

The MUNDLING STICK



the LION
Salt Works
TRUST

Newsletter of the Lion Salt Works Trust: **SUMMER 2001**

VOLUME 7 No. 2



AN ACTION PLAN FOR RESTORATION

The Lion Salt Works Trust has appointed a team under the leadership of Donald Insall Associates to recommend a future for the historically important Lion Salt Works in Northwich, Cheshire. The team has investigated the current status of the Salt Works structures, its present role as a visitor attraction and a range of enhancements of its current functions and possible new lives.

The consultants have worked with the Trust to propose a VISION for the site's future, to set out what this might cost and how it might pay its way. The finished document is therefore, necessarily the consultants' and the Trust's views on how to proceed, based on the experience of the team and the initial findings.

The Action Plan summarises the investigations, the team's analysis and the details the teams recommended approach. Much work remains to be done but the team is confident that a robust future lies ahead for this vitally important tenant of our industrial heritage. The site must be saved it is of crucial importance to the industrial heritage of Cheshire and the nation.

The Lion Salt Works must be found a new life within the emerging town of Northwich. The team addressed the question of what to do with a dilapidated salt works and the conclusion became obvious. The future of the site is as an operating salt works. The existing salt-making plant cannot be re-commissioned, but salt making in a new pan could act as the catalyst for regeneration. Income could be derived from paying visitors, retail, café/restaurant and selling salt to the speciality food market. The Salt Works could be self-sustaining in energy costs through the use of a heat and power generated by burning readily available biomass, which is wholly in line with current government policies. The repair of the structures will need substantial grant assistance towards the budget cost of £4- £5 million and thereafter can pay its way as an open-pan salt making plant.



The Lion Salt Works Trust must now move on a variety of different fronts:

- Using the report gain comments and support from all stake holders and all parties interested in the future of the Lion Salt Works.
- Make an application for Planning Permission and conditional Listed Building Consent.
- Make application to grant giving bodies for the use of biomass to produce steam to produce of heat and electricity.
- Liaise with English Heritage about recording of the existing structures.
- Make a two stage application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant initially to develop the recommendations of the report.

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.

THE CONSERVATION STATEMENT

Preface

Before good decisions can be made about repair, reuse and regeneration it is essential to understand the nature of the site in question. The Lion Salt Works at Marston in mid-Cheshire is a rare, perhaps unique, survival of the traditional inland salt works which once produced this essential commodity. Standing buildings and structures on the site illustrate the whole process of salt production and date from the late 19th and 20th centuries. It is the only surviving site in Cheshire, which in the late 19th century provided 86% of the nation's salt. There has been salt production in this part of Cheshire for at least 2000 years. Cheshire has the largest beds of rock salt in the country. The industrialisation of North West England in the 18th century, the construction of canals and the international trade of the Mersey docks provided the context for the success of Cheshire's salt industry. The site sits in a landscape shaped by past and current industrial processes. The site has been redundant since 1986. Many of the buildings and structures are in a very poor state of repair. Limited emergency structural repairs have been carried out in recent years but decline still continues. The former office has been adapted and now houses a small museum and offices occupied by The Lion Salt Works Trust, who lease the site from Vale Royal Borough Council.

The Significance of Lion Salt Works

Countless historic buildings and sites have been demolished and cleared because they were considered obsolete, only to be mourned when their importance was later recognised. Defining the significance of a site enables us to avoid such mistakes.

National Significance

Lion Salt Works is Listed Grade II as a building of special architectural or historic interest. Several of the buildings represent rare, in some cases possibly unique, survivals of their type in the country. This part of Cheshire produced the vast majority of the country's salt in the 19th century and laid the foundations for the area's thriving chemical industry.

The Human Dimension

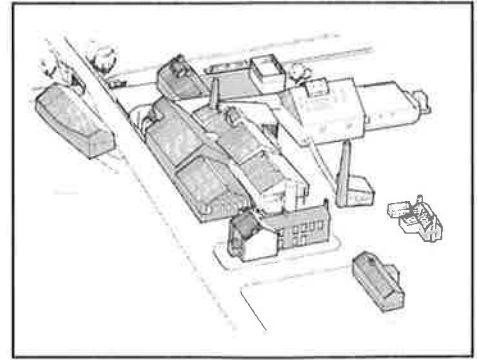
The site illustrates the craft tradition of salt making which spans two millennia. Salt is essential to human survival. The site is closely linked to many generations of a single family, providing an insight into Victorian family and business life. The site embodies the working lives of several generations, the last of which is still within living memory.

