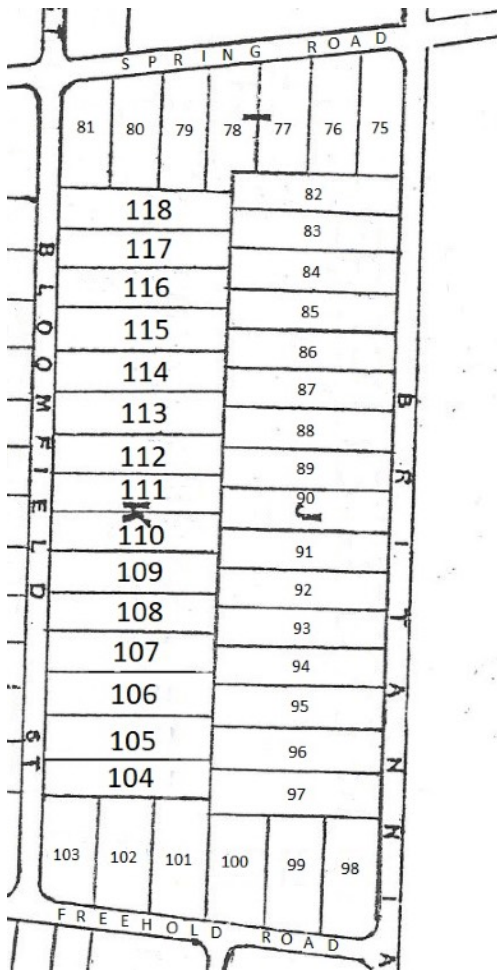


THE BRICKYARDS OF BLOOMFIELD STREET



Plots 104-118 East Bloomfield Street



The Brick Maker.

From 'The Book of English Trades' (1827)

The primary purpose of the Ipswich & Suffolk Freehold Land Society was a noble one – the enfranchisement of the working man. By owning their own plot of land, these '40-shilling freeholders' would have the right to vote. The Society's first purchase was almost 100 acres of farmland from the former Cauldwell Hall Estate, bounded by Woodbridge Road to the north and Foxhall Road to the south. In late 1850, once the network of new roads had been planned and named (between Cauldwell Hall Road to the west and Britannia Road to the east) and the land divided into numbered plots, Society members with sufficient funds took part in a ballot.

Within a year the area had popularly become known as California (initially New California). One ballot winner, James Calver, later recalled working on his plot in Cauldwell Hall Road, when a 'great man of the town' rode up to him and enquired what he was doing. "Digging for gold, as they do in California," replied Calver. "You're more likely digging a grave to bury yourself in," said the great man and rode off.

But there was not much rush, for gold or anything else, in Ipswich's California. Some, having won the right to vote, bided their time. Some cultivated their land. Others sold it for a quick profit. And many wealthy landowners used the opportunity to acquire yet more land. Houses sprung up over time, but not immediately. Except in the case of Philip Stephens.

Plots 104-105 Bloomfield Street

Philip Richard Laws Stephens (1799-1855) had been the landlord of the Ipswich Arms in Lower Brook Street. In the 1850 ballot, he was allotted plots 104 and 105 on the east side of Bloomfield Street. They were the two southernmost plots on that side of the street, close to Freehold Road. Having got his land, Stephens immediately set to work building a lavishly equipped hotel, the Freehold Tavern. In the opinion of the aforementioned James Calver, "He was right enough, but about forty years too soon."

Stephens was also at the wrong end of Bloomfield Street to attract passing trade. Spring Road, at the north end of the street, was a thoroughfare of sorts, but not Freehold Road. Philip Stephens' biggest mistake was to cling on to the plots he'd been allotted in the ballot instead of negotiating a deal with plot owners in a more favourable location. By 1852 he had let the property and returned to the centre of town, initially as landlord of the Theatre Tavern in Tacket Street. A newspaper advert for the auction of the Freehold Tavern in 1853 demonstrates what an elaborate building it was.

**To be SOLD by AUCTION,
By Mr. ROSS,**

On Friday, the 7th day of January, 1853, at 6 o'clock in
the Evening for 7 precisely,
At the Crown and Anchor Hotel, Ipswich,
THAT Substantial and Newly-erected Fully-licensed
PUBLIC-HOUSE, known as The
“FREEHOLD TAVERN,”
Situate in **Blomfield Street, California,**
In the Parish of St. Margaret, in Ipswich, and now in
the occupation of Mrs. E. CARRINGTON.

