

## **Industrial Heritage Yorkshire Network Meeting**

**Elsecar 26<sup>th</sup> 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 for the Yorkshire Network, the network had not been formed by the time of the first lockdown, though discussions had started. The in-person meetings give greater opportunity for networking than online ones, as were able to speak to an individual 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.

### **Role of Industrial Heritage Support Officer – MDN**

MDN was appointed as IHSO in March 2020, and is the fourth person to have the role. Arts Council England (ACE) is the principle source of funding but other bodies also contribute. These include the Ironbridge Museums (where MDN is based). The role was the result of a series of reviews of the industrial heritage sites dating back to 1998 by English Heritage. The 2008 report of was identified that there was a 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 to provide support for the industrial heritage museums and sites in England.

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 not 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. One is predominantly used for publicising initiatives and guidance while the other features news and stories from network members. 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 network members. Given that approximately half the industrial heritage sites are volunteer only (or at best have one or two staff) and/or are very small they do not necessarily have the resources or inclination to search for information. By MDN bringing the information into one place is part of the support given by the IHSO.

By having England divided into regional networks it provides the opportunity to have discussions, share advice and provide local support between the members.

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 (such as the skill shortage maintenance which has been exacerbated by lockdown and the issue of suitable fuel due to the move from coal). This is part of a research partnership that is being developed between Ironbridge and Keele University.

MDN showed a slide of the 23 sites or museums with an industrial heritage connection that are receiving money under the ACE National Portfolio Organisations scheme during the 2023-2023 funding period. It was pointed out that recently the Barnsley Museum group and Rotherham have been added. Even with these additions given that there 1,000+ such bodies who have Portfolio Organisation status it shows that industrial heritage represents a very small proportion. The additions show that the situation is regarding funding changing.

Currently MDN is finalising the update of the database of 600+ industrial heritage sites, which had originally drawn-up in 1998, to ensure they still meet the criteria of being protected (either by being listed or scheduled), interpreted and open to the public. This currently excluded are the sites relating to transport, watermills, tidal mills and windmills. 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. MDN will start reviewing the 160+ wind, tidal and watermills once he finished the three regional network meetings he has this week. It is clear that a fair proportion of mills (not just ones included on the original list) have been converted into holiday lets. 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. The database and maps can be used to show the industrial heritage sites within a region or by type.

There can be an issue in determining which sector a site should be included in. This is especially true when it is part of an industrial landscape where there can be various industries represented or where the purpose of the building has changed over its 'working life'. For example, the pumping station at Elsecar is classified under the original function of pumping out water from the coal mine.

A new element for the IHSO project is online seminars with the intention of spreading information and best practice. The first one was held on 20<sup>th</sup> July about climate change and industrial heritage using different sites as case studies. Another one, on the subject of heritage crime, is planned for November 2023 – 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. MDN said he would distribute the slides.

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.

MDN uses the Museum Development Teams (MDT) to promote industrial heritage events. The MDTs are in the process of being reorganised into larger regions. 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 <https://www.museumdevelopmentyorkshire.org.uk/>.

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 (such as applying for grants and the reduced disposable income for families at a time of increasing bills for everyone).

Work is underway to extend the IHSO project until 2028. There is still a need for the sector wide support. There is even the possibility of additional people being employed as currently it is only MDN doing the work.

### **Elsecar Heritage Centre – John Tanner (JT)**

The Cosson's Report of 2008 identified Elsecar as the number one industrial heritage site most at risk. With funding from English Heritage and other organisation Elsecar opened under the auspices of Barnsley Museums.

There was a realisation that the Newcomen steam engine was not the only thing of significance at the site – rather it was an industrial landscape which had developed and changed over the years. It was originally created as an aristocratic estate village. The big difference was that it was for workers engaged in industry rather than agriculture. As a result, the architecture is reminiscent of traditional estate villages though built around a large complex of collieries, ironworks and workshops.

