

# NEWSLETTER

MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE LOCAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC (Founded 11<sup>th</sup> June 1958)

Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society

ABN 34611778680

PO Box 450 Muswellbrook NSW 2333

Editor Lionel Ahearn

No. 5 October 2020

## Displays in the Library

At the moment there is a display in the glass cases towards the back of the library dealing with the Muswellbrook Brickworks. Some brief notes and photos are displayed together with a number of bricks dating back to the early days of Muswellbrook. The article in this Newsletter deals with the early brickmaking in Muswellbrook as well as the local Muswellbrook Brickworks.

Two other displays deal with the early baseball teams that existed in Muswellbrook and a selection of articles donated from Wall's Chemist Shop. Shortly we hope to mount a new display in the fourth cabinet.



## John McDonald



The Members of the Society were saddened to hear of the passing of John McDonald on 4<sup>th</sup> October. John was a long term resident of the district living at his property EIEIO. He had a keen interest in local history and was involved in the publishing of many books.

Three of his books continue to be sold through the Society emphasising the popularity of his work. They are 'What's in a Name - A history of McCully's Gap & Dunbar's Creek', 'The Muswellbrook Coal Company – The first 90 years', 'Muswellbrook Railway' and 'Muswellbrook Athletics Club.'

The photo shows John McDonald launching his Railway Book at Muswellbrook Railway Station

## 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday



To all the people who surprised me with a fantastic morning tea to celebrate my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday may I take this opportunity to personally say thanks. A special thanks to Garry & Heather Meissner for arranging it without my being aware of it. Also to the members who were able to attend to make this a memorable morning.



## DETAILS ABOUT THE SOCIETY

### Objectives:

- To collect, preserve and promote the social, cultural and physical history of Muswellbrook Shire, its environs and its people for future generations.
- to promote public access to our collections and research facilities, and
- to provide information, advice and assistance to individuals, community groups, organizations and businesses.

### Meetings

The Society meets on the third Tuesday of each month starting at 7.00 in the Society Room at the rear of the Muswellbrook Library. All members and visitors are welcome to attend the meeting and stay for a cuppa, biscuit & a chat after.

### Premises

The Society maintains its records in a section of Muswellbrook Library. You will find us at the rear of the Library. The Research Centre is open every Saturday from 9.30am to 1.00pm. The Research Centre may be opened at other times by appointment. Bus & tour groups are most welcome.

### Annual Fees

Single \$25 Double \$35 Pensioner Single \$15 Pensioner Double \$25

The Hon Secretary may be contacted via the post office box or email [mei2@bigpond.com](mailto:mei2@bigpond.com) The Society also has a web presence thanks to Darrin Khan and Lionel Ahearn at <http://www.mbkhistorical.org> and a research site at <http://research.mbkhistorical.org>

**MUSWELLBROOK BRICKWORKS**

Information from the 'Archival Recording & Photographic Record of Muswellbrook Brickworks' prepared for Muswellbrook Coal Company by members of Muswellbrook Shire Local & Family History Society Inc.

Recording and photographing conducted in late 2009. Report published in 2010



Plate 21:  
chimney at

Photo 01. Site B,  
northern end of

Site C, kiln 2. Site A to right & Site G in background.

Brickmaking was one of the first industries to start in Muswellbrook. Bricks were definitely being made in Muswellbrook by 1838 and that was only four years after the sale of the first land. Surveyor Ralfe (and Commissioner for Protection of Crown Lands) informed the Surveyor General that Mr Nowland, a publican of Muswellbrook had built a but on Crown land for a brickmaker and that person was digging pits plus digging away the river bank for the purpose of making bricks. Edward Danny Day, Police Magistrate at Muswellbrook was asked to explain. Day responded stating that Ralfe's information was partly correct. There was another brickmaker there and his name was Large and he was in the process of completing 11,000 bricks for the police barracks. Unfortunately Day does not give the Christian name of Large, it is possible that he was the bricklayer who was assigned to Captain John Pike of Pickering in 1832.<sup>1</sup>

