

### Former Northcote Brickworks

Almost as quickly as Northcote was settled there has been some form of brick and pottery making. The biggest was developed on land adjoining Separation St; one of the earliest was started in 1866 when John Roberts discovered quality clay soil at the rear of his *Carters Arms* Hotel (near the corner of High St).

In 1882 the Northcote Brick Co was established, purchasing 9 acres of land including the pit at the back of the hotel. A new pit was begun and Northcote Brick used the most up to date steam machine presses and latest in brick-making technology – the Hoffman kiln with its continuous fire. The iconic double stamped red brick came into production. Within a few years a rival brick company, New Northcote, set up business next door in Dennis St. To prevent further encroachments on its land, Northcote Brick Co put claims on land extending east including McDonnell Park (see photo opposite). A special spur train line connected the brickworks across High St to the Whittlesea railway line (parts of the latter now on the South Morang line).

In the late 1880s the brickworks was employing some 500 people plus an additional 100 carters. For quite some time brick and clay works in Northcote accounted for over half of the factory work force. There was a gigantic hole that kept getting deeper (now under All Nations Park), with up to five massive Hoffman kilns in action. Apart from occasional closures (in 1890s and 1930s), the kilns were in continuous production for decades. Many old residents remember the hot brick kilns glowing at night with the occasional bright orange flame licking out. The kilns had a single tall chimney in middle, producing thick black sooty smoke – they quipped that the only time sunshine was seen in Northcote was when the brickworks were idle!

Northcote brick production was massive – at its peak 1.2 million bricks being produced every ten days. Considering how many bricks were made, there are surprising few brick houses in Northcote! Most of the bricks went into building the Melbourne of the 1880s, a popular saying then was – ‘Much of Melbourne is built of Northcote clay’. Later, the Shrine of Remembrance was made from Northcote bricks.

By the 1970s the brickworks were closed. Kilns were demolished and what was rumoured to be the deepest man-made brick hole in Victoria became the Northcote tip, taking around three decades to fill. Covered over and replanted, All Nations Park now stands where the hundreds of men and children once worked in this iconic Northcote industry.

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More details & photos: [northcotehistory.weebly.com/northcote-brick-co.html](http://northcotehistory.weebly.com/northcote-brick-co.html)  
[heritage.darebinlibraries.vic.gov.au/article/294](http://heritage.darebinlibraries.vic.gov.au/article/294) [heritage.darebinlibraries.vic.gov.au/article/880](http://heritage.darebinlibraries.vic.gov.au/article/880)  
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*Aerial view of Northcote Brick Co c1960s, with Dennis & High Sts in foreground. A Hoffman kiln can be seen (below centre), all that was left of the New Northcote Brick Co. Photograph courtesy of Darebin Libraries Heritage Collection.*