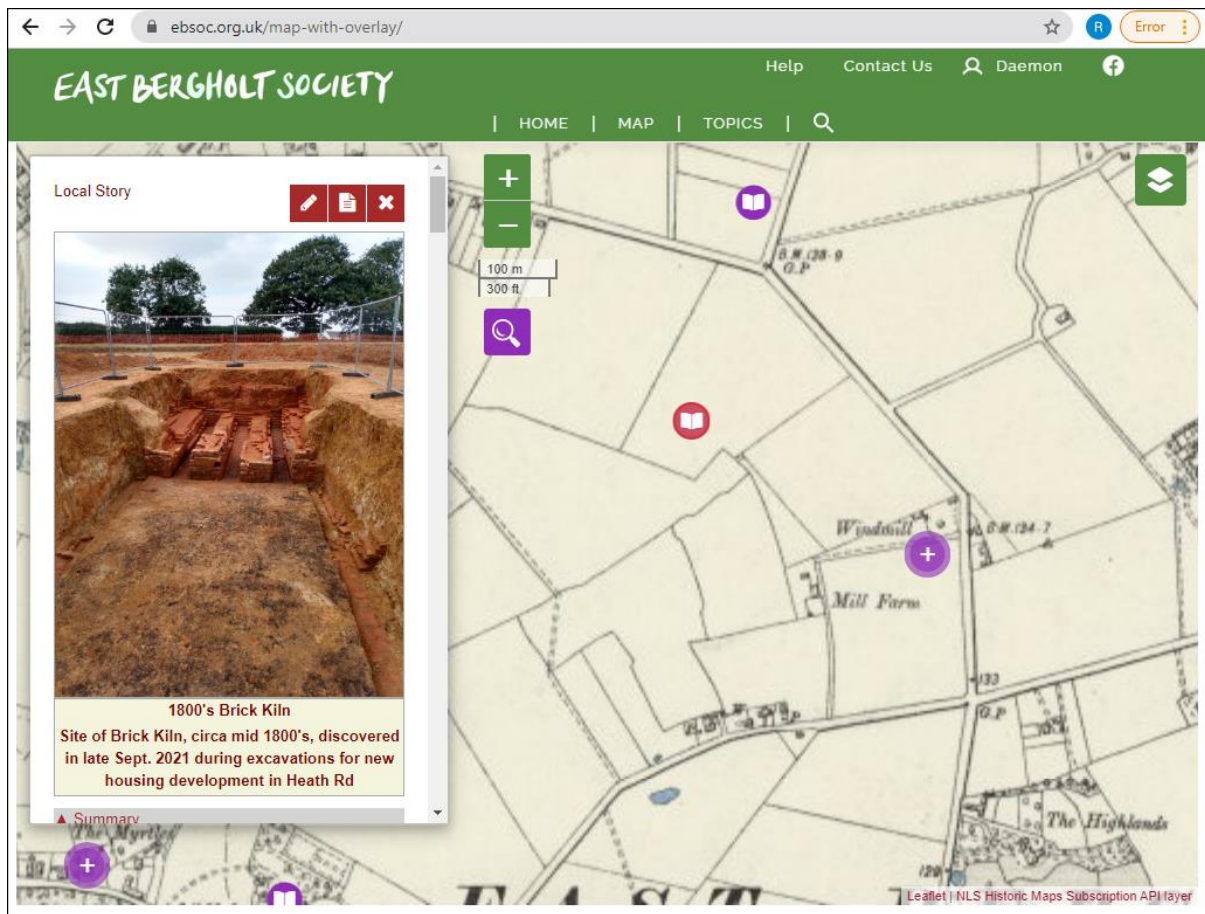


1800's BRICK KILN AT HEATH ROAD SITE, EAST BERGHOLT

The following is taken from the East Bergholt Society Website , URL:

<https://www.ebsoc.org.uk/local-story/brick-kiln/>



Summary

The remains of an 1800's Brick Kiln have been unearthed in a field next to the Medical Centre in Heath Rd. This kiln, typical of its type for Suffolk, would have been close to the Constable family Windmill on the corner of Mill Road and would typically have used locally sourced clay from "Clay Pit Field" next door north east of the Donkey Track. The red bricks from this kiln would doubtless have found their way into numerous houses in the village built during that period.

Finding such a site in good condition is unusual, although a few other examples have been found in this part of Suffolk. It is unfortunate that, within a week of the find being made public, the developers filled in the site completely. Sadly therefore, except for the photos, we have lost this little bit of Victorian industrial history almost as soon as we found it.

Details

An 1800's Brick Kiln was unearthed by the archaeological excavation of the two fields next to the Medical Centre off Heath Road, East Bergholt. The excavation was begun in early September 2021 by **Colchester Archaeological Trust** as a precursor to planned development of 76 new homes on this site by the **Hills Building Group**.

