

**WIAS Visit To Webster Hemmings & Sons Ltd.,
Brick Manufacturers, Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry.
Saturday 15 May 1993**

The visit commenced on the rim of the pit (at one time 140 ft deep) where the Keuper Marl was first dug in 1870. Extraction is still taking place, but the huge hole is currently being back-filled with Coventry's refuse. The pit also contains a much-disputed SSI which is also being covered as a means of preservation for future generations. The demands of refuse disposal, archaeological survey, and raw-material extraction for brick-making seemed to be delicately balanced.

Ownership has been in the Webster name since 1896, with the name of Hemming added in 1938.

Once extracted from the pit, the clay is left to "weather" before being loaded onto the mill conveyor belt. A curtain of heavy chains at the belt conveyor loading bin ensures that the tipping by the mechanical shovel is evened out in the feed to the Kibbler roller pan. This latter pan breaks down the large lumps before passing to the pug mill.

Additives are included at this stage (e.g. barium carbonate to improve brick quality; wood pulp to reduce power required to drive the mill; and coal slack to assist in the burning of the bricks.) After the pug mill, the clay passes to the brick-making shed. It was here that our Chairman, Toby Cave, noted the unusual "Belfast" roof trusses. In this shed, modern machinery produces extruded bricks, with ingenious wire-cutting machines producing bricks of the required size. The machine also produces the rusticated effect via a dragging action across the face of the brick.

After being loaded automatically on the pallets, the green bricks are then transferred on an old rail-car system driven by 220 DC to a bank of drying ovens (heated by paraffin fuel.) Each chamber takes between 5,000 and 6,000 green bricks and the drying takes place over 3 to 4 days at 180 degrees F.

The final process involves the firing of the bricks in the Hoffman Kiln. This was rebuilt in 1950. The 18-chamber kiln has a two-week cycle of setting, firing, cooling and drawing. With a light oil fuel, a temperature of 1020 degrees F. is reached in the firing stage.

We finished the tour by looking into the working pit, noting how the developments in hydraulic excavators had removed the necessity of blasting out the hard lower layers of clay.

This was an excellent visit, with a good attendance by members, and a thoroughly entertaining and informative tour given by our guide, Mr. Hall. We are grateful to the company for allowing us to visit the site. We hope the brickworks continues to survive in what must be very difficult times. It was a pleasure to see a small brickworks producing for a specialised brick market.

E & O E

John Selby

A few samples of the products of this brickyard from the collection of one of our members. No black and white photographs were taken of the works during the visit - perhaps an excuse for a second visit?!

