

Industrial Irlam visited by HRH the Duke of York KG

"It is hard for a greater contrast in industry to have been found; in one was all the grime smoke, smell and ceaseless din of the foundry, where brawny men wrestle with the huge caldrons of molten metal, wild eyed and with glistening bodies giving them the appearance of veritable Vulcans. Then the other, where cleanliness and quietude reigns supreme. Dainty specimens of budding womanhood hold sway, spotless in their attire, working with astonishing deftness on materials which contrast equally with those of the steel works. "

This paragraph is taken from the Irlam and Cadishead Guardian written in 1932 at the time of the Duke's visit to Partington Iron and Steel Works and the CWS Margarine works. This was part of tour around Lancashire as patron of the Industrial Welfare Society. I can't imagine that the people working at these companies on that day quite imagined themselves in this way but the contrast must have been quite striking going from the dust and grime of the Steel Works to the peace and quiet of the Margarine Works.

The Duke had been president of the Industrial Welfare Society since it was founded in 1908 and had taken a real interest in the work they carried out. The Managing Director of the steel works Mr James Kerr was a pioneer in Health and Safety and Accident Prevention and had developed classes for all the departments. His efforts in the direction of safety first and care in carrying out the simplest of duties had borne fruit with the decrease in accidents over the past few years. In order to stimulate competition among the many departments Mr Kerr had a large chart placed in a conspicuous position and in regard to accidents and a shield was offered yearly and held by the department with the fewest accidents. There was also a well equipped first aid room and ambulance department.

On arrival at the Steel Works the Duke was shown the blast furnace and then went on to the steel plant and power house finishing his visit at the rolling mills.

The Duke then went on to the CWS Margarine works, one of the most modern food factories in the country and the Duke could not fail to be impressed with the spotlessly clean condition of everything he saw. The Duke visited most of the works seeing the laundry, cloakroom, warehouse, box shop, lard refining, advertising department, welfare section, margarine churning, cold stores and power house. The Duke was greeted by a guard of honour of the female employees dressed in their white overalls and left to a guard of the companies Fire Service.

It was a credit to Irlam that two of its largest works should have been singled out on the Dukes visit to Industrial Lancashire, and the directors and managers of the respective concerns were justifiably proud. The Duke was as impressed with the welfare work that was carried out and it is admitted that was down to the workers who are responsible for the great developments in health and safety and welfare which had taken place in the district

I wonder what the workers who met the Duke thought when five years later he became King George VI. At the time of the visits he was the Duke of York - second in line to the throne with no notion of what was about to happen a few years later.

By Debbie Yates



Figure 1 Waiting for the Duke to arrive



Figure 2 Duke at the Steel Works



Figure 3 Duke at the Margarine Works