

## 6. BRICKS AND TILES

- 6.01 **Brick Making**
- 6.02 **Brick Burning**
- 6.03 **Brickwork**
- 6.04 **The Cavity Wall**
- 6.05 **Brick Veneer**
- 6.06 **Special Bricks**
- 6.07 **Roofing Tiles**
- 6.08 **The Marseilles Tile**
- 6.09 **Tiles & Decorative Terra Cotta**
- 6.10 **Terra Cotta Block & Lumber**

Brick walling is one of the few aspects of building which has been actively discussed by architectural historians in Australia, but the discussion has generally proceeded from dubious premises to totally incorrect conclusions. It may be as well to state at the outset that the brick cavity wall is by no stretch of the imagination an Australian invention, though it may well have become more important in this country than elsewhere. Conversely brick veneer construction as used in Australia, while it may not be a totally new local invention, is certainly a form distinct from that used in the United States, and is a topic of some significance.

An odd connection with the United States is the fact that large shipments of bricks were sent from Sydney to San Francisco in the first half of 1849, and it is possible that the first brick house in the town – though it was not the first brick building - was of Sydney brick. The disastrous fires in San Francisco increased the demand for brick construction, and imports of bricks from Australia increased still further in the early 1850s.

Any bricks which came to Australia itself from overseas, at least after the time of the First Fleet, tended to be specialised ones such as firebricks, because common bricks were a heavy, low value cargo which would not repay the transportation costs when competing against locally made bricks of adequate quality. Bricks did not come as ballast in any literal sense: that is, they were not simply loaded into the bottom of the ship to give weight, without any expectation of a significant financial return. Bricks required to be loaded quite carefully if they were going to be sold at the other end but, as always, the heavier and more durable cargo was stowed as low as practicable. An exceptional case was the arrival at Melbourne in 1854 of 20,000 red and 20,000 white bricks from Hamburg,<sup>1</sup> for there is no indication that these were anything other than common bricks.

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<sup>1</sup> *Argus*, II, 23 March 1855, p 2.

The use of roofing tiles in Australia, or at least the Marseilles tile in particular, was first discussed in a pioneering paper by the archaeologist Robert Varman, and our knowledge has been expanded by Susan Bures's work on the Wunderlich Company. But the present writer's contributions, which have been published in various contexts, and are now presented here, greatly expand and should, I believe, entirely supersede the previous accounts. Despite a widespread and romantic interest in so-called gargoyles, the use of terra cotta and faience has previously attracted only superficial attention, and though what is offered here is an advance, the topic remains shrouded in a degree of mystery.