There's a lot of clay in Suffolk and local brick kilns must have been quite common across the county. We can imagine hundreds of such kilns working with locally sourced clay, creating bricks with slightly different dimensions fuelling the housing booms of the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

Most of these kilns are long gone and covered up and so to find this one is relatively rare. There have been other finds nearby, notably in **Layham, outside Hadleigh, Trimley St Martin**, just north of the River Orwell, and at South Cove near Southwold, the latter being reopened for the public to see in 1977.



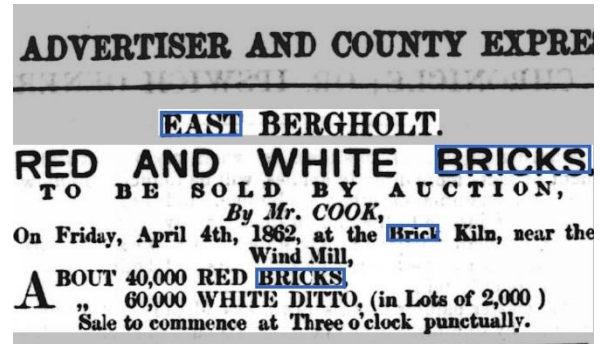
It's possible to guess at the location of the sites of brick kilns from the names of the surrounding fields . Fields with names like "brick", "kiln" "clay", "pit" etc are all likely candidates, and in East Bergholt, using the old "Tithe" maps (which list fields by name and owner), we can identify three areas where brick kilns would have been likely to be sited:

- Woodgates Road, where a **Tithe map of 1817** shows two fields called "Kiln Field", and another "Kiln Pightle" with associated buildings owned by a Mr Robert Rist,
- Flatford, where a **Brasier map of 1731** names 2 fields as "Clay Hill" and "Kiln Hill" at the bottom of Touche Hill, close to the river Stour, and
- Holton, just north of the A12 "Four-Sisters" junction, where the **1840 Tithe Map** lists two fields "Kiln Fen" and "Brick Yard".

For the site in Heath Road there is a similar name reference to be found in the **Brasier Map of 1731**. This is a field called "Clay Pit Field" which is just east of the Donkey Track and adjacent to the site. This provides some evidence that brickmaking was going on here in the mid 1700's, well before the 1800's. In those days this area of the village was primarily heath land, generally of poor quality and thus ideal for use for kiln work, a good place to carry out work that would have produced unpleasant smells and refuse. Today this field has a significant pond at one end which may have been dug out as a source of the clay used for brick making.

BRICK AUCTION OF 1862

The existence of a brick kiln in the village has long been forgotten together with any related field names, but supporting evidence of the site was spotted by one keen local historian (Adrian James) in this advert for an auction of 100,000 red and white bricks from a local newspaper of 1862:

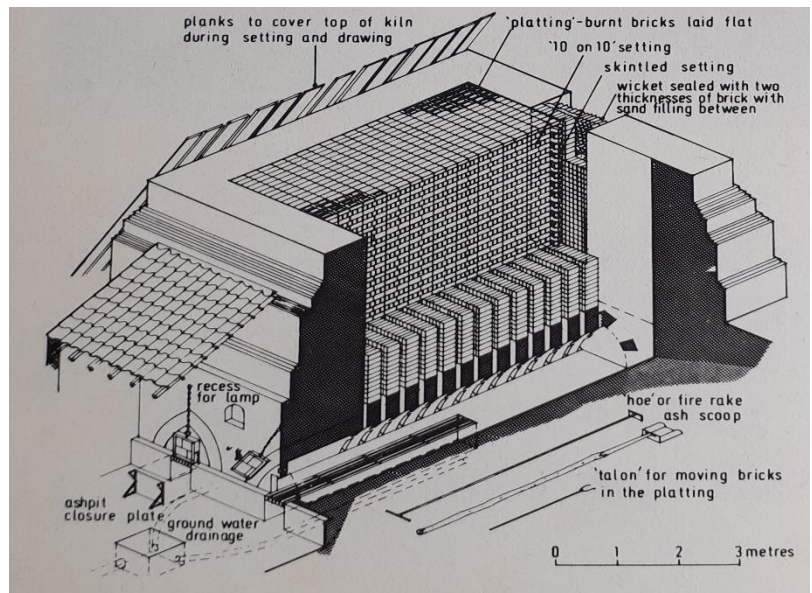


John Jones ([Suffolk Industrial Archaeological Society](#)) has observed some interesting points in this advertisement. Firstly, having so many bricks for sale at the same time, and by auction, suggests that the proprietor was either retiring or had failed in his business. Secondly, the advert offers both red and white bricks for sale from the same site. This is an unusual situation because Suffolk clays were mostly used to make red bricks, (notable exceptions being in the Woolpit area, where high quality whites were made, and at Fison's brickworks in Stowmarket, where both types were made as well as white malt kiln tiles). Until this now there's been no evidence that anywhere else in Suffolk could make both types, but of course the existence of this advert doesn't make it certain that the bricks for sale were actually made on site - it may have been that the whites were imported and simply being offered for resale. Isn't archaeology frustrating - you suspect but you can never know for sure!

