

Napton Brick Works

Sale of surplus machinery, Saturday, May 20th. Included in this sale was a steam engine by Pelham of Walsall. This was on a 20ft. bed, so a bit large for the majority of would be preservationists. Mr. Morton of Blists Hill Museum was notified, it is not known whether he was able to save it or if the torch and hammer squad moved in.

Postscript: Tuesday, 13th June. The engine is unsold. The owner Mr. Sheasby put a reserve on of £1000! There are two boilers, one now converted to a storage tank. The engine was used until about fifteen years ago and drove all the machinery, including the clay tubs by chain, the conveyors and the crushing pan. The exhaust steam was used for drying the 'green' bricks. Nothing wasted here.

According to George Watkins the engine was built by J. Wilkes of Pelsall Foundry, near Walsall, c1885? It was a non-condensing horizontal single cylinder engine operating at 80 psi. He suggests that the works were started in 1885 by Nelson, Watson and Co. producing traditional bricks and tiles. The engine was well built and was overloaded for many years, needing little but running repairs. Twenty six years on the site remains largely derelict, despite several attempts to develop it. Most recently, it has been the subject of a locally contentious planning application for a craft village. This sought permission for a number of detached houses with adjacent craft workshops, the idea being to attract a community of self employed crafts people. However, general local opinion was that this was an underhand attempt to develop a housing estate in an inappropriate location, and nothing seems to have come of the proposal. Meanwhile, fragments of the sites industrial past remain evident, most notably the clay extraction quarry on Napton Hill, now a fishery, and the house style office building at the site entrance.

This article is re-produced from the WIAS newsletter number 30, March 2008. Additional notes by Mark Abbott and photographs of the Napton steam engines by R.J. Blenkinsop supplied by courtesy of the Derek Billings collection.



