

Still Engineering

Introduction

In these dark economic times when it seems like Britain's manufacturing traditions have been lost overseas it is always reassuring to find that engineering is still going on and many engineering firms can still be found in Leeds, some of them able to trace their roots back to our Victorian engineering firms. Though the Hunslet area of Leeds is no longer heavily involved in engine making, the engine making heritage of Leeds is not confined to the past. In the Hunslet area itself the former Hunslet Engine Co works closed in 1995 and this was considered by many to be the end of Leeds' association with the industry.

A.Taylor & Son

The former Hunslet works is now used for the production of electrical components whilst nearby another of the former engine works, that of Mann's Patent Steam Cart & Wagon Co, still sees engineering use with new owners metalworking firm A Taylor & Son. In March 2011 a visit to this works was arranged by members of the Leeds & District Traction Engine Club. The works was going through a refurbishment as Taylors expanded their operation on the site, the member of staff showing us round commented "we've had a good look round and haven't found any old engine boilers lying around" This proved to be a little joke, one of the contractors working on the building had his Bagnall narrow gauge locomotive boiler in the works at the time.



Above – Photo of Bagnall boiler in the former Mann works (Kris Ward)

Pickersgill Kaye

Behind the former Mann Works is the works of Pickersgill Kaye, though somewhat rebuilt this works also has a steam engine heritage having previously been the works of Yorkshire Patent Steam Wagon Co. Joseph Kaye & Sons started in Horsforth, initially producing oil cans it later diversified in to producing locks. Pickersgill Kaye continue to supply specialist locks for the rail, architectural, high security and custodial industries.[1]

Pickersgill-Kaye has also been involved in supplying components to railway rolling stock manufacturers across the world, even to far east based manufacturers Rotem and Hitachi. A press release in January 2012 describing the company as "A prominent manufacturer of equipment to the European rail network and supplies a cross-section of blue chip companies like Bombardier, Siemens, Swiss Railways, Polmor, IFE, Jukova, SAPA and EVAC, including loco locks, emergency door release access panels, cab door locks and hammer boxes, for transport systems in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Finland, Austria and Ireland." [12]

Another works building still in engineering use is the former locomotive works of John Fowler's Steam Plough and Locomotive Works. This building is let as a number of small units that see all sorts of use, some of it being light industrial use, however one part of the building was returned to cultivation related use as police found a cannabis farm there in 2011. [2]

The Fowler name survives in South Africa as a result of the continuation of the company's South African subsidiary after the takeover of the British firm, Marshall-Fowler. Marshall-Fowler (SA) (PTY) Ltd manufactures boilers in Aureus, Randfontein, South Africa. At the time of writing a John Fowler steam roller is used to illustrate their website. [3]

Braime Pressings Ltd

Also in Hunslet is the stunning works building of Braime Pressings Ltd. The firm were founded by Thomas Braime, an apprentice at J&H McLaren, and saw initial success also producing oil cans, one of many companies who gained a lot of work through the presence of the local engine making industry. The firm expanded and their current works with its impressive office buildings was built in 1911. It is, a recent brochure boasts, "a major supplier to a wide range of industries including the automotive, commercial vehicle, fire prevention, commercial catering, material handling, medical, petrochemical, refrigeration and utility industries and of components for conveyors and elevators sold worldwide" [4]

Below Left - Photo of the Façade of Braime's Works. Below Right - the shop floor in Braime's works.



(photos Kris Ward)

Nearby two sites in Hunslet are still involved in locomotive engineering, the Freightliner Maintenance depot at Midland Road and the Middleton Railway.

Freightliner Maintenance

Freightliner's Midland Road maintenance facility is situated near the centre of Hunslet. Established on the site of the Leeds Steel Works in the beginning of the 21st century to provide a maintenance facility close to the Stourton Freightliner terminal it carries out anything from routine servicing to major work on the firm's fleet of class 66 and 70 locomotives.



Above - Freightliner class 66 66615 stands in front of the Midland Road depot (photo Kris Ward). Note the brick building in the background, that is the former Mann works mentioned above. Behind that is the works of Pickersgill-Kaye from where cab door locks have been supplied to American firm EMD that built the class 66 locos.[12]

Various Museum Workshops

Across the busy Leeds to Sheffield railway line from the Midland Road depot is the Middleton Railway. The workshops at the Middleton Railway carry out overhauls of its steam and diesel shunters as well as the routine maintenance these old machines are dependent on. Occasionally major boiler work has to be outsourced however as much as possible is done in house. Up to 7 locomotives can be accommodated in the workshops at a time.

Elsewhere in Leeds are a couple more preservation sites that maintain working locomotives. The Abbey Light Railway in Kirkstall runs a fleet of narrow gauge diesel, petrol and battery locomotives on its line up to Kirkstall abbey. Some fine examples of locally produced locomotives can be found in their collection. Nearby at Armley Mills the Leeds Industrial Museum has a collection featuring a great cross section of Leeds products including locomotives and traction engines. Hunslet narrow gauge steam loco *Jack* is maintained in working order and can often be seen demonstrated on the track through the mill site.

