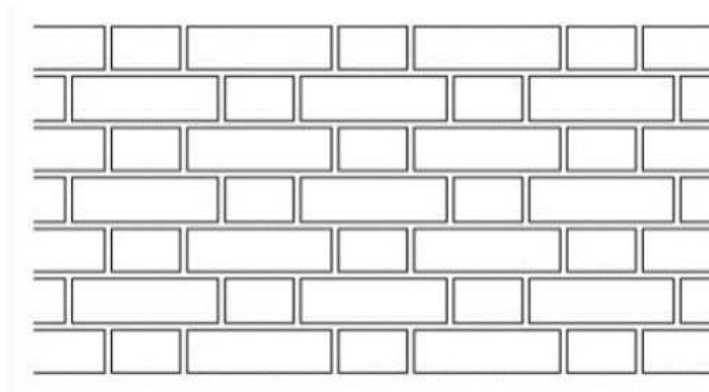


Berkeley Station – The Bricks by Derek Hore and Andrew Perrin

The co-authors of this article are volunteer members of the Vale of Berkeley Railway based at Sharpness Docks (valeofberkeleyrailway.co.uk). One of the VoBR projects is the excavation of the site of Berkeley Station, which we believe was probably demolished in the late 1970's. One of the long term aims of the VoBR is to rebuild the Station, but in the medium term we hope the site will be of interest in enabling visitors to see the remaining outline of a building which once served the local community and is helping to inspire the creation of a Heritage Railway. Curiosity about the origins of the bricks used in its construction inspired the research, largely by Andrew, which enabled us to put these words together during July 2020. We also acknowledge contributions by Bob Marrows from Lydney, the town across the River Severn to which Berkeley Station was connected by rail before the Severn Railway Bridge link was lost in 1960.

The walls of Berkeley Station were constructed mainly of brick laid in Flemish Bond with lime mortar.

Flemish Bond is made up of alternate headers (short sides) and stretchers (long sides) with each course being offset. This bond is considered one of the stronger types.



Detail of platform elevation showing the red brick facings with cream bricks surrounding the doorway and also applied to the corner of the building. Just visible beyond are the blue brick cappings to the parapet around the West wing with a blue brick dentil course below.

In addition to the brickwork, sandstone was used for external lintels, door and window sills also for one of the distinguishing features of the station design, namely the central mullions and colonettes between each pair of round-headed windows on the north (platform) and south (driveway) elevations.



The sandstone windowsill and central mullion or colonette between the double round-headed windows on the South of the station

The tops of the chimney stacks were originally stone cappings and mouldings, but had been rebuilt with blue bricks by the 1940's.



Some of the red, cream and blue bricks from the station excavation

Thanks to the use of lime mortar throughout its construction, the demolished brickwork tended to separate into individual components, which could be readily cleaned up with a minimal amount of work with a hammer. At the time of demolition, it seems likely that most of the walling was simply pushed into the very deep floor voids, rather than being carted away. In consequence, we have been able to recover numerous examples of the different types of brick used, many of them in reasonable condition. By far the majority are relatively soft plain mellow red bricks, made with no frog or recess. We believe these could have been manufactured locally by the Oakhunter Brick Works (active through most of the 19th Century), or by an individual such as William Gough who was a brickmaker at Sharpness Point in the early 1870s, but alas, there are no distinguishing features or identification marks to be able to attribute this. These bricks do not seem suitable for outside use, being very porous and liable to spall after exposure to frosts, so must have been used primarily for construction of the internal walls and partitions. One such brick was found to contain part of the shaft of a smoker's clay pipe fired into it during the manufacturing process in the nineteenth century.

The facing bricks used on the station building are slightly greater in bulk and weight than the 215 x 103 x 65mm bricks in common use today.



The shaft of a smoking pipe cast into one of the bricks

By contrast, the exposed external walls were constructed with a mixture of harder red and cream bricks, together with engineering quality blues for the plinth, many of which were of special profiles to suit their application, either to form decorative string courses at plinth and eaves level, or to provide a capping to the parapet around the east wing.

The cream bricks were used around the doors and larger windows and the curved heads only of the single doors and windows. They were also incorporated to form contrasting quoins to the external corners of the main building.



Some of the cream brick surrounds to the station doors and windows found during excavation

Some of the cream bricks came from Midland Works, Coalville, Leicestershire. Despite their name, we do not think this company had any connection with the Midland Railway. Curiously, the details of the manufacturer, prominently imprinted in these bricks, bear a letter “N” reversed. Was it a mistake or a deliberate feature of distinction? We tend now to think the latter.



