

The MUNDLING STICK



the LION
Salt Works
TRUST

Newsletter of the Lion Salt Works Trust: **SPRING 1999**

VOLUME 5 No. 1

WORK FOR 1999 and looking forward to 2000

1999 looks like the year in which all the past hard work and endeavours will result in a definitive plan for the restoration of the Lion Salt Works. It is almost thirteen years since the works produced its last commercial block of salt following the loss of overseas markets in West Africa. With only limited sales in the UK the works was put into voluntary liquidation and the last owner Henry Lloyd Thompson retired.

INITIAL STEPS

The site had been designated a Grade II listed building and set within the Marston Conservation Area. To prevent its demolition the works was purchased in 1986 by Vale Royal Borough Council with the concept that it might be preserved as a working industrial museum. In 1993 a charitable Trust was created and two years later the Lion Salt Works Trust took over the assigned lease of the former Red Lion Inn from the Groundwork Trust who had run the building as an environment centre since 1990.

DIFFICULT GEOLOGY

The salt industry has left a difficult legacy of below ground problems associated with rock salt mining and wild brine pumping. These problems affect the salt works just as much as the centre of Northwich. At the outset of the project the potential effect of the adjacent Adelaide Rock Salt Mine was unknown. Following extensive research and surveys by ICI and the local authorities it is now understood that the mine poses no great threat to the stability of the site, though the

ongoing effects of local wild brine pumping is still an unknown factor. Our site is now linked into a wide spread precise levelling survey and the possible effects of current and future surface movements can be evaluated and incorporated into our restoration designs.

BUILDING SURVEY

The Brian Clancy Partnership have been looking at the problems of restoring the Lion Works. 80% of the survey work has been completed advising on the condition of the bricks, mortar and timber. Future work will incorporate advice on how the buildings can be restored, incorporating modern health and safety, building regulations, food hygiene etc.

MONUMENT PROTECTION PROGRAMME

The Trust has been involved in a survey initiated by English Heritage to record and protect all industrial archaeological sites in the country. The future reports are expected to identify the Lion Salt Works as one of the most important surviving sites in the country for salt making. It is hoped to be able to fast

track the site through the subsequent STEP Reports and seek direct English Heritage support for fundraising and a major Heritage Lottery application.

LEARNING ABOUT SALT MAKING

Over the last year we have begun small scale demonstrations of salt making, made a replica Roman lead salt pan and produced salt glazed pottery. Much of this work has involved help from volunteers who have enjoyed the opportunity to carry out many interesting projects. The proposal to use wood as a fuel shows the exciting prospect of the works not only as a salt works but also as a technology centre.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

We still have a lot of work to do, not least in trying to fund the restoration work. We are not in an EEC assisted area and English Partnerships no longer see Vale Royal as an area for grants, there are also great pressures on local authority budgets. The Trust is confident however that the preservation of the last Victorian open salt works is so important that a way will be found to achieve its aims.



Block salt. A speciality of the Lion Salt Works.



Students from Little Leigh School help demonstrate open pan salt making.



Photograph by Mr and Mrs Allen showing how the Victorian pans looked in 1970. It is how they should look after the restoration.

mundling stick *n.* ~tool used to pack salt crystals into the wooden tubs when making lump salt. This newsletter will likewise try to cram in all the latest information about the conservation and restoration of the Lion Salt Works.

WOOD as FUEL Demonstration Day

For Science Week '99 in March the Trust organised a two day demonstration about the uses and preparation of wood as a fuel. The demonstrations stem from our interest in using biomass technology to heat our restored salt pans. In restoring the last of the Victorian style salt works it would be unacceptable to also restore the pollution which was created at that time. In adopting wood as a fuel the works would once again be adapting to external changes and would return to the use of sustainable and managed woodlands as used prior to the adoption of coal.

LRZ CONSULTANTS

The Trust has sought advice from LRZ about which type of wood burner would be appropriate to heat the salt pans. Robert Rippengall visited the works in February and his report is eagerly awaited. The slow steady heat required for brine evaporation is ideal for biomass burners.

