

Childs Brothers Brickyard

Childs Road, Littlehampton

1895 - 1902	Childs Bros. (James Alfred Childs & Stephen Houghton Childs jun.)
1902 - 1917	Childs & Miels (James Alfred Childs & Edwin (Ted) Miels)
1917 - 1924	J.A. Childs & Sons (James Alfred Childs & his sons, James Roy Childs & Stanley Lewis Childs)
1924 - 1951	J.A. Childs & Sons (James Roy Childs & Stanley Lewis Childs)
1951 - 1958	J.A. Childs & Sons (James Roy Childs & his sons Roy Raymond Childs & Kevin Maxwell Childs)
1958 - 1973	J.A. Childs & Sons (Roy Raymond Childs & Kevin Maxwell Childs)

In 1895, brothers James Alfred Childs & Stephen Houghton Childs (jun.) established the Childs Bros. brickyards on 5 & 1/2 acres the eastern side of Childs Road (Hundred of Macclesfield, part section 5009). The location of the brickyard was near where the present sawmill and car wrecking yard are located. They were experienced brickmakers having worked at the Coppin brickyard for many years Their father was Stephen H. Childs, who had married Ann Coppin. Ann's father was James Coppin, of the Coppin Bricks Company, also from Littlehampton.

"The clay at the time was taken from the pughole by pick and shovel and wheeled by wheelbarrow to the shed where it was crushed by putting it through a set of rollers. It then went through a pug mill, which mixed the clay with water and formed it into a continuous length the width of a brick. Next it travelled to a wire cutter, which was worked by hand, pulling a lever, cutting 6 bricks at a time. These 'green' bricks were stacked in an open kiln (it was called that because it had no roof) for burning or cooking. The kiln was then covered with iron and ground clay to form a roof and fire holes were on two sides of the kiln where wood was used for the fires. Draft was caused by a flue and a chimney. The kiln took 1 week to burn. During the first 3 - 4 days, a small fire was used to remove the moisture from the bricks - steaming the bricks. Then gradually the fire was increased to reach the temperature of 1300degrees F, then the fire holes were blocked off. This prevented the bricks from cooling too quickly, which would cause cracking. The fires went 24 hours a day and approximately 32 tons of wood was used for each kiln"

Business was so successful that in 1896, they built another shed to provide cover for 50,000 bricks. In 1897, a woodheap in their yard was deliberately set on fire. It contained about 10 tons of wood. The matter was put into the hands of police, who brought a black tracker up from Adelaide to help locate the culprit. The search was fruitless, and the offender (who was said to be well known) could not be charged for lack of evidence

In January 1898, Childs Bros. completed an order for 50,000 bricks for the Port Pirie Smelting Works and received a very large order from Wallaroo Copper Co. for 540,000 bricks to build new kilns and sheds. Soon after, a personal tragedy occurred for one of the brothers. Stephen's wife died on the 6th of March 1898 (aged 30), one week after giving birth to their first child. The daughter (Hartie) died on the 14th of April 1898 (at 6 weeks and 4 days old).

On 13th of October 1902, Stephen Childs left the company, and Edwin Miels became a partner. The company was called Childs and Miels Bricks. The bricks were stamped 'C & M' in the frog.

On 3 Jun 1905, two of the boys employed at Childs & Miels brickworks had a fight. One boy was stabbed and the other was brought before the courts. They were Arthur A. Wyld, aged 16, son of Mrs. Wyld, and Harry J. Hall, aged 15, son of Mr. R. Hall. ^[19]

The Advertiser reported on Sat 3rd June 1905:

"Both were employed at Messrs. Childs & Miels' brick- works, and the testimony of the workmen is that after Wyld had hit Hall with a piece of clay the two made uncomplimentary remarks about each other. Wyld resented one of Hall's statements, and, as he persisted in repeating it, struck him several times, whereupon Hall seized a butcher's knife, lying near, and plunged it into his companion's back. Some employees rushed forward and happily prevented Hall from further using the knife, which he had raised in a threatening attitude when it was wrested from him. Wyld was taken home, and although there are signs that the lung has been injured, Dr. Smeaton says there is no serious constitutional disturbance apparent. The knife shows signs of having penetrated to the extent of about 4 in. Hall was arrested by Corporal Dowling on Thursday, and was brought before, the court at Mount Barker on Friday morning."

The Advertiser reported on 4th August 1905:

"Harry James Hall (15) pleaded not guilty to a charge of having done grievous bodily harm to Arthur Alexander Wyld at Littlehampton on May 31. Mr. J. H. Vaughan appeared for the defence. The evidence showed that the two lads were employed in Mr. Child's brickworks at Littlehampton. A quarrel ensued over family scandals, and Hall stabbed Wyld in the back with a knife, causing a wound, which penetrated the lungs. The jury found the prisoner guilty. The prisoner will be released this morning on giving two sureties of £10 each for his good behaviour."

