

# The MUNDLING STICK



Newsletter of the Lion Salt Works Trust

Spring 2016

Volume 1 : 2016

## Worth Its Salt

Since it opened in June 2015, the Lion Salt Works has won four prestigious awards.

The enormously complex technical achievement was recognised in June when it received the Heritage Award in the prestigious North West Construction Awards. The project was praised for 'its exemplary heritage restoration, local regeneration, use of traditional materials, and for the number of people trained in heritage skills'.

The project was 'highly commended' in the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors ( RICS ) North West awards.

It won the Award for Community Conservation from the Chester Civic Trust, whose awards scheme rewarded the best architectural projects of the last five years. 'The judging panel was really impressed by the careful conservation which has transformed the site from a collection of derelict and dangerous buildings into a new visitor attraction which provides a unique record of a now historic industrial practice'.



Of course the successful completion of the restoration is only the beginning of the site's new life as a visitor attraction. There has been a great deal of complimentary feedback, and it is especially pleasing that the Salt Works has also won the award for the Best Newcomer to the Tourism Industry from Marketing Cheshire.

Visitor numbers are the ultimate proof of success, and we are delighted to know that we welcomed the 11,000<sup>th</sup> paying visitor 25 weeks after opening.

## THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERS

One of the tasks which the Trust is very pleased to carry out, is to represent the Lion Salt Works on the European Route of Industrial Heritage. ERIH consists of 1200 sites in 43 countries, The Salt Works is one of 87 'Anchor Points' in the network. The UK part of the network holds liaison and training meetings every few months. September's meeting was held at the National Brewery Centre in Burton on Trent, and it explored the importance of social networking in promoting and publicising heritage projects.

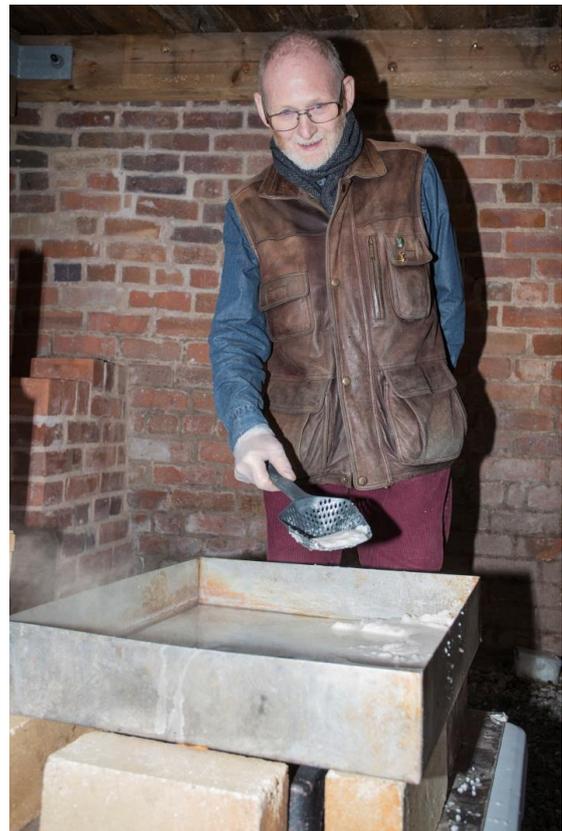
The most interesting part of the day however was the afternoon visit to Claymills Pumping Station. ([www.claymills.org.uk](http://www.claymills.org.uk)). The pumping station was built in 1885 to handle the waste from Burton's many breweries, pumping it 2 1/4 miles & 70' uphill to a sewage farm. The site contains four Woolf compound, rotative, beam pumping engines built by Gimson & Company of Leicester in 1885, which are among the largest surviving in the UK. The site is managed by the Claymills Pumping Engines Trust which was incorporated in 1993, and which now has a 60 year lease from Severn Trent Water.

The most impressive thing about the site is the fact that the engines have been restored purely by voluntary effort. Not only are there huge beam engines, but also a great variety of other steam engines, most restored to working condition, so many in fact that the volunteers have to think hard to work out just how many they have (nearly 30 at the last count).

If our Trust needs to look anywhere for inspiration as to what can be achieved by volunteer power, in the context of a Grade 2\* listing, surely it needs look no further than this. We have invited ERIH to hold a future meeting at the Lion Salt Works.



Woolf beam pumping engine at Claymills.



Lion Salt Works Volunteer Tony Leonard making salt.

## PROGRESS ON THE SALT VAN

In September, Trust members visited the Carriage and Wagon Works at Llangollen Railway to inspect progress on the restoration of our salt van.

