

# The MUNDLING STICK



the LION  
Salt Works  
TRUST

Newsletter of the Lion Salt Works Trust: **SUMMER 1998**

**VOLUME 4 No. 2**

## **BROWN TOURISM SIGNS PUT SALT WORK ON THE MAP**

At last visitors trying to find the Lion Salt Works can follow brown tourism signs from the surrounding road junctions.

Fourteen tourism signs have been erected at a cost of £4,000 to direct visitors from the three approach roads for visitors travelling from Warrington, Manchester and Northwich. Signs are positioned on the A559 at Lostock Gralam, at Higher Marston and on the roundabout at the east end of Chester Way, Northwich.

The signs show a positive commitment to improving facilities and increasing the number of people who visit the site. It is hoped to increase the number of signs as funding becomes available.



## **TOURISM FACT-FINDING TOUR FROM AUSTRIA**

In May, the Mayor of Vale Royal Cllr Keith Musgrave and the Mayoress Mrs Mabel Musgrave were distinguished visitors to welcome a group of Austrian delegates on a fact finding mission from Austria.

The group came from Halstatt an ancient salt mining town reputed to have the oldest rock salt mine in Europe. Halstatt was made a World Heritage Site in 1997 and is seeking to present the heritage of its oldest industry as well as develop other facilities alongside natural mountain and lakeside setting.

The organising consultants *Pharos International* discovered the Lion Salt Works whilst searching the internet for web sites related to salt. There they found the site created for us by Interactive Developments.

Therefore Northwich, as a salt producing town with its own developing tourism industry, was included in their itinerary alongside established UK tourist destinations such as York, the Lake District and Snowdonia. The group was led by Wather Cerny and included the Director of the Rock Salt Mine at Bad Isch, and the Austrian National Parks Department.



Cllr Musgrave presented the Mayor of Halstatt Peter Scheutz with a presentation gift of salt and salt cellar. Also helping to receive the party were Trustees Dr Todd and Cllr Lloyd.

*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.*

## SALT GLAZING EXPERIMENTS A SUCCESS

In March three days of salt glazing experiments as part of Science Week were a great success. 37 small pots were produced over the three days as potter Steve Harrison sought to discover how different types of clay would react to the salt which we manufactured by open pan evaporation. Steve had selected 15 different clays to conduct the experiments some which he used regularly while others were more unusual and proved more difficult to throw, however each was expected to produce a different effect by the way in which it interacted with the salt during firing. The event was funded through a grant from COPUS and the support of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Two days were used to provide demonstrations for schools selected by SET-UP'98 a group established to provide venues for schools from Cheshire during Science Week. South Cheshire College and Malbank School participated this year and we were provided with help and support from Ray Saddington's students from Alsager Campus of Manchester Metropolitan University.

On the Saturday a public demonstration day attracted a specialised audience some of whom travelled from as far afield as Bradford. Others we discovered were developing ordinary kilns in their own backgardens in Northwich.

The pots had already been biscuit fired at Steve's kiln in Enfield, which allowed the propane fired salt kiln to fire the pots during the demonstration day.

Careful notes were made of the firing, something which Steve does during every firing to enable him to monitor the characteristics of each kiln. No two firings are ever exactly the same. In addition a video was made by Ray Sutcliffe to add to the Trust's archives.

The process involves raising the temperature of the kiln and the pots to 1200 degrees centigrade where the silica in the clay begins to melt, at this point salt is added to the kiln in small quantities, over a period of time. The

high temperature vaporizes the salt whereupon the sodium is attracted to the silica and becomes fused to the surface of the clay as a glaze.

In chemical terms the process can be expressed as  $2\text{NaCl} + \text{H}_2\text{O} > \text{Na}_2\text{O} + 2\text{HCl}$  or salt + water gives sodium oxide (the glaze) + hydrochloric acid

The process is only carried out today by a small number of craft potters in rural locations because of the fumes which are created. Even in the sixteenth century towns complained bitterly about the pollution from salt glaze kilns. Steve's portable demonstration kiln is however very small and the fumes produced barely noticeable.

What our experiments showed was the wide variety of textures and shades which can be produced by the different clays. Shades ranged from almost white through fawn, beige/brown to greys and dark browns, and where the flame path gave localised effects highlights and dark blushes were created in a variety of pieces adding distinctive and attractive shadings to the glaze. Some effects may be created by the impurities within our salt such as iron, magnesium and potassium.

The next stage in our collaboration with Steve Harrison will be to develop individual shapes and pottery styles which will allow the pure tones of simple salt glazed bodies to become identified with the Lion Salt Works, linking traditional methods to modern design.

For those interested in studying salt glazed pottery a new book, written by David Gaimster, has been published by The British Museum Press. It is called German Stoneware 1200-1900 and costs £45.00. It has excellent colour photographs and over 400 pages (ISBN 0-7141-0571-6)

An exhibition of the pottery produced during Science Week and prototype display pieces will be held at the Lion Salt Works in December 1998. Other pieces from Steve Harrison's catalogue will be available for sale.