HOW DID SUFFOLK BRICK KILNS WORK?

All the discovered East Anglian brick kilns appear to follow a similar construction, as illustrated in this image opposite.

The kiln was dug deep into the earth, typically about 2m, and the kiln laid out in two parts; the fire pits where the coal burned and its heat fired the clay bricks and a base, this slightly sloping helping push lighted coals into the firepits using a 'hoe' or fire rake as a coal-pusher and ash-remover.



Newly cast clay bricks would be laid in layers on a 10 x 10 "netting", forming a series of "chimneys" through which hot gasses would pass, thus heating the bricks. The end of the stack, (termed the "wicket") would be sealed with a sand filling to keep the heat in, and the top of the kiln would have wooden planks to act as a draught control during the "setting" and "drawing" of the kiln. The openings to the firepits were covered with cast iron fire doors. Ground water often had to be extracted from the base of the kiln and different ground water drainage systems were typical.

HOW OLD IS THE HEATH RD BRICK KILN?

The fact that there's no evidence of fire doors or their hinges in this site, and that there was no evidence of a ground water drainage system indicates that the structure may be of a more primitive design than the kilns at Trimley and Layham. That and the 1731 Brasier map reference to the "Clay Pit Field" raises the possibility that the Heath Rd Brick Kiln existed from a time earlier than the mid-1800, possibly going back to the early 1700's - after all the village certainly had bricks in those days and they were most likely fired somewhere central to the village. Had the site not been so prematurely filled in it might have been possible to examine the bricks in situ to try and establish the validity of that idea. Sadly that level of investigation is not now possible.

More details on the design can be seen in the drawings made of the Layham Brick Kiln (Heritage No. TM030094 and described in the [linked PDF file here](#)) and in drawings made of the [Trimley St Martin Kiln TM274379](#)

As with other topics on this website, the East Bergholt Society welcomes your comments and questions, and where relevant will redirect specific technical and historical queries to the subject experts noted in the credits below.

Credits and References

This article was based on input from

- Charlotte Mclaughlin of the [East Anglian Daily Times](#) for her article of 1/9/2021.
- John Jones of the [Suffolk Industrial Archaeology Society](#), who contributed much of the technical and mapping research for this article.
- Adrian James of the East Bergholt Society, who identified the 1862 Advertisement for the brick auction.

Rob Wombwell coordinated the authoring of the article.

Other Images



Brasier Map of 1731

Showing "Clay Pit Field", near the Heath Rd Kiln site



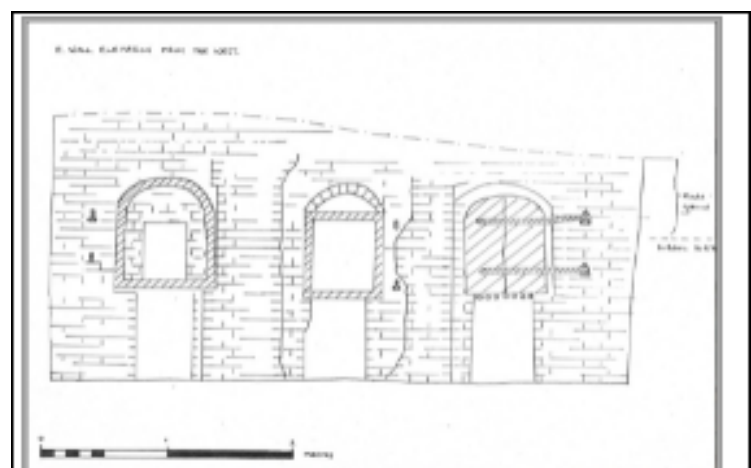
Heath Rd Site

Showing the rows of fire pits into which lighted coal would have been pushed to fire stacks of clay bricks stacked in layers above them. The slightly sloping base where the coals were lit before being



Heath Rd Site - side elevation

A sideways view of the fire pits



Layham Brick Kiln, elevation drawing

This drawing of the excavated Layham kiln shows a typical Suffolk Brick Kiln fire pit doors, with one cast iron fire door in place.

Page 10 East Anglian Daily Times, Wednesday, November 18, 1982



Trimley St Martin Brick Kiln

Site excavated in 1983, showing fire pits and firedoor openings



Brick Kiln at Stone Cove, nr Southwold

What the surface buildings of a typical Suffolk brick kiln would have looked like. This building was re-opened in 1977



Layham Brick Kiln

Showing typical Suffolk opening to fire pit



Layham Brick Kiln

Showing the kiln cooling area and fire pit openings with cast iron firedoors in place