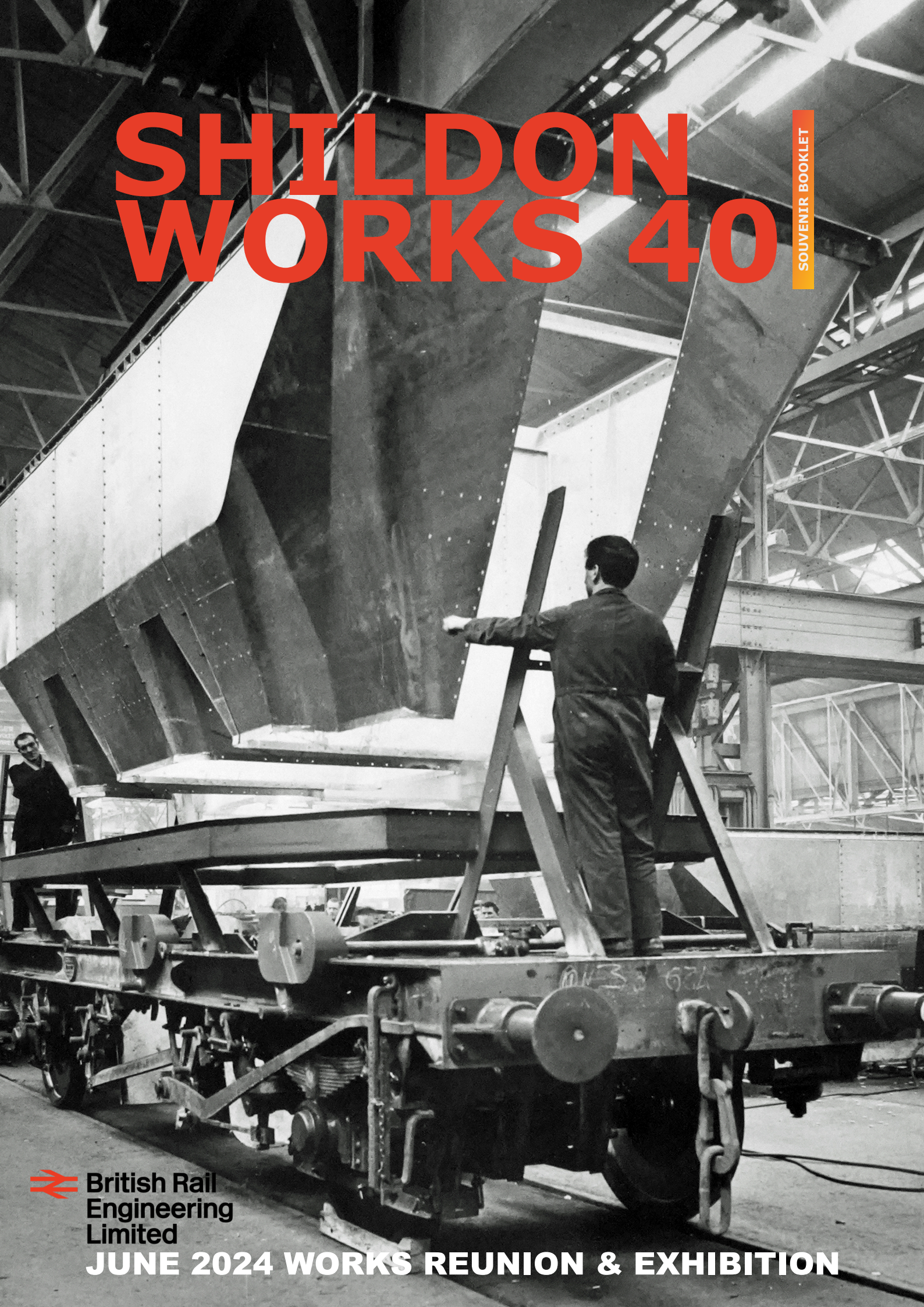


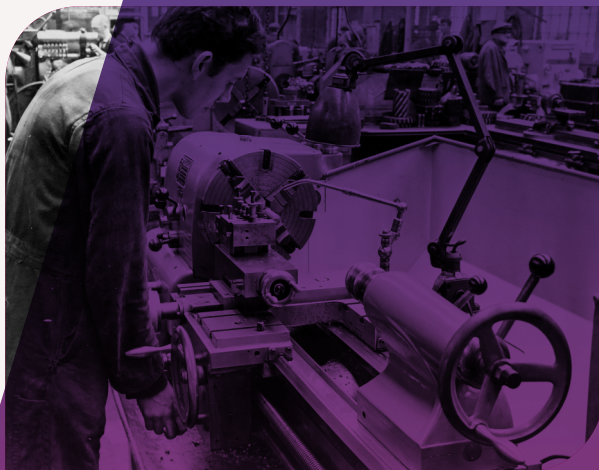
SHILDON WORKS 40

SOUVENIR BOOKLET



 British Rail
Engineering
Limited

JUNE 2024 WORKS REUNION & EXHIBITION



FILM

A new documentary "Made in Shildon" captures memories of the works.

Following on from our 2019 film "The Full Works" which focused on the last intake of apprentices, we're going a step further this year creating a more rounded film to release later in the year.

READ

This special souvenir booklet, with rare photographs of Shildon Works.

A major milestone like this warrants something a little special. We've dug into the archives to unearth memories of the Shildon Works, for those who might remember it, and for those for whom this once mighty engineering works exists only in the stories of misty eyed grandparents. Within these pages we'll bring back to life what was once one of the world's most significant railway engineering sites, and the very reason why New Shildon was built.

EXPO

Come together to meet and swap stories at our Reunion Exhibition.

We're holding a special commemorative exhibition and reunion on Sunday 30 June at the Shildon Railway Institute. Bring everyone.

KEY ARTICLES

1. SIMPLY VAST 04

We take a tour of the works, passing through the various workshops, to gain an appreciation of the scale of this titanic operation.

2. JOBS FOR THE BOYS 07

Generations of men, and women, from Shildon families, and others further afield, worked here, but what exactly were they doing?