The House, which has been built within the last three
years, without regard to expence, has extensive Cellar-
ages, Entrance Hall, Tap-room, large Bar with Parlour,
small Bar for the Bowling-green), large Club-room,
Kitchen, 6 capital Chambers, Dressing-room and Water
Closet. In the Yard are the Stables and Cart Sheds.

Attached to the above is a **LARGE GARDEN,** with an
Excellently-laid Bowling Green.

Ipswich Journal advertisement 18th December 1852

There were two bars, a clubroom, six rooms for guests and, outside, a skittle alley, a bowling green and stables. The Freehold Tavern struggled on, with a variety of owners and landlords, until Cobbold Breweries offered it to the Guardians of Ipswich Union in 1869. After some modifications, it opened as the St John's Boys' Home in 1871. It was later massively extended to accommodate far larger numbers of both boys and girls.



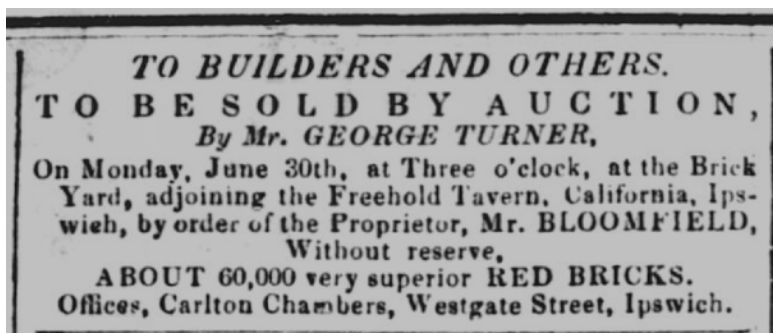
The two-storey former Freehold Tavern adjoining the three-storey St John's Home, viewed from the south end of Bloomfield Street c1910 (Peter Higginbotham / workhouses.org.uk)

Plot 106 Bloomfield Street

There may not have been gold in California, but there was still something worth digging for. An abundant supply of brickearth – soil rich in clay suitable for the manufacture of bricks – had already been discovered in Rushmere Field, north of Woodbridge Road, and it was soon found that this seam of earth ran south along Bloomfield Street and down to Foxhall Road.

By 1852 John Bloomfield (sometimes spelled Blomfield) had established a brickyard on plot 106 – a single plot adjacent to the Freehold Tavern. John Bloomfield was most probably the landlord of the Ten Bells in Tower Terrace, Ipswich – there were quite a few publicans who purchased brickyards as a sideline. The fact that he was a Bloomfield making bricks in Bloomfield Street (named after Suffolk-born poet Robert Bloomfield) would seem to be mere coincidence.

John Bloomfield's brickyard was one of several established in and around Ipswich to cope with the ever-increasing demand for houses. In 1852 he sold 100,000 bricks by auction. Despite his brick kiln being partially blown down in a storm in 1853 he sold a further 110,000 'superior red bricks' in 1855-6. It may seem incredible to establish a brickyard on a single plot of land, but these plots were larger than you might suppose. Thomas Alderton's similar sized plot (plot 125) on the other side of Bloomfield Street had, by 1854, been divided into six plots, each with its own house, which were rented out.



Suffolk Chronicle 28th June 1856 - one of John Bloomfield's brick auctions

John Hart Bridges, owner of the Falcon Brewery in Falcon Street, took over ownership of the plot from John Bloomfield in 1857. Unsurprisingly this brickyard was quickly worked out. From 1864 it was no longer listed as a brickyard and in 1871 was acquired by the Guardians of Ipswich Union, becoming part of the grounds of the St John's Home.

Plots 108-112 Bloomfield Street

Continuing northwards along the east side of Bloomfield Street, plots 108-112 were acquired by William Parkes Ribbans (1809-1871) who established his brickyard at a similar time to John Bloomfield – certainly it was operational by 1854. (Spare a thought for William Meadows, who built a house on plot 107 and now had two smoking kilns as next-door neighbours.)

William Parkes Ribbans sold the brickyard in 1857 and subsequently became an architect and town surveyor of Ipswich. There's a distinctive Italianate character to his design of St Clement's hospital, and his surname (plus two-thirds of his middle name) lives on in Ribbans Park Road, leading off Foxhall Road into the estate. The main building has more recently been converted into flats, with many additional houses and a golf course.