The top of one of the cream bricks used around the doors, windows and corners of the building

We have found five different types of blue bricks in our excavations. Standard bricks, very large half round bricks (for cappings), a good number of smaller capping bricks with a flatter profile, plinth bricks, single bullnose bricks and some specially profiled bricks for the moulded string courses incorporated at plinth and eaves level.

Among the standard shaped blue bricks excavated we have found a small number bearing the name HAMBLET, a company in West Bromwich, which at one time had a fleet of forty canal boats to transport its products. The company was well known as a maker of quality blue brick, so we wonder if they made any of the other types of blues we have found.



Hamblet blue brick

The capping bricks have presented us with something of a mystery which has only recently been partially explained. In the early stages of our project, we came across four examples of an exceptionally large, half round blue capping brick, but why only four? Around this time, we unearthed a quantity of capping bricks which were round at each end, but with a flat-topped profile. These were found close to the Weighbridge Building, but we assumed that they had been used on the wall of the almost certainly unroofed East wing of the Station. For two years we were puzzled as to why we had never found any corner versions of these, as two would have been needed. Looking one day at an old colour photo of the station, we realised that these corner pieces had in fact been made of stone, whereupon, lo and behold, our efforts in digging out the floor voids produced two such items, one showing signs of demolition damage, the other in good condition.



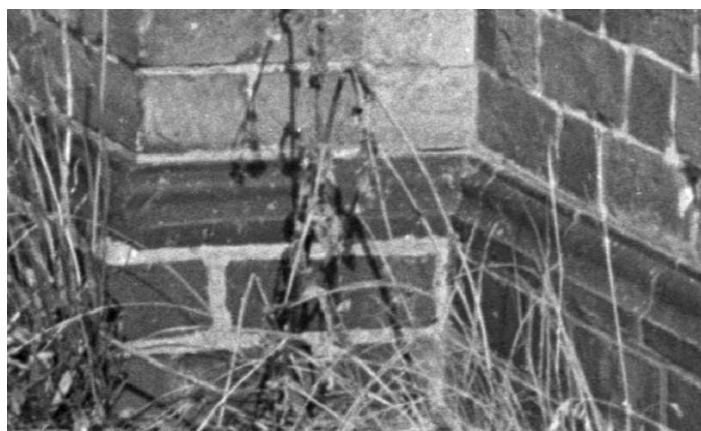
The Flat-topped blue capping bricks and a sandstone corner coping from the East wing of the station building, together with a matching half round capping brick. The upper photograph shows the stone corner coping in situ, with the dentil course clearly visible below.

It was then we realised that the profile of this shaped stone matched the half round capping block of which we had only four examples and these were indeed used on the walls of the East Wing. So, a mystery remains, what happened to the rest of them, and where were the Flat-topped examples from? It is possible that they were used around the Station house as several blue ridge tiles with decorative finials were found in the same location near the Weighbridge, and we now know that those came off the Station House roof.

The multitude of other shaped blue bricks carry no makers name but almost certainly came from Staffordshire. Among them are plinth bricks and single bullnose bricks, the former use of which currently remains a mystery, though they may well have been incorporated into internal wall reveals or thresholds where heavy wear and tear could be expected, e.g. in the coal store, parcels office or lamp room. However, only two of these have been found, incorporated rather randomly as filler pieces in brickwork courses, so it is possible that they were odd brick types which just happened to be available, unless the other survivors have been taken away when demolition occurred.



Two of the single bullnose blue bricks



Some of the special blue bricks forming a string course at plinth level on the station in 1967



Some of the recovered blue string course bricks used at plinth level



Some of the special blue string course bricks used at eaves level on the station in 1967

The only red brick type bearing a maker's name was marked in the frog with the marks 'G AUFORD' and 'TEWKESBURY'. Being of local origin, we thought it would be of interest to learn more about these bricks.



Some of the G Auford Tewkesbury red bricks.

A lot of research to identify this brickmaker at first didn't get us anywhere.

We have now however discovered the most likely source of these red bricks. To explain this, we need to first look at an earlier Gloucestershire engineering project on the Upper Lode on the Severn Navigation.

Improvements were made to the Severn Navigation (1840s- early 1850's), to allow faster transit from the Birmingham area and beyond to the Severn. There was still an area which was a bottleneck, despite widening which had taken place on the river at The Ham and The Lode near Tewkesbury.

From the mid 1840's to the mid 1850's there were many arguments and several proposals concerning works to improve transit of the Severn in this area. Finally, in 1855 Parliament authorised works to be carried out.

