

Industrial Heritage East Midlands Network Meeting

Cromford Mills 28th July 2023

Introduction

Michael Nevell (MDN) as the Industrial Heritage Support Officer (IHSO) for England was the host for the meeting. It was the first in-person East Midlands regional led by MDN, as within three weeks of MDN starting the job of IHSO the country went into lockdown. The intention for the future is to have two network meetings for each region a year – one on Zoom during the autumn and winter and in-person meetings in spring and summer. The in-person meetings give greater opportunity for networking than online as attendees able to speak to an individual(s) rather than the whole group when a topic may be of limited interest.

Went around the room with people introducing themselves and the organisation they represent and their role within it.

It was agreed that the minutes would be circulated with the slides from the meeting.

Role of Industrial Heritage Support Officer – MDN

MDN was appointed as IHSO in March 2020. The role was the result of a series of reviews of the industrial heritage sites dating back to 1998 by English Heritage. In the Cossons Report of 2008 it was suggested that the lack of support across the industrial heritage sector should be addressed (though there were sector interest groups there was nothing that encompassed the whole sector). As a result in 2012 the IHSO role was created. The remit of the IHSO is to help the c. 600 industrial sites identified in 1998 that are protected (either by being scheduled or listed), open to the public and interpreted.

The position of IHSO has been extended until 2025. At the time of the extension the aims of the project were slightly rejigged. As a result there is now a greater emphasis in providing support and promoting best practice via both digital and in-person platforms, have network meetings, support and aid strategic leadership and partnerships, to gather data on the condition and resilience of sites in the industrial heritage sector. MDN and the groups connected with the IHSO role are working on having the position extended as there is still a need. To enable the dissemination of news and information there are two websites run by the IHSO (<https://industrialheritagesupport.com/> and <https://industrialheritagenetworks.com/>), each one having a different role. From these websites it is possible to sign-up to the newsletter. MDN, as IHSO, as a presence on various social media platforms including Twitter (X), Instagram, Facebook and, most recently, Threads. These platforms can be used to promote events for and by the various networks members.

When MDN was appointed as IHSO seven of the ten regional networks for England had been established. As a result of Covid the formation of the remaining three was delayed. The meetings being done now are for the 'new' regions. By mapping the sites within each region it is possible to see that some industries have a regional distribution.

Arts Council England (ACE) have Portfolio Organisations to which they provide funding. Of the 1,000+ such bodies only 26 have an industrial heritage connection (the slide shows 23 but MDN has learnt of some museum groups in Yorkshire that are receiving money under the scheme during

the 2023-2023 funding period). This shows what a small proportion of industrial heritage sites submit an application and are successful.

Historic England have produced a new industrial heritage strategy, which MDN has had some input and includes reference to the continuation of the IHSO role. This will be published shortly and MDN will inform the networks when this has happened.

Currently MDN is finalising the update of the database of sites, which had originally drawn-up in 1998. This currently excluded are the sites relating to transport, watermills (including tidal) and windmills; but he is about to turn his attention to the mills. There are regional spreadsheets that will be distributed, in due course. The intention is for all the sites to be mapped onto Google Maps and for these to be added to the IHSO websites. From the maps people will be able to click on links of the individual sites, museums and locations. This would be a way of them getting some publicity. MDN displayed a slide showing the distribution of the protected, interpreted sites that were open to the public in the East Midlands, as identified in 1998. Red dots are those that no longer meet the threefold criteria – it does not necessarily mean the sites no longer exist. One of those dots was the National Brewery Centre in Burton on Trent – which had closed this year as the landlords decided to use the building as office space. The artefacts have been put into storage with a promise that a new location for the museum will be found. However, this means the brewery museum will no longer be located in historic buildings related to that industry and so could diminish the experience. The green dots on the map represent sites that now meet the definition to be included in the IHSO remit.

MDN is starting to review the 160+ wind, tidal and watermills on the 1998 database to ensure they still meet the criteria. It is clear that a fair proportion of mills (not just ones included on the original list) have been converted into holiday lets. SPAB (the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) Mills Section are keen for this to be done to they have an up to date list. After this has been completed MDN will be turning his attention to the transport sites. The historic rail and canal network is complexed and throws up various issues. Part of the problem is that these are linear sites where some parts are listed and others are not. Similarly some parts are open to the public but not all. Given the problems it may be a while before this is completed.