3. LOCOMOTIVES & WAGONS 10

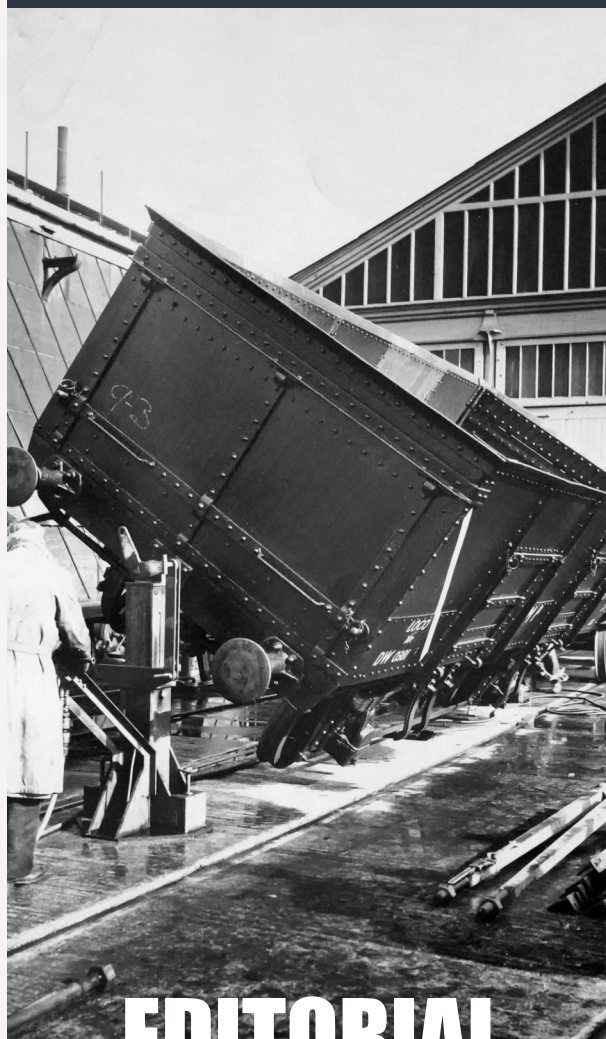
Not just a wagon building town! Between 1825 and 1863 it was the S&DR's locomotive powerhouse.

4. THE RISE & FALL 18

Respected local historian Alan Ellwood gives a retrospective view of the whole story.

5. A WORKS, TOWN & TEAM 30

An article from Rail News in January 1971 gives a flavour of life at a thriving railway works.



EDITORIAL

As we come together to commemorate 40 years since the closure of Shildon's historic railway engineering works, we wanted to produce something visual in tribute. We hope you find some fond memories within, or, if you are too young to remember the works at their peak, you might learn something new about our town's historic place in the world.

Though there ought to be some familiar sights in here for some of you, we'll also go back beyond living memory to rediscover some of the forgotten aspects of this famous works site, and conjure up a few reminiscences along the way.

Dave Reynolds
(Editor)

SIMPLY VAST

Covering 43 acres, 12 of which were 'under cover', and employing 2750 people at its peak, Shildon Works was one of the biggest railway engineering facilities in Europe.



Looking North-East Towards the Masons Arms.

The site was so big that though there are many exterior photographs of the works, you rarely see the same view twice.

People who worked there always recall how vast the site was, which is quite unsurprising considering how much was going on there, especially once locomotive operating ceased at Shildon. That change enabled a huge, triple roundhouse, locomotive shed, to be converted into a useful five-road wagon repair shop with three service pits.

In those later years, there was a Smith's Workshop with forging and welding machines for creating wagon body pressings, axle guards, drawgear and couplings. The Forge and Press Shop with drop stamping facilities as well as hydraulic presses. The Heat Treatment Shop was just outside the Forge. The Fabrication Shop had jigs and fixtures for specific wagon components while the Machine Shop and Tool Room conducted machining of metal components for new and repaired vehicles. The Bogie Repair Shop, with its 12 ton overhead cranes, also enabled modifications and conversions to various wagons.

The Lift and Brake Shop catered for 4 wheeled rail vehicles that needed lifting to enable refurbishment of wheels, brakes and suspension gear, while the Wheel Shop was where wagon wheels and axles were machined and assembled. The Plate and

Section Shop used guillotine shears, oxy-gas cutting machines and multi head auto-scan gas cutters to shape steel plates and rolled steel sections. Progressive building of welded and riveted wagons took place in the new Construction Shop, with its 75 foot span overhead travelling cranes, while the Final Assembly Shop undertook the last stages of wagon construction. Then on to the Paint Shop where an airless hydraulic paint spray system made the new and repaired wagons look brand spanking new, ready to exit the works and take on whatever the world threw at them.

Additionally there were Maintenance Shops looking after, and sometimes storing, the mechanical and electrical upkeep of all the plant machinery, a Tinsmith's Shop maintaining railway lamps and other hardware, and a Craft Training department with facilities to ensure the staff stayed up to date with the latest skills and techniques.

The amenities consisted of two dining rooms and a tea bar, a Medical Centre, with State Registered Nurse and an ambulance maintained through contributions from the staff, and a volunteer Fire Brigade.

The exterior storage areas



1. ACRES OF STORAGE

The exterior storage areas from the Brusselton end, probably photographed from a crane.

2. AERIAL VIEW

The workshop buildings photographed from north-west, Byerley Road to the fore.

3 IN THE SHADOW OF A CHIMNEY

A view of the rear of the Plate & Section and New Construction workshops.





EVERY INCH USEFUL

Here you can see that the space between the Forge and Smith's Shop (right) and Machine Shop (left) is used to store a wide array of components waiting to be used.

were serviced by 2-ton and 4-ton overhead gantry cranes, designed to transport heavy components stored around the works yard.

It was frequently a long walk between departments, or to the canteen building for a break. In their brochures and leaflets, British Rail Engineering acknowledged that the Shildon Works was the largest of their engineering sites, having gradually been extended over the many decades that led up to extensive reorganisations and modernisation in 1965 and 1967. In the 1930s the works had absorbed the huge triple roundhouse railway shed, designed by the same architect that had designed the Railway Institute on Redworth Road. That shed had previously been used as a Running Shed by the LNER Railway Operating division and had also been where the earlier North Eastern Railway had stabled their fleet of pioneering electric locomotives, deployed as part of an innovative experiment that involved the electrification of the old Clarence Railway route, from Shildon to the north side of the mouth of the River Tees, around the time of the outbreak of World War One. Though successful, the electric locomotives were decommissioned

in the mid-1930s, around the same time the Running Shed was amalgamated into the engineering works. This building, still standing today, became the Wagon Repair Shop with its five 'roads'.