Until the 1980s the site was owned by the National Coal Board. It was possibly this fact that meant when it became a heritage site the focus was solely on the 1850's coal story and ignored the iron (with the exception of a single sign).

Because Elsecar had been a working industrial landscape for two hundred years, since the late eighteenth century, with different industries represented it was a difficult site to understand. This was not only because of the different industries and ancillary services but also because of the changes and developments within these. It is only recently that a greater understanding of the site has been possible. However, this knowledge is not complete and to achieve even greater understanding of that is still on the site and what was previously there research links with various universities have been developed. In moving away from the 1850's coal story the heritage centre has created a core site focuses on the foundry and canal, though not ignoring the other activities.

Footfall has doubled over the past ten years. Covid had little impact on visitor numbers as the access to the open space attracted people (this is a similar situation to other outdoor sites). In 2022 the visitor numbers had returned to pre-Covid levels; in fact exceeding them. Part of this success is be commodifying the site – by providing events and attractions that people want to spend their time and money to visit.

There are challenges. For example most of the buildings are Grade 2 listed. The number of these have increased as have the number of Grade 2\*. These gradings puts greater restrictions and responsibilities on doing any work on the buildings. As well as the listed buildings there is a large area that is scheduled. In addition to the industrial heritage there is a conservation area; so the natural landscape is also protected. However, neither the protection for the industrial heritage nor natural environment mean that the site is an open-air museum set in aspic. Both are protected and

need to be conserved. The village of Elsecar is a real village and home to c. 2,000 people. Fortunately, the villagers are supportive. But the heritage centre and visitors must ensure that they are not alienated.

The aim is to create visitor hub to make visits to the site more coherent as an industrial landscape better showing how the various parts fitted together – the ironworks, mines and transport links. The finance is in place to do this.

Though Covid itself had little detrimental effect on Elsecar as a whole there was one unexpected outcome. The heritage railway handed back their lease – in part due to the challenges of Covid. It is the intention that the heritage railway will be reopened eventually but as it is now within the scheduled monument site the matter is far more complicated.

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.

### South Yorkshire Transport Museum

It was originally located in the Sheffield tram shed but moved to into a larger, new building in Rotherham. The museum is a charity run by volunteers. They have expanded over the years.

Covid resulted in them being closed for 18 months. This has a negative effect on retaining and recruiting volunteers as they have more calls upon their time.

Have had a student on placement from Sheffield Hallam university looking at curation of the collection. They are hoping to be able to recruit another one as they want to tell the social history of the exhibits (possibly with audio).

Another problem the museum has faced was the sharp increase in rent charged from 2022. Having to look for sponsorship with the aim of at least breaking-even again.

Also provided information about Keithley Bus Museum. Their lease has expired and the landlord would like to sell the building – preferably to the museum trust or to a benefactor who would let the museum stay. The problem is that the roof needs replacing. This is leading to uncertainty over its future – it may have to move which gives rise to where the new location could be and what would happen to the vehicles and building (it is currently based in an old foundry building).

### Calderdale Industrial Museum

Located in a warehouse rather than an industrial building. This is possible an advantage for them as they are not restricted and so can tell the story of a wide range of industries from the area. Having said this, there is a focus on the textile industry especially wool.

Originally a council funded museum but due to the cost of repairing the building and other issues they decided to close the museum as too expensive to run. It reopened in 2017, but only on Saturdays.

They have c. 200 members of which half are volunteers.

It is intended that the displays need to be updated with regard such things to labelling and interpretation. This has led to some tension with some groups as some want to keep things as they remembered the museum in the 1980s while others want radical changes to continue to attract visitors and make the collection more relevant.

Want to get more of the machines working – such as the stationary steam engines. However, this desire means there are many issues that have to be resolved first. Among them are how to power the machines (especially given the phasing out of coal), training (there is the possibility that the Prince's Trust may be able to assist), and funding.

Financially Covid was not a problem for the museum as they received council funding. Visitor numbers are at about 80-90% of pre-Covid figures with them increasing steadily. Volunteer numbers have reduced as a result of Covid but recently they have been able to recruit more. Apart from the first lockdown they allowed volunteers to attend, provided they followed social distancing rules.