Architecture and Archaeology

The buildings represent the specific industrial vernacular of traditional salt making. The buildings and their contents cannot be separated, the two elements are structurally and functionally linked, both being constantly rebuilt within their working lives. Buildings on the site illustrate the evolution of the site from the 19th to the 20th century. In addition to the standing structures, the site and its surroundings contain a wealth of archaeological evidence for the evolution of the industry. The fact that the site continued to be developed and remained in use into the late 20th century is a curious anomaly.

Landscape and Memory

Lion Salt Works is an integral part of the industrial landscape of canals, earthworks, flashes and other subsidence features, housing and factories. The site is within the Marston Conservation Area. The pan houses and hot houses are deeply atmospheric spaces. The site enables a full understanding of the process of salt manufacture. Lion Salt Works presents a real opportunity as an educational resource.





Vulnerability

The site has survived decades of decline and redundancy, yet is threatened in many ways.

Redundancy and Context

Since the buildings are unused their maintenance has been poor, vandalism occurs, features are being lost and repair costs exalating. A significant investment, financial and human, is needed to secure the future of the site. New uses for the site are limited by the nature of the buildings and their contents. A number of well known and established industrial museums and attractions already exist in the surrounding area.

The Site Itself

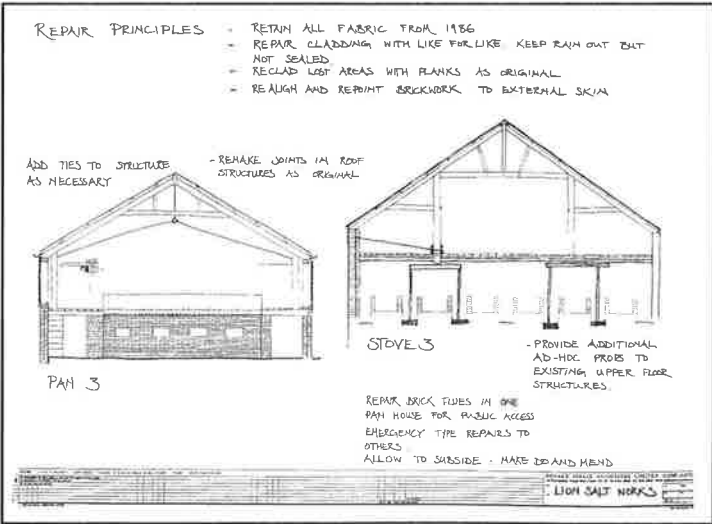
Many of the buildings were designed to be constantly rebuilt and adapted to accommodate the nature of the industry they housed. This contributes to their very poor condition. The corrosive effects of salt making and subsidence also add to the poor condition of the buildings. Industrial sites can be perceived as unattractive and subsidence is still active.

Future Change

The demolition of buildings could undermine the sense of continuous evolution on the site and alter its appearance as a whole complex. Any new building would alter the appearance of the site. The poor condition and extensive use of asbestos cladding on the site pose health and safety issues during building works.

Principles and Policies

The Statement will help to guide decisions about the site and ensure that its significance is protected and revealed for the future. Principles - The site must continue to tell the full story of the salt making process. Public access is important. Detailed recording of all the buildings should be undertaken to ensure preservation by record.



Repair

The most historically significant buildings require urgent repair to halt their decline. A repair strategy for different types of building and structure on the site should be established, taking into account the functional performance intended by the original builders.

Reuse

The limited scope for alternative uses may suggest that preservation as a monument is appropriate for many parts of the site. The use of existing buildings to produce salt would require very extensive reconstruction. A balance must be struck between the conflicting demands of: conserving rare and historic structures; demonstrating the process for public benefit and enjoyment; and modern standards of hygiene, health and safety and efficiency.

