**Essays on Mount Crosby - The Pumping Station Bricks**

The pumping station is a nice old building, dressed up, as it is, in lovely red bricks that look as though they were carried from miles away just to match the pride the Board of Waterworks had in their new building. You could easily have convinced me they were made in Oxley or Toowoomba or perhaps even somewhere distant like Sydney. How amazing, then, to find that the lovely red bricks of the pumping station were made just one and a quarter miles away, near the site of today's school oval.

Chamberlain & Wylie was the company engaged to build the pumping station, and during the hot summer of 1890-91 they excavated the foundation, dug the pump wells and built the taller part of the brick building that you see today. A newspaper article described it like this:

*A good deal of other work has also been done, especially in the line of excavating, and as over 30ft of the surface has been taken away in some places, the foundations for the engines and the three-storied engine-house, should be pretty solid. ... Altogether, on Messrs. Chamberlain and Wyllie's contract, about eighty men are under constant employment. About a mile away, at another spot near the bank of the river [near today's school], ten men are engaged making bricks, and, on Monday last, it was estimated that exactly 100,000 had been made.*

It's the way bricks were made in those days. It was a transportable skill, but never a trivial one. To make a brick, the right sort of man would select a site near the right sort of clay, and there build a temporary kiln known as a "clamp" from the sun dried green bricks themselves. The courses of green bricks in the clamp were carefully arranged with arches in the lower courses where coal, coke or timber could be placed and burned - while the bricks in higher courses were gapped to allow the heat to "flue" upwards and bake the bricks.

At first the clamp was fired lightly for two days to drive a lot of moisture from the bricks. During this time steam and smoke would belch from the clamp and when it stopped that was the signal to really fire up the clamp to about 1000 degrees Celsius for about 7-12 days.

After a week of constant tending, the clamp was allowed to cool down slowly - the outer bricks (used to make the walls of the clamp) were set aside to be refired next time, and the inside ones inspected, sorted and sent for duty.

No private house in Mount Crosby was made of brick before the pumping station, never mind how pretty bricks are when made from our "soil". It reminds me of a saying I have often used when things seem more expensive than they should: "Well Colin, have you tried to make one yourself?". No - I think I'll buy my bricks ...

Col Hester