### Vintage Carriage Trust

The Vintage Carriages Trust is located on the Worth Valley Railway line. They are separate organisations with different emphasis – the Vintage Carriage Trust has been collecting Victorian and Edwardian carriages where Worth Valley Railways decided to concentrate on rollingstock from the 1950s and 1960s. While most of the time they co-exist harmoniously there have been tensions with both organisations wanting to expand.

During Covid staff were furloughed, though there were some redundancies because they had additional health issues. Financially the trust were better off as a result of Covid. This is because they received more legacies than was typical but also because Worth Valley Railway hired carriages from them so that they were able to comply with the family carriage rules while social distancing was in place though attractions were open.

Became an accredited museum because it gave them greater funding opportunities. Want to appoint a development officer to be able to apply for grants and funding for future improvements. As part of recent developments (main purpose was to install toilets) they installed a themed display showing the local area and the destinations that could have been reached when the railway was originally operating.

### Bradford Museums

Bradford Industrial Museum is one of four museums owned and run by Bradford Council. It has various sections including stationary steam engines, spinning, weaving, and print, etc. They have National Portfolio Organisation status.

Due to Covid they found the number of volunteers had reduced. Now have a volunteer coordinator to support the recruitment and retention of volunteers. They want community engagement and having volunteers is one way of helping to achieve this.

Funding is an issue. Money is needed for repairs and staff training (especially operating the stationary steam engines). They are also looking at applying for a capital grant so that the museum can be redesigned and re-interpreted as it has basically remained unchanged since it opened.

Have been working with Leeds Beckett University and Bradford University in recent years. Part of work with Leeds Beckett has been looking at a digital legacy – such as 3D scanning of the machines. With Bradford they have been looking at creating immersive experiences.

#### Heritage Architect

Specialist in museum and industrial heritage and as well as working with Elsecar has also commissioned to do work for the lead mining museum in Durham. At the site he had found that the loss of trees (due to storm and other causes) has led to an excess of water on the site, which is causing damage.

Supports clients with applications for MEND (Museum Estate and Development) funding to repair woods as part of flood amelioration and other work. From visiting sites it is clear that there is a backlog of maintenance of both buildings and the grounds. Especially in exposed areas this quickly leads to further deterioration and so makes it a larger and more expensive task to rectify the matter.

#### Insurance Broker

Works for GRP, who have been taken over by a large American company that has a mindset of giving back to the community and want what they are involved with to be community led. Her role is to be able to inform the company of what people want. She is at the stage of gathering idea about what people are interested in where the money the company decide to spend could do some good. At present she is looking at the Barnsley, Sheffield, Rotherham area and what historical things in the area are at risk.

Being an insurance broker triggered a discussion about insurance and brokers. Some of the attendees gave examples of who even after explaining the situation the broker didn't understand (for example that just because you train carriages didn't mean that you were carrying passengers). Needed to 'train' broker but when they moved and allocated another had to start the process again.

#### Barnsley Museums and Heritage Trust

Have a lot of volunteers across their sites (of which Elsecar is one). They would like them to get more involved though this has to be carefully managed.

They are a local authority group and do receive help from the council. Also in receipt of funding from the National Lottery.

Issues faced include maintenance backlog (which seems common and to have got worse due to the impact of Covid as well as constraints on councils budgets) and turnover of staff. When you have a small staff any changes in personnel can have a big impact.

After lunch we were given a tour of the Elsecar site. This included watching the video of how the surrounding area was thought to have been in the 1880s – used flyby to show the industrial activity of the pumphouse, railway, ironworks, blast furnace, colliery and canal as well as the

domestic and social (the cricket pitch). Given how long the site had been an working, industrial environment had to select a period for the video as not practical to show how things changed over time. The date chosen showed the peak of activity.

As part of the tour we went into Earl's Great Engine as well as other of the buildings.