

January 2024 Newsletter

Forthcoming Talk

History of Old Court Nurseries by Helen Picton
at Colwall Village Hall.

Monday 29th January 2024.

Doors open 19.00. Talk at 19.30.

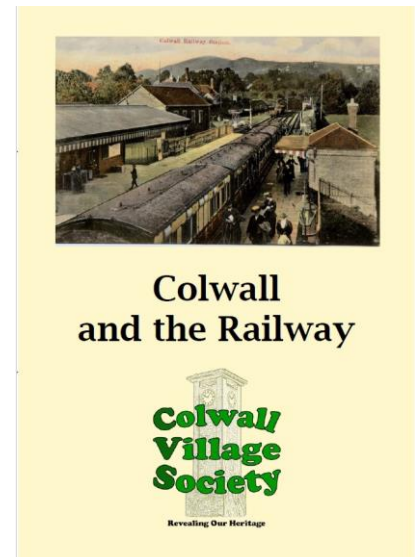
Ernest Ballard, youngest son of Stephen Ballard, started the growing of Michaelmas daisies at this Colwall site in 1906. Come along to hear how the site has developed over the years to be the thriving business and garden that it is today.

Colwall and the Railway Book

The Colwall Village Society newest book "Colwall and the Railway" will be available to buy at the January talk. The book contains an eclectic collection of railway-related short articles about Colwall and the railway since its arrival in the village in 1861.

The book costs £5.00 but CVS members may buy a copy at the discounted price of £4.00.

It is also available at Colwall Post Office.



The Colwall Brick and Tile Works – Andy Ball

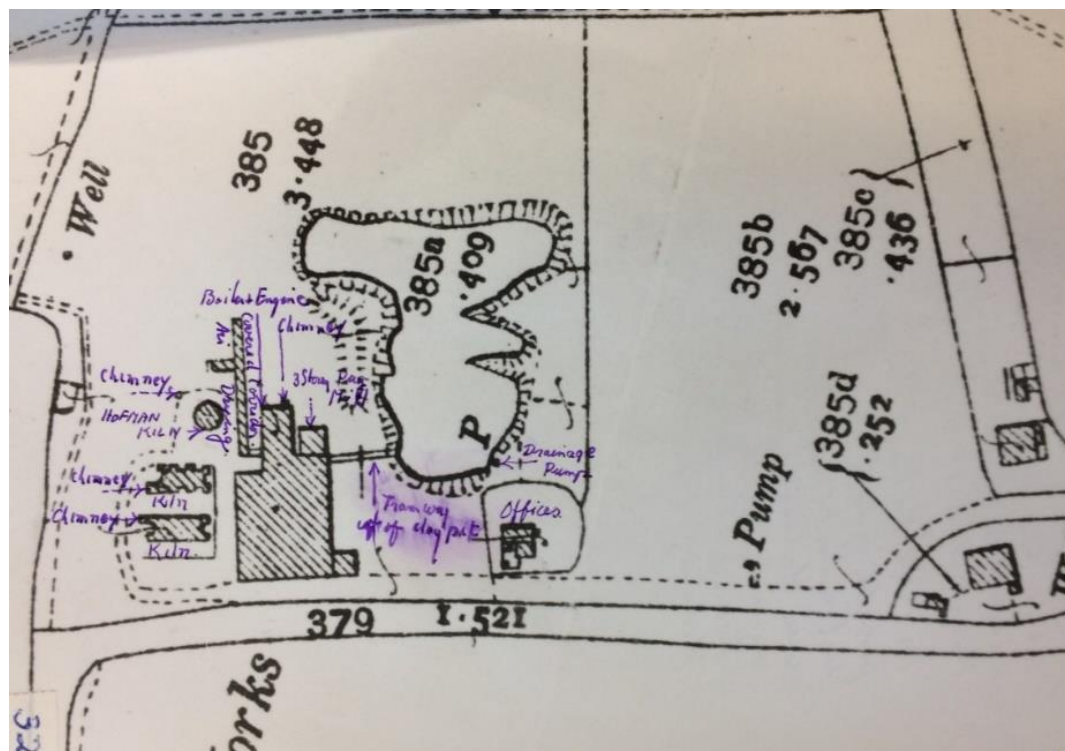
This is a summary of a fuller article, with referencing, which is available on the CVS website at www.colwallvillagesociety.org.uk/Articles/BrickworksArticle.pdf

The Colwall Brick and Tile works was created in around 1890 by Frederick (Fred) Ballard, one of Stephen and Maria Ballard's four sons. In doing so he was following a family tradition. His uncle Robert Ballard of Ledbury ran a brickworks in New Street, Ledbury between the 1840s until around 1867. It was bricks from these brickworks that were used to build the impressive Ledbury viaduct on the Worcester to Hereford railway.