Overall the Shildon Works site covered a whopping 43 acres, 12 of which comprised the roofed workshop buildings.

The works had capacity to

“The total staff employed was somewhere between 2,400 to 2,600 men.”

repair and overhaul up to 800 wagons a week, while the Forge, as well as supplying wagon components, also produced drop stampings and forgings that were sent on to other British Rail sites for final assembly of other rolling stock.

JOBS FOR THE BOYS

Within a large workforce, producing all manner of rail engineering products, there were many different career paths to choose from.

In the following pages we take a look at several typical job types that you might have seen people doing around the works on a normal working day.

Generally speaking, in the early days of the works, the easiest men to recognise would be the foremen. They wore black bowler hats as a symbol of their status while regular tradesmen wore flat caps.

A Saddler would manufacture, repair and maintain leather drive belts, rubber conveyor belts and in earlier days, horses harnesses and bridles.

A Sawyer operated the bandsaw used for cutting wooden sleepers and other boards to shape from raw timber, and also operate metal cutting saws using 'disc blades'.

The Saw Sharpener was responsible for maintaining the saw blades - sharpening, honing and replacing damaged teeth.

A Driller operated radial arm and fixed drill banks, producing components for assembly work in a variety of locations around the works.

A Riveter used hot steel rivets to join components by inserting the heated rivet into aligned holes and using a pneumatic rivet gun to hammer the end of the rivet thereby compressing the joint.

A Fitter used his skills to assemble mechanical components to high tolerances including moving components, hydraulics and braking systems on rolling stock.

A Turner manufactured spindles, axles, round bar items and cylindrical components.

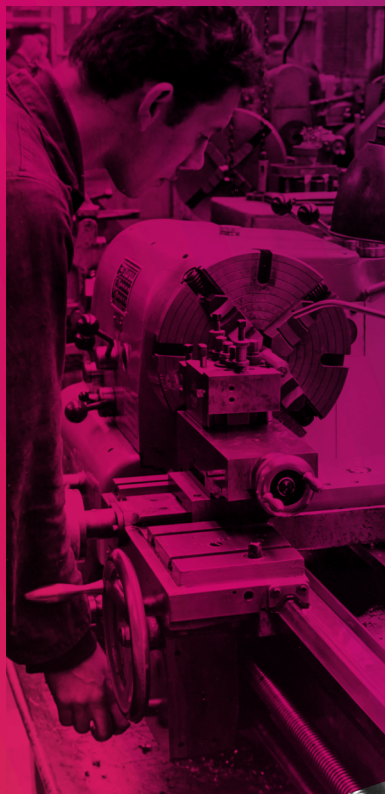
A Millwright was a skilled tradesman who installed, maintained, repaired and moved machinery around the works.

The Electricians installed, maintained and connected plant requiring electrical power, lighting, heating and data links such as CNC systems.

Welders joined steel components using Manual Metal Arc (MMA) and Metallic Inert Gas (MIG) welding plant and induction

From Blacksmiths to Welders, every man had a key part to play day to day.





processes such as 'spot welders'.

Hand Burners used oxy-fuel cutting torches to cut and shape steel plate and sections by hand. Also worked on 'break up' cutting up condemned rolling stock for scrap.

Profile Burners operated oxy-fuel cutting machines which could cut multiple components from sheet steel using a template or CNC program.

Press Operators shaped and folded steel plate, sheets and sections using hydraulic power producing various shapes and finished components.

The Guillotine Operator cut sheet and metal plate components to size and shape, up to a thickness of 12.5 mm.

The Joiner manufactured and maintained all types of wooden structures such as staircases, walkways, gantries and railings anywhere on the works. In earlier

times they would cut sleepers, wooden buffer mounts and the timber components of rolling stock to size and shape.

Plumbers would manufacture, install and repair all aspects of pipe work carrying liquids, gasses, and waste, also installing and maintaining heating systems around the works.

Bricklayers created and maintained structures such as walls, bunds, new buildings and, during the two World Wars, also created air raid shelters at the works.

A Jig Assembly Worker positioned components into a 'jig' ready for the Welder to tack and then weld, including wagon sections, hoppers, and chassis. They may also assemble mechanical components which were bolted or screwed together.

Labourers were employed to assist the various tradesmen in their work, mainly offering 'a helping hand' during assembly work.

Garage Staff maintained motorised vehicles such as vans, lorries and the works ambulance, and occasionally, the works manager's vehicle.

Store Men worked in various places around the works distributing tools, components and equipment and recording these items once issued onto the stock database which automatically created an inventory.

Forge Men operated drop hammers and associated hot forming machinery to produce finished components such as chain links and training arms from hot steel. This group of men included the Hammer Operators.

Blacksmiths manufactured components which were too small or intricate to be forged. They were adept at heating materials in the coke fired forges and using hammers and anvil to bend, shape and form the metal.

The Tinsmith made sheet metalwork including oil cans, funnels, tool boxes and other miscellaneous items.

Crane drivers operated derrick and overhead cranes to move



materials onto and from machines and jigs, and finished assemblies around the workshops.

A Slinger secured loads to the crane and directed the crane driver to his destination, before 'landing' the loads and removing the slings.

Just before closure, CNC machines became popular in the works and these 'automated' systems were controlled by 'punch tape' or used telephone wires to program individual machines.

Shunters drove small engines marshalling rolling stock in the yards, assembling trains and delivering these to their workplace or sidings.

A Marshaller assembled rolling stock into batches for repairs or into trains for dispatch after repair.

The Platelayer put down sleepers and track wherever required, using items such as a 'Jim Crow' to bend the lines to profile; he would also maintain and repair tracks and signalling equipment.

A Linesman, or Lengthman, had the job of walking the tracks daily looking for any damage, loose chairs or misalignment which could cause a derailment.

The Gate Keeper checked in workmen at the start of shift, and out at the end keeping a tally on their work hours, reporting times to the Paymaster department.

The Crossings Keeper operated

the crossing gates allowing rolling stock to enter or leave the works over the Masons Arms crossing.

Security men maintained a presence, patrolling perimeter fences looking for breaches and checking deliveries and dispatches into and out of the works.

