

Payments for building and school ...	£4634	12	3
Investments by Committee ...	2850	0	0
To meet petty expenses ...	1	9	2
Allowance to Secretary ...	100	0	0
Payments equal income ...	£7586	1	5

KILCHATTAN BRICK AND TILE WORKS

By T. GILMOUR

[Read 13th December, 1949]

My only experience as a practical tilemaker is being taken over to the works as a child of 5 by my grandfather to see the last kiln being burned. That was in the year 1915. In my researches, however, I have been exceedingly fortunate in obtaining first hand information from one of the last of the old tile-work men, Mr Hugh Gill, who, now an octogenarian, commenced work in the tileworks as long ago as 1883 when a boy of only 13 and worked there until production ceased in 1915. Mr Gill's father served in the works from the time when my grandfather took over the tenancy in 1866, so that I have had the benefit of as good as first hand information for all but the first 17 years of the tileworks' existence.

As far as I know Kilchattan Tile Works were built fully 100 years ago. The date on the porch of my house is 1849 and I understand that the works were built a few years before the house. The tileworks were built on the initiative of a former Marquess of Bute and in addition to making bricks and tiles they also served as the Estate Sawmill. The original tenant had the rather imposing designation of "Master of the Tile-work" but in spite of this impressive title he and his successors were not too successful in business. By the year 1855 the tileworks were idle. My authority for this fact is an old Tourist Guide to the Clyde which I saw a few years ago at a Clyde Steamer Exhibition in the Mitchell Library. It stated that "At Kilchattan there is an extensive tilework, at present unhappily idle

due to competition from the Ayrshire works." The tenant immediately before my grandfather was a man named Thomas Todd. He was no more successful than his predecessors and my grandfather, who was not a tolerant man, attributed his non-success to the fact that "Tam Todd wore a white sark to his work."

The forerunner of the tile drain was the stone drain and a laborious job it must have been collecting suitable stones and laying them. This method of draining was used during the latter half of the 18th century. It was not until the early 19th century that a burned tile was used. The first type of tile produced was what is known locally as a "mug" tile. It was rather a crude product, made by hand. My grandfather never made "mug" tiles.

At the time my grandfather took over the tenancy the tiles were still made by hand but within a few years, besides introducing his own patented design of power-driven tile machine, he built a second kiln, extended the drying capacity of the works and built a steam-heated brick-drying stove. The reason for this activity was the introduction of government-assisted draining. This was a very enlightened policy and hundreds of thousands of acres of land were tile-drained and brought to a high level of productivity. The Marquess of Bute took full advantage of the government grants and for some thirty years a minimum of 256,000 tiles per annum were buried in Bute. Normal annual production was about $1\frac{1}{4}$ million tiles and half a million bricks, so that the bulk of the production of tiles had to be exported. Over the years a very extensive trade was built up throughout the Western Highlands and Islands and also in Northern Ireland. Many tales could be told of the men and boats engaged in this trade. Kilchattan was quite a port. My grandfather had his own boat, an old jigger, the "Christina and Janet" of 70 tons burthen, and in addition there were the locally owned smacks "Duchess," a product of Ardmaleish Yard and a flyer in her day, the

"Cottage Girl" and one or two smaller vessels of 25/30 tons burthen. Those boats were engaged mainly in the tile trade, carrying dross from Ardrossan for burning the kilns, tiles to Campbeltown, bricks to Tarbert, tiles to Islay, to Tiree and as far north as Stornoway. Kilchattan tiles were famous and there is nothing approaching them in quality being made to-day. Only a few days ago I was telephoning a Department of Agriculture official to see if he could give me any idea of the number of tiles that would be required in Bute over the next few months, but in spite of the fact that quite a few schemes were going on it was mostly a case of lift and relay, as the Department consider that it is better to relay Kilchattan tiles, although it is 40 years since they were last made.

At this point I might give you a rough idea of the layout of the tileworks. The nerve centre was the engine house and milling plant. Attached to the engine house was another building that housed the smithy, workshop and stores. The prime mover was a very ancient steam engine supplied with steam from a 25' x 3' egg-ended boiler. In addition to providing steam for the engine, the boiler also supplied the steam for the brick-drying stove. Factory regulations were pretty lax in those days. When an extra head of steam was required, the simple but effective method was used of tying down the weight that operated the safety valve. But there was never a serious accident during the whole history of the works and the old engine that had come from a pithead in Ayrshire back in the forties of last century provided the power until the works closed. Incidentally, there was a huge fly-wheel, which still lies where it was dropped when the machinery was scrapped in 1935 and according to local tradition this flywheel came out of a Rothesay Cotton Mill. I cannot vouch for the truth of this. Another building housed the clay cutters, rollers and the pulleys which operated the tile machines by means of endless ropes. Radiating from the Mill Building were the two

large drying sheds, each some 120 feet long. Those sheds had a drying capacity of some 50,000 of 3" tiles and in their day were the biggest in Scotland. Tile making was never what one might call "big business" and most of the works were managed by the owner or tenant with a staff of some 20 men. The kilns were massive affairs; one of them exists until this day, having been converted to a very useful shed. Each kiln, which was of the updraught type, had a capacity of about 60 tons of tiles. The kiln was fired through 26 fire holes, 13 on each side of the kiln, and it took some 30 tons of dross to fire one kiln.

