

remember Mr Crabtree who was the publican at the Coronation Hotel in Eltham. Every week he would go up to George Peebles, the grocer and say "Well, who's the worst off this week?" George would look down his list and say, "Here's old (whatever his name was), unemployed with five children and he owes this." Old Crabtree used to just pay it and walk out. He did that for some time. He was a very generous man and no one would know about it. He would

also go to George with his old car and fill boxes of groceries and go out at night and leave these poor unemployed folks a box of groceries on the verandah. He was a wonderful man and probably never went to Church in his life. The slump didn't affect our family as much as some others because we had our farms. I didn't learn music during that time and wasn't able to go to secondary school or anything like that. Everyone had to work on the farm.



Haymaking, Stoffel's farm, Rawhitiroa. Wally Stretton on right. Phil Stretton on cart (middle).

## THE BRICK WORKS

Henry Ford lived in Opawa near Christchurch. The day he read the Government's advertisement seeking the unemployed to bring their families to settle in the district known as the Ngaere Swamp in return for a 10 acre block, changed he and his family's lives. They packed up their meagre belongings and entered into the ballot system for procuring land. One of Henry Ford's sections was numbered 53, which was granted to him on December 18, 1899. This section sat on the junction of the Rawhitiroa and the Hu Roads just west of the Mangamingi Saddle. Roma Jenkins tells us in her yet to be published story, that Henry's training at Opawa Brick Works would naturally make him interested in the clay soils dug out of hillsides to construct solid road foundations. He would have noted that the texture of the clay was different and the natural transgression was the establishment of a brick kiln. The nearest brickworks at the time were in Hawera or Patea, and as the cost of cartage was almost prohibitive, Henry's fate was sealed. His family helped clear a site, construct a Pug Mill, drying shed and covered workshed and commenced work. The method used by Henry Ford to make bricks was described by his son, Fred, many years later, when he attended Rawhitiroa School's 75th Jubilee in 1974:

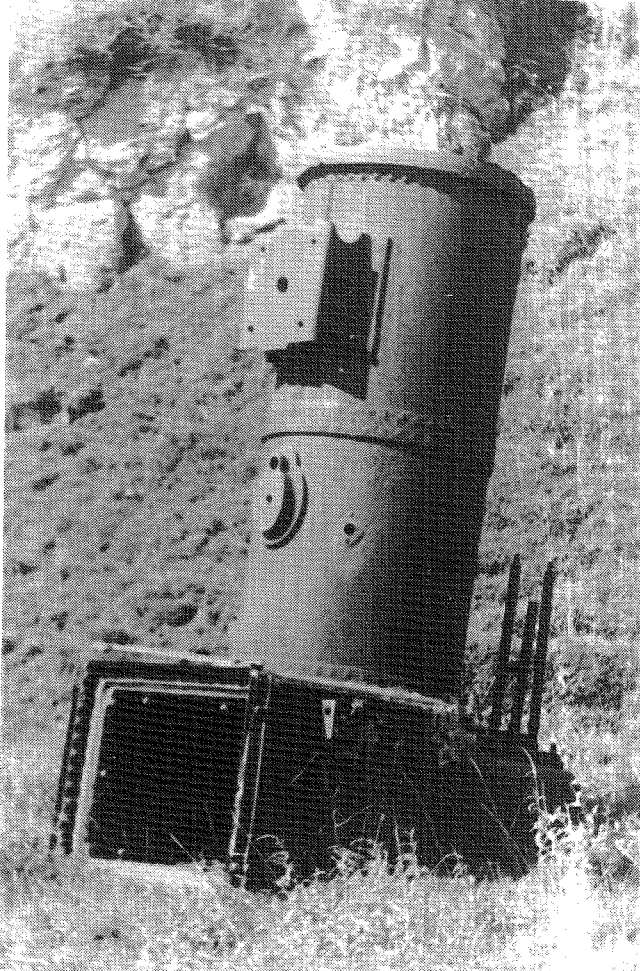
*My father started making bricks by hand about 1897. He erected what they call a Pug Mill. First he dug a hole in the bank about eight feet wide, just big enough to work in. Over the top of the entrance he built a small bridge. The Pug Mill itself was like the ordinary mixing machine you use in your home, but much larger of course, about six feet high. It was*

*placed in a vertical position. The clay was tipped on a platform above the machine. A round track was made for a horse to walk round and round, traversing over the bridge with each circuit. This continuing circuit by the horse was the means by which the Pug Mill operated. A long thin pole was fastened to the top of the Pug Mill and the outer end of this was attached to the bit in the horse's mouth, by this means the horse had no option but to follow the circle of track and in the process turn the mixing machine. The clay would be watered to a consistency which could be handled. With the mill going around, the pug would be mixed up and forced out at the bottom.*

*My father would then cut off a piece of clay, enough to make a bit more than one brick. He would then square it up roughly by bumping it on the bench. A wooden mould, the size of the required brick, would be beside him, placed on a firm wooden base, a small piece of wood about four inches wide called the frog. The square block of clay would be taken by two hands, lifted up, then slammed down into the mould hard enough to fill all corners. The surplus clay on top would be scraped off with a piece of flat wood to leave a level surface. A thin flat board, a little larger than the brick would be placed on top, and the mould tipped over to release the bricks from the frog. These would then be wheeled away to the drying shed, before being stacked into the kiln for firing. Father was a quick and skilled worker and would form a barrow load of 27 bricks in two and a half minutes. Wood was used in the early days for baking the bricks, but in later years coal was used. The bricks*

were much in demand by neighbours building chimneys in their new homes.