The Colwall works were established on land recorded on the Colwall Tithe Map in the early 1840s as 'Behind the Wall'. Subsequently the field was acquired by the Ballard family and renamed 'Longlands'. The former brickworks site is now on two parcels of privately owned land at the north end of Old Orchard Lane.

Prior to establishing the business in Colwall, Fred obtained a position at the Piercy Brick and Tile Works in West Bromwich to gain knowledge, skills and experience. This establishment produced a wide range of brick and tile products, specialising in the production of blue bricks. Fred worked for that business for an unknown period and developed a good rapport with the staff there. Several workers subsequently joined Fred's Colwall venture and in the Worcester Chronicle dated 11 August 1894 there is an account of how "On Tuesday last the employees numbering 430, connected with the West Bromwich Brick and Tile Works, came to Colwall for their annual outing, and had a thorough day's enjoyment. Dinner was served at the Winnings Farm Buildings."

The Ordnance Survey map, hand-annotated by Stephen Ballard III, shows the form and function of the Colwall brickworks complex. Clay for the bricks was taken out of the marl hole (quite a deep excavation of between 12 and 20 feet in depth, located in the centre of the map) by means of a small tramway. A 12-inch diameter pump driven by a portable steam engine removed excess water. A brick-built structure and large diameter vertical metal pipe are still evident at the site.



Traditionally the excavated clay would have been allowed to weather for some months before use to make it more workable and to help remove unwanted salts that could make the bricks unsightly.

In Stephen Ballard III's accounts of the workings of the site it's recorded that an engine was used to wind trolleys full of clay to the top of a three-storey building which housed the rolling mill and the pugmill. The clay would have been rolled and washed before it was ready for hand pressing. This was done in the traditional manner using wooden moulds and pallets. The brickworkers hand threw the clay into the mould and removed any excess with a taut wire bow. After moulding, the bricks would have been dried to remove excess water before firing.

There were three kilns on the site. Two long Newcastle horizontal draught type kilns heated bricks to 1800 degrees F. The firing process for each batch took around 5 days for the kilns to reach the required temperature and a similar time for the bricks to cool off before removal. Decorative bricks and terracotta tiles were fired separately in a circular Hoffman kiln running at a higher temperature.



Fred's sister Ada made the designs for the decorative terracotta tiles, examples of which are attractively showcased on the nearby property – 'Marston' (formerly 'Labor Rest' or 'Labour Rest') - which was purpose-built as a brick workers house. The moulds for the tiles were crafted by John Armstrong who made the moulds from rough iron castings produced on the Colwall site using a shaping machine. Mr. Armstrong formerly of Oldbury (according to the 1891 census) appears to have joined the Colwall works

having met Fred Ballard at the Piercy Brick and Tile Works. In the 1901 national census Mr. Armstrong was

recorded as living at 'Brighton Villas', Colwall with his occupation listed as Steam Engine Fitter.

The Colwall Brick and Tile Works relied upon a supply of coal which was brought to the village via the Worcester to Hereford railway and then delivered by horse drawn vehicles to the site. There was also a gas supply to the site from the Colwall Gas Company works located in the grounds of what is now 'Kimberley House' in Old Church Road. The gasworks provided gas for street lighting in the village and the marl pit apparently had gas lamps present. Other buildings associated with the brickworks are still present in Old Orchard Lane including the former offices at the works were converted into the house now known as 'Marl Cottage'.



Colwall bricks and tiles have a smooth and hard surface. The bricks are identifiable with their signature BALLARD COLWALL logo encased in an oval. They were made in a large number of patterns. When the site was being cleared in the late 1970s Stephen Ballard III described how over 60 varieties of bricks were collected and taken to the garden at 'Grovesend'.

Estimates of the number of bricks produced during the life of the works vary between 2.5 and 4.5 million. The marl hole was deep and extensive and there is only a small heap of spoil still present on the north side of the site so presumably the rest of the clay was processed into finished products. Colwall has several good examples of houses contemporary to the Brick and Tile Works which have been built with its products. Amongst these is 'Dumbleton Cottage' just off Walwyn Road.

Stephen Ballard III recounts that the brick and tile works closed around 1903, having most likely never been that profitable. The reasons for closure are likely to have been significant competition locally in the brickmaking industry and the increased countrywide use of fletton bricks which used a type of clay which was far less costly to fire than the Colwall bricks. Fred Ballard subsequently moved on to other things, notably involving the building of houses in Colwall.

The works remained as a former industrial site on the fringes of the village for many years. During the Second World War the kilns were dismantled by Government order and the bricks were used to make air raid shelters. The heavy machinery was removed from site and melted down to help the war effort. As late as the 1960s some of the built structures building remained on site but these have now gone and the site has slowly been reclaimed partly as an attractive garden with the marl pond as a feature, and also as woodland.