WOOD REQUESTED

A general request went out prior to the wood event asking for off cuts and unwanted wood. It would have been difficult to demonstrate the use of the machinery without sufficient quantities of wood to process. It was not difficult to amass sufficient timber for the two days, mainly from contractors clearing highways of fallen and dangerous trees. Most of the wood was of general low quality and of little practical use; it would have been chipped and much of it would have ended up in landfill sites. In processing it during our event it was made available for mulching or burning at one of our future salt making events. At least this small quantity of wood has been used for a productive purpose, saved transport costs, and space at a landfill site.

DEMONSTRATIONS

The Wood as Fuel days were used to exhibit equipment used in processing wood. A selection of tools and machines displayed and a wide variety of leaflets were available. The use of wood at the salt works would be dependant on a large and regular supply of suitable wood preferably from the Cheshire area.

The event was supported by a **Vale Royal Sustainability Grant** linked to the Council's support for Agenda 21 policies and a Cheshire County Council **Working Woodland Grant**. Displays were also provided by **The Mersey Forest** who are trying to encourage local landowners to plant modern coppice woodlands. On Friday Paul Trimby from **The Centre for Alternative Technology** at Machynlleth was available to answer questions from visitors. On Saturday Alex Argyropulu was on hand to explain the work of the **National Small Woods Association**. Richard Slatem was kept busy with a variety of equipment available from **Fuelwood Harvesting** which included loggers, sawbench, firewood machine and a kindler. **Nick Bowman** provided demonstrations of the use of chainsaws and a chipper and Carl Cooper of **Traditional Charcoal** was a popular attraction demonstrating the art of charcoal making. Carl produced stick charcoal for drawing but also argued for the benefits of good quality locally produced BBQ charcoal rather than the often cheaper imported varieties. David Lloyd-Jones of **Cheshire Tree Surgeons** demonstrated that felled trees have other uses than for burning and produced a piece of activity furniture from three large tree trunks.

Many thanks also go to **Cheshire County Council Rangers** who provided two tractors to power the machinery, and **Barclays Bank** whose contribution enabled repairs to be made to our mobile classroom.



LION SALT WORKS SALT MAKING DEMONSTRATIONS

The use of wood fires to boil our demonstration salt pans is becoming a popular event at the site. We currently have three pans to choose from. A replica lead salt pan is being used for experimental work to analyse the lead take up into the salt. The second is a scale replica of an iron pan described by Agricola in 1565. A stainless steel pan is used for events where visitors may want to taste natural salt made from unrefined brine. The use of the site for such demonstrations shows the unique value of the site for demonstrating engineering and technology within a social history setting, also and most importantly under the Science Week banner that it can be interesting and fun.

World-Wide Connections

We are constantly reminded of the world-wide connections that were created through the trading of salt. Each month new links are made and new information collected for the Lion Salt Works' archive.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, USA

Mrs Dobbertin of Illinois (whom the Trust is helping to research her ancestors who were saltboilers in Northwich) recently donated a book written by William A Rooney, *Architectural Ornamentation in Chicago* which features 676 photographs of terra-cotta brick-work used in the building of Chicago. Jabez Thompson contributed many terra-cotta and moulded detailing to buildings in our area. A similar gazetteer for Northwich was initiated for the Trust by Katherine Garfoot a geography student at Manchester Metropolitan University



GALVESTON, TEXAS, USA

In tracing more information about the Thompson family themselves we are grateful to Mrs Murphy of Houston for supplying details of James Edwin Thompson, her great grandfather. James trained as a surgeon, much to the displeasure of his father John Thompson who wanted him to follow in the family businesses. In 1891 James took up a position as the first chairman in surgery at the newly built University of Texas School of Medicine where he lived and worked until 1927.



GEELONG, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

Ron Spencer revisited the Lion Works last summer having worked here for a year in 1954. Eventually Ron emigrated to Australia in 1964.



It is always nice to hear stories of what life was like at the works. Ron wrote to tell us that his visit recalled many old memories. His main job was in the "otters" where the salt was dried and stacked before being sent to the millroom for crushing and bagging. He often started work at 5am in the otters, then daywork till 5pm, then helping the "lumpers" in No1 pan with Sam Bowyer till about 7pm (a 14 hour day) - but only for three days a week. Another chore was loading Joe Cross's lorry with bagged salt under the eagle eye of Ned Gates who was foreman at that time.

At Christmas he kindly sent the Trust a calender of watercolour scenes of the Australian countryside which we are using to record the volunteer's rota on our reception desk.