Leonard Cooper Ltd

Close to where the Middleton railway branches off from the Leeds to Sheffield railway is another engineering firm that is still running, another one that can trace its history back to Victorian times, Leonard Cooper Ltd. The company are structural engineers, steel fabricators and erectors and have had a long history of service to the construction industry, fabricating steel framed buildings. The company were founded in Leeds in 1865 by iron and steel merchant Mr Leonard Cooper. They moved into their Balm Road works just after the First World War. [5]

Below is a photo of a veteran bending machine still in use in the works. Made by F. Berry of Sowerby Bridge, when it was first put to use has been long forgotten but it is thought it was originally steam driven via the works' line shafting, its drive belt now being rigged up to an electric motor.



Above – Photo of the historic bending machine in Leonard Cooper’s Balm Road works (photo Derek Rayner)

William Cook Cast Products

One large engineering site in Leeds is William Cook Cast Products. With routes going back to 1840 and still in the Cook family the company now operates at sites across the country. Its Rail Division is situated at

the group's Leeds works in Cross Green.

The Rail Division of William Cook Cast Products produces all manner of castings including bogie frames, axle boxes, couplings, parts for tilting mechanisms including those on the Pendolino trains and even parts for the French TGV. For those who thought Leeds engineering firms just made shunters it is interesting to know that the fastest train in the world has Leeds made parts! [6]

The company gained notoriety amongst steam enthusiasts in recent years when it produced many of the cast parts for A1 pacific locomotive Tornado, the A1 trust regarding it as a 'principle sponsor' for this work. [7]



Hunslet Engine Co

The Hunslet Engine Company name survives, though the engineering work is carried out at the LH Group's works near Burton on Trent and the Hunslet Engine Co just has offices in South Leeds that handle the orders and design work. Recent work by the Hunslet Engine Co has included major overhauls of shunters as well as construction of a brand new design of diesel shunter. An order from Korea for a new battery electric coke works locomotive continued a tradition established by the Leeds firm Greenwood and Batley that Hunslet had acquired in 1980. [8]

Having acquired the original Hunslet Engine Co brand the LH Group inherited the designs of the several firms that Hunslet had acquired over the years. The company has produced new Quarry Hunslet and Kerr Stuart ‘Wren’ narrow gauge steam locos at Statfold Barn. At Statfold Barn a number of steam related engineering jobs have been carried out, including the return of a Leeds based firm to the steam roller business as Hunslet built a new tender for the John Fowler built Pudsey Roller



Above – One of the new build Quarry Hunslets “Jack Lane” is posed in front of the former works office on Jack Lane Hunslet. (Photo Andrew Johnson)

Swillington Rollers

Another Leeds return to roller manufacture was the recent production of small petrol powered rollers for cricket pitches by a local member of the Road Roller Association Eric Smith and his son Simon under the Swillington Rollers name. The first batch of five rollers are thought to be the first rollers produced in Leeds since the closure of the Thomas Green works in the 1970s. Produced in the Hunslet area they are tandem type machines powered by 9hp electric-start Honda engines, they can carry tools and equipment on the back or even tow a small trailer. [9]



Above – The first Swillington Roller (photo Derek Rayner)

Sulzer Pumps

Not far from the offices of the modern day Hunslet Engine Co is Manor Mill Lane and the factory of Sulzer Pumps. Sulzer Pumps have had a presence in Leeds since 1936 when they acquired Leeds firm Hathorn Davey and its Sun Foundry. The Sun Foundry dated back to 1844 and was founded by famous locomotive engineer Charles Todd. Originally some locomotives were built there but the firm turned more and more to the production of steam powered pumps. Hathorn Davey and predecessors Carret, Marshall & Co produced a lot of steam powered pumping equipment in the Sun Foundry works on Dewsbury Road. Though the original works is demolished and the site occupied by a car showroom the company are still supplying pumping equipment all over the world from their modern factory. [10]

Wellman Booth

Another surviving engineering firm with a long history in Leeds is Wellman Booth. Jeremiah Booth established the Union Foundry in Rodley in 1847 and in 1855 it passed to his son Joseph. The company remained in the family and built steam, diesel and electric powered cranes until the 1960s when a series of mergers saw it become part of the Gateshead based Clarke Chapman Group. Now owned by the Langley group, the Rodley works has closed but the orders and design work for Wellman Booth are handled in their offices in Yeadon, the engineering work now taking place at Gateshead. The company now specialise in overhead cranes and many of these are trusted with the task of handling radioactive material. [11]

These are just a few examples of engineering still taking place in Leeds, though it's not the massive employer it once was here I'm sure there will still be many more notable engineering facilities around the city that I haven't mentioned and Leeds always will be an engineering city.

External Website Links

Leeds Engineers

[A Taylor](#)

[Pickersgill Kaye](#) [1]

[Braime Pressings](#)

[William Cook Cast Products](#) [6]

[Hunslet Engine Co](#) [8]

[Sulzer Pumps](#) [10]

[Wellman Booth](#) [11]

Other

[A1 Steam Trust](#) [7]

[Marshall-Fowler \(SA\) PTY Ltd](#) [3]

Bibliography

Yorkshire Evening Post article 30/7/2010 [2]

A Partnership from Design to Delivery. The TF & JH Braime Story [4]

Old Glory January 2012 [5]

Old Glory December 2011 [9]

Acknowledgements

This article was produced by [Kris Ward](#) in 2012 for the leedsengine.info website.

With thanks to Derek Rayner , John Knapton and the Leeds & District Traction Engine Club, Ian Howitt, John Benson of A.Taylor and Michael Woodhouse of Wellman Booth