

## Four humble bricks

Mike James & Steven Vincent



This month we introduce four local, hand-made, ‘signature’ bricks from the museum’s collection.

The earliest, a rough yellow brick bearing Henry Glasscock’s initials (HG), was made in his Rye Street works. Through several owners, this site remained in production for more than half a century (1830s – 1900s).

The next brick bears the initials of John Laybank Glasscock (JLG) a local builder whose brickworks was near Collins Cross on Stansted Road. It is probable that this brickworks operated some time before he took it over because the 1839 Tithe Map names four ‘brick kiln fields’ and a ‘brick ground’ in this area. JL Glasscock’s business on The Causeway was very successful and JLG Jnr, the local historian, sold it to David Robinson in 1912 – the 3<sup>rd</sup> set of initials. DR soon diversified away from building into the funeral business, presumably because the yard included a thriving carpentry workshop. Daniel Robinson & Co continues in South Street today.

The 4<sup>th</sup> brick bears the signature of Joseph Day (his masonry yard still exists in Station Road). We don’t know for sure the site of his brickworks, but most likely it was on Rye Street too.

The Stort Navigation (which opened on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1769, 250 years ago) facilitated local brick production. The Navigation took Stortford grain and malt to London, but each barge could return

with 60 tonnes of coal. Local timber, the basic building material up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, harvested from neighbouring woods like Birchanger, could not supply the town's increasing building demands, or its kilns. But coal could fuel the brick industry boom and from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards started a transition to a new building style.

Bridge Street and Windhill show especially well the change from old (16-18<sup>th</sup> century) timber and plaster construction (a technique little changed for millennia) to 19<sup>th</sup> century Stortford brick. In North Street, too, earlier timber buildings (the Indie's offices, the George, Côte Brasserie) still remain among later ornamented brick buildings (Barclay's Bank, Bishop's Cave).

Our oldest brick buildings are associated with inn-keeping (the Curriers Arms, now Zizis in Market Square; The Chequers Inn, now Savills in North Street; the remnants of brewery buildings in Water Lane). The Working Men's Club that was in South Street – the former home of FJ Nash (1777-1854), a Hawkes Brewery partner – was at least brick-faced if not fully brick constructed. The Tithe map of 1839 names 20 'brick fields' and 'brick kiln fields' whose owners were Hawkes & Co and Nash family members, as well as brick makers, coal merchants and builders, so the building boom was probably begun, at least at first, by brewery capital. Take a Town Trail (available from the Tourist Information Centre in Market Square) and learn more about our town.

**Researched and written by Stephen Vincent and Mike James.**

Stephen is retired and has volunteered at the museum for five years, and worked for another museum prior to Bishop's Stortford. He has a lifelong interest in geology, archaeology and history and over the years has undertaken extensive fieldwork and associated research.

Mike has volunteered at the museum since 2009, helping to catalogue the collection among many other things. He has written articles about local history for the Herts and Essex Observer, contributed to the book 'Stortford Histories' published in 2012; and most recently helped to revise the Town Trails available from the Tourist Information Centre in Market Square.