The works at Pentrefelyn, hidden away down a narrow track leading off the road to the Horseshoe Pass, is a real eye opener. Originally the pattern store from Swindon Carriage and Wagon Works, the building was obtained from the demolition contractors, and modified and erected by volunteers. It is 240 feet long and 74 feet wide and can accommodate up to 9 coaches and 3 wagons.

At the far end of the shed, our van looked a little forlorn. It had been dismantled down to its sub-frame to allow the most difficult part of the repair, the replacement of the rotted buffer bars, to be carried out.



*One of the Trust's aspirations is to encourage research into the fascinating history, not only of the Lion Salt Works, but also the wider story of traditional salt making. Members of the Trust are unearthing some fascinating material, some of which we will publish from time to time.*

## THE HUMAN PIPE-CLEANER

The 1910 map of the Northwich area shows not only the other famous mines and salt-workings surrounding the Lion Salt Works, but also isolated boreholes with pumping stations.

These were a source of brine to be pumped and sent to one of the Salt Works. Many of these were drilled speculatively; sometimes brine was found, sometimes not.

An unfortunate Mr Parks, for example, sank three bore-holes. The first was successful; he sold this to Messrs Rayner and Howard.

The second was dry; a failure. The third, in a field near Marston, rapidly filled up with brine, but so weak (2oz, compared with the desired 38oz plus) that it was not economic to exploit it. Moreover, Mr Parks "had to pay damages for one horse and two cows, the cows having been poisoned by eating red lead, and the horse tumbled into the hole at the top of the shaft, and had to be destroyed..."<sup>1</sup>

Messrs Rayner and Howard had more success with their own borehole, just off Wincham Lane. It had been drilled in 1912-13, struck brine, but seems to have lain idle for some years.

It was in July 1922 when Mr Calder, Salt Union Engineer, was asked to install a pumping plant over the borehole.

Unfortunately over the years rubbish had been dumped down the shaft and formed a blockage inside the tubing 126 feet from the top, floating on the brine.

At first the only solution was to do some "fishing" with a "spear rod 18 feet long, 1¼ inches in

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<sup>1</sup> The Salt Union Ltd., Notes on Northwich Brine Area Vol III P. 486

diameter, one end being pointed with two fork tails, attached to a wire rope.”

After numerous attempts, “several pieces of wood and a shovel head were drawn up.” The shaft remained choked. Later, after many wearying hours operating the winch, workmen drew up a few more pieces of wood, but the 24 inch cylinder remained firmly blocked.

At length, the men themselves proposed a solution: someone must go down to clear the blockage. The first option, lowering a man on a “horse” or chair, was considered too risky.

Management had a novel solution; a cage was constructed, narrow enough to pass down the 24-inch wide tubes, big enough to hold a small man. But it was a perilous enterprise; the man in the cage would have to be closely monitored, and brought to the surface every half hour “in case he was overcome by any foul gas....”

Readers suffering from claustrophobia should stop reading here.

Mr Herbert Bannister – presumably a volunteer - was squeezed into the narrow cage, with a car battery and electric light above his head, and a collection of tongs and clips. Once in his cage, he was fitted into the cylinder and slowly lowered down the dark column of tubing to a depth of 126 feet - which later increased to 180 feet as the debris was gradually cleared. There in the cramped, foetid darkness he set about his solitary work of clearing the foul mass of tangled rubbish – wood, metal, wire, bricks.....

At first an airline was provided, but the tube became tangled with the cable, and this was discontinued. We do not know if there was a team of volunteers, or if Mr Bannister was the sole occupant of the cage.

“Removing the material took a considerable time,” reported Mr Calder. The picture shows the heroic Mr Bannister, with some of the debris removed from the shaft.

Pumping began on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1923, the brine being sent a distance of 4,720 feet to the Victoria Works and the Adelaide Mine.

The Salt Union *Notes on Northwich Brine Area* record a similar episode reported in *The Children’s Newspaper* (7.10.22):

“One of the United States oil companies recently dropped a huge bushing, or hollow metal cylinder, down one of its wells, blocking its drills. Officials... called for volunteers to go down and hook a cable on to the bushing to pull it out.

A man appeared who was willing to undertake the task, and made six separate trips before a coupling was effected, but he did it, and the well was saved.”<sup>2</sup>

Heroic indeed. And Mr Herbert Bannister and his colleagues did not even wear a hard hat.....