Cleaners kept the shop floor clean and free from trip hazards as well as keeping WC's and washrooms in a sanitary condition.

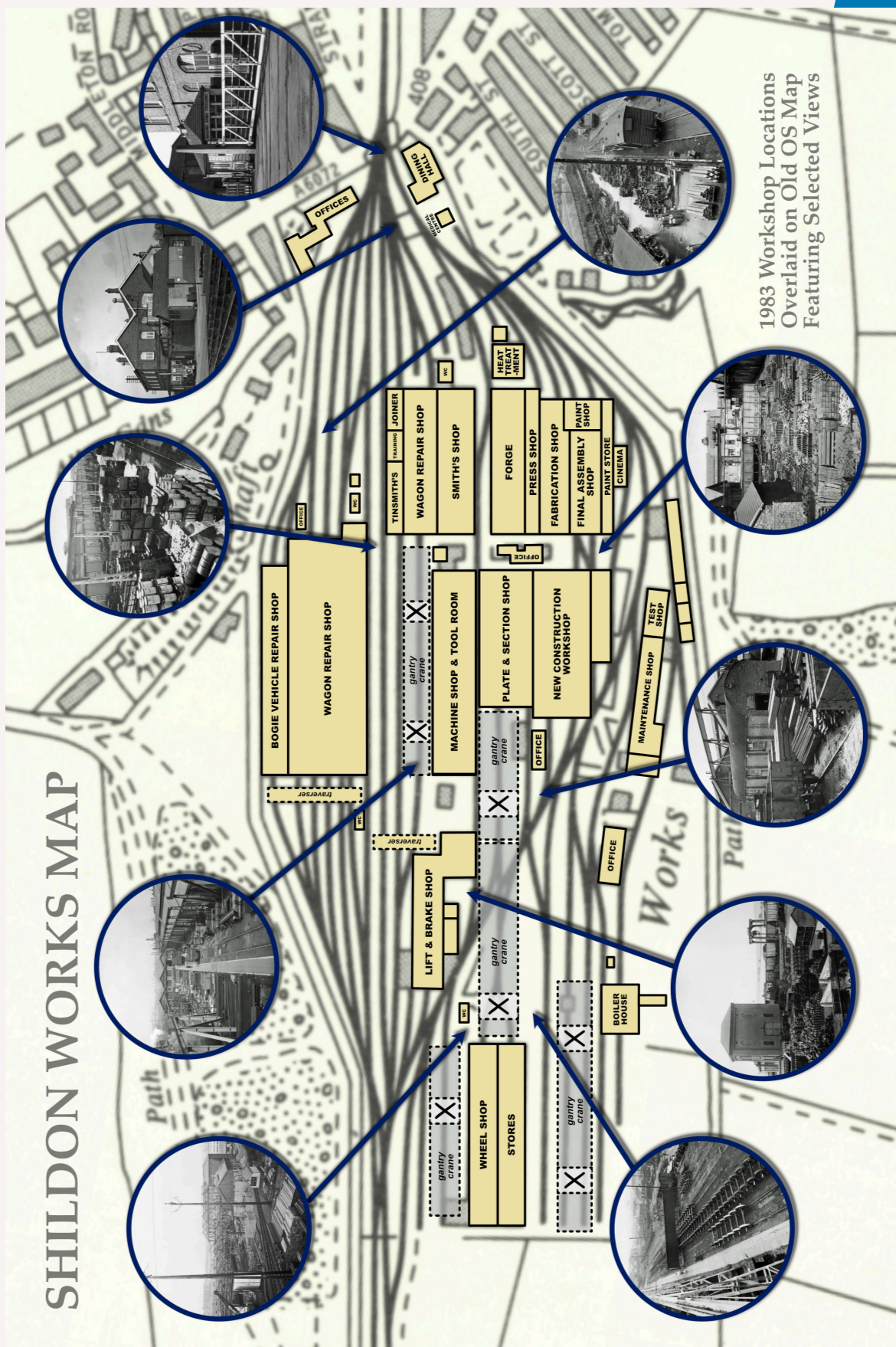
The works Ambulance Driver was on call 24-hours-a-day and usually had a place in the Ambulance Room with equipment to administer first aid.

A Motor Vehicle Driver was allocated for stores and personnel (visitors) transport etc. Purchasing Clerks, Accounts Clerks and Wages Clerks were situated in offices around the works. All of them reported to the Chief Clerk's department.

Draughtsmen produced drawing work, designing new rolling stock, modifying existing rolling stock and in some cases designing new buildings on the works site.

Moving between the departments and workshops in the days prior to telephony were Messengers, also known as Runners, quickly transferring requests, 'chitties' and paperwork from office to office.

SHILDON WORKS MAP



A WORKS MAP

Above: Map showing the locations of the various workshops around 1983, superimposed on an earlier OS map of the site. The actual layout of the works changed over time as new workshops were added and old ones demolished to meet new engineering demands.

Though Shildon is remembered today as a wagon building town, its works was the birthplace of many of the S&DR's locos.

LOCOMOTIVES

Shildon's Iron Horses

STEAM POWER

When we talk about engineering at Shildon we usually speak about manufacture and repair of wagons, but this wasn't always the case. Though Timothy Hackworth's "Royal George, the locomotive that proved steam power to be superior to horses, was created at his own nearby Soho Works, many of his subsequent designs from 1829 onwards were built at the Stockton & Darlington Railway's Shildon Works. These include his 0-6-0 mineral locomotives "Victory," "Magnet," "Briton," "Leader" and

"Trader" all of which were advances on his "Royal George" as well as the somewhat different 2-2-2 "Arrow" and 0-4-0 "Dart".

