

MARGARINE WORKS

Building of the Co-operative (CWS) Margarine Works commenced in 1914 to satisfy increased demand for fats of all descriptions. Progress was not easy, due to it being at the height of the First World War, but construction and equipping of the factory continued, albeit at a steady pace.



Located in Higher Irlam, the works finally opened in 1917 and became a prominent landmark to visitors of the district and were bounded by the Liverpool Road on one side and the Manchester Ship Canal (MSC) on the other. The buildings housed the whole operation from the production and

packing department, engineering, laboratories, a garage, laundry and offices.

The works also had its own railway sidings, accessed via the MSC railway which the CWS had running rights along and connected with the main line at Irlam Station. It also had its own rolling stock including a number of 0-4-0 locos used for shunting and running a small train to the station, which helped with the transportation of raw materials.

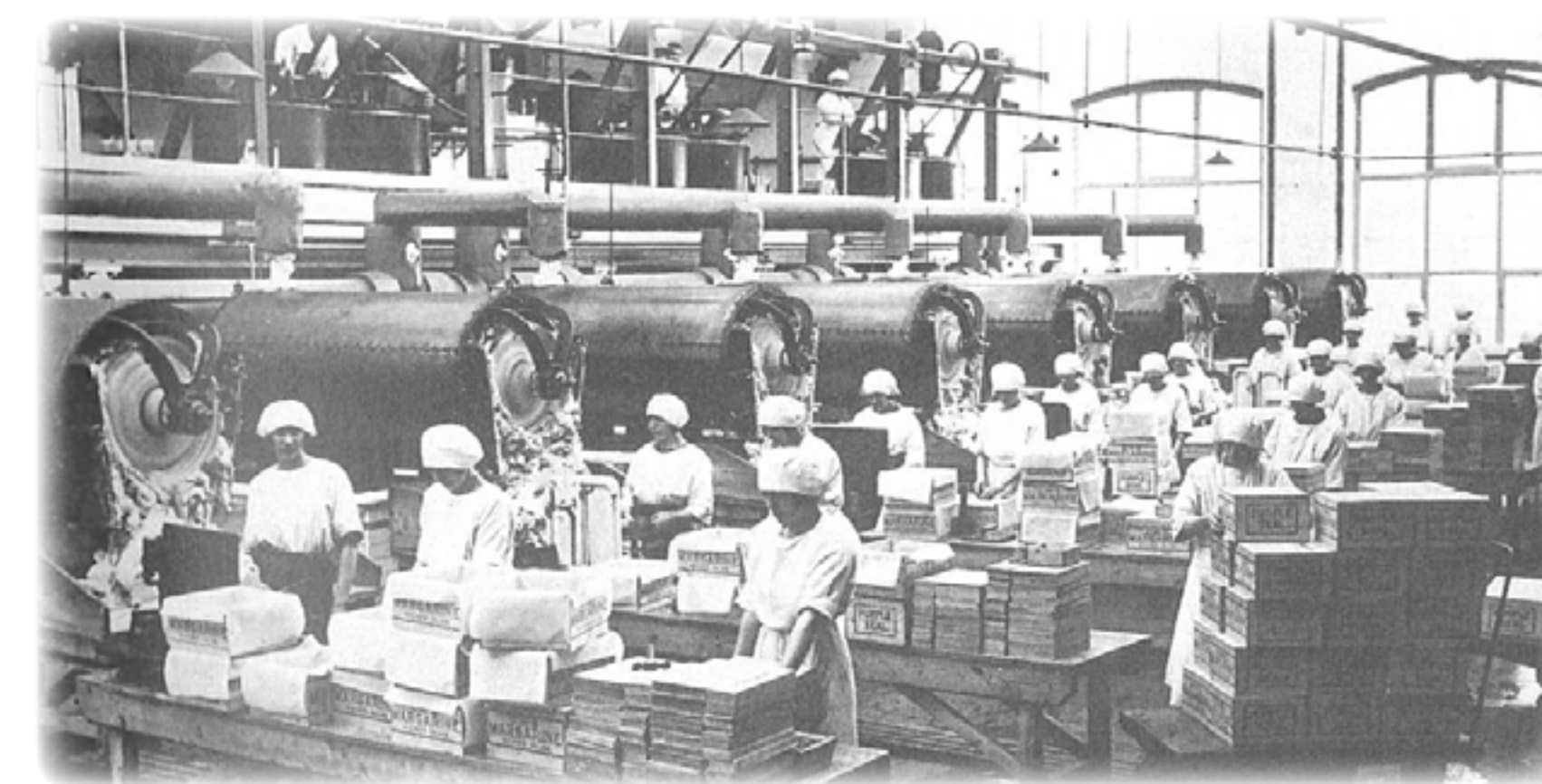


Demand for products continued to grow, even after the war, and resulted in the works being expanded in 1919 including the introduction of bigger offices. The

CWS also acquired their own fleet of lorries to speed up distribution.



Around this time the production of lard was shifted from the Soap Works to the Margarine Works. In the 1930s improvements were made to incorporate the newly-discovered vitamins A and D into their products. In 1932 the works employed around 1,200 people and



turned out commodities such as lard, Sutox shredded beef suet, Gold Seal, Silver Seal and Purple Seal margarines.

With high standards employed throughout, the workers enjoyed spotlessly clean working conditions and the latest production methods. This included completely enclosed packing machines capable of wrapping ninety half-pound packs per minute, meaning the margarine was untouched by hand.



His Royal Highness the Duke of York was welcomed by workers when he visited the CWS Margarine Works as



part of his tour around Lancashire as patron of the Industrial Welfare Society in 1932. The Duke hailed the factory as one of the most modern in the country and he was particularly impressed with the cleanliness of the operation and the pleasant landscaped gardens outside.

The district as a whole had a lively social scene at this time due to the thousands of workers employed at the Steelworks,

Soap Works, Margarine Works and other local industries. This resulted in many relationships being forged between workers. This is depicted in a piece of artwork situated on the roundabout in Cadishead in which the characters 'Marge and Steel' can be seen dancing the tango at a local Tea Dance.



By 1970 the works employed just 400 people, yet by the 1980s the Margarine Works was the second largest manufacturer of edible oils and fats in the UK.

Sadly, following increased competition and market changes, the Margarine Works eventually ceased operation and closed its doors in 1995 with new owners sought for the main building.

Five years later the original Margarine Works building became home to Morson Projects, part of the Morson Group. Following extensive restorations the original office building was preserved as a local landmark and original internal features retained including the staircase, the old wages room with its reinforced 12inch steel door and the supporting pillars, which kept its links to the past as an industrial powerhouse. With state of the art facilities in place the new offices, 'Darwen House', became fully operational in January 2014.

More images of the Margarine Works and other local industries can be seen in the Station House, along with artefacts and artwork reflecting the district's heritage.