A new element for the IHSO project is online seminars. The first one was held in July about climate change and industrial heritage. Another one on the subject of heritage crime is planned for November – details will be posted on the IHSO website and sent out to the regions. Despite being online the number of places is limited because of bandwidth. Interest was expressed in having the course re-run. If this happens it will be in 2024 and will probably feature different sites. MDN said he would distribute the slides.

The data from the database can be used to take a thematic approach. For example, as shown on the map, by looking at the distribution of water and sewage pumping stations that meet the IHSO definition. It is recognised that there are many more industrial heritage sites that fall outside of the definition and so are not included on the database/map. It was suggested that thematic, online meetings could be held online by MDN (such as stationary steam engines) so that discussions could be have that affect them that not have the same relevance to other sites.

MDN uses the Museum Development Teams (MDT) to promote industrial heritage events. The MDTs are in the process of being reorganised into larger regions. So, this means the East and West Midlands are becoming a single region, though they will retain current bases. Among the things the MDTs offer is information, resources and events, which are free to participate in. These include

such things as carbon literacy and museum accreditation. Full details can be found on their website (www.mdem.org.uk).

One recent development is the decision for three student internships in a partnership with Keele University and Ironbridge. One of these will be overseen by MDN. This person will be involved with stationary steam engines. Questionnaires have been issued and the information gathered will be used to assess the condition of the machines and the issues faced in running them.

MDN has identified three medium term challenges faced by industrial heritage sites -

- Climate change and the impact on industrial heritage sites (i.e. the increased risk of flooding and the resultant damage to sites in valleys).
- The recruitment, retaining and training of volunteers.
- Finance.

At this point this point each of the attendees spoke about the problems their organisation faces in the aftermath of Covid and as a result of the cost of living crisis.

Abbey Pumping Station

Had to close for 18-months due to Covid. However, since reopening the number of visitors has returned to pre-lockdown level. This has been helped by promoting their children's activities and holding steam days.

They have one full-time member of staff who is responsible for technical matters. The other people are volunteers.

As the museum of council owned they do help with maintenance of the site. However, even this can be problematic and bureaucratic even though it is their premises. Unfortunately, getting other funding or assistance from the council is more difficult. The grants the council has received from ACE have been directed to other activities (especially the creative arts). There are various matters that cause some tension in relationships between the museum and the relevant council employees. These range from a lack of interest or understanding of industrial heritage, pressure on budgets, the need to concentrate on core services, and staff turnover, etc.

Wolfson Foundation are a possible source of grants.

Derwent Valley World Heritage Site

There are all sorts of different organisations running different parts of the Derwent Valley World Heritage Site. As a result there are many different bodies that can provide grant or funding options but they are not all open to all the different organisations. Makes it complicated to provide advice and support because of the variety of sources and the different requirement.

One big problem is that though the numbers of visitors have remained fairly stable (helped by being a substantially outdoors and with many of the attractions being free) they are not spending as much. This can be seen in the takings at the cafés and businesses that use Cromford Mills and

other parts of the world heritage site as their base as well as in such things as a family hiring a single audio guide when previously they may have had one per member of the group. This drop in revenue with the dramatic increase in costs will have short- and medium term impact.

Covid has led to a reduction in the number of volunteers. In part this is because they got out of the habit of dedicating a certain day of the week to volunteering and during the various lockdowns developed other interests or now have other calls on their time.

The good news is that Masson Mill has reopened the museum with tours every weekday, though the shopping village remains closed. The new owners are deciding how best to preserve and develop the site.

Moira Furnace

They were able to reopen as soon as possible after lockdown as they were a country park as well as an industrial heritage site. This attracted local people as a place to come when people were allowed out for exercise. Because of the size of the site they were relatively soon able to hold events like markets as people could remain socially distanced. Though the cost of living crisis has visitors they are still coming to the site and spending money. This is helped by free parking though donations are possible – and on realising what this helps support are generous with what they give though parking charges are often a begrudged expense of daily life.

Necessity is the mother of invention – Moira Furnace have found that by diversifying and offering new things people will keep coming.

After the meeting attendees had the opportunity to explore the Cromford Mills site.