

AN OLD DANDENONG INDUSTRY BOWS OUT

Most will be aware that one of Dandenong's early industries, The Ordish Firebrick Company, has been closed down by the Kaiser Company which took it over in recent years.

It is interesting to look back on the beginnings of the industry:

The "Dandenong Advertiser", of September 5th., 1912, printed this paragraph: "During the week Mr. Herb Ross has been busy with the prospectus of a company to be formed to work his valuable deposit of clay in his paddock fronting Stud Road."

"Already those who are interested in the flotation are asking for shares. The clay has been proved, on expert knowledge, to be most valuable for tiles and heat resistant blocks, retorts etc. We are pleased that "Herb" has struck a winner."

Ten years later the "South Bourke & Mornington Journal", of May 25th, 1922, in the course of an article on The Ordish Firebrick Company, indicated that the clay deposit was being worked by Mr. W. Ordish before the company (Ordish Firebrick Company) took over around 1918.

These extracts from that article give an interesting picture of the industry as it was 62 years ago:

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DANDENONG INDUSTRIES

Ordish Firebrick Company

[Extract from "The South Bourke and Mornington Journal," 25th May, 1922]

If one sets out to "boost" up his town he is likely to be met with a query, "What industries have you got?" If the question can be answered satisfactorily, then he is in a fair way to be entitled to use the words "important industrial centre," as applied to his particular town. We recognise that there are a number of flourishing industries in Dandenong and district, with the undoubted prospect of more to follow in the near future. The operations of these establishments are probably on a larger and more extensive scale than most of our readers are aware of. It is, therefore, with a view to giving a little authentic information regarding the inner workings and general operations of these undertakings, that we have in this issue commenced a series of articles, in which we hope to ultimately deal with the whole of the primary and secondary industries in Dandenong and its immediate neighborhood. We consider it the duty of a newspaper to advertise the resources of its town and district, and contend that this can be done in no better way than by enlightening the public as to the comprehensive and important nature of the various producing establishments in our midst. The first of these contributions we have decided to devote to one of our most valuable assets—The Ordish Firebrick Company.

A representative of this paper was shown over the large works of the above company, on Friday morning last, by the courteous manager, Mr J. Stewart, who is not only a practical exponent of the art of firebrick making, but is a gentleman who apparently takes a pride in the works under his charge.

The property is situated on Stud road, about a mile and a quarter from Dandenong railway station, and comprises an area of 52 acres, the proved deposit of fire clay covering 20 acres. The Ordish Firebrick company, which took over these works from Mr W. Ordish about four years ago, is a proprietary company, with a capital of £30,000 of which £20,000 is called up. The purchase price was £10,000. Employment is given on an average to 20 men, and the wages amount to about £100 a week.

The company is fortunate in possessing

an immense supply of what has been pronounced to be the best firebrick making clay in the State. The face of the pit at present being worked is about 300 feet in length, over 20 feet high, and has been proved to a depth of 57 feet. Taking the area of fire-clay deposits at 20 acres, with an average depth of 54 feet, it pans out at equal to two tons to the foot, or a total of two million tons. When the bore was put down to a depth of 54 feet it was still in the same class of fire-clay, so that there is really no knowing how deep it may go. The State Geological department claims that this is the largest known deposit of fire-clay in the world. A peculiarity of the clay formations on this property is that the fire clay is a pipe formation, and adjoining it on the same property is a pure building clay, from which bakers' oven bricks are made.

An inspection of the brick kilns and capacious drying shed at once convinced one of the magnitude of the output at these works. There are three draught kilns of a capacity of 37,000, 27,000, and 10,000, and also a "Scotch" kiln that holds 33,000 bricks. In addition to these, another 25,000 draught kiln is about to be started. At the time of our visit there were 105,000 bricks in the kilns, some burnt and others in the process of being burnt, and there were many thousands in the immense drying sheds, 165 feet by 145 feet and 60 feet by 66 feet, giving a total drying space of about 27,900 square feet. The stock carried varies in value from £1300 to £2000. It may also be mentioned, for the information of those unacquainted with the process, that all fire bricks are moulded by hand, as machinery cannot be used in moulding fire bricks. A special line of bakers' oven bricks are being made from the clay in No. 1 pit, and these are the best procurable. The many and varied shapes of bricks, tiles, etc. turned out by the Ordish Company may be realised when it is stated that there are fully 1000 shapes of bricks, tiles, and fire lumps in the yards. One of the most delicate pieces of work is the burning of shields to shape for electric light purposes, the shape being retained without buckling. An idea of the variety of fire bricks made by this company may be gathered from the

fact that one order received last week comprises no less than 16 different sizes and shapes of fire bricks. On account of not being able to use mortar in connection with fire brick furnaces, the brick is cut in its green stage into what is known as 1 inch and 1 1/2 inch splits on the flat, and on the edge the same way. The largest brick made at the works is 36 in. x 12 in. x 6 in., and the smallest is 9 in. x 3 in. x 1 in. 11

The machinery is driven by a 25 h.p. Cornish engine, and electric power is used for lifting the water for the mush bins and to empty the pit in the event of flooding.

The Ordish Firebrick Co. is doing an extensive business throughout the Eastern States, and as far as Tasmania and Adelaide, but it is somewhat difficult to give the output of the works, as the proportion of fire bricks turned out is only about 40 per cent. of the output, the remainder being in lumps and shapes. The ground fire clay is used instead of mortar, and this is sent to practically all the States, being highly valued in the setting and repairing of firebrick work. The company has been contractors for the Victorian Railways department since its inception, taking over the contract from Mr Ordish. The whole of the commodious buildings and up-to-date plant has been erected since Mr Stewart took over the management of the works about 2 1/2 years ago, and in view of increasing business, it seems that other additions will follow as the necessity for same arises. As a matter of fact, it is the intention of the manager to install a plant for making building bricks from No. 1 pit.

The outstanding features of this valuable industry to Dandenong are—the unlimited deposits of the very best fire-clay, and the easy manner in which it can be treated and turned into ideal fire bricks; the name which the Ordish stamped article has made for itself in Australia; and the local value of these extensive brick works in connection with the foreshadowed increase of factory buildings in Dandenong at no distant date.

The Ordish company is now on a firm financial footing, and is looking forward with confidence to the future for a return for their expenditure and enterprise in building up one of Dandenong's most important industries.

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A paper given by G. Jackson at the Society's meeting on