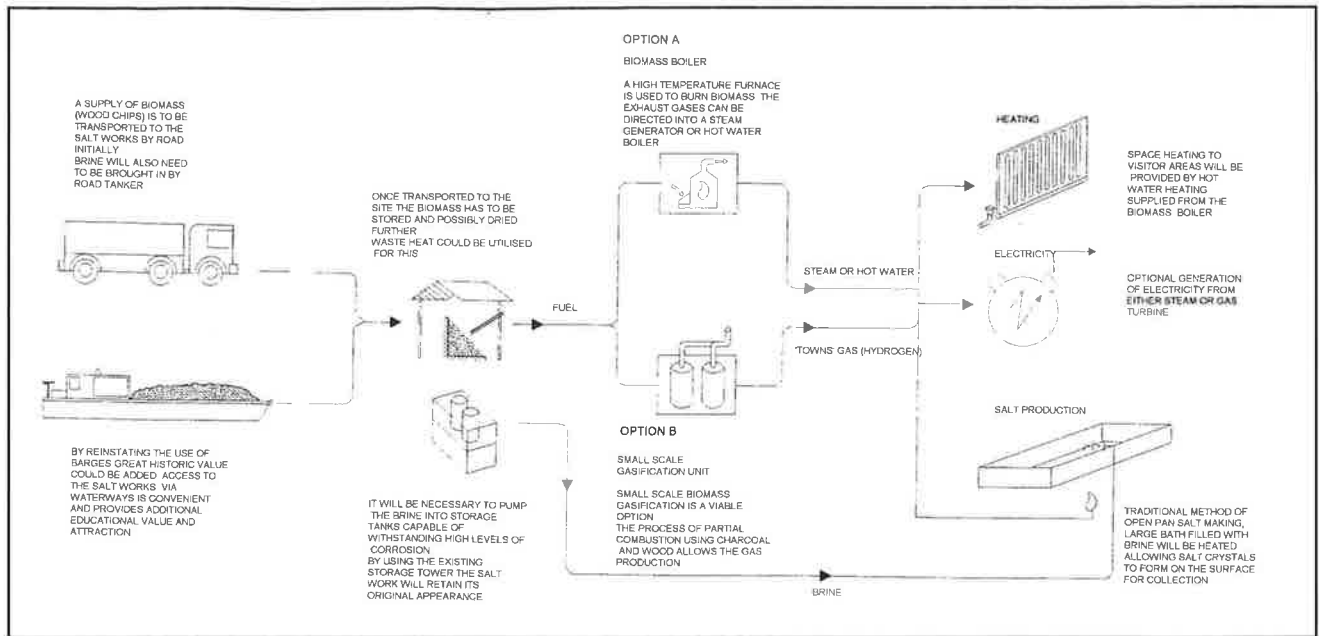
New uses for the readily adaptable buildings must support the conservation of the site as a whole. Any new buildings must support the conservation of the site as a whole and enhance the site's character and significance. The existence of other industrial sites and attractions should be seen as the foundation for beneficial collaboration and as the basis for attracting a wider public.

Managing Change

The industrial character and functional layout of the site must not be undermined. Any demolition or irreversible alteration must be shown to have real benefits to their wider conservation of the site that outweigh the loss. Missing or badly damaged components within the process may be restored, if sufficient evidence is available and such work would support the conservation and understanding of the site.

The Donald Inshall Action Plan for the Lion Salt Works was supported and funded by:

AN ENERGY CONCEPT FOR THE LION SALT WORKS



It would not be desirable to restore a fully polluting Victorian salt making process. However, by installing a modern biomass combined heat and power system the museum would look back at the Roman and medieval woodland management using coppiced woodland and also utilise waste wood which might otherwise be lost to landfill sites. The heating of the salt pans would provide two other energy uses on site. It would be used to generate electricity and captured waste heat for space heating of the museum. Back up power could be provided by bio-diesel. The working salt pans will be laid out so that future deliveries of woodchip could be made by narrow boat, making use of the Trent and Mersey canal, thereby taking transport off the local road network. The unique energy needs of the Lion Salt Works provides an ideal opportunity for the salt works to become a pilot environmental scheme in Cheshire to demonstrate the viability of sustainable biomass technology, a focus point for environmental groups and an addition to the educational value of the project.

DATES for your Diary

Saturday & Sunday 15th-16th September 2001

Middlewich Roman Festival

The Lion Salt Works is contributing a display of salt making at the Middlewich Roman Festival.

Our stand is supported by British Salt and will feature working demonstrations of ceramic and metal salt pans evaporating brine to make white salt crystals.

The event will launch a new Guidebook, a Roman Town Trail and exhibition in the library. The Ermin Street Guard will perform on both days on the site of the 1st Century Roman fort. Together with a tented village of crafts and activities on a Roman theme. Details from Jane Weir, Tel: 01606-836336.

OPENING TIMES

The Lion Salt Works is open each afternoon 1.30pm to 4.30pm. Donations welcomed : £1 per adult, 50p per child. Booked parties by arrangement. For further information call 01606-41823.

Web site address -

<http://lionsaltworkstrust.co.uk>

Help interpret your local heritage to others. The Trust still requires additional volunteers to assist with maintenance and to open the exhibition centre especially on Saturday afternoons.

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 Gift Aid form.

The Lion Salt Works Trust is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity No. 1020258. VAT registration No. 628998076. The Mundling Stick is written by the Lion Salt Works Project Director and is kindly designed and printed by Vale Royal Borough Council.