Gareth Calan Davies

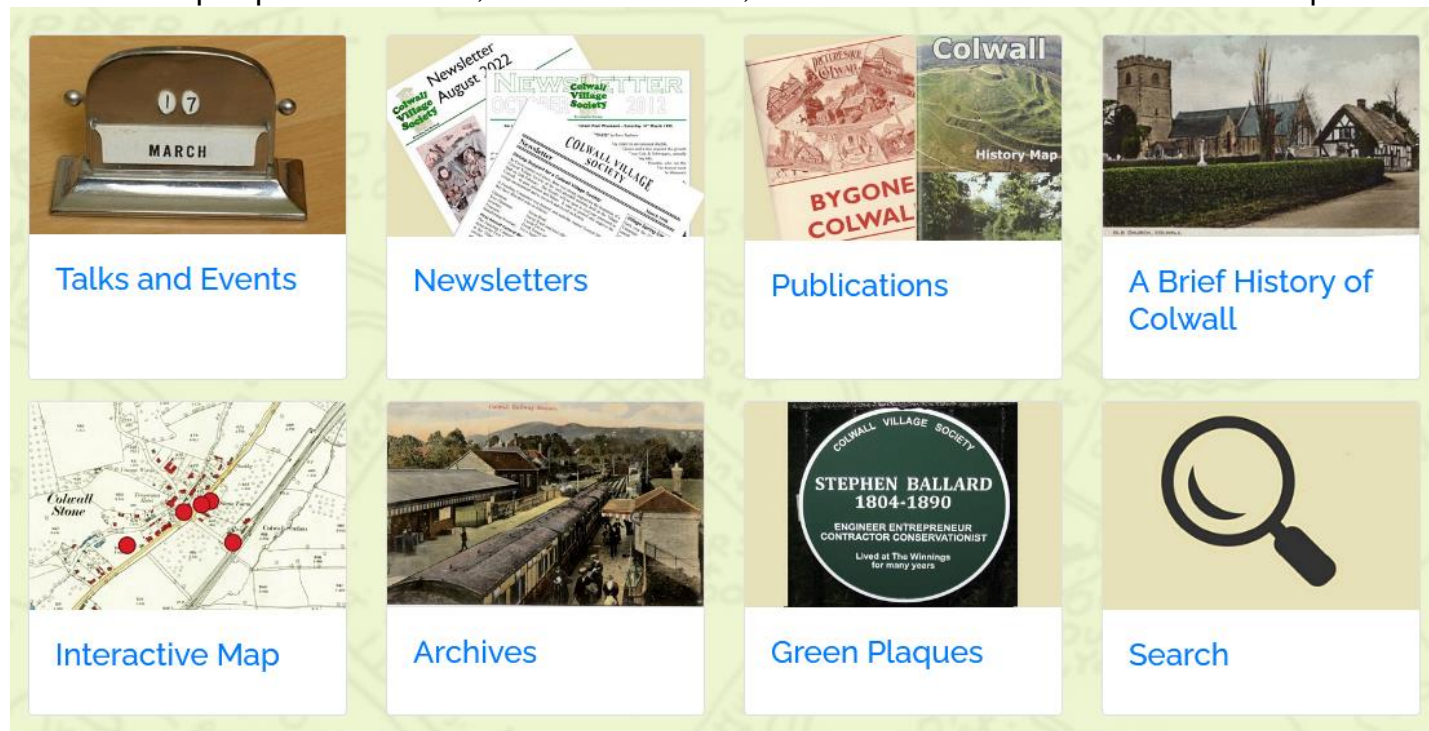
We were very sorry to learn that Gareth Calan Davies has recently died. Gareth was instrumental both in suggesting and in getting our latest booklet 'Colwall and the Railway' to print and this became one of a group of similar railway-themed books that he was responsible for producing. He was also working with Colwall Parish Council and the Village Society on a project to get a new display board installed at Colwall railway station to celebrate the history of the railway and Colwall heritage generally. This will be installed in the New Year.

Gareth was a resident of Ledbury and had a long career working in public transport. In his retirement he did much to champion local bus and rail use through groups like *Rail and Bus for Herefordshire*, *Beyond the Hills Community Station Partnership* and the *Herefordshire Sustainable Transport Group*.

He helped us by providing gentle guidance and technical support, and always seemed to have good contacts whom he could call upon for extra help (and finance!) when required. Gareth had a wonderful quiet, and understated nature, with a very keen sense of humour. It was always a joy to work with him.

Colwall Village Society Website

Our website has undergone a face-lift. Our home page, at colwallvillagesociety.org.uk, now includes a link to a new brief history of Colwall. From this page you can also access the past 25 years of newsletters, wander around our Interactive Map of places of interest, Search our website, or find out about our Publications and Plaques.



The “Archives” link takes you to information held in our digital archives which is available on the internet or on the computer in the Millennium room.



Under the “Shops and Businesses” link, we have recently added new articles on the Ballard Brick Works, Malt Vinegar Works, Ice Works and the Colwall Gas Company.

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