FROM THE ARCHIVES

An archive photograph of East Midlands geology from the British Geological Survey collection

Ludlow Hill brick clay quarry

The clay pit lay close to the boundary between West Bridgford and Edwalton, adjacent to the former Nottingham to Melton railway line and is now accessible via Ludlow Hill Road, off the A606 Melton Road through West Bridgford. While it was being worked, the pit was photographed by the Geological Survey photographer T C Hall in 1908.

Excavation began around 1885, with the construction of a brickworks on the site by Messrs. Smart. Like numerous other brickworks in the area at this time, demand was fuelled by the rapid expansion of Nottingham's industry and population, and the need for construction materials for factories and dwellings. Smart's Brickworks mainly fed the demand for bricks for the growth of West Bridgford. Mudstones were initially exposed in the eastern wall of the railway cutting, and were then exploited by further excavation in an eastwards direction. Railway sidings were constructed in the quarry to load completed bricks for transport to West Bridgford and Nottingham, and to drop workers off at the brickworks, avoiding the walk from Edwalton Station 1 km to the south-east.

Brick clay in the Nottingham area has mainly been quarried either from the Permian Edlington Formation (formerly Middle Permian Marl) or the Triassic Mercia Mudstone Group. Much of the latter contains clays suitable for brick making, but the most commonly worked clays occur at two stratigraphical levels within the Gunthorpe Formation in the lower part of the Group. These beds were favoured mainly because of their association with overlying, resistant sandstone units (the Plains 'Skerry' and the Cotgrave Sandstone Member), which form prominent scarp slopes allowing the underlying clays to be quarried with ease. The Ludlow Hill Pit exploited the mudstones immediately below the Cotgrave Sandstone Member, a greenish-grey, calcareous and dolomitic sandstone, visible as a pale coloured series of beds towards the top of the quarry face in the photo. From its heyday in the mid to late 19th century, brick clay excavation in Nottingham has now declined to a single quarry at Dorket Head, Arnold, which exploits mudstone immediately below the Plains 'Skerry' sandstone bed.

Smart's Brickworks remained in production until its closure during the Second World War, supposedly to prevent the blackout being compromised by the glow from the open kilns. The site was sold and became an industrial estate; a warehouse on the site was used by the BGS in the 1980s as a store for core samples and publications prior to completion of purpose-built facilities at Keyworth. Parts of the site have recently been re-developed for residential use, but remnants of the quarry faces remain, including some very overgrown exposures of the Cotgrave Sandstone Member.

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Ludlow Hill brick clay quarry, in 1908 (BGS photograph # A00727 © NERC).