Anderson, J. Marks, A. Seldon and W. Kemp. It is the researchers opinion that the Henry Nash listed is the same Henry Nash I referred to earlier with whom Ernest Seymour was living. The A. Hewlett listed above as "Engineer" was the gentleman who operated the steam traction engine of the company which is described later in this article.

The Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser of April 23,1920 gave an account under the heading of "Tonbridge County Court" in which a case was brought before the Honour Judge Parry regarding a brickmakers dispute between Walter George Melville, Hill Brick Works,Tonbridge, and A.B. Hughes of the Stone Court Brick & Tile Company of Pembury for the supply of bricks with a value of 12 pounds 16 and 3 and that there was a counterclaim for a similar amount. Although not confirmed it could be A. B. Hughes who took over the company after its liquidation in 1920.

Insert ('Pembury Brick 2'

Another image from Mary Standens book is shown opposite which shows the rebuilding of the brick chimney and men working on the top of an adjoining brick kiln. Part of the text associated with this image stated "There were twenty-two kiln in one block, with a huge drying block on top of them and two rather unusual round ones which you see in the two pictures. The chimney being repaired was the shortest of three. This one is from the round kilns, the largest one was from the big

block and the third chimney was from the engine which drove all the machines, pulled the trucks in from the clay pit and made steam for the whistle which was blown six times a day. Before the days of wireless everyone in the district set their clocks by the Brickyard whistle”.

(insert ‘Stone Court tractor 1’)

The steam traction engine that provided the mechanical power to this operation is shown opposite while on display in front of Bandai’s Toy Museum in Japan. Bandai produced a 1-16th scale model of it and sold it in various hobby shops around the world. This engine was a Garrett 4CD Traction Engine No. 22705 (registration BJ4788) which was sold to the Stone Court Brick & Tile Company in Pembury in 1919. Nothing is known but she probably worked at the brick plant right up to the time the business ended and was then sold. It is known that this engine was given a makeover and emerged as a Showmans Engine, being fully decorated, which were used by fairground operators to tow their equipment, along with their living van. On site the engine was equally indispensable, generating power to run the lighting or even powering the rides by belt drive. If required it’s a simple matter to remove the rear wheel drive pins and employ the winch drum on the back axle. Later this machine was purchased and came part of the collection of the late Tom Varley’s Museum of Steam, and was named “Pendle Princess”. Sometime in the 1970’s it was shipped to Japan and put on display. Bandai went out of business in 1996 and all traces of this engine ended. It was obviously sold off but to who and what happened to it afterwards is unknown. Tom Varley was a collector of steam-powered road vehicles. His business was in running Todber Caravan Park at Gisburn, in the high Pennines of Lancashire. The museum was housed in a barn alongside the caravans. The collection was best known

from its frequent appearances at steam rallies throughout the 1970's and 1980's. Varley's wagons were recognizable from their fine paintwork and signwriting, each named and prefixed "Pendle..." Ton Varley died in the 1990s. His contribution to the preservation of steam vehicles in the UK has been widely recognized. Since some of these Steam Traction engines in fine restored condition can command prices around one million pounds, one can be reasonably assured that this relic from the days of the Stone Court Brick and Tile Company, is still around somewhere, which apart from a few bits of stone rubble in Pembury is perhaps the best artifact from this defunct business.

I noted that walking tours in Pembury include trudging along past what was Stone Court Farm and orchards there. I noted in the description of the walk a reference to a "small brick building" and a "small derelict brick hut and different clay peg tiles on the roof".

In closing it was noted that a company by the name of J.S. Downham & Co. Ltd began to appear in Pembury directories in 1950 which manufactured bathroom fittings with premises as "Stone Court Works" Lower Green, indicating that they had taken over the former brickworks premises. The last directory listing for this company at that address was in 1970.