In around 1845 he began to collaborate with William Bouch who had become manager of the Shildon Works in 1840 after Hackworth diverted his attention to concentrate on his own business. These collaborative designs including locomotives "Redcar," "Eldon," "Shildon" and "Driver," continued to use the 0-6-0 wheel pattern that had been found to be



“METEOR” (ABOVE)

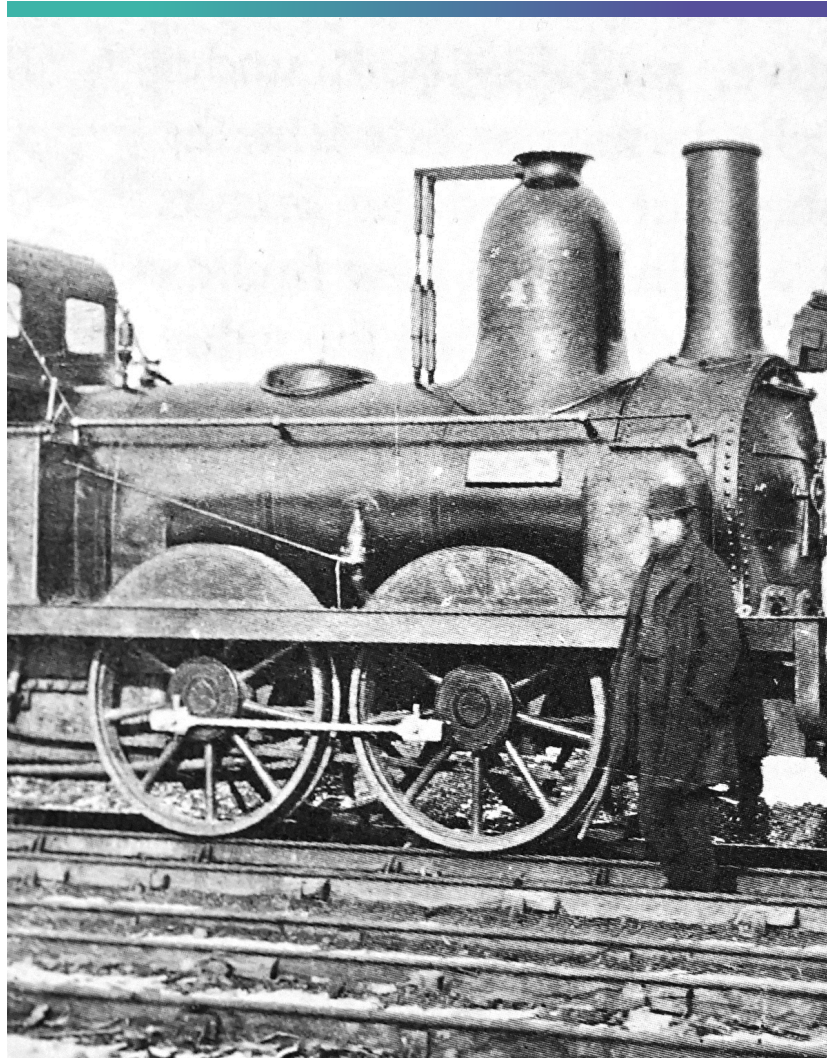
The Shildon-built locomotive “Meteor” from 1842, one of several 2-2-2 engines built for the Stockton & Darlington Railway under the tenure of William Bouch as Shildon Works manager.

Ideal for pulling mineral trains, but was also the first locomotive designer in Britain to try the 2-4-0 wheel pattern that was first adopted in America. Bouch proved to be an innovator like Hackworth, inventing “Bouch’s coffee can,” a water sleeve around the chimney pre-heating water en-route to the boiler, as well as a radial screw reversing gear and a “steam retarder” which applied brake power to cylinder pistons.

In 1863, the Stockton & Darlington Railway Company

“DART” (BELOW)

Built at Shildon to a Timothy Hackworth design, this little 0-4-0 locomotive was built in 1839-40 to haul passenger traffic. Weighing around 14 tons it could pull a train at 30 miles per hour and was still working in 1875.



opened a new works in Darlington which soon became a specialist locomotive workshop, shifting focus at Shildon to wagon work.

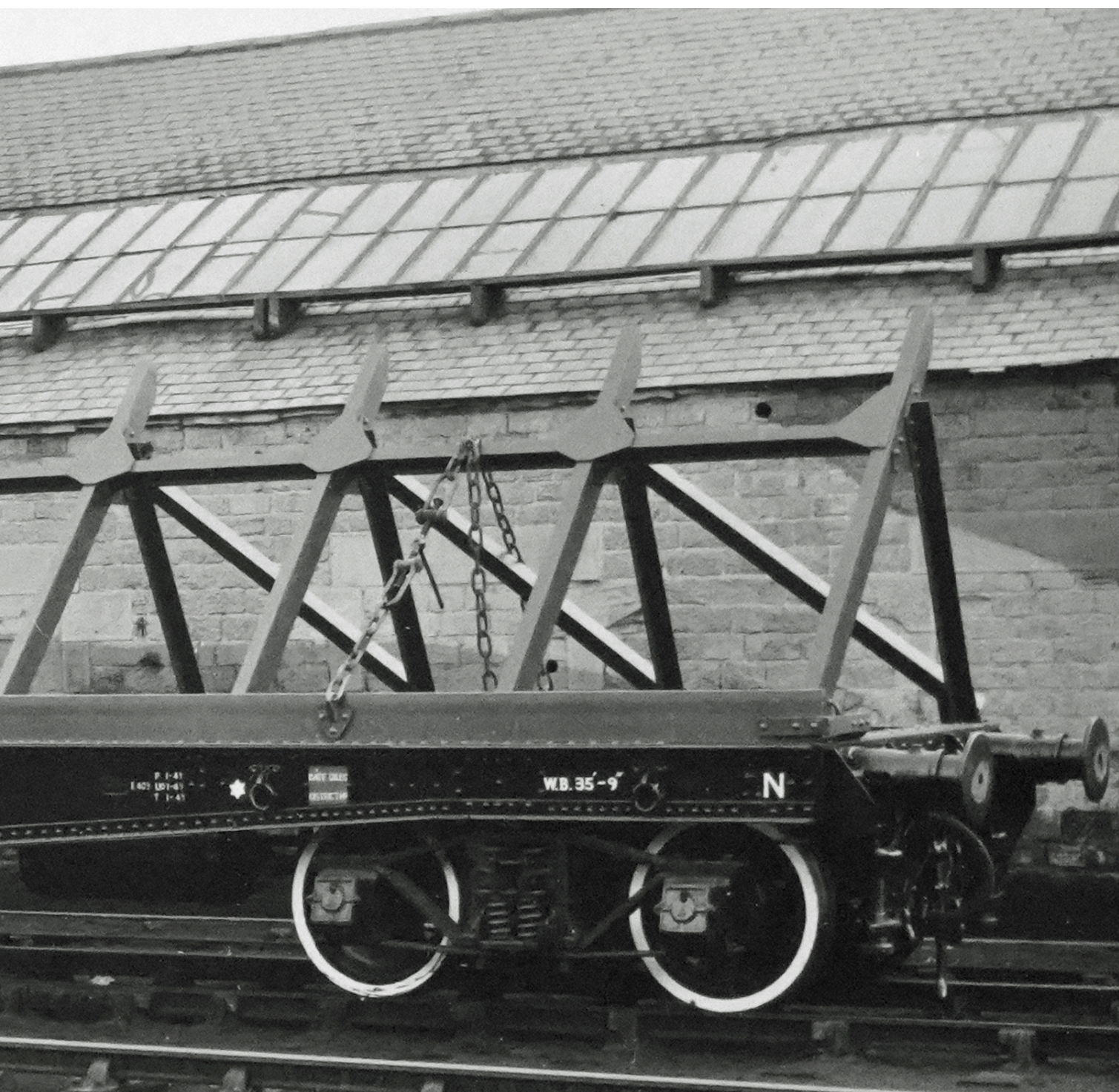
Bouch built the last of his locomotive designs at Shildon during the period up to that change, including “Gladstone” (1863), “Barrow” (1863), “London” (1864), “John Dixon” (1864), “Alice” (1866) and “Helena” (1866). William continued designing, though not building, locomotives with mixed success at Shildon up till his death in 1876.

