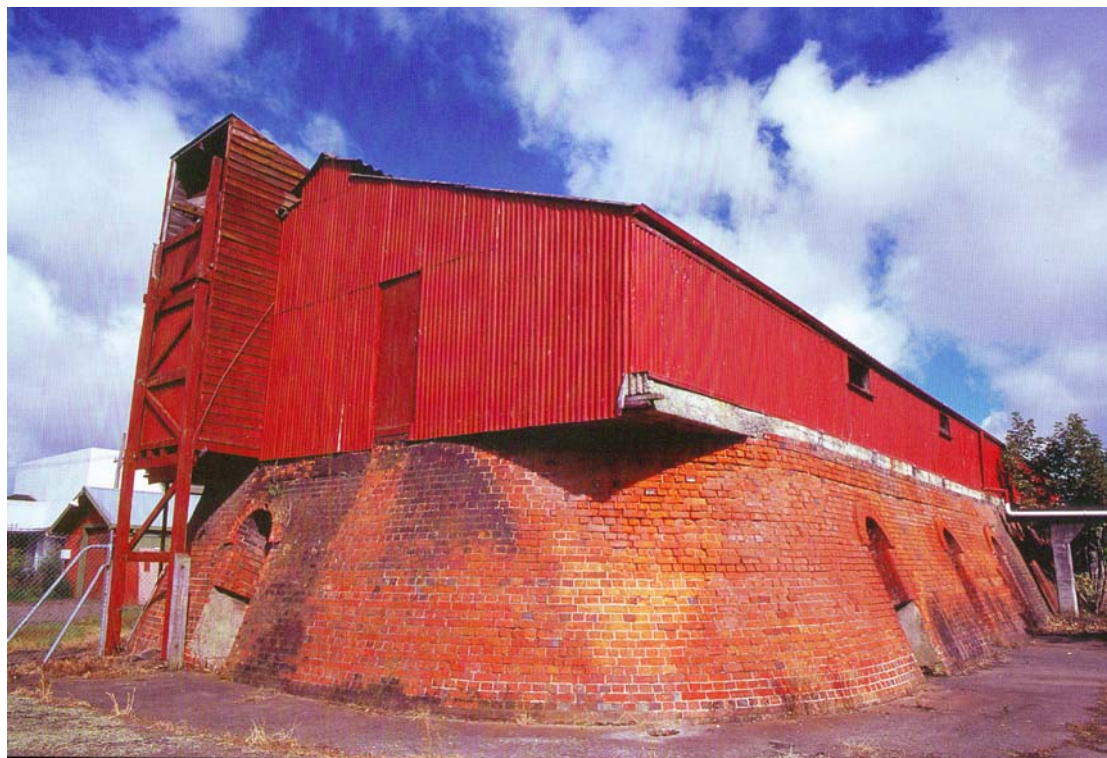


Hoffman Oblong Continuous Kiln

615 Featherston Street, Palmerston North

NZHPT Registration Number: 194
NZHPT: Registration Type: Historic Place-Category I
NZHPT: Registration Date: 01/09/83
City/District Council: Palmerston North City Council
District Plan Status: Category I

Other Names: Brick and Pipes Ltd Kiln, Hoffman Kiln, Palmerston North Continuous Kiln, Sercombe Continuous Kiln



Brief History

The Palmerston North Hoffman Kiln is of national heritage value as an example of a continuous kiln - a type common in industrialised countries from the mid nineteenth century. In New Zealand, these kilns were popular in larger centres from the 1880s but all have now been demolished except the local kiln and another at Benhar, near Balclutha. The Palmerston North kiln was built in 1904 by Manchester-born Robert Price Edwards using bricks produced on site. It was based on a rectangular design patented by William Sercombe of Leicester, England in 1891, which was a variation of the original circular plan patented in Germany by Frederic Hoffman in 1858. His son John Baker Sercombe promoted Sercombe's design in New Zealand.

In 1919 Edwards sold the brickworks to a new company Brick and Pipes Ltd. At that time bricks were in great demand, being used widely for the construction of houses, institutions and industrial buildings and it was estimated that the Hoffman kiln could produce 9,000 bricks a day.

However, demand declined after the Hawke's Bay earthquake on 3 February 1931 and local clay also began to run out. The three downdraft kilns on the site became sufficient to meet the demand and the Continuous Kiln was fired for the last time in 1959. In 1977 its 28-metre high chimney, for years a local landmark, was demolished. A protection order was placed over the kiln in 1984 and despite damage by vandals the structure remains sound.

The kiln is an imposing structure, over 34 metres long. The outside brickwork was laid using the strong 'English bond' system and the curved internal chambers and flues are particularly well preserved. In operation, green bricks were placed in ten of a series of fourteen chambers and fires in the empty chambers were fed to reach the temperature of 1,000 degrees required to fire bricks. The fires were directed from chamber to chamber and it took about fourteen days for the fire to travel round the kiln. At any given time different chambers were being loaded, fired, or emptied – a highly skilled process. The heritage value of the kiln is enhanced its site. Near the kiln is the well-preserved Brick and Pipe Ltd office fronting Featherston Street. The former clay pits can still be identified.

Principal Sources:

Lundy, DJ, *Nine Thousand Bricks a Day*, Palmerston North, Manawatu Branch of the NZHPT, 2005.

Palmerston North City Council, *Palmerston North City Heritage Trail*, 1993.

Palmerston North City Library Photograph Collection, BC160, 194, 195, 196, 250, 255, B258.