

BRICK-MAKING AT SITTINGBOURNE.

Brick-making, from the nature of the product, may be deemed one of the most important of our industries, and we may safely term Sittingbourne, if not the metropolis, at least one of the chief centres of the trade, seeing that some of the largest brick-makers in the country have their works here.

We have recently had the pleasure of visiting the large works owned by Messrs. Smeed, Dean & Co., Ltd., and, apart from their mere industrial significance, which is very great, we can truly say we have had few more interesting experiences than fell to our lot here.

To begin with, the extent of operations was a revelation to us; conceive, if the reader can, great fields of labour extending over 500 acres and mostly adjoining, active with the labours of 1,300 men and youths, and turning out 70 millions of bricks per year, besides vast quantities of other materials for builders' and contractors' use. Think, too, of a fleet of upwards of 80 barges, distributing goods by water over a wide area, about 70 horses assisting the labours of the staff, and, further, a colony of 300 well-built houses used solely for the accommodation of the hands, and some idea will be gained of what the existence of the Company means to Sittingbourne.

Like most great businesses, the origin of the one of which we are writing was of a comparatively humble description. It was founded by the late Mr. G. Smeed, a man of many parts and varied career, and withal a successful man, though labouring under the then too common disadvantage of not having had any early education beyond what he picked up himself.

The first year he started, about 60 years ago, Mr. Smeed made two million bricks, not by any means a bad beginning, and from that time, to use a rather hackneyed phrase, he "never looked back." In course of time, the business was converted into a Limited Company, with the following directorate:—Mr. Smeed, Mr. George Hambrook Dean, Managing-Director, son-in-law of the late Mr. Smeed, Mr. John Andrews, and, since the death of Mr. Smeed, Mr. J. Hambrook Dean, son of Mr. G. H. Dean, Mr. George Andrews, son of Mr. J. Andrews, who has passed the whole of his business life with the firm, and Mr. Harry Greensted have been added to the directorate. Almost from the first, Mr. G. H. Dean has been general manager, and Mr. J. Andrews, first as brick maker and subsequently as field manager, has been 31 years in the business. Both these gentlemen have all along unflinchingly advocated total abstinence amongst the employees, in this they have been backed up by their co-directors, who have done everything possible to make the surroundings of the men comfortable, to render life brighter and more attractive to them, and to diminish the seductive influence of the public-house, with the result that there are few bodies of men, we should say, especially men engaged in necessarily heavy work, amongst whom such self respect and so true an appreciation of the dignity of labour exists. The output has been considerably extended and the business is now far and away the largest of its kind in the district.

The bricks made are kiln red, malm and speck bricks, malm being the term given to the very finest class of bricks which are used for facings. As flint merchants, the Company sell over 50,000 yards per year, and for the purposes of their own business, they are barge builders, engineers, sail-makers, saw-mill proprietors, &c. In addition, they are the makers of Dean's Patent Steel Moulds and Stocks, and Improved Bed plates for brick-makers, of which many thousands have been sold and are in satisfactory use. The premises are so extensive and the work is being carried on at so many different points that to go consecutively through the various works and so describe them is impossible.

Apart from the clay beds and chalk pits, there are many acres of ground utilized as drying fields, and more on which stand drying sheds, pug mills, moulding machinery, barge builders' yards, sail-makers' shops, stores, engineering shops, stables, offices and many other necessary departments.

The stables deserve more than a passing word; they are constructed with every regard to sanitation, comfort and convenience, with lofty outbuildings adapted for isolation, and were specially built to accommodate the working horses. There are also departments where steam power is employed for bruising corn, cutting chaff, &c., and every horse has a daily allowance of salt, bran, and salad consisting of greenmeat in summer and silo and wurtzel in winter. Warm bran washes are also always given when necessary.

So large is the place, that various operations are conducted at great distances from each other. At the various points at which they are obtained, the chalk, earth and brick clay is made into slurry separately and then mixed in proper proportion, to be pumped to the drying back, from some points as far as two miles off. On the drying fields are the pug mills in which the slurry, when dry enough, is ground and afterwards moulded into bricks, mostly by hand; very powerful steam-driven pumps are necessary for pumping the slurry. The bricks, when made, are taken to the drying fields, and as every row is covered with a slanting roof supported by timber props, the many acres thus utilized present the appearance of a huge village of man-high huts with a perfect forest of supports.

Some of the bricks are dried in the sheds, and all eventually find their way to the kilns to be burnt in clamps.

Ever and anon we come across powerful engines driving the machinery, these ranging from 80 h.p. to 120 h.p. To keep these in order and also to turn out the patent moulds and bed plates, as well as to carry out the many engineering jobs necessitated in such an establishment as this, a thoroughly fitted engineers' shop and a smiths' shop with six forges and a steam hammer is maintained, and indeed all the supplementary departments might well be independent businesses rather than mere accessories to another. The sawmills, too, have a fine equipment of steam driven frame, band and circular saws, English and foreign timber being bought and converted here for the various purposes for which it is required.

Scattered about the works are shelters and resting rooms for the men, who evince in many ways their appreciation of the consideration shown them. At Adelaide Dock, Milton Creek, we get a glimpse at the firm's barge fleet, but these are for the most part absent, as the constant stream of traffic demands.

