

John Watts Brickyard

The History of the Scott Creek Brickworks and of John Watts and his family has been very extensively documented and can be found in the archives at the Mount Barker Local History Centre (Mount Barker Library) and also in the State Library of S.A. What follows below is a summary of this information.

John Watts was born on 29th of June 1812, in England. He married Ann Nancy Avery (called Nancy) on 23rd of November 1834 at Bethnal Green, London, England. Their first son, John, was born in England. They arrived at Holdfast Bay on January 12th 1837 on the 'Coromandel' with their infant son John Watts (Jun), making them one of the state's earliest settlers.

John and Nancy settled in Hindmarsh Town and stayed there for about 20 years. It was reported that his house was on the corner of Port Road and Adam Street which is where the Entertainment Centre now stands. His occupation was listed on the *Coromandel* as tanner, but he was a tailor, and he worked at a tailor shop in Hindley Street for a time before becoming involved in the brick making industry. It was reported that he was one of the first brick makers in the Hindmarsh area. In 1839, and, when his second son Joseph Samuel was born, his occupation was listed as brickmaker.

John and Nancy had 14 children. John (junior) was born in England. The next 11 children were born at Hindmarsh between 1838 & 1856. It is assumed that moved to Nairne in 1858, as the remaining three children were born at Nairne between 1858 & 1862.

Family histories indicate that John Watts started making bricks in the Scott Creek area in 1858, and by 1860, the Scott Creek Brickworks was in full operation, as the following advertisement was from the South Australian Register, Fri 21st Dec 1860.



Records indicate that there were several sites used for brickmaking over time. They were mostly around Harrogate Road, Native Valley. The earliest site is still in evidence on Sect. 1977, Hd Kanmantoo at the junction of two creeks about 1km south of the final site. The second site was used from about 1863, and was on Sect. 1980 Hd. Kanmantoo, on Hutchinson Road, now called Harrogate Road, 9km from Nairne.

The brickworks at Scott Creek were originally set up to manufacture fire bricks which were used in smelting works at Scott Creek, Kanmantoo and Clare. The brickworks also supplied fire bricks to smelting works at Wallaroo and Moonta. The Watts' brickworks were also known for producing red bricks.

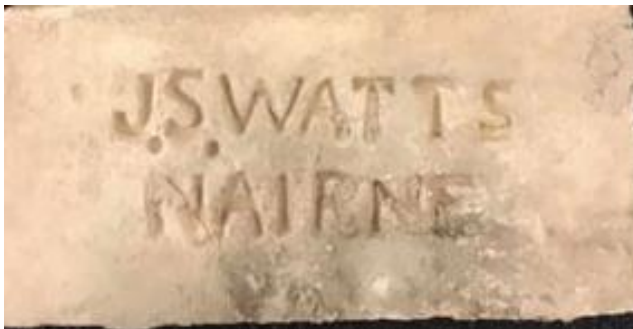


In 1864, 53,000 firebricks were made for Wallaroo Mines, 6,000 firebricks to England & Australian Copper Co. with other orders to Cornwall Mines Association and Worthing Mines & Smelting Co.

In the 1870's, firebricks were produced for furnace linings, roasting furnaces for pyrites and smelting copper ore, industrial chimneys, boiler furnaces, brick kilns, bakers' ovens, domestic stoves and fireplaces, grate bricks, industrial and hospital incinerators and other uses.

In 1879, the brickyard was called Watts & Son, with the son being Joseph Samuel Watts. Employees in the early days were Bond, Linklater, L. Watts, Tilbrook, May, Teague, Allen, Davies & Blizzard.

Family legend has it that in 1878, John Watts (aged 66yrs) went to Little Hampton to help his son Luke start a brickyard there, and he is listed as a brickmaker in the Almanac from 1883 to 1886. In 1887, he is not listed, but his son Luke Watts is listed as a brickmaker of Little Hampton. Joseph Samuel Watts was in charge of the Hutchinson Road yard.



In 1886, J.S. Watts purchase Pt. Sect. 4412 in 1886 from George Mills & John Shepherd, and Pt. Sect. 1893 from Will Thompson. These two part sections comprised the third and final site for the brickyard, and in 1888, a new downdraft domed kiln was built, followed by an updraft kiln.

On 27th November 1883, the Nairne railway station was opened. This was a major improvement in transporting bricks to Adelaide. They had previously been carted by ox cart. During the 1880s and 1890s, the business expanded greatly and Watts firebricks were being used all over the colony.

John Watts was gored by a bull in 1890 and was left semi-paralyzed and confined to his room. He died on 23rd Jun 1895 at Littlehampton, South Australia, just short of his 83rd birthday.

In 1900, The business name became J.S. Watts and Son, with the son being Joseph Horsell Watts. In 1913, J.S. Watts died and Albert Robert (Bert) Watts became a partner with his brother Joseph Horsell (Joe) Watts. The company traded as J.S. Watts & Sons.

In 1923, a second-hand Republic lorry (truck) was purchased. It had solid tyres, no cab and no windscreen.

In the 1930's, several more Watts sons were working with their fathers in the brickyard and several of the daughters were working in the office.

In the depression years, the demand for bricks reduced, but the brickyard remained open with repairs to machinery being made and some employees were kept on cutting wood for the yard and making fence posts for sale. They also undertook sinking of dams using horse drawn scoops and raising gravel for Council road repairs.

From 1935, high grade clay was sourced from Mt. Crawford allowing for an improvement in the quality and shapes of the firebricks. Demand for these bricks continued for another 20 or so years and the brickyard was at full capacity during these years. There were 22 men working in the yard. In the 1940's Victorian Bauxite was being used to make bricks with a higher alumina content for higher temperature kilns. After some time, Leigh Creek Coal was being used, and when this became unavailable (held back for electricity generation), Bituminous coal was sourced from N.S.W.

On 21st October 1946, Joseph Horsell Watts collapsed and died at the brickyard. His sons, Joseph Samuel Watts and Ernest Edward Watts became the owners of their father's half of the business with their uncle Albert Watts and his sons Reginald, Hope, and David owning the other half.

In the 1960s, the demand for firebricks waned for one reason being that they were no longer needed for locomotives. The yard began producing house bricks again.

In the 1970s, several of the Watts family members retired with Joseph Samuel Watts and Ernest Edward Watts becoming sole owners after buying the shares of the others. The company still traded as J.S. Watts & Sons. In 1981, the partners formed a company called the Traditional Brick Co. retaining all of the assets of J.S. Watts & Sons. The last firing was done in June 1983. On 14 February 1985, the company was sold to Greg and Richard Timmins.

John Watts started making bricks at Hindmarsh in 1839 before moving to Scott Creek in 1858. Four generations of Watts men had a continuous involvement in brickmaking for more than 140 years.