On March 11 1907, the *Register* reported that;

“Messrs. Miels & Childs had made important improvements at their brickworks, in the shape of a new oil engine and crushing plant. The engine, which was installed by Messrs. Clutterbuck Brothers, of Adelaide, is a 12-h.p. Blackstone (oil engine), of the latest pattern. The crushing plant comprise; two pairs of 17-in. rollers, and was manufactured and installed by Messrs. W. Salman and Co. of the Perseverance Ironworks. Mount Barker.”^[3]

This information was supported by an article in the *Advertiser* dated 3rd May 1907, an advertisement in the *Advertiser* placed by Clutterbucks on Saturday 12 October 1907 and an article in the *Courier* on 22 November 1907,^[12]

The Adelaide Register reported on Thursday 30 July 1908;

“A painful accident happened at Messrs. Childs and Miel’s brickworks today. A young man named Ryder got his hand caught in the crusher and had three of his fingers badly injured. He proceeded to the Adelaide Hospital.”



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On the 10th February 1909, there was a letter to the editor of the *Advertiser* that reported a shortage of bricks in Adelaide for building, and recommending that the Government established kilns to reduce the shortage. A second letter from “One of the sufferers of Littlehampton” points out that the four yards at Littlehampton can supply large quantities of bricks but have not been able to get (railway) trucks to transport the bricks to Adelaide.

An article on 16 Feb 1910 in *The Register* and another on 14 March 1910 in the *Advertiser* indicated that the shortage of railway trucks being made available to the Littlehampton brickyards was still in evidence, and affecting the supply of bricks.

By 1910, the brickyard was one of the largest and most progressive in the district. The yard occupied a six-acre site and had a large supply of clay for making house bricks and also silica rich shale for firebricks. A registered tramway helped transport the clay from the open cut section and the clay tunnels. A 12hp Blackstone oil engine ran the plant and horseworks were also utilised. The plant had 2sets of rollers for grinding the shale and a brickmaking machine with a capacity of over 1,000 bricks per hour which extruded clay which was wire cut into bricks. This process allowed for the clay to have about half the water content, which dried in less time and could be fired soon after pressing.

Also in 1910, Childs & Miels purchased another acre of land to supplement the clay supply. They also erected their third kiln.

On 29th October 1910, *The Register* reported that a strike had been averted at the Littlehampton brickyards. The workmen wanted to be paid at the same rate as the workers at the Hindmarsh yards. The owners offered a pay rise but the workers stood firm and said they would not work until the full raise was granted. The owners granted the pay rise and announced that the price of bricks would have to go up. The *Advertiser* reported on the same story on 29th October 1910 as well.

In 1914, it was reported that a brick press was purchased from a disused brickyard owned by Savages of Nairne, that Childs & Miels supplied the 'blue vitrified bricks' for the new Mount Barker High School and also for the new Mount Barker Police Station. Also, on 25th July 1914, the foundation stone of the new Methodist Church was laid at Fischer Terrace, West Adelaide. The walls will have bands of Littlehampton vitrified bricks. On the same day, the *Advertiser* reported that the Walkerville church will be built from Hallet bricks with bands of Littlehampton vitrified bricks.

Note: the blue vitrified bricks were water resistant and served as a damp course layer. This process was also used for kerbing bricks and there are still examples of these kerbing bricks in use in the older section of Strathalbyn.

In 1917, Edwin Miels died and James Childs took on his two sons, James Roy Childs and Stanley Childs as partners. The name became J.A. Childs and sons. The word 'CHILDS' was stamped in the frog



On 15 July 1921, the *Courier* reported on progress at J.A. Childs & Sons.

"The firm supplies large orders for builders throughout the southern district, in addition to the large quantity for Government Departments quoted in the Littlehampton Station returns for the year. About a dozen men are now employed by the firm, which recently found it necessary to install a new dry process brick machine capable of turning out eight to ten thousand bricks a day. The amount of bricks, tiles etc. by Messrs. Childs & Sons for the past 12 months total 800,000"

J.A. Childs & Sons. purchased a further 1 & 1/2 acres of adjoining land in 1922 for clay. Also, 3 dome kilns were built, each able to hold 32,000 bricks.

28 January 1924

*"The death occurred of Mr. J. A. Childs, of Littlehampton, at the Mount Barker Memorial Hospital on Monday morning. He was 59 years of age, and was a son of the late Mr. Stephen Childs, one of the oldest residents of Littlehampton. He was a partner of the late Mr. Miels, and the firm carried on brick making. On the death of Mr. Miels, two of Mr. Childs's two sons were taken, into the business, which was then conducted under the name of J. A. Childs & Sons. Mr. Childs was a useful townsman. He was a member of the Loyal Britannia Lodge for 36 years (since July, 1888)."*¹

The business continued trading as J.A. Childs & Sons, run by his two sons James Roy Childs and Stanley Lewis Childs

The Great Depression (1929–32) was a time of extreme hardship for people in Australia. For the Childs brickyards it was a difficult period. The building industry was at a standstill and the firm had bricks stockpiled in the yard. Bricks were hawked about the district and regularly swapped for wood to fire the kilns. The kilns were re-lined during slack periods. ^[6]

In 1926, the yard was using three kilns worked on a three-week cycle, fired by burning local wood for ordinary bricks and Newcastle coal for fire bricks.

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In 1951, Stanley Childs withdrew and the company carried on with James and his two sons, Roy and Raymond. In 1958, James Roy Childs passed away and his two sons carried on the business continuing with the J.A. Childs & Sons name. In 1973, the company ceased operation when the South Eastern Freeway was built over part of the company grounds. The location now has a sawmill and car wreckers on the site.