As to where the 70 million bricks and other goods go we need only say that contractors, builders and users of these products throughout the whole of the South-eastern district and beyond these limits create a constant demand for them. The Company have a high reputation for everything they turn out, and their output is amply sufficient to show that this has extended far and wide. For their steel moulds and bed-plates, in particular, they have customers all over the country; these have no equals for durability and cheapness, and both lighten the labour of the brick moulder and effect an economy for the employer.

Years ago the Bauham Co. carried on cement works on the property, and the firm, having exceptional facilities for making this product, are about to reconstruct

the works laying down an entirely new plant, which they hope to have in working order in a few months.

Naturally of so extensive a place a far more lengthy and more technical article might be written, but our purpose here is to give an idea of its great resources, and also of its importance to the town of Sittingbourne. Certainly one can hardly imagine a demand being made upon the Company's resources with which they would be unable to comply, and in the relations existing between them and their employees, solutions to the many vexed questions affecting labour and capital might effectively be studied.

THE CYCLE TRADE.

The oldest, and one of the largest and cheapest houses in Kent in the Cycle manufacturing and agency business—Messrs. F. Cleaver & Co., West Street, Sittingbourne—have just issued their 24th annual catalogue as a reminder to the cycling world of Kent that another season is rapidly approaching. This is one of the most useful little catalogues we have come across, as it not only gives the facts and figures of the several types of "Invicta" Cycles made by the firm, but price lists of Singer, Swift, Humber, Coventry Cross, and Star Cycles—all 1899 patterns—which will be found handy for comparison. Everyone knows that prices are coming down with a run, and it is pretty evident from the current quotations that standard machines are now about as cheap as they are likely to be, considering the limits set by the cost of first-class materials and workmanship.

Messrs. Cleaver's establishment is a very striking one, having a show-room frontage of some 70 feet, and exceptionally spacious show-room space where some 200 cycles may be inspected. Adjoining the show-rooms and business offices are extensive works, replete with a big plant of machine tools, brazing, enamelling, plating and other trade apparatus, giving the firm a big pull both as regards cycle building and repairs. A second floor brings the visitor face to face with a great stock of material, components, fittings and accessories, the B. S. A. and Eadie specialties being those chiefly used by the firm. The Kent County Cycle Works form, in a word, a first-class factory and a trade dépôt for the high-grade components used by all the best makers.

As regards the "Invicta" cycles, Messrs. Cleaver & Co.'s road racer, with Dunlop tyres, at £11 10s., cash net, needs no introduction to our readers, and their two chief types of ladies' "Invictas" are even more elegant and reliable than they were last season, though it must be confessed there is little room for improvement in respect of any make of "Invicta" cycle.

As agents for the leading manufacturers the firm show a wonderful assortment of 1899 Singers, Swifts, Humbers, Coventry Cross, Stars, Beestons, and numerous other makes, ranging in price from about £10 to £23 for the highest-finished specially. Cyclists should see the new machines for themselves, either at Sittingbourne or at the firm's branch depôts, 39 Stone Street, Faversham, and 153 High Street, Mile Town, Sheerness-on-Sea.

The head of this firm, Mr. F. Cleaver, is a popular and influential member of both the Sittingbourne and Milton Urban District Councils, and enjoys the confidence and esteem of cyclists of all classes.

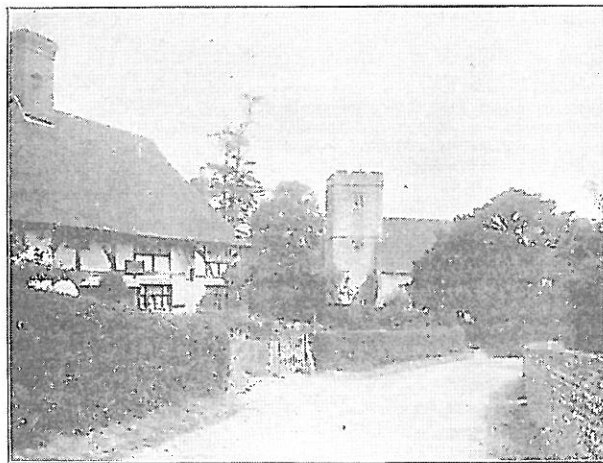


Photo by]

MILSTED CHURCH.

[F. M. Russell, Sittingbourne.

THE BAYFORD WORKS.

As in every other department of ship-building, iron and steel is entering largely into the construction of barges, but there is still plenty of scope for the old industry, one of the most recently started works, at Sittingbourne, being Mr. C. T. Master's barge and boat building works at Adelaide Dock.

He does barge and boat building and repairing, and makes oars, masts and blocks, besides undertaking general ship-smith's work, the three items mentioned, oars, masts and blocks, being special features.

Although only started in October last, on his own account, Mr. Masters is by no means a beginner or even a young hand at the business. On the contrary, he has been engaged for 40 years in barge and boat-building with his father, and therefore knows whatever there is to know in connection with the trade.

His premises, known as the Bayford Works, are in a convenient locality for a business of this kind, and has every convenience for docking and floating barges, besides every necessary equipment for any work he may be called upon to do.

A barge on the waterway is a very picturesque thing to the sightseer, but to those who have to work and live in them, as also to those responsible for their condition and fitness, their maintenance in good order is a very practical thing, needing both knowledge and experience to ensure good results.

With such a trade record as Mr. Masters has he may be said to know a barge or a boat inside and out, and whatever work is entrusted to his hands is at any rate carried out by a thoroughly practical man.