

9. Hooper Lane Brick Field

A steep bank separates Mousehold Heath from the flat land of Hooper Lane and the Showmen's Guild caravan site. A hundred years ago this was a busy complex of brick pits and kilns. Brickearth lies beneath the layers of sand and gravel which cover Mousehold Heath. To get at it, the Hooper Lane brick pits were excavated into the north-eastern slopes of the Heath. The quarries expanded as the demand for bricks grew to build Norwich. The brickearth was so valuable that two picturesque windmills sited on a high point of the Heath were destroyed; they featured in paintings by the Norwich school of artists, including John Cotman and John Crome.



1. A clay pit at Mousehold Heath 1841 showing a windmill in the distance. Print by Miles Cotman 1847, after a sketch by John Sell Cotman.

Brick making continued here until after World War 2. Nearby, the Brickmaker's Arms at the top of Sprowston Road is a reminder of this important local industry.

Traditional brick making involves kneading the clay with a pugmill, then moulding it using wooden frames. The raw bricks would be dried in open sheds before being fired in a kiln. In the later 19th century a large Hoffmann kiln replaced several smaller kilns at Hooper Lane. Hoffmann kilns were patented in 1858, and allowed bricks to be made continuously, as the fire burned in rotation through a series of chambers.



2. A brick pit at Sprowston, 1923, showing 'Norwich Brickearth' under-lying glacial sands and gravels.



3. The brick kiln at Hooper Lane was demolished in 1950s.

The old Hooper Lane brickfield is now private property owned by the Showmen's Guild, but the site can best be viewed from the edge of the Heath just north of Heath Farm.

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