

# SGI 4 Grange Brick and Tile Works

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London Borough of Brent

**The Grange Brick and Tile Works, Willesden Green**

*Grid reference: TQ 229 842*

In what is now a purely residential area of Willesden Green, in the London Borough of Brent, there was once a thriving Brick and Tile works, owned and run by George Furness.

## George Furness

George Furness was a contractor of public works, with projects both in this country and as far afield as Russia and South America. Several Willesden Green road names, for example Palermo Road and Odessa Road, reflect his travels. After working on several railways, his biggest project in Britain was as contractor for Joseph Bazalgette's London Embankment and northern main intercepting sewer. In 1873, George Furness bought Willesden land offered for development. Instead of housing, he started his brick and tile works. The Grange Brick Works was for several years the biggest employer in Willesden Green, and Furness was well-respected in the area. His grave can be found in St. Mary's graveyard, Willesden Green.

## Brick Works

The site, known variously as Willesden Green Brick and Tile Works, The Grange Brick and Tile Works, and Chambers Lane Brick and Tile Works, consisted of a deep open pit with rail lines leading out from the pit face, several buildings for the manufacture and storage of the bricks, three kilns, a reservoir and a chimney over one hundred and forty feet high.

Soon after the arrival in Willesden Green of the Metropolitan Railway, George Furness had spotted the opportunity offered by the rise in population and growth of industries in the area. At the time, he was living at Roundwood House (sadly now demolished, although Roundwood Park is still a feature of the area) and set up his brick and tile works at The Grange in Chambers Lane. Chambers Lane bricks were used for housing the influx of workers both for his own factory and for others nearby, and can still be seen at St. Andrews Church on the corner of St. Andrews Road and High Road. The topography of the part of Willesden Green between Chambers Lane, Donnington Road and Peter Avenue was shaped by the excavations at the brickpit. The Grange was one of several hundred similar pits in the London area in the late nineteenth century.



The Chambers Lane Works produced vases, flower pots, drain pipes and glazed decorative tiles, but the highest sales were of bricks - high quality red bricks and also cheaper brown stock bricks. A few Willesden buildings displaying Chambers Lane red bricks remain. However, the most striking remains of the brick works today are the blackened, overbaked clinker bricks, often used in decorative panels in the garden walls in several local streets. The best examples can be seen in the following Roads: Temple, Mora, Ivy, St. Michael's, Hamilton, Ellesmere, Fleetwood and Ambleside. The abundance of these clinker bricks gives an indication of how the brick works once dominated the area: these over burnt bricks did not travel far. The need for land for more housing, finally led to the closure of The Grange Brick Works in 1937. Houses

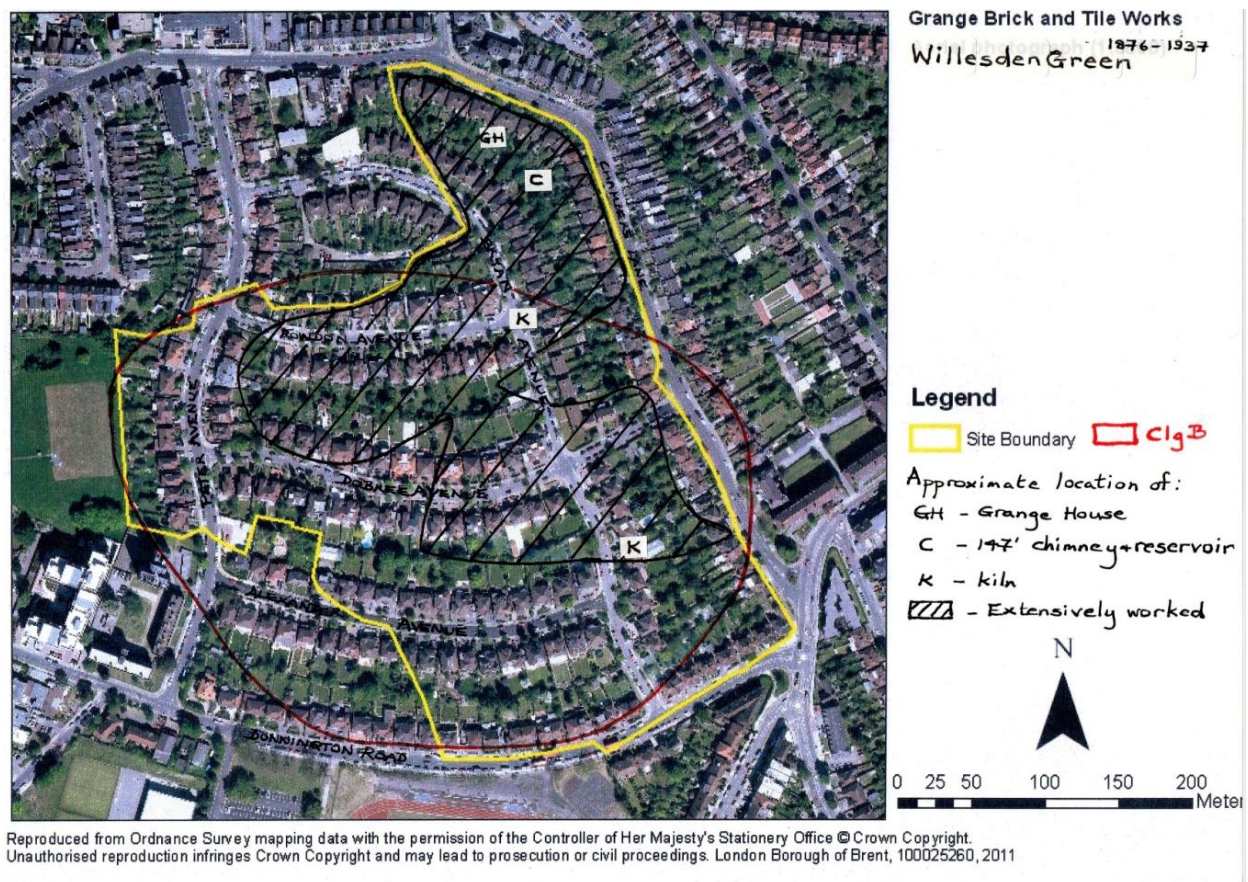
now cover the whole area.

## Geology of Willesden Green

In the mid-nineteenth century, the highest land in Willesden Green was a pocket of Claygate Member (alternating silt and fine sand horizons at the top of the 50 million year old London Clay). The hill is about 65 m at the highest point. In a Geologists' Association report of an excursion undertaken in 1916, it was stated that the Grange brickpit was in a continuation of the Highgate-Hampstead Ridge and a look at the geological map confirms that it lies midway between Hampstead to the east and Hangar Hill Park to the west which is



also topped by Claygate Beds. During the 1916 excursion, 'Attention was drawn to a quantity of curious "box-stones" consisting of bedded ferruginous sandstone enclosing pure white sand.' Ferruginous concretions and septarian nodules also occur in places. Fossils from the Claygate Member at Willesden Green are recorded by Wrigley (1921). The Claygate Member with its mix of clay, silt and sand, is a good medium for making a better quality of fired bricks - bricks which are less liable to crack during the manufacturing process. The British Geological Survey map Sheet 256 (North London) shows an area of 'worked ground' over the Claygate Member, which largely represents the extent of The Grange brickpit.



**Grange Brickworks** (BGS NERC 201623, 201624, 201625)

## References

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