WAGONS

40 Ton Trestle Plate Wagon

Trestle Plate wagons like this one here, photographed at the Shildon Works site by the official works photographer for promotional purposes, were intended to be used to transport steel plates that would have been too big to transport flat within rail gauge limits.

**“FOR EVERY RAIL TRANSPORT
CHALLENGE THERE WAS A
WAGON ENGINEERED TO
PERFECTLY SUIT THE TASK”**



As much as locomotives dominate peoples' perceptions of the world of railways, they are significantly predated by the advent of perhaps the most essential item of rolling stock - the mighty wagon.

The primary task of railways from their beginnings up until the time that Shildon Works closed, was the movement of goods materials and equipment. The very first railway trucks being built at the Stockton & Darlington Railway's Shildon Works would have been

advancing variants of 'chaldrons' and mineral trucks, though they would have been followed by rudimentary box wagons and mainly open passenger trucks and vans.

By the time Shildon works had been merged into the estate of the North Eastern Railway, the diversity of types of wagon required had increased substantially. Though there were many common ones, the company's catalogue of available rolling stock, built specifically to use across the region, really did

make it seem like there was a wagon for every task - and many of them were being built or repaired right here in Shildon.

Certainly there were mineral wagons of various weight capacity, built for coal, coke, ballast and ironstone, with guards vans to match. But there were others with far more specific purposes by the end of the Victorian era. Flat wagons for agricultural equipment. Tank wagons for ammonia, gas and

creosote. Wagons for cattle, for packed fish, for fruit, for meat and for salt. Low sided, high sided and covered goods wagons. Wagons designed specifically to carry timber, girders and, yes, glass too. There were wagons for carrying gunpowder, and supporting engineering ones for transporting huge boilers and even locomotives themselves.

The more sophisticated engineering became, the greater the scale and tonnage of the wagons created. The 10 ton NER coal wagons of the 1890s had evolved by the time of the LNER era, to become their pioneering 40 ton hopped and self-discharging High Capacity coal wagons. Though the wagons of this era were still being made mainly for the region's railways, some travelled to the continent, such as the open and covered wagons especially made for the Harwich-Zeebrugge train ferry.

It was the merger of the 'Big Four' railway companies into the nationalised British Railways in 1948 that led to Shildon making and repairing wagons for the whole nation, and the later separation of

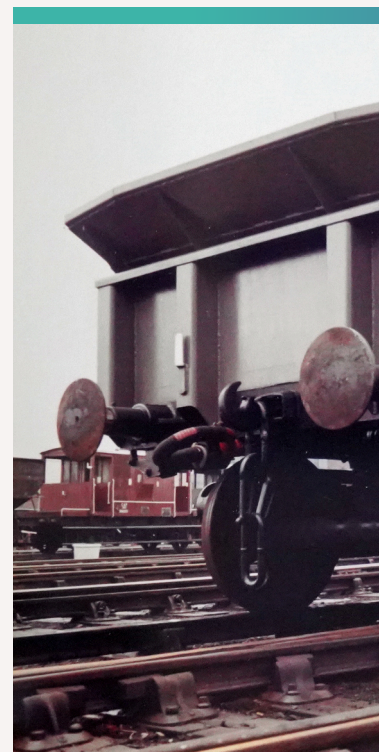
British Rail Engineering Limited as an independent and commercially competitive organisation, albeit under the governance of the British Railways Board, in 1970 that allowed it to tender for manufacturing contracts internationally. Shildon Works fulfilled export orders for parts and wagons that were sent to Malaya, Kenya, Ghana, Jordan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Yugoslavia, Zambia and Bangladesh as well as Ferry Wagons for Switzerland.

During the British Rail era

“The separation of British Rail Engineering Limited (BREL) from BR enabled tendering for international contracts.”

Shildon workers took responsibility for maintaining over 60% of the nation's wagon fleet.

Notable wagon designs included the 'Presflo' air discharge cement wagon that was also used to transport other powdered





The Merry-Go-Round (MGR)

Ever on-the-go, these high capacity coal wagons were designed to be loaded and discharged on the move, ferrying coal from colliery to power station.

commodities, and the iconic Merry-Go-Round hopper wagons that were designed to be both loaded and emptied efficiently while constantly on the move. These were the 33 metric tonne successors to the older LNER High Capacity wagons. 11,083 of these MGR wagons were built at Shildon between 1965 and the closure of the works in 1984. Only a couple are still in service though several have been preserved including two displayed at Locomotion in Shildon.

Later BR wagon types were designated a three letter Total Operations Processing System (TOPS) code where the first letter indicated the type, the second the variety, and the third described the braking system used. Departmental Bogie Goods Wagons were also assigned 'fishkind' names like Catfish or Lamprey, with the wide range of wagons making for a list as diverse as sealife itself.



L. TANKS ON WHEELS

This PCA was One of several BREL tank wagon designs used for transporting raw materials like alumina.

R. 'TURBOT' BOGIE BALLAST WAGON

Designed to carry ballast, though the drop side doors enabled a range of other uses.

