

Coppin Brickyard

1856-1935

In 1856 James Coppin (aged 41) and his family arrived in South Australia on the ship 'Gomelza', moved to Littlehampton and started making bricks. While there had been other brickmakers in Mount Barker and Littlehampton (Hombin, Love, McDonald, Wraight, Weller), it is thought that they were small operations and that the Coppin Brickyard was the first brickyard in the area, predating the WATTS brickyard at Native Valley (near Nairne) by about two years. James and several of the children had worked in brickyards back in England and quickly developed a reputation for a good quality product.

James Coppin died 27 Jan 1866 (age 52), not quite ten years later. The business was taken on by his son James Alfred COPPIN, who was 16 years old at the time. Some years later Henry COPPIN joined the business, and it became known as Coppin Bros. In 1883, James A. COPPIN married Lucretia (Louisa Lucretia) WATTS, the daughter of John WATTS, who ran a brickyard at Scott Creek (near Nairne).

Henry Coppin withdrew from the business (perhaps around 1900) and became a storekeeper. This shop is still standing at No.70 Old Princes Highway, Littlehampton. The brickyard was still called Coppin Bros. In 1918, James A. COPPIN handed over the business to his son Alfred Moses COPPIN who became the sole proprietor.

For the first 70 years of its operation, the brickyard had kept with the original methods of making bricks. It had a clay pit 20ft deep and the clay was mined by hand at the pit and loaded into a truck which was hoisted by a horse driven winch up an inclined tramway to the mill. The yard used a down draft kiln with a capacity of 40,000 bricks.

On 17 August 1923, J.A. Coppin was given the honour of turning on the Littlehampton electricity supply and in 1927, Alfred Coppin installed an electrically driven machine for grinding the pug (the wet clay) and extruding it as a slab. The machine was constructed by Messrs. E. Kreiger (an engineering and manufacturing firm located on Port Road, Croydon) to Mr. Coppin's design.

Alfred Coppin died suddenly at home on 17 April 1937 and is buried at St. James Anglican Cemetery at Blakiston. On 5 Aug 1937, I discovered a notice that the estate of Alfred Moses COPPIN was bankrupt. The bankruptcy petitioner was his widow Ada Mary COPPIN. On 14 Aug 1937 brickmaking equipment from the estate of Mr. COPPIN is advertised for sale, and on subsequent dates, bricks were for sale.

Location of the brickyard

There are reports that the Coppin brickyard was on Childs Road, and also where Coppin Scrub now stands on West Terrace, but I do not give these reports much credit. The “Record of Mines” Card for Coppin’s Brickworks gives its location as “*On the North side of main road at Littlehampton*”.

Elizabeth Childs (a long term local and relative of the Coppins family) wrote that the brickyard was located at the end of Coppin Road. This view is supported by notes in the Watts family collection (the Watts were related also) and Bolto family notes (also related) suggest that the clay was quarried from between the rail line / creek and Coppins Road and also shale from a section in Coppin’s Bush, which was owned by the family. Coppins Road is just west of the Balhannah Road and runs parallel to it, from Old Princes Highway down towards the creek and the railway line. Supporting this view is that Borrow & Haycraft’s wattle-extract factory was on the Balhannah Road, opposite the Coppin Brothers brickyard.

The only wrinkle to this is that the SARIG (SA Govt. Mapping Service) shows the location of the Coppin Brickyard as being slightly further west, very close to the Eastern end of what is now the Cool Frogs Childhood Education Centre via Rosella Crt. (off of Cleggett Road). The site that is suggested by SARIG was the Littlehampton Brewery in 1850 and later became the “Monks of Old” meatworks. Coppin’s brickyard was operating until 1937 and for more than 50 years, it was south of the railway line.

SARIG location Coppins Road No. 5 Balhannah Road Great Eastern Hotel



Coppin’s Scrub 

Note: The location suggested by SARIG was originally the location for the Littlehampton Brewery (est. 1850), then the “*Monks of Old*” meatworks, then the “*Foggitt Jones*” meatworks, then the “*Once a Jolly Swagman Restaurant*” and which is now the Cool Frogs Childhood Education Centre.