*The Trust wishes to thank Compass Minerals ( Winsford Salt Mine ) for the loan of archive material and for their kind permission to publish this photograph.*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid P. 472

## INSPIRED BY THE SALT WORKS

*I have been a volunteer tour guide at the LSW for only a few months, but it has been an interesting, varied and fun experience.*

*One of my earlier tours were some Blue Badge Tour Guides from Liverpool and Chester, a little nerve wracking for me, to say the least, but a delightful group they were and so interested in the story that the Saltworks has to tell!*

*Another group were some poets with their tutor, John Lindley. I asked if they could possibly let us see the poems they wrote, inspired by their visit and they very kindly sent some in for us, and now you, to enjoy, though I am sorry we do not have room to print them all!*

**Celia Johnson**

Still

Closure

Clock unused

Gates shut and locked

No cars, no cycles, walkers or workers

The big spiders spin silky silver webs

Invade corners

Catching Flies

Pigeons

Nest

Save

Restore

Ancient wreck

Needs hands and time

The hammer's strength, the saw's length, height and depth

Will we see this monument rise again ?

Furrowed brow, add

Devotion,

It stands

Built.

**Eugenie Williamson**

Lion on which the sun never set  
Liberating salt no sun has warmed for ages  
Decreeing it should be sold to Nigerians  
Did they really have none of their own ?

Would they believe in white men  
bent bare-chested twelve hours at a stretch  
over a steaming pan, salt-created rusty lace  
desperately patched and riveted.

Imagine a queue by the pay window  
They knew their reward is pitiful  
the Works steams on to oblivion  
inviting visitors as to a zoo.

Follow them into the company pub  
Slaking their salt-rimed throats  
before trudging home to see their work  
sit dainty on their wives'embroidered cloths.

**Cath Stone**

**Salt of the earth**

Baleful faces

stare out

at the camera

salt and sweat drenched,

stripped

to the waist

stripped of dignity.

One day

they'll even

hang his pants up

for display.

**Rita Furnival**

# VISIT US

## Opening hours

### Salt Works

#### Winter opening times November to February:

Museum open Tuesday to Sunday 10:30am—4pm, last admission 3pm. Closed all Mondays except bank holiday Mondays.

#### Play Area and Butterfly Garden

Gates, play area and gardens open Monday to Sunday 9am and will close at dusk.

#### Admission charges

**Adult** £6.25

**Concession** £5.50

**Child** £4

**Family 2 adults + 2 children** £16.40

**Family 1 adult + 3 children** £14.60

**Concession Family 2 adults + 2 children** £15.20

**Concession Family 1 adult + 3 children** £14

**Adult Annual Pass** £18 valid for 12 months from date of issue

**Family Annual Pass** (2 + 2 or 1 + 3) £50 valid for 12 months from date of issue. Concessions are OAPs, Jobseekers, or Students. Children are aged 5 – 16

There is free admission to the :

Café  
Gift Shop  
Butterfly Garden  
Play Area  
Canal Towpath  
Car Park

**To find out more about the Trust and how to get involved please contact Nick Hunt:**  
[ngkhunt@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ngkhunt@yahoo.co.uk)

*Mundling Stick n. ~ tool used to pack salt crystals into the wooden tub when making rock salt. Likewise this newsletter attempts to cram in all the latest information about the conservation and restoration of the Lion Salt Works.*

# Oral History Project

During the development and opening of the Lion Salt Works, many of our visitors have offered personal experiences of working there, and have a wealth of information to share.

The Oral History Project started with a fabulous interview with Joan Webb, a salt worker from the age of 15 until her 70th year. A two day oral history training for volunteer interviewers was funded by Saltscape and staffed by West Cheshire Museums. The first of the interviews took place on day 2 of the training, and allowed volunteers to develop their training in real-life interviews.

There will now be a programme of interviews led by volunteers. The edited recordings and the transcripts are being used on a variety of platforms including; The Mundling Stick, West Cheshire Museums website, and the education, exhibitions, and events programmes. Phase 2 of the project will use what we have learnt to pass on skills to a developing volunteer group,

If you would like to get involved, we will need transcribers. This is best done in the comfort of your own home, and can be done using a free download called Audacity. Twenty minutes of interview takes about one hour to transcribe.

Please contact:

[kate.harland@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:kate.harland@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

## THE LION SALT WORKS TRUST

The Trust is a key partner in the running and future development of the site. Current trustees have a range of backgrounds including local industry, banking, and local government. It meets formally four times a year, but works through sub groups on particular topics. There is a group of volunteers who support the Trust, and they attend the Trust's meetings.

Nick Hunt  
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Fiona Crane  
Elsie Barber Company Secretary  
Treasurer