## SAFETY AND SECURITY

In preparation for consultants to start work on studying the structural elements of the pan houses and drying stores a programme of propping and shoring has been carried out. Work has concentrated on those areas which will be studied during this phase, but further remedial work will be required in other areas later.

As we anticipate the works becoming a building site a security fence has been constructed around the site. The six foot fence replaces a more modest chestnut paling and serves both for safety as well as security purposes.

Within Pan House No3 a variety of props, ties and timber frame-works have been installed to secure floors and roof trusses as specialist begin to clamber and crawl around the drying and storage areas.

The early stages of work within Pan House No3 were carried out as quietly as possible by Peter Egan due to the residency of a blackbird who had chosen to build her nest in the one of the roof trusses. Birds seemed to be well understood by his workmen who arrived each day with their own homing pigeons which were released to find their way home each day.



Left to right: Trustees Dr Todd, Cll Lloyd, Nick Davies, Martin Bell MP, John Linn, Richard Hamlett (Chairman, Trustee), Malcom Sargeant, Jim McCleary.

Martin Bell MP once again visited the site during Museums Week and was able to see salt being made in our replica lead salt pan. Mr Bell is MP for our constituency of Tatton and visited the site last year shortly after the last general election.

He was able to see the progress which had been made on the site and to hear about the work being commissioned this year to investigate the restoration work which will be required. He also met members of the Ruabon Field Club who were visiting for the afternoon and a large number of the Trust's volunteer stewards.

## WEB SITE BRINGS VISITORS

The Trust's web site is having a marked effect on publicising the work we are doing to restore the last open pan salt works in the country. Researchers are able to quickly discover the basic facts about the site and follow up with more detailed enquiries. In addition to the web site an e-mail address speeds up the exchange of information.

The Trust now has contacts in France, Germany, Canada and the USA. Continuing publicity about the site has brought in more enquiries this spring and should result in two television items later in the year, one for *Scientific Eye* a schools programme on Channel 4, the other for BBC2's *History Hour*.



## New Artifacts

Since Christmas three items have been devated to the trust to become part of its museum collection.

Two items are small comprising pair of pencil sketches of the works made by Hartford artist Julia Midgely and a 1½lb block of Thompson salt which had been bought in the 1970's in Dorest for 14p.

On a larger scale three lead salt pans of Roman or Medieval date have been donated by Mrs Hague after she read of our work to replicate a lead salt pan.

The pans had been found on her farm twelve years ago.

More details and photographs in our next newsletter.

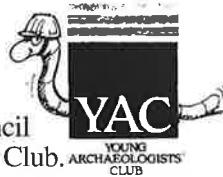
# DATES for your Diary

Summer—Autumn '97

Two more events this year when you can see demonstrations of open pan salt evaporation. This year we are experimenting with using wood fires to evaporate the brine and will be extending the range of experiments. Come and watch salt made in a lead pan Roman salt and a see a scale replica of a medieval iron pan.

## Saturday, 25th July 1998 National Archaeology Day

National Archaeology Day is promoted by the Council for British Archaeology and the Young Archaeology Club. The YAC encourages families and children to learn more about archaeology and we shall have a variety of practical salt making demonstrations. A new month for this event (In previous years it has been held in conjunction with Heritage Open Days in September). Sponsored by Marks & Spencer Plc Details on the web at <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/cba/nads98.html>



## Saturday and Sunday 12th & 13th September Heritage Open Days

National themed week-end sponsored by The Civic Trust, Warner and The Guardian newspaper. Events will be publicised in a Heritage Open Days '98 Directory and in will also be published in The Guardian on 1st August in The Guide. Information about other premises open in Vale Royal will be available in a local leaflet printed by Vale Royal Borough Council. Details are also available on web pages at <http://www.civictrust.org.uk>



## December Exhibition : Experiments in Salt Glazed Pottery

Results of salt glazing experiments carried out in March as part of Science Week. Display of ceramics with supporting video.

Variety of pieces by Steve Harrison one of the country's leading salt glaze potters. Come and find that special Christmas present.



New salt pigs are now available in our gift shop. Formerly a local Cheshire potter from Tarvin Jean Knowles now lives in Norfolk. Made from hard fired stoneware each has a leaf pattern in a blue or green slip decoration. Prices : large £34.50; small £17.00.

Also now added to our range of post cards is a view of common salt being loaded into one of Henry Ingram Thompson's narrow boats.



## OPENING TIMES

The Lion Salt Works exhibition is opened each afternoon 1.30pm to 4.30pm by our volunteer site stewards.

We ask for a donation of £1 per adult, 50p per child.

For further information call 01606-41823 or discover our web site <http://www.lionsaltworkstrust.co.uk>

## TRUSTEES

Richard Hamlett, (Chairman); Lady Rochester; John Kerrigan, Terry Cresswell, Dr Sandy Todd, Dr Tom Farthing; Cllr Mrs V Frame; Cllr Brian Lloyd; Cllr Ron Carey.

## 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 Nick Davies, Project Assistant, Lion Salt Works Trust, Ollershaw Lane, Marston, Northwich CW9 6ES or telephone 01606-41823. Newsletters will be 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.

The Mundling Stick is written by the Lion Salt Work Project Director and kindly designed and printed by Vale Royal Borough Council.