

STEELWORKS

The construction of the Cheshire Lines Committee (CLC) Railway in 1873 and the Manchester Ship Canal (MSC) in 1894 was a catalyst for the rapid expansion of industry in Irlam and Cadishead.

The building of the MSC left a large area of land (109 acres) that was a former confluence and flood plain of the Rivers Irwell and Mersey. This became the site for the Partington Iron and Steel Company, known locally as the Steelworks. Originally a large part of the site was in Partington before the canal was cut, hence the name.



Construction began in 1911 and included buildings to house blast furnaces, coke ovens, steel furnaces, rolling mills, rod mills and offices. The canal infrastructure was important in the development of the new works. The MSC railway and building sidings were used to service the site, which had its own internal rail network to connect to the main line. A junction at the Irlam end was added in 1912 with further sidings following in 1913.

Commencing production in 1913, the Steelworks initially produced iron rails, joists and sections. In January 1914 the first steel furnace was tapped and steel ingots rolled out. At first iron ore was

transported by CLC and MSC rail from quarries at Wakerley in Rutland, later the materials were brought in by the MSC railway from Trafford Wharf. The railway lines of the Canal Company provided the essential rail connections to the CLC from 1913 until 1957.

In August 1914 the Steelworks came on war footing and the need for shell steel became of major importance resulting in two more steel furnaces being constructed and the expansion of sidings at Glazebrook. Major extensions were carried out to the works in 1916 and output almost doubled. Due to shortage of labour, German prisoners of war (POWs) were brought in by special train from Leigh POW camp each day to help with production.



The Steelworks obtained running rights for its own locos and rolling stock on the MSC lines in 1920, ensuring the easy movement of raw materials and finished steel products. In the 1930s the Irlam works became part of the Lancashire Steel Corporation (LSC). One of the major developments at this time was the building of their own wharf, completed in May 1932.



In 1932 His Royal Highness the Duke of York visited the Steelworks and Margarine Works as part of his tour around Lancashire as patron of the Industrial Welfare Society.

During World War II (1939-1945) resources were concentrated on producing steel for shells, bombs, tanks, aircraft, Bailey bridges and shelters.

Thousands of workers operated day and night, sometimes in blackout conditions when shutters were closed causing the heat, fumes and smoke to become almost unbearable. Workers who went off to war were reassured that their jobs were secure on their return and that the Steelworks were paying an allowance to their families to cover earnings whilst they were away. In the men's absence a large number of female workers were engaged in various roles including general labouring, crane driving and office work.



After the war, further development took place with an additional steel making plant being built by the mid 1950s. The Steelworks had an extensive rail network of its own and was handling one and a

quarter million tons of raw materials per year.

In 1956 the LSC successfully applied for an Act of Parliament to build a direct connection from its internal track to the CLC main line. The single track line opened a year later at a cost of £1 million. This new section of track entered the works via a branch siding off the mainline just west of Irlam Station and required the construction of a bridge to carry the line over Liverpool Road. The new mainline connection opened on 27th May 1957.



1911-1979



The works became part of the British Steel Corporation in 1967 following nationalisation. A few years later on 21st April 1971 the death knell sounded for the Steelworks when wholesale redundancies were announced which meant the closure of the Irlam factory with over 4,300 people losing their jobs.

In 1974 iron and steel production ceased, leaving only the modern rod and bar mill in operation. Final closure of the Steelworks took place on Saturday 27th January 1979.

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

Acknowledgements: Irlam and Cadishead Local History Society

For further information about the history of Irlam and Cadishead visit: www.irlamandcadishead.net