St Clement's Hospital designed by William Parkes Ribbans (countyasylums.co.uk)

Samuel Sicklemore Baldiston took over ownership of the brickyard for the next ten years until his death in 1867. It was then managed by his devisees, who were initially John Morgan & Co. In the 1861 census Morgan was listed as employing 9 men and 9 boys, and by 1871 he was a master brickmaker employing 27 men and 17 boys (probably at more than one location).

However, the brickmaking trade could be hazardous for the many children employed. In October 1868, thirteen-year-old Edward Powell, in the employ of John Morgan, was driving a horse-drawn cart laden with bricks along Foxhall Road. He fell to the ground and one wheel of the heavy cart passed over his body. He died about an hour later, but the exact cause and circumstances were unclear. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death.

Samuel Baldiston's devisees continued to own the land until 1899, and the various occupiers who ran the brickyard were James Scarlett Norton, Robert Powell (father of the late Edward Powell) and finally Isaac Punt (from 1876-7, then again from 1880 onwards). Punt had been landlord of the Freehold Tavern throughout most of the 1860s, and in 1871 was a market gardener living at The Old Cottage, Bloomfield Street. He ran the brickyard in its final years. In an 1885 directory, Isaac Punt is listed as a brick and tile maker in Bloomfield Street with further brickyards at Rushmere and Bixley Heath. By 1891 he was living on Bixley Heath as a farmer.

It's likely that the brickyard had ceased to operate by 1890. Subsequent tenants were not brickmakers, and by 1896 it was no longer listed in rate books as a brickyard. Interestingly, the large clay pit remained on the property and can be seen in subsequent Ordnance Survey maps right up until 1962. It only finally disappeared when Starfield Close was created in the early 1970s.

The Brickmaker That Got Away

The original ballot for plots of land in California was held in October 1850 but, by December, plots 114-117 had been acquired from the initial owners by Edward Gibbons (1819-1870). Despite being one of Ipswich's major brickmakers, and Bloomfield Street seeming to be a prime site, he decided not to retain the plots and concentrated his attentions elsewhere.

One of Edward Gibbons' brickyards was directly north of Bloomfield Street. The Victoria Brickworks was on the east side of Howard Street and occupied much of the land bordered by Howard Street, Spring Road and Britannia Road, with its entrance in Woodbridge Road. In May 1867 (the year before the death of Edward Powell) it was the scene of another tragedy.

Eleven-year-old George Canham was working on the site – his duties were to tread the clay, fetch water from the pond, and place the bricks on barrows so they could be removed for drying. The pond was about forty yards from the brickmaking table, and while George Canham was attempting to fill two buckets with pondwater he fell and drowned. Again the verdict was accidental death – and the jury's recommendation that the pond should be partially fenced off was swiftly complied with.

EDWARD GIBBONS,
MANUFACTURER OF THE
BEST RED & WHITE SUFFOLK BUILDING BRICKS,
BRIMSTONE & SALMON PAVORS, PAMMENTS, TILES, COPING, & OTHER WARE.
ALEXANDRA BRICKWORKS, CHILTON, NEAR SUDBURY, SUFFOLK.
BELHUS BRICKWORKS, AVELEY, NEAR ROMFORD, ESSEX.
CROWN BRICKWORKS, ALDHAM, NEAR HADLEIGH, SUFFOLK.
VALLEY BRICKWORKS, ST. CLEMENT'S, IPSWICH, SUFFOLK.
VICTORIA BRICKWORKS, ST. MARGARET'S, IPSWICH, SUFFOLK.
WHITE ELM BRICKWORKS, ST. CLEMENT'S, IPSWICH, SUFFOLK.
ORNAMENTAL WORK TO ANY DESIGN.
All Goods not in Stock prepared to Order on the Shortest Notice.
All Communications to be addressed to the Head Office, **WOLSEY STREET WORKS, IPSWICH,** where they will meet with prompt attention.
Agent for London—A. BARFIELD, 27, South Audley Street, W.
Agent for Suffolk, Essex, and Norfolk—J. D. BLYTH, Crown Yard, Leytonstone, Essex, N.E.
N.B.—FOR SALE, Cheap, Upwards of a MILLION of Thirds White Builders' Damaged BRIMSTONES, &c.