A number of buildings erected in Muswellbrook in the 1840s and 1850s were constructed of brick so this early industry must have continued. Buildings still surviving from this period are the Valley Hotel, Loxton House (facade is stone, but the rest of the building is brick) the first St. John's Church and parts of Eaton's Hotel



Loxton House MSL&FHS photo 2188.3

1st St John's Church

Eaton's Hotel

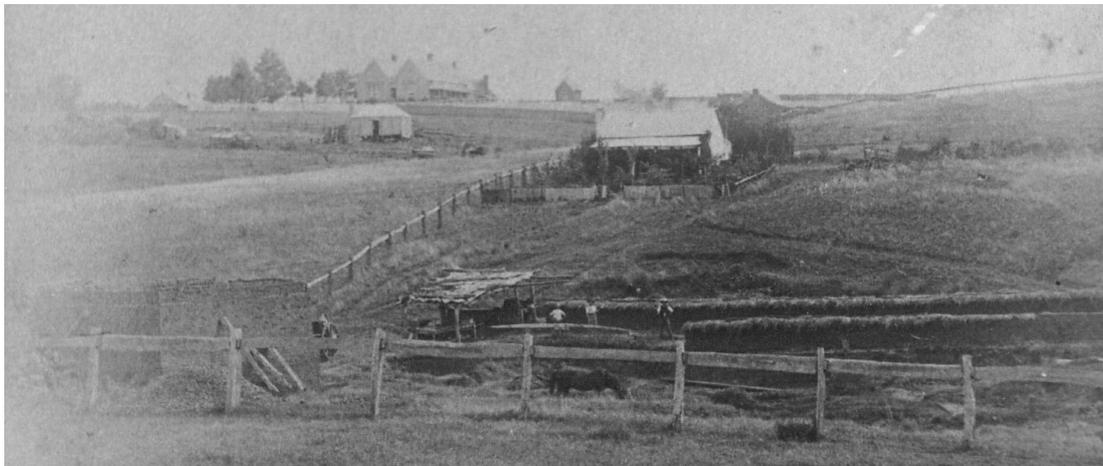
MSL&FHS photo 2029

MSL&FHS photo 0145

Brickmaking continued, not only in Muswellbrook, but on stations where the original timber buildings were being replaced. George Bowman of Skellatar called for tenders to make 300,000 bricks on his property, stating there was plenty of clay, water and wood on the site. William Cains, builder of East Maitland advertised that he required 70,000

bricks at Merton (near present Denman) and tenders were called for making 50,000 bricks at Muswellbrook for the Wesleyan Chapel. Unfortunately, the early records are silent as to the identity of these early brickmakers.

It would appear that early brickyards in Muswellbrook were located on Crown Land close to the Hunter River. One of the early pits was located during the construction of the levee bank in Ford Street. The next location for a brick yard was in Possum Gully east of Sowerby Street.



MSL&FHS  
photo 0606.2

This brickyard is attributed to Edwin Smithers. The Benevolent Society Hospital can be seen on the horizon. Other early kiln sites were found and recorded by Rob Tickle.



on the east side of Possum Gully



Part of a kiln found in Brecht Street

Part of a kiln found

Originally, all bricks made in Australia were by hand-moulding. A brick mould is a four-sided box without top or bottom. Clay is placed in the box by hand with sufficient force to fill it, the surplus is removed with a strike and the brick is turned out to dry.



COAL

Plate 1: Example of hand mould. Mould came from the Singleton area and now owned by Jeff Wolfgang of Denman.

COMPANY TO  
ESTABLISH

#### BRICKWORKS

Mr H. C. McDonald (chairman of directors of Muswellbrook Coal Co. Ltd.) stated yesterday that the company proposed to expend upwards of £20,000 in establishing brickworks at Muswellbrook. Mr McDonald was speaking at the annual meeting of shareholders.