THE RISE & FALL



Alan Ellwood, a renowned local historian, has made the study of Sildon's past his lifetime's passion. Here he casts a critical eye over the growth and demise of our town's engineering fame and lost treasure.



SHUNTING TIME

All traffic is held at the Masons Arms crossing as a Class 3 British Rail shunting locomotive leads a train of repaired wagons out through the gates of the works to re-enter service.

Shildon Wagon Works was born on the Sebastopol marshes in 1823, brought into this world by the Pease family, though it was principally Timothy Hackworth who nursed the infant venture, ensuring the Stockton & Darlington Railway's first works had a strong heartbeat. One that pumped life blood around the arteries of the world's first public railway, and far beyond, for over 150 years.

Opinions conflict as to the date of the establishment of a first workshop on S&DR land at Brusselton Bank Foot, but from a number of articles and documents it seems likely that the first building was erected sometime in 1823. Others soon followed including cottages, a turntable and storehouse.

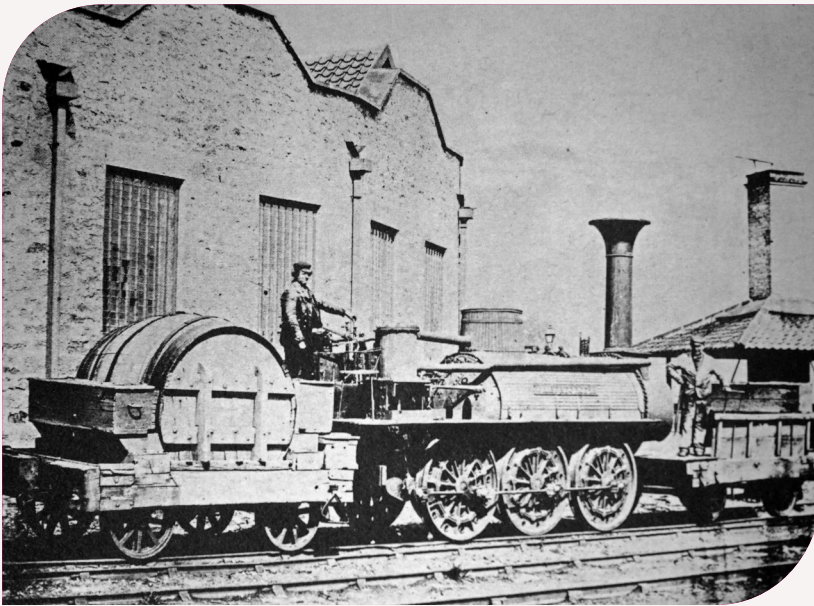
After the 1825 initial 'passenger' journey to Stockton, a rapid expansion of both the works site and housing for workers occurred.

Shildon Works, known to many as 'Shildon Shops', shortening the word

“The largest wagon building and repair centre in the world”

‘workshops’, employed whole families in many trades. Sons followed fathers and grandfathers, into rail engineering; keeping that heart of England's, and the world's, railway network beating, making, repairing and sending steam locomotives and wagons to many different countries.

Hackworth later started his own additional Soho Works a quarter of a mile away, still by the tracks of the S&DR, still undertaking contracts from Shildon Works and other engineering enterprises, whilst also building his own improved steam >>



1. SEBASTAPOL ROUNDHOUSE

Early S&DR locomotive "Wilberforce" building steam in front of the Shildon locomotive shed.

2. PAPERWORK PLEASE

A small office building beneath the gantry crane behind the plate and section workshop.

locomotives and stationary engines some of which were the first steam locomotives sent to Canada, Russia, Africa and many more countries.

Through the benevolence of Hackworth and the railway company, Shildon gained the first Mechanics Institute in the world for railwaymen, a school to which workmen paid a penny each week for their children's education, and a strong Methodist tradition.

After Hackworth's death in July 1850 the S&DR purchased his estate, including his workshops and contracts, and amalgamated them into the company. Everything then passed to the North Eastern Railway and then the LNER under whom Shildon works became the largest manufacturer and wagon building and repair centre in the world, fulfilling lucrative contracts at home, in Africa, the far East and Europe.

Many still remember the dull thud of the steam hammers echoing around the town night and day, the clanking of couplings as trains of rolling stock were shunted in and out of the works, the shrill whistles of steam locomotives, the dull blast of the diesel shunters horn, or perhaps the works buzzer which also sounded morning and noon. We grew up with these everyday noises and never gave them a second thought until they were gone and eerie silence prevailed.

In 1962 £800,000 was spent on upgrading the workshops to increase production, and again in 1973 further investment was made including the installation of a Liquid Petroleum Gas plant, with storage tanks, to provide a hotter, more reliable gas for both heating, gas cutting machines and torches.

As late as 1982 British Rail Engineering Limited referred to

Shildon works as “The Jewel in the Crown of BREL” even though, behind the scenes they were already planning its closure. This despite it being the most profitable sector of their enterprise, and having a full order book for new and repaired rolling stock.

Despite the pleas and plaudits of the Bishop Auckland MP, Unions and Councils and protest marches around the town, and through London, the works finally closed as a railway enterprise in June 1984. This was now 40 years ago.

To the surprise of townsfolk, the railway lines feeding the now defunct works were ripped up within weeks. The workshops were ransacked for machinery, steel stock and scrap metal, leaving the buildings nothing but bare shells.

It was plain for all to see that there was no going back now!

Out of the ‘ashes’ emerged a new venture to attempt to plug the gap in unemployment in and around the town, an organisation created by Sedgfield District Council called SASDA, (Shildon and Sedgfield Development Association)

This employed a handful of staff from BREL to manage the enterprise from a row of portacabins situated behind the Civic Hall. The team sought to oversee new Enterprise Workshops in the recently closed school on Thornhill Gardens, the Eden grange fishing ponds and nurseries and a handful of other small projects.

Unfortunately SASDA achieved little to soften the blow of closure, especially for those in their 50’s and 60’s some of whom were never able to find suitable work again.