Suffolk Chronicle advertisement from 7th May 1870, just weeks before Edward Gibbons' death, listing his brickworks empire

In May 1870, Edward Gibbons died suddenly as the result of a foot injury. The Victoria Brickworks had been worked out by then, with many houses already built on the site, and was sold by auction after his death.

Plots 113-118 Bloomfield Street

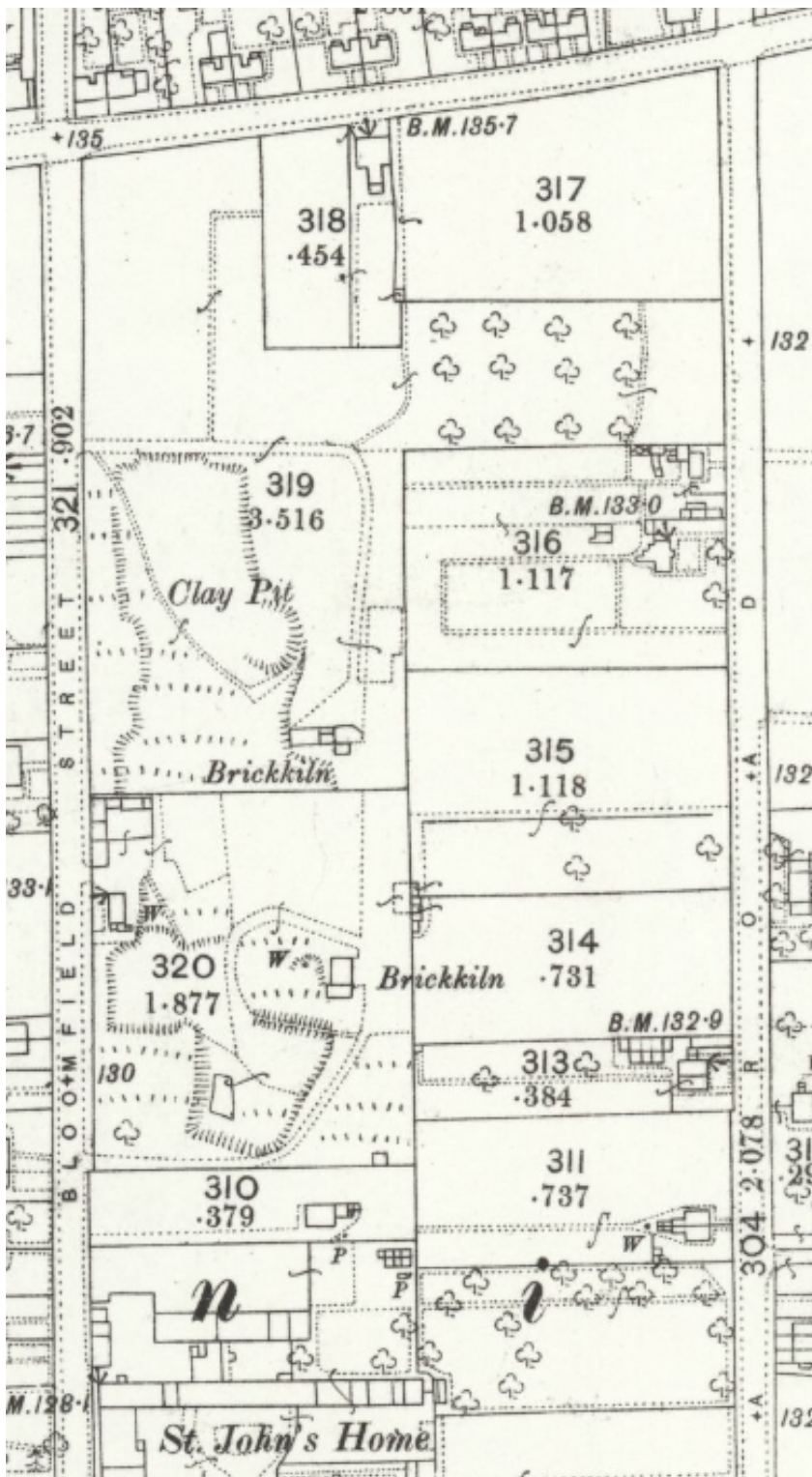
Although Edward Gibbons had decided against developing plots 114-117 on Bloomfield Street, in some ways they turned out to be the better prospect – certainly for longevity. Together with plot 113, and later plot 118, they were acquired by Francis Fisk (1791-1871), whose main brickyard in St Helen's Street extended up as far as Woodbridge Road. The Fisk family was extremely prominent in Ipswich commerce – an 1869 directory lists eleven Fisks, each with their own business. Despite many productive years from the two brickyards further down the road, Francis Fisk doesn't seem to have commenced brickmaking on Bloomfield Street until 1860.