#### PRODUCTION IN 12 MONTHS

Mr McDonald said it was hoped to start production of bricks in from nine to twelve months. He said there was a vast quantity of clay available without the task of digging, as the material from which the bricks would be made was provided by

overburden removed in operations at the open cut mine. Production in the early stages would be at the rate of 30,000 bricks per week.<sup>1</sup>

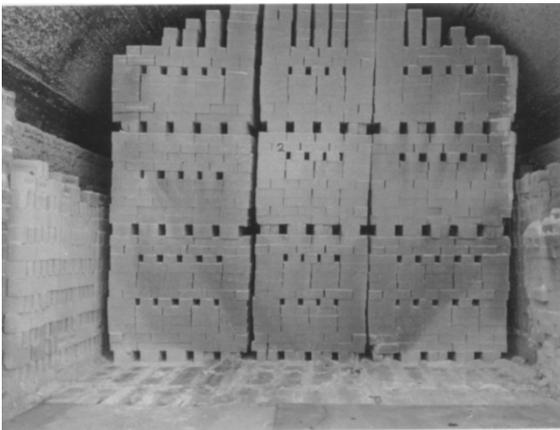
#### BRICKWORKS COMMENCE OPERATIONS - DISTRICT'S NEWEST INDUSTRY

Brickmaking operations were commenced yesterday by Muswellbrook Brick and Tile Co. Pty. Ltd., a subsidiary company of the Muswellbrook Coal Co. Ltd. The new industry is situated on portion 12, Rowen, known locally as Kennedy's Paddock, beyond the Open Cut. Yesterday, the first bricks were pressed in a modern plant which has been set up for brickmaking purposes. A temporary kiln has been constructed in which will be burnt the first bricks pressed. Those bricks will be used for the construction of permanent kilns. It is expected that several months will lapse before bricks will be available for sale.

#### 10,000 BRICKS DAILY

The plant and equipment have been installed by the Coal Co's own staff and will be capable of producing 10,000 bricks per day when in full production.<sup>2</sup>

#### LOCAL INDUSTRY'S EXPANSION



A new kiln at Muswellbrook Brick and Tile Works was commissioned into service on the 10<sup>th</sup> August 1959, when Mr H. C. McDonald, Chairman of Directors, Muswellbrook Industries Ltd., thrust a flaming torch into the fireholes and ignited the fires that will burn the kiln's first setting of 100,000 bricks.<sup>3</sup>

MSL&FHS photo D0268 shows an example of the type of kiln used.

#### BRICKWORKS TO CLOSE

Muswellbrook brickworks will cease to operate as from the end of March, throwing 14 men out of work. The brickworks, a subsidiary of Muswellbrook Industries Ltd, began operations about 18 years ago.<sup>4</sup>

#### BRICKWORKS RE-OPENED

After being closed down for just over a month Muswellbrook Brickworks re-opened on Tuesday of this week under new ownership. The plant was recently purchased by Mr C. J. O'Brien, of Maitland, from Muswellbrook Coal Co. Pty Ltd.

In 1979 the brickworks were placed on the market. They were purchased by Geoff Jackson and Don Goodridge and opened on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1979. The business continued until 1999 when the land was sold to Muswellbrook Coal Company and all brick manufacturing equipment was auctioned.

#### PERSONAL NOTE



The 1989 Newcastle earthquake occurred on Thursday, 28 December. The shock measured 5.6 on the Richter magnitude scale and was one of Australia's most serious natural disasters, killing 13 people and injuring more than 160

During the quake Christchurch Cathedral Newcastle suffered serious damage. Considerable time was needed to establish what needed doing and how to accomplish it.

Eventually it was realised that there was a need for certain special bricks to match those destroyed in the earthquake. Muswellbrook Brickworks was approached being the only brickworks still hand making bricks.

Christchurch Cathedral restored

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<sup>1</sup> Muswellbrook chronicle 21 September 1954

<sup>2</sup> Muswellbrook Chronicle 15 January 1957

<sup>3</sup> Muswellbrook Chronicle 11 August 1959

<sup>4</sup> Muswellbrook Chronicle 18 February 1975

My son, Greg, was working there at the time as an apprentice fitter and turner. He constructed the moulds needed to produce the bricks. Luckily, Don Goodridge with his knowledge and experience knew from which quarry near Maitland that the clay had been obtained originally. Special permission had to be obtained to reopen the quarry and to remove enough clay to make the required bricks. They were fired at Muswellbrook Brickworks.