Henry was busy as there was much demand for his bricks. He was also required to replace his temporary living quarters in a hastily built whare, to something more permanent. In about 1900 Henry, his family, friends and a local builder built a handsome brick house near where the factory was situated. This house was pulled down in 1933 by my father, who built a modern dwelling which still stands today.



*Old boiler - a remnant of the brick kiln on Hu Road. Owned and worked by H. J. Ford.*

In 1901 Eltham suffered a major fire which prompted the government to introduce a by-law necessitating that a brick party wall had to be built between shops. This by-law heaped even more work on Henry Ford's shoulders and in May 1907 he formed a partnership with Messrs Edwards and Gordon. The following notice appeared in the *Eltham Argus* on May 8, 1907:

*H.J. Ford desires to inform the public that Messrs E. Edwards and H. Gordon have joined the business, which in future will be styled as Ford & Co. Both of the new members have had home and foreign experience, and will shortly announce in these columns the many and varied lines they intend placing on the market.*

Business was brisk as a report of May 29, 1907 indicates:

*The I.X.L. baking and tea rooms will commence business in Bridge Street on Saturday in premises next to Mr C.A. Wilkinson. The building has been entirely renovated and everything done to make it meet the requirements of the trade. A very fine brick oven, built by Mr Fake, should prove large enough for the new firm as it is probably one of the largest in Taranaki, no less than 14,000 Rawhitiroa bricks being used in the construction...*

On June 4, 1907, the *Eltham Argus* reports:

*We look forward with confidence to seeing considerable developments taking place in connection with the Rawhitiroa*

*brickworks. The new members of the firm, Messrs Edwards and Gordon, have had a long experience in clay working and know the business from end to end. One of the firm had the unique experience of working in an establishment where his father and grandfather were employed, the three of them being employed by the same firm at the same time.*

*What Messrs Edwards and Gordon do not know about the brick and tile business is scarcely worth knowing. Mr Gordon informs us that from experiments they have made he and his partners are well pleased with the quality of the Rawhitiroa clay and are of opinion that they will turn out agricultural drainpipes, sanitary pipes and connections, roofing tiles, garden edgings, ridgings etc, of a quality that will fully equal anything of its kind on the market, and at prices that will be satisfactory to the buyer. They intend making a speciality of a brick intended for flooring cow byres, stables etc. These bricks will be of a vitrified nature, quite impervious to moisture and therefore perfectly suited for the purposes they are intended for. Mr Gordon estimates that £7 10s spent on these bricks will go as far as £18 spent on cement.*

*Those farmers who intend improving their milking sheds for the coming season should take a note of this and make enquiries of Ford and Co, Rawhitiroa Brickworks, before they go any further. Speaking of these bricks, Mr Gordon says that he will guarantee them to outlast the asphalt on the Eltham streets.*

*He would like an opportunity to lay down a crossing in town, in some locality where traffic is very heavy, just to show how lasting these bricks are. The proprietors hope that before long they will have some 20 or 30 men employed. We hope that local residents will do all they can to patronise and support generally this very desirable local industry.*

In July 1908, following the death of his beloved Emily, Henry farewelled Rawhitiroa and his successful brickworks and went to live in Te Kuiti. At this time he sold the brickworks to Messrs Edward Edwards and Hugh Gordon and history shows that the venture was their undoing, as in 1909 there is a report of their being declared bankrupt. Roma Jenkins, in her paper, finds no clues as to what happened to the brickworks after that, although Walter Hunger at the Centennial was able to supply a few more pieces to add to the jigsaw puzzle.

He tells us there was a tall square brick chimney behind the kiln, the kiln itself being shaped like a beehive. A tunnel was built to create a draught under the kiln and keep the fires burning evenly. The airflow was controlled from within the workshop where the tunnel commenced by some type of mechanism, possibly bellows.

Walter Hunger remembers playing in and around the abandoned brick buildings. When he was about eight years old, a bigger boy persuaded him to help him clear the blocked up tunnel entrance of bricks and rubbish so they could explore it. The boys spent many hours working together, the friend handing the bricks to Walter who piled them nearby. When they had cleared quite a way, the friend handed up four bricks all at once. Walter's small hands couldn't hold that many and he dropped them. They landed on his friend's head. Years later when they met again as middle-aged men, the friend declared his baldness was caused by those bricks bouncing off his head!

Joan O'Connor remembers the remains of the brickworks being pulled down after the four acre separate title was purchased along with the surrounding farm by my father, Fred Tipler. Roma records:

*The last chapter for the brickworks could be said to be in 1956 when young Brian Tipler dug up a brick roadway he uncovered leading from the Hu Road gate into the brickworks' site and sold the bricks for pocket money.*

As for the rest of the Tipler family - like Walter Hunger and his friends, many hours of fun were spent playing around what was left of this part of Rawhitiroa history.