Fisk Charles, *Brickmakers' Arms*, 87 St. Helen's street
Fisk Elizabeth (Mrs.), *Orwell inn*, 62 Lower Orwell street
Fisk Francis, drain pipe manufacturer, 59 St. Helen's street
Fisk George, grocer &c. 33 Queen street
Fisk Henry, beer retailer, New Friars road
Fisk Henry, relieving officer, 20 Norwich road
Fisk Henry, *Safe Harbour*, Borough road
Fisk Maria (Mrs.), *Railway family & commercial hotel*,
opposite the Railway station, Stoke
Fisk Mary Ann (Miss), shopkeeper, 60 Lower Orwell street
Fisk Samuel, beer retailer, 8 Regent street
Fisk William, writer & grainer, 23 Tower terrace

A fistful of Fisks in the Commercial Section of the Post Office Directory 1869

In 1869, towards the end of his life, ownership of the brickyard passed to Francis Fisk Junior (1815-1903). The 1880 Ordnance Survey map shows the two sizeable brickyards of Fisk Junior and Isaac Punt side-by-side, each with a large clay pit and its own brick kiln. However, both brickyards were nearing the end of their productive lives.

In 1884 Fisk made an unsuccessful attempt to auction his brickyard and for the next few years it remained largely unoccupied. By 1893 he had retained part of the land and created four allotments on the rest, which were rented out. The land remained his property until his death in 1903. It's possible that Isaac Punt managed to keep his brickyard operational for a few more years than Fisk, but it's definite that all brickmaking in Bloomfield Street had ceased by the end of the 1880s.



1880 Ordnance Survey map with two brickyards – Fisk's above and Punt's below

A Pair of Brickmaker's Arms

In 1861 Charles Fisk (son of Francis Fisk Senior and brother of Francis Junior) became the first landlord of the Brickmakers Arms, 87 St Helen's Street. It was on the corner of Wells Street, which no longer exists, and opposite Fisk's Brickyard. (Argyle Street was created later, after the death of Fisk Senior in 1871 and the sale of his brickyard.)



On White's 1867 map, Charles Fisk's Brickmakers Arms is at the bottom of Wells Street (marked with a red dot). Argyle Street is the proposed road to the left of Francis Fisk's extensive brickyard



Procession passing the Brickmakers Arms, St Helen's, in the 1920s

Just two years after the Brickmakers Arms opened in St Helen's Street, Benjamin Willsher became the first landlord of another beerhouse called the Brickmakers Arms, this one at 315 Spring Road. It seems bizarre to have two Brickmakers Arms pubs on the north side of the same road (as Spring Road leads directly onto St Helen's), but the pair happily co-existed from the 1860s until the closure of the St Helen's Brickmakers in 1926. It would be interesting to speculate how many friends had arranged to meet in the Brickmakers over the years and had finished up drinking alone in different pubs.

To add to the confusion, there was already a Bricklayers Arms in Foxhall Road which predated the other two by a few years, and another Bricklayers in Cox Lane in the 1870s. In 1860 it was estimated that the Borough of Ipswich contained 138 public houses and 90 beer houses, so it's likely that each establishment catered for a very local clientele.

In 1863, when the Brickmakers Arms in Spring Road first opened, it was ideally positioned. It was on the corner of Spring Road and Howard Street and opposite Edward Gibbons' Victoria Brickworks. It was also diagonally opposite the east side of Bloomfield Street, where all three brickyards were operational, although the smallest one, next to the Freehold Tavern, was in its final days. The 1880 Ordnance Survey map shows a skittle alley in the grounds of the beerhouse, running parallel with Howard Street.