Ron also remember going to the office on one occasion with lacerated knuckles caused by splintered woodwork in the millroom. "Old" Mr Thompson dosed the cuts with iodine, then charged him one penny for the treatment. What it was really like to work in "the old days"!

Geelong has its own salt works which was visited by one of our volunteers, Jim Foote, during his recent holiday to Australia. The works was started in the 1890's when Mr Cheetham emigrated from Cheethams, Manchester.

QUEENSTON, ONTARIO, CANADA

Peter Birtles wrote to us after being sent a cutting from the Manchester Evening News about the Trust's virtual reality project. The computer graphics work uses photographs taken in 1891 by Thomas Birtles.



Peter is not sure if he is related to the Birtles photographic family who came from Warrington but his family were native of Northwich and he himself attended the grammar School between 1939 and 1943 before leaving England in 1951. He wishes the Trust every success with its restoration work and hopes to hear more about the project some time in the future.



Dr James E Thompson, first president of the Texas Surgical Society, was the first physician in Texas to limit his practice to surgery.



DATES for your Diary

Spring — Summer '99

WOOD as FUEL

12th March - 9th May

Display and leaflets looking at the use of biomass technology. Also a video taken during our Wood as Fuel Day held as part of Science Week.

Salt in Cooking from 15th May

MUSEUMS WEEK

15-23 MAY 1999

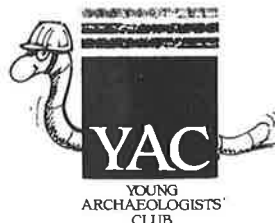
This exhibition will look at the uses of salt in the kitchen with many extracts from Mrs Beaton, but also recipes sent in by former customers. The great cookery writer Elizabeth David was a user of Thompson salt and extolled its benefits in her book *English Bread and Yeast Cookery* and *Spices, Salt and Aromatics in the English Kitchen* published by Penguin Books.

Did you use Thompson block salt? Were your uses for drying and preserving or general cookery? Over the years we have received blocks of salt and recipes from former customers of Ingram Thompson's Cut Lump Salt but would like to receive more. Visit the exhibition, write to us or send us an email. Perhaps your recipes could be used for a Lion Salt Works Cookery Book.

National Archaeology Day

24th - 25th July

Salt making demonstrations. Part of the Young Archaeology Club promotion of archaeology. Come along for information about archaeology.



Heritage Open Day '99

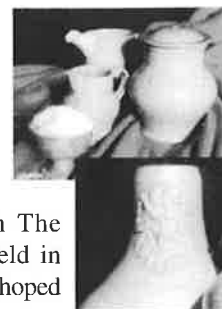
11th -12th September

Salt making demonstrations. Visit other buildings in the area also open as part of this national event organised by the Civic Trust. Also this year a part of the 1999 Northwich River Festival.

Further details later in the year.

SALT GLAZED POTTERY 2000

The Trust is seeking a sponsor to help create a limited edition firing of salt glazed pottery to be commissioned from Steve Harrison. The special kiln firing will be made using salt made at the Lion Works and will be taken to the 8th World Salt Symposium in The Hague to be held in May, 2000. It is hoped that special large



pieces will be purchased by some of the world's largest salt companies. Following the symposium items will be exhibited at the Lion Salt Works and be available for sale as a special memento of the new millenium. If you would like to register your interest in purchasing one of our unique pieces of salt glazed pottery please send us your name and address. Following a successful firing we will send you a catalogue and description of all the pieces together with a price list. Pieces will be available to those who have registered an interest before being offered for general sale. All pieces will be available on a first come basis.

OPENING TIMES

The Lion Salt Works exhibition is opened each afternoon 1.30pm to 4.30pm. Donations : £1 per adult, 50p per child. For further information call 01606-41823.

Web site address -

<http://lion saltworkstrust.co.uk>

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THE MUNDLING STICK *by post*

If you would like to have a regular copy of The Mundling Stick sent to you by post please send your name and address to The Lion Salt Works Trust, Ollershaw Lane, Marston, Northwich CW9 6ES or telephone/fax 01606 -41823. Newsletters are currently sent free of charge.

Cheques for donations should be made out to THE LION SALT WORKS TRUST. If you would like to provide long term support for the Trust please ask for a covenant form.

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