At the Upper Lode, a cutting alongside the Severn Ham for the realignment of the Severn Navigation was made, to create the (150' long and 80' wide) double chambered locks on the Upper Lode.

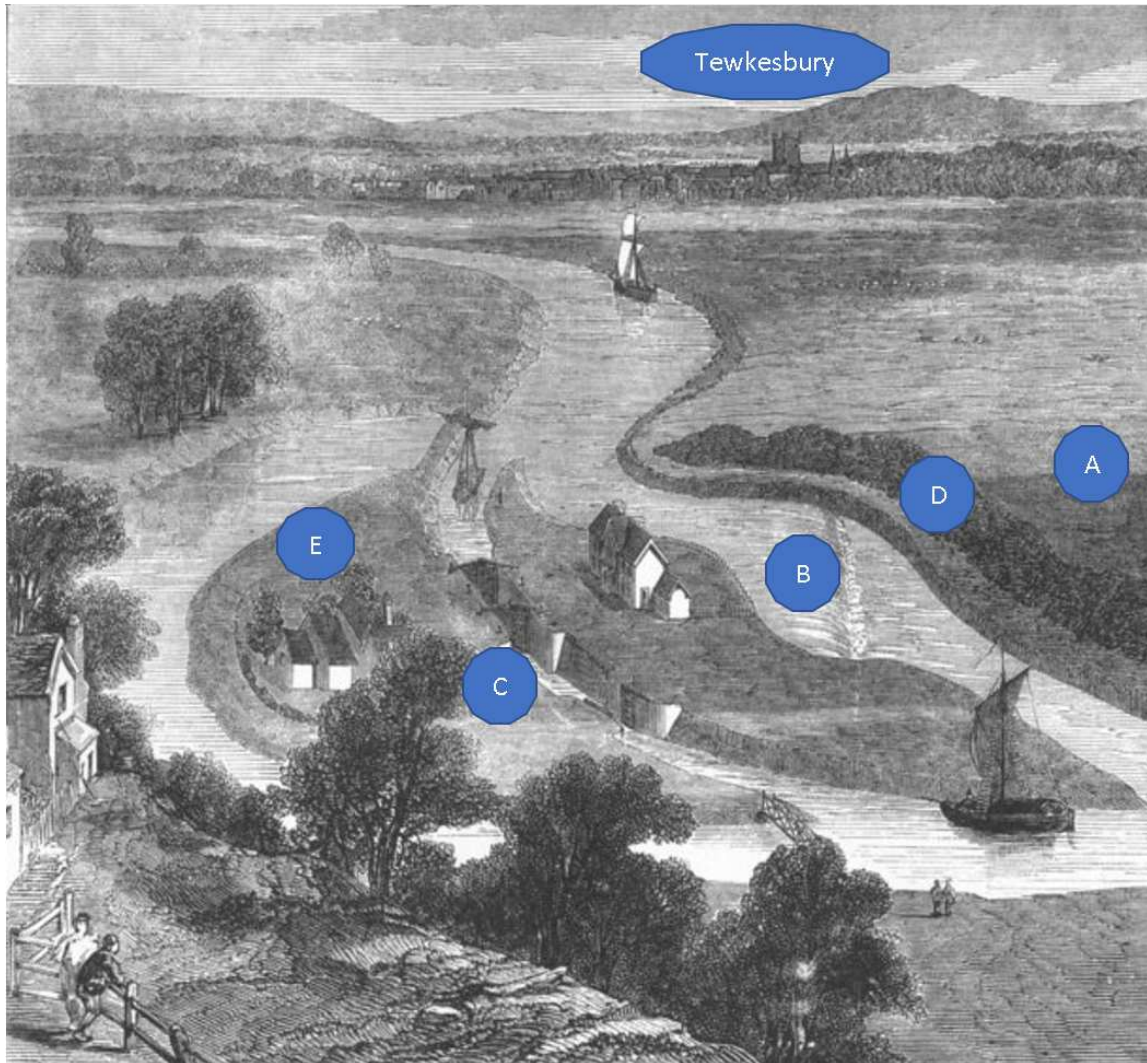
The works started in 1856 and involved excavating approximately 230,000 cubic yards of material.

There was an 18' deep cutting for the weir channel consisting of 3' of loam on top of 15' of 'capital brick clay'.

The excavation for the locks was 34' deep and the first 18' of that was of similar character to the weir cutting (capital brick clay).