The Brickmakers Arms, 315 Spring Road

Looking at it today, the construction of the Spring Road Brickmakers Arms is a little unusual. The original two-storey house is at the centre of a single-storey rectangular extension. This was added in 1884 after much discussion by the Public Health Committee. It was believed by some that it extended beyond the 'Spring Road building line', spoiling the previously 'uninterrupted view' from neighbouring properties, and causing a 'terrible obstruction'. Similar proposals for extensions by other publicans (including Charles Fisk of the St Helen's Brickmakers) had been repeatedly turned down. Matters were further complicated by the fact that the current owner of the Brickmakers Arms, Charles Cullingham, was also chairman of the Public Health Committee. In his (diplomatic) absence, the Committee agreed that 'the position of the new building was objectionable' but didn't feel justified in withholding their approval.

The Brickmakers Arms remains open to this day. In addition to the historic crest on its pub sign, the interior décor includes a large photograph of a brickmaker, plus three wall-mounted wooden brickmoulds.

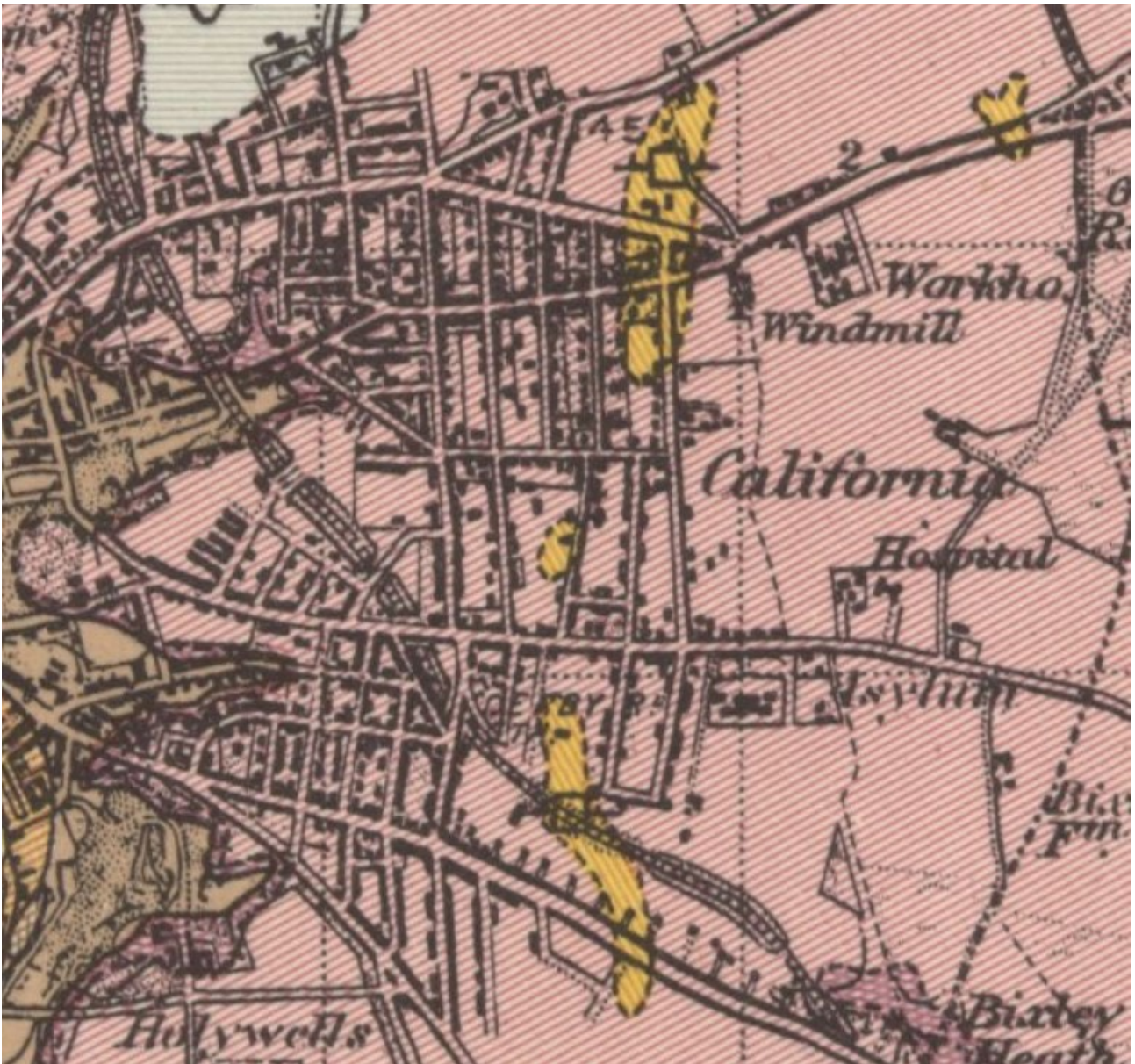


Brickmakers Arms pub sign

Bloomfield Street in the ice age

As early as 1875, geologist William Whitaker had made a personal study of the ready-made excavations provided by Ipswich's brickyards to assist with the geological mapping of the area. He visited the (by then abandoned) Victoria Brickworks north of Spring Road, as well as the Bloomfield Street brickyards. He found the northernmost brickyard (belonging to Francis Fisk) to have a surface of brown loam, then a couple of feet of gravel, and finally three feet of boulder clay.