In its heyday the tilework employed some 20 men. In addition to the direct employees it provided the bulk of the work for the locally owned smacks and also was the main source of livelihood of half a dozen carting contractors, who were engaged in carting dross from the Old Quay and tiles back. When draining was at its peak in the eighties of last century there was tremendous competition among the farmers to get tiles and it was not unknown for carts to start off from the North End of the island shortly after midnight to get a place in the queue for the kiln being emptied in the morning. In the early days of this century there were no telephones available, but there was a telegraphic service from Kilchattan Bay Post Office. In connection with the shipping side of the business there was a constant receiving and sending of telegrams. When my grandfather had to send a telegram he simply wrote it on a tile and gave it to a carter to hand in to the Post Office. The tile was put under the post office counter to be kept as a record and periodically an S.O.S. would come from the postmistress to send a cart to collect the old telegrams!

The reason for the decline and ultimate closing down of what was at one time a flourishing industry was really lack of demand. For a few years my grandfather had a taste of what his predecessors had

suffered and nothing could be done about it. After the turn of the century it became more and more difficult to find a market for the output. Bute could absorb only a fraction of its former requirements and the market was latterly limited to Campbeltown district and an occasional cargo to Islay. Combined with the decline in demand was the fact that the original clay bed had become exhausted and the new pit, which was opened in 1908, was a pit in all conscience. Eighteen feet of subsoil and sand had to be bared before the clay was reached. Even to-day this would be quite a task, but back in those days of pick and shovel it was hopeless from the start. Nevertheless, the pit was opened up, a pumping plant installed to keep down the water level and the business struggled on until 1915, when the last kiln was burned. My grandfather had kept the works in continuous production for 50 years and it was a sore blow to him when it was closed down. He was then bordering on 80 years of age and died the following year. My father kept the works on a care and maintenance basis for many years but agriculture remained in the doldrums and the works never re-started. As you all know, in the uneasy years between the wars no money was available for capital improvements such as land drainage. When the second world war broke out in 1939 most of the smaller works had gone out of existence and the few works left could not cope with the demand that arose for tiles. I am often asked if it is not possible to restart the industry. Apart from the very considerable capital outlay that would be involved it is doubtful if the local market would absorb even 10 per cent of an annual output of say 1,000,000 tiles. It never was possible to compete on the mainland of Scotland apart from the extreme West, so that the market would be limited to the Western Highlands and Islands and demand there is very problematical. In regard to bricks, the very quality of porosity that made such a good tile made a rather indifferent brick except for partition work, so

that in my opinion the re-starting of the industry is not a practical proposition.

Although tiles are not made now, the old works are still in use and it says much for the materials and workmanship of more than a hundred years ago that the original drying shed still stands, having withstood a century's gales, and the original yellow pine drying racks are still in daily use for drying poultry shell and grit.

FOOTNOTE:

Mr Gilmour adds: I learned recently that the present Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia is the grandson of the Tam Todd mentioned above. The P.M.'s father was born in the house in which I now live. The family emigrated to New Zealand in 1864, where they amassed a fortune making — bricks!

NOTES ON ROTHESAY NEWSPAPERS

By R. D. WHYTE

[Read 13th December, 1949]

Before dealing with the Newspapers printed and published in Rothesay I wish to refer to the first pamphlets printed in Rothesay. Alexander Anderson, a printer from Leith, compiled and published "Random Records of Rothesay." The date of publication was 1839, and the dedication was "to the Nobility, Gentry and the public of Rothesay, the first work printed and published in the Island." It consisted of 24 pages and the price was 3d.

A second edition was published in 1842. This edition had an engraving, published by W. H. Lizars, Edinburgh, showing the County Building, the Castle and the Bay. It also contained portions of Lady Wardlaw's "once admired, but somewhat affected and pointless forgery 'Hardyknute'" and a poem "Rothesay Castle" written by Anderson himself.

Anderson also printed "Bute Records of Rural Affairs," edited by Mr Samuel Girdwood. It was a fortnightly publication of 22 numbers, the first appearing on 26th November, 1839 and the last on 1st January, 1840. It was reprinted as one volume in 1860. Anderson left Rothesay and settled in Australia.

The earliest Rothesay Newspaper was "The Rothesay Advertiser and Literary Journal," first published on 28th May, 1847. It was printed in Greenock and lasted for four numbers. "The Rothesay Journal and General Advertiser for the Western Isles," a monthly publication, ran from June, 1852 till December, 1853. This paper was printed in Glasgow