The clay element was said to be, "of the best quality for making bricks". Some was used at the time, to make in excess of a million bricks for the construction of the locks there, which opened 10th August 1858.

On completion of the Severn Navigation improvements at Upper Lode, Tewkesbury, all the unused excavated clay remained on the banks of the Severn facing the new locks and weir. At the time, this was generally described as, the "huge mountain" of clay.



The new channel opened at Upper Lode 10th August 1858 Illustrated London News

A – Severn Ham, B – The new weir, C – The new locks, D – The ‘Clay Mountain’, E – Upper Lode Inn

Two local gentlemen, Mr William Jaynes and Mr George Awford entered into business to secure the privilege of transforming the enormous store (‘Mountain’) of clay into bricks. Under the agreement, the clay was divided between the two men.

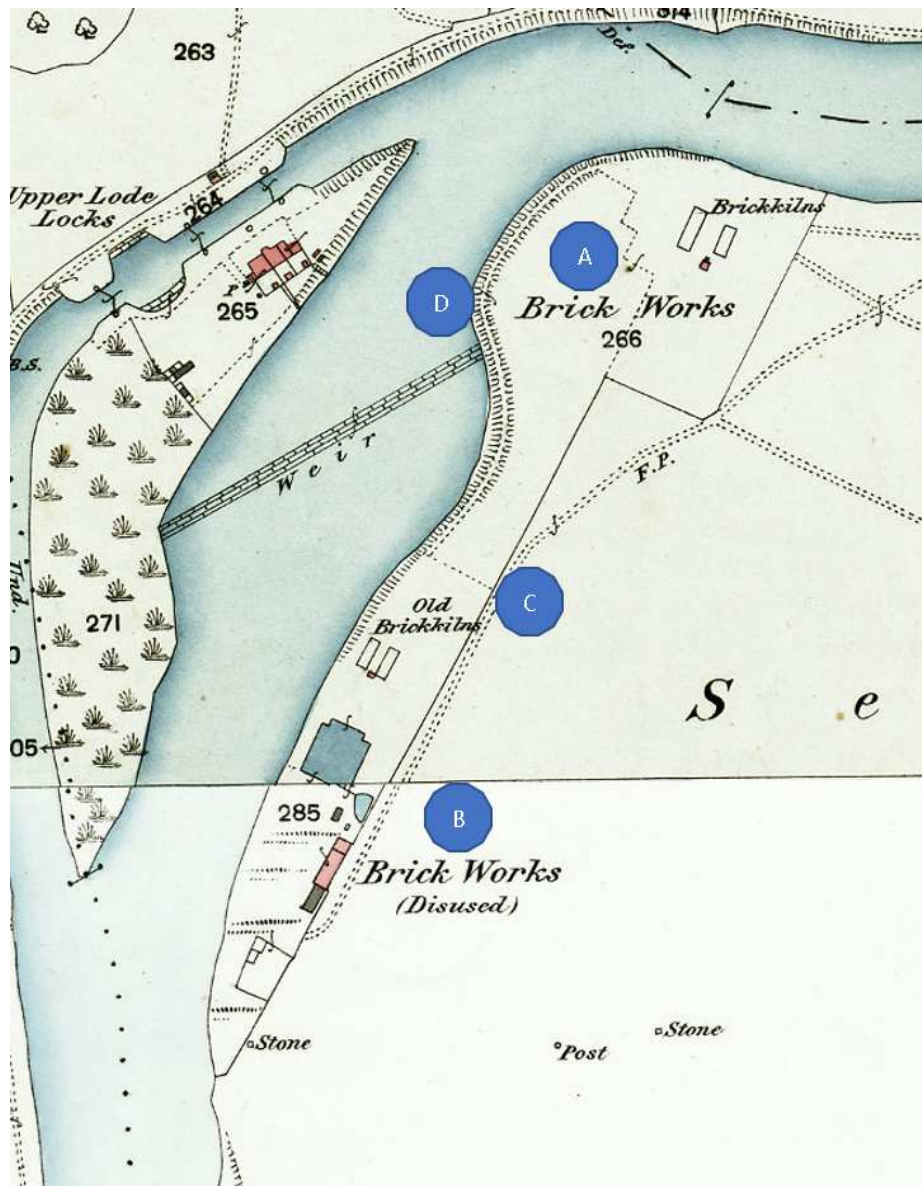
William Jaynes erected his brickworks at the upper end of the clay on the banks of the Severn Ham solely working on brick, tile and draining pipe manufacture, expanding to yards in other locations, until his death on 14th January 1899.

