

1,400 YEARS OLD – CHURCH OF ST. JOHN, EPHEBUS, TURKEY

The church was built in the 6th century and still stands at the site of the home of Mary, mother of Jesus. The ridges in the design were created by hand.



FIRST CENTURY A.D. – BATH, ENGLAND

Hypocaust tiles such as this one were part of an ancient Roman heating system. The hollow tiles allowed heat to circulate beneath the floor or in the walls of buildings.



ABOUT THE CURATOR

Every brick tells a story – the late Basil Saffer knew that better than most. As curator of the General Shale Museum of Ancient Brick, Saffer spent decades going on brick-hunting expeditions in dozens of countries throughout the world and bringing his finds back to Johnson City, Tennessee, to be admired by visitors to the company’s headquarters.

Saffer, a former British merchant sailor, self-taught archaeologist and General Shale’s marketing director, once said, “To me, these are not just bricks – they are pieces of history.”

Saffer passed away in 2011, but the legacy he established at General Shale’s headquarters in Johnson City lives on.

The collection is a subtle, yet valuable, marketing tool – the ultimate statement about its products’ durability. “Here you can see brick that has been exposed for centuries and yet shows no sign of wear,” Saffer said. “These things have withstood the test of time.”



MUSEUM HOURS

Open to the public.
Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Reservations required for groups of five or more.
Call for more information or to arrange a visit.

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MUSEUM OF ANCIENT BRICK


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GENERAL SHALE MUSEUM OF ANCIENT BRICK

General Shale's dedication to creating high-quality brick products extends to an appreciation of the building material's history.

Almost five decades ago, Basil Saffer, a self-taught archaeologist and General Shale's marketing director at the time, began collecting bricks from all over the globe and displaying them at the company's headquarters.

Today, visitors to the Museum of Ancient Brick can discover bricks excavated from the foundations of the world, from the ancient city of Jericho and the Roman Colosseum through Colonial and 20th century America in nearly 100 exhibits.

Ten thousand years ago, humans learned to develop a lasting building material from pieces of clay dried in the sun. Ancient Egyptians used sun-dried mud brick. The biblical Tower of Babel was made of sun-dried brick.

Thousands of years later, the basic process for producing brick remains the same. The only difference — today's brick is heated to nearly 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit in a kiln, similar to a furnace.

Regardless of how it's made, brick's lasting beauty withstands the test of time — and is still the choice for structures that will last thousands of years. Come and experience the history of civilization by viewing artifacts from the past, one brick at a time.

9,000–10,000 YEARS OLD – JERICHO

This handmade, sun-dried clay unit – found in the buried settlement beneath the biblical city of Jericho – is possibly the first brick ever made! Weighing three pounds, the hog-backed (meaning thumb-pressed) plano-convex is the oldest brick known to civilization. Plano-convex means flat on the bottom and curved on the top.



1584 – CHINA

The first brick to legally come out of China since the Communist takeover, this piece of the Great Wall is from the portion rebuilt by Emperor Wanli (1563–1620), whose rule of 48 years was the longest in the Ming dynasty.



1620 – THE MAYFLOWER

The Pilgrims' ship was probably about the size of a canal boat — approximately 90 feet long and 24 feet wide. Placed in the bottom of the hold to keep the vessel steady, this brick was part of the ballast and was later used in the foundation of a Plymouth plantation home.



70 A.D. – ROME, ITALY

The Colosseum in Rome was built almost entirely of hard-burned brick. This one came from the Colosseum's highest galley.



1793 – WASHINGTON, D.C.

George Washington laid the first cornerstone of the White House in 1792 — but never got to live there. Three kilns on the property produced several million bricks, including this one, that were used in the White House and other federal buildings.



1846 – APPOMATTOX, VIRGINIA

This brick is from the foundation of the original town hall at Appomattox, Virginia, where General Robert E. Lee came to an agreement with Northern officers — a truce that would end the Civil War.