After Nina Layard discovered Palaeolithic tools in her excavations of Edward Gibbons' former Valley Brickworks in Foxhall Road in 1903-5, several other archaeologists began to study the area. Reginald Smith's own conclusions, after inspecting the various vacated brickyards in 1914, was that a preglacial river flowed between Round Wood (north of the junction between Rushmere Road and Woodbridge Road) and Ipswich Racecourse (between Felixstowe Road and Nacton Road). It ran north to south, passing through Bloomfield Street and continuing until it eventually flowed into the Orwell. Others maintained it was a series of lakes rather than a river, but the abundance of brickearth certainly indicated that water had once been present. Whether prehistoric man ever sat fishing on the banks of Bloomfield Street we may never know.



Geological map of Ipswich (surveyed in 1881) showing yellow bands of brickearth in a north-south line passing through Bloomfield Street

The Bloomfield Street market garden

On the 1902 Ordnance Survey map, the two brickyards belonging to Francis Fisk Junior and Isaac Punt, on the east side of Bloomfield Street, are depicted as virtually deserted. The vast clay pit on the lower property is missing from the map, although it was definitely still there and would reappear in later maps. (It's likely the clay pit on Fisk's own land was at least partially filled in when he converted the land to allotments.) The only significant building on that side of the road, at the southern end, is the St John's Home.

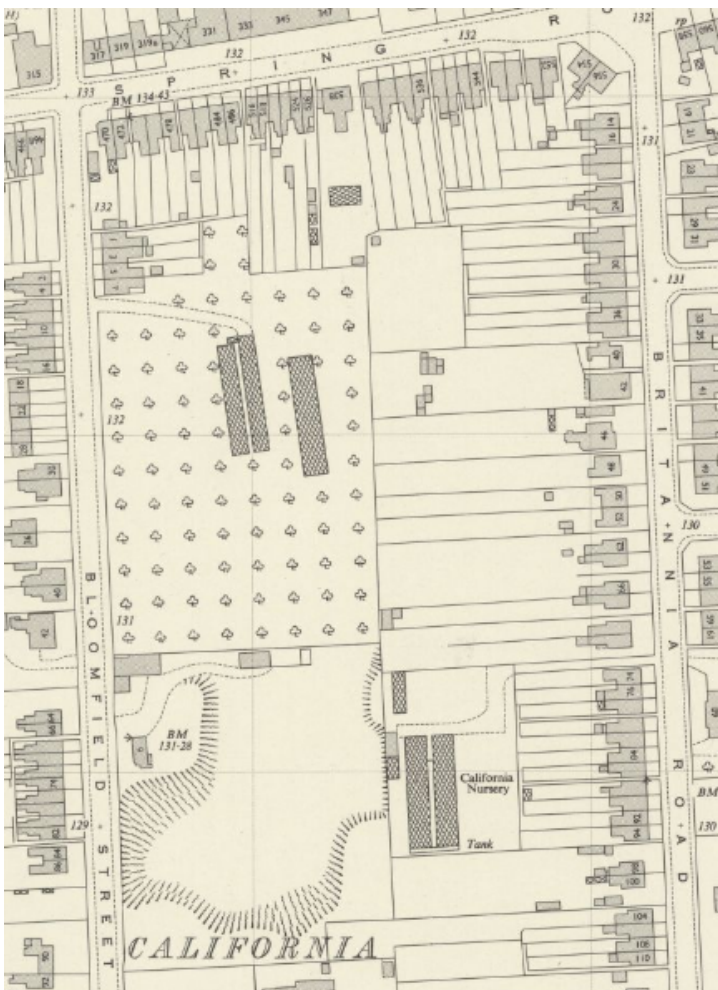
Following the death of Francis Fisk Junior in 1903, his former brickyard was purchased by Thomas Henry Smith (1862-1951), who converted the whole site into a single allotment and, by 1909, had added a greenhouse. However, even a market garden was not without its dangers. Yet another tragic accident occurred in May 1910, when his seven-year-old son, Albert Edward Smith, drowned in the pond on his property while fishing for tadpoles.