William and his brother Thomas Jaynes spent their early lives in Tewkesbury training to follow the building trade. William was instructed as a carpenter and joiner and Thomas as a mason and bricklayer.

Thomas early associated himself with the carrying out of important railway contracts and proved very skilful in tunnel construction, in which he excelled on many railway enterprises in England, France and other parts of Europe. In 1863-4, Thomas was engaged in connection with the construction of the railway from Tewkesbury to Malvern, including the brickwork of the tunnel through Mythe Hill.

George Awford set up his brickworks below Jeynes at the end of the 'clay mountain' below the weir.

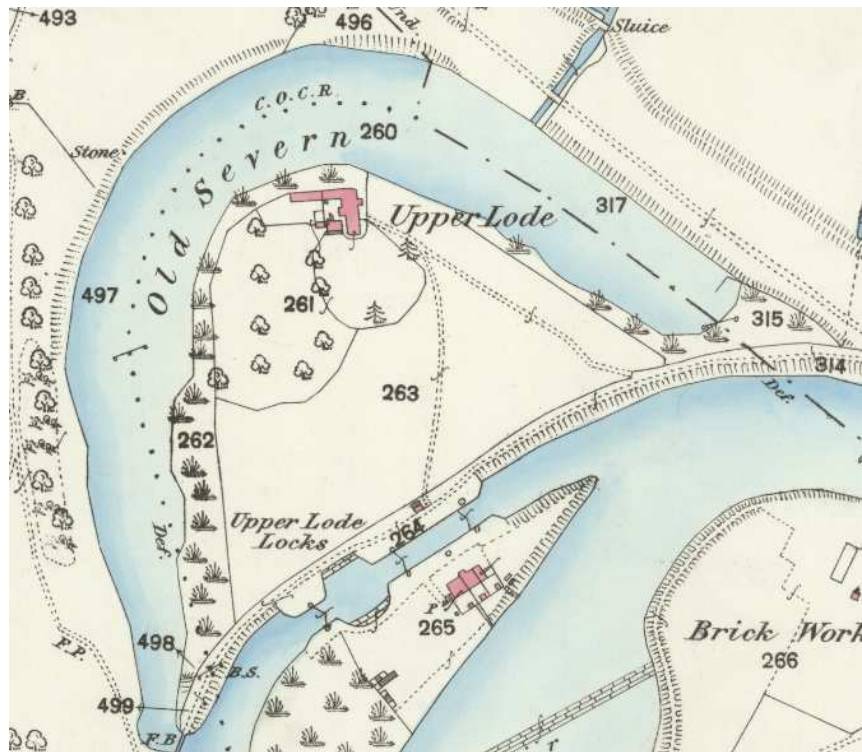
The reason is unknown why the decision was made to use the name 'G AUFORD' as opposed to G AWFORD on the bricks.



1886 1st Edition Ordnance Survey 25" Sheet showing the two brick works.

A – Jeynes Brick Works, B – Auford Brick Works, C – Boundary between the two brickyards, D – Remaining 'clay mountain' along the banks of Mr Jeynes yard.

Awford and his family lived at the Upper Lode Inn, which being cut off from the Ham by the construction works, was discontinued as an Inn and turned in to his family's private dwelling house and office.



1886 1st Edition Ordnance Survey 25" Sheet showing Upper Lode House (previously Inn)

George Awford carried on the business of brickmaking at Upper Lode until 1885 when the supply of clay had become depleted. This means our red bricks were from a local Tewkesbury brickmaker who only operated for a little over 26 years.

The Awford family moved from Upper Lode House in 1885, a Mr Chris Ball, coal merchant and barge owner, moving in to Upper Lode house.

George Awford passed away living in Gloucester 2nd March 1900 aged 89 years.

The Midland Railway approved the Contractors proposal for their design for Berkeley Station at the start of August 1874 and the bricks were probably ordered before the end of 1874.

The red bricks would have been delivered directly by Canal barge from the G Auford Brickyard to Sharpness in the first half of 1875 and taken from Sharpness to site either by horse and cart or by rail using the contractor's wagons and a locomotive to the Contractors 'Ladymead Yard' at Berkeley Station.

The main station building at Berkeley was completed by the start of January 1876, only the wooden passenger shelter on the up platform to Berkeley Road remained to be constructed and some of the signalling to be finished before the line opened to passengers on Tuesday 1st August 1876.

The bricks which made up Berkeley Station were from Gloucestershire (Reds), Staffordshire (Blues) and Leicester (Creams).

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