

SGI 15 Brick and tile kiln, Walmer Road, Notting Hill

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Brick and tile kiln, Walmer Road, Notting Hill
Grid reference: TQ 24219 80570

The Walmer Road 'bottle' kiln is a rare example of what was once a common design of brick and tile kiln in London. Very few are still in existence. In 1774, the Penton family, of Walworth Road, obtained permission to dig clay to make bricks for housing, and work in the brickfields began around 1781 in the area now occupied by Avondale Park. During most of the nineteenth century, this area of Notting Hill was known as 'The Potteries and Piggeries'. They will have exploited the local Brickearth which is excellent for brick making as it contains the right mix of clay, sand and ground up chalk, deposited in pockets as a 'rock flour', blown by the wind from a retreating glacier. In this area the Brickearth is named the Langley Silt.

The existing tile kiln in Walmer Road belonged to Norland Pottery Works started by William Adams. From the mid nineteenth century, with the growth of industry and consequent increase in population, brickworks were commonplace throughout the whole of what is now Greater London. London Clay was widely dug to produce bricks for housing. By 1833, several kilns were in production on the site. The surviving tile kiln was recorded in a picture of 1824. Although workers in The Potteries and Piggeries were considered as separate communities, they all lived side by side in appalling conditions. [The Hippodrome Race Course, which was situated behind the existing kiln, had a very short life (1837-1842), mainly because of the foul-smelling, muddy conditions on the site.]

The self-styled 'pig-masters' of the "West End Establishment", collected waste food from houses and hotels, which they then separated into food suitable for human or animal consumption. Slurry from the pigs, mixed with rubbish, eventually began to flow into the pits which had been dug for clay. Many of the houses which the workers built for themselves were single storey constructions, surrounded by earth mounds, which contributed to the general lack of drainage. Soon the whole area was considered to be one great open sewer. The largest such stagnant pool, to the west of Walmer Road, was known as 'The Ocean'. It is ironic that, in addition to tiles, the Norland Pottery Works also produced drain pipes. In the mid-nineteenth century, The Potteries and Piggeries area was considered to be the unhealthiest area in the whole country, with life expectancy, from 1846-1848, of eleven years and seven months, at a time when the London average was thirty-seven years.

The kiln was rebuilt in 1879 by the Adams family, who sold the Potteries and Piggeries site in 1889. The seven foot deep excavations referred to as 'The Ocean', were finally filled in. Part of the site was built on, and the remaining area was turned into Avondale Park, which formally opened on 2nd June, 1892. More detailed information about the design and method of operation of the bottle kiln can be found in the Historic England Archaeological Areas scheduled list entry, List No. 1002039. (First scheduled: 15th March, 1966.)



Walmer Road kiln is now visible only from the street. It was at one time partly converted to residential accommodation. The concrete wall obscuring the base holds the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea plaque. Avondale Park, on the opposite side of Walmer Road to the kiln, has public toilet facilities and covered outdoor seating at a small café.

Access

Walmer Road brick kiln can be reached by bus to Ladbroke Grove: Ladbroke Gardens/Westbourne Grove stop, and from there a short walk (approximately eight minutes) via Lansdowne Crescent, Lansdowne Rise, Clarendon Crescent and Hippodrome Place to Walmer Road.



Photographs of kiln and plaque: <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Image References:

Kiln 1824, from book entitled: Notting Hill in Bygone Days by Florence M. Gladstone, found on:
www.theundergroundmap.com

More pictures of the kiln: www.geograph.org.uk

Text references:

www.housmans.com

<https://historicengland.org.uk>

www.british-history.ac.uk