T H Smith (left) outside his shop in Upper Orwell Street (Robert Malster)

T H Smith described himself as a fruiterer, rather than greengrocer, and used his market garden to supply his town centre shop at 51 Upper Orwell Street as well as several nearby greengrocers. By 1927 he had built four houses at the Spring Road end of east Bloomfield Street. These were numbered 1, 3, 5 & 7 and marked the beginning of

house numbering on this side of the street. (There had been a full set of even numbers along the entire length of the west side for well over a decade.) T H Smith lived in number 7 and his market garden was accessed via a path that ran by the side of the house. By 1936 he was also supplying a fruiterers run by a relation, Winifred Smith, at 470 Spring Road, on the corner of Bloomfield Street and adjacent to his row of houses.



1950 Ordnance Survey map showing Smith's market garden and California Nursery

The 1950 Ordnance Survey map shows the whole expanse of Fisk's brickyard now planted with fruit trees, plus two long greenhouses. South-east of them, behind Punt's claypit, are two other greenhouses belonging to the California Nursery, owned by florist John William Potter, with access from 72a Britannia Road.

LOT 9

A

Market Garden

situated in

BLOOMFIELD STREET, IPSWICH

and adjoining and on the South side of No. 7 Bloomfield Street.

The ground is planted with numerous plum, apple, pear and cherry trees and has

TWO SPAN ROOF GREENHOUSES

brick pinned and being respectively: 110 ft. by 15 ft. and 100 ft. by 15 ft. one being heated.

The Land has a valuable frontage to the Street of about 350 ft.

and an

Area of 2 acres, 0 rood, 33 poles (or thereabouts)

TENURE - - - FREEHOLD

Now let to Mr. L. R. Blowers at the very low rental of

£18 0s. 0d. per annum.

The tenant paying the water rate.

Bloomfield Street Market Garden as listed in a 1952 Oxborrow auction catalogue

Following the death of T H Smith, his many Ipswich properties were auctioned in March 1952, including the Bloomfield Street market garden. In addition to the two span roof greenhouses (one heated) there were 'numerous plum, apple, pear and cherry trees'. However, the buyers had little interest in growing fruit, and the 1962 Ordnance Survey map shows numbers 1 to 7 Bloomfield Street now extending to number 39. Isaac Punt's claypit still remains, as do the California Nursery greenhouses.

On the 1973 Ordnance Survey map, the final remnants of brickyard have vanished. Six additional houses cover the Bloomfield Street side of the claypit, while Starfield Close slopes down more or less between the two former brickyards, then branches off left and right. The last surviving patch of T H Smith's market garden, still planted with fruit trees in the 1960s, is now road and pavement, while various houses and gardens cover land that was formerly California Nursery and the remainder of Isaac Punt's claypit.

Hotel California

There are only a couple of lasting reminders of Bloomfield Street's brickmaking past. Firstly, the noticeable descent into Starfield Close, at least partially caused by decades of plundering the land for clay. And secondly, the Brickmakers Arms in Spring Road – that enduring monument to a bygone craft. In its heyday it must have soothed many a parched throat from the four neighbouring smoky brickyards. If you're ever passing, pop in and raise a glass to these kiln craftsmen of yesteryear.

The final veteran to leave Bloomfield Street was, coincidentally, the first to arrive. St John's Home, later renamed Freelands, had become a storage depot by the early 1950s. It was still standing when Starfield Close was created at the start of the 1970s. By the end of the decade it was finally demolished – along with, at its southernmost point, an over-ambitious hotel built in the early 1850s and almost as old as California itself ... the Freehold Tavern. For a white elephant, that's quite a lifespan.

Alan Stafford

(I would particularly like to acknowledge the work of Hilary Platts, Andy Gooding and Borin Van Loon, the assistance of the East Ipswich Camera Club, and the incredible resources of Suffolk Archives.)

[Editor's note: Alan was particularly pleased with his discovery of a photograph of the St Helen's Brickmakers Arms, which he bought as a glass negative from eBay while completing his research.]