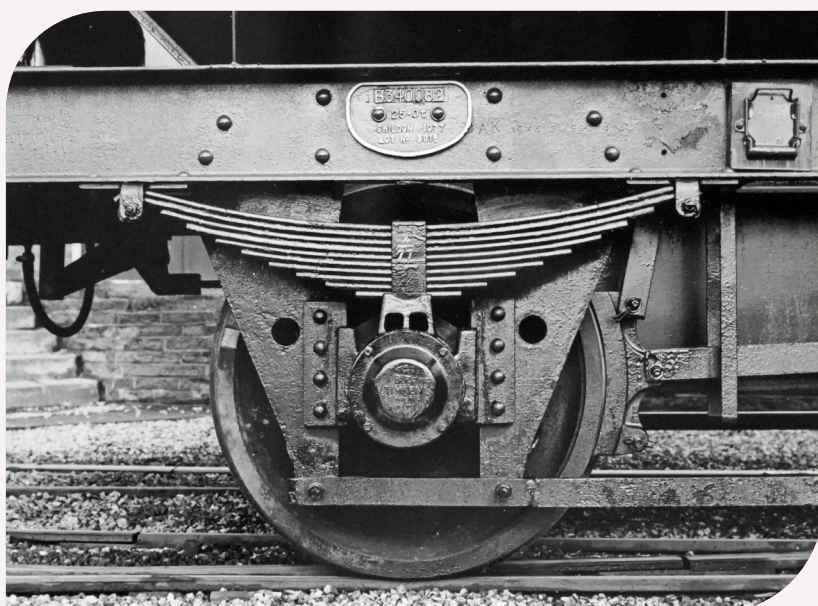
A few new businesses moved into the empty works site including Triple T Engineering, which is still there, Oilman Industries, Solatron and Shildon Timber, whilst the forge also remained in operation for a >>

1. WORK TOGETHER, EAT TOGETHER

Workers gather at the Works Canteen to enjoy a hearty meal before returning to complete their shift.

2. MADE IN SHILDON

Every Shildon wagon was fitted with a serial number plate on its frame explaining where and when it was built.



short period of time, before moving, lock stock and barrel, to Manchester.

Meanwhile, hundreds of redundant workers; men and boys; lined up each week to 'sign-on' for dole money, first at the Main Street

“THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN OF BRITISH RAILWAY INDUSTRY.”

Methodist Hall, and later at the green wooden shed opposite Hackett & Baines on Main Street.

Townfolk were so blighted by the effects of the closure following that of our last coal pit, that some got together to form food kitchens. In those days folk were allocated a pound of butter if the householder was in receipt of state benefits, for which we had to queue outside the 'labour rooms' on Church St weekly.

Shildon, like York, Doncaster, Derby, and other towns that had relied upon railway engineering work, feels in many ways as though it has never fully recovered from the demise of BREL.

The town today is much changed from how it was in 1984, and much poorer for it. The railway engineering works is fondly remembered by those who once worked there. The families who benefitted from a good regular wage, not to mention occasional perks such as free or subsidised travel on the rail network, miss it. 'Shildon Shops,' as it was known, has lived long in the memory of the former workforce; as have those who conspired to close this 'Jewel in the Crown' of British Railway Industry.



KEEPING THINGS ON THE MOVE

The works site was fitted with 4 ton and 2 ton gantry cranes to enable heavy materials and equipment to be moved around vast areas of the works site from point of fabrication to storage areas and then on to the workshops where they could be put to use in manufacture or repair of rolling stock.





THE S OF SH



1. STRATEGY

Strategy meetings for the campaign to make the case to save the works from closure took place at the Railway Institute.

2. BRASS

Musicians from Shildon Town Band fire up the campaigners with evocative march music on a demonstration.

3. FAMILY

The younger members of Shildon families joined held their placards high in defiance of the threat to jobs.

4. SPEECH

John Priestley seeks to find the right words to stoke the Shildon Campaigning in a speech at the football ground.

5. UNITY

The women workers of Shildon's Astraka clothing factory join the menfolk on their march to protect jobs.

SECTION

IEGE ILDON

When news arrived that the Government, and British Rail Board, planned to close down BREL's Shildon Works, the people of this proud little town resolved to battle for their collective livelihood.

In 1962 British Rail created British Rail Workshops Limited as a division. This incorporated all of its works locations and was headquartered in Derby. The reorganised workshops division became British Rail Engineering Limited on 1 January 1970 as a consequence of the 1968 Transport Act.

On 4 May 1979 a Conservative Government came into power at Westminster, under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher's personal political philosophy and economic policy was built upon a belief that nationalised industries should be privatised, and that the power and influence of trade unions should be greatly reduced.

It would be wrong to believe that only Thatcher held this belief. Throughout the nationalised rail era several key industrialists had written of that perceived need to re-privatise Britain's railways, claiming that nationalisation starved the country, and of course themselves, of opportunities.

Thatcher's election victory placed her in a position where she was given significant power to progress a programme of privatisation. Those that had funded her election campaign, along with more than thirteen and a half million people that had voted for her party of MPs, were now cheering her on from the sidelines. What ensued was biggest

1.

(Right) Powerful words, but no ‘teeth’ to back them up.

A flat bed trailer serves as a stage for union leaders as they try to build resolve in the hearts of the engineers, while veteran MP Derek Foster and a young future PM Tony Blair look on, probably knowing their actions would have no real effect on the outcome of the dispute.



programme of national de-industrialisation in British history, and a large scale cut-price sell-off of nationalised industries to private investors. The Government's many privatisation objectives included a desire to slim down the nation's rail engineering operation until what was left would be ripe for selling-off to private investors. The executives of BREL, as employees of the state, were given their directive accordingly. For Shildon, the first announcement of an intention to close the Shildon Works came on 23 April 1982, a time when around two-thousand six-hundred people were employed at the Shildon Works. Rumours of the announcement had been circulating for around eight days, and a small pre-emptive demonstration had taken place outside the British Rail headquarters in London. The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), under General Secretary Sid Weighell, mobilised to campaign against the closure, and on 29 April a mile long march, comprising of about five-thousand people, headed by MP Derek Foster and MEP Roland Boyes, snaked through the town to a rally at the football ground on Dean Street. This was followed on 25 May by a



2.

(Above) With the Mason's Arms as a backdrop the Shildon workers listen carefully to the union officials and politicians.

There were reports of some men drifting away from the rally as the speeches progressed. Sid Weighell claimed later in 1990 that he sensed the Shildon union men, compared to NUR members overall, were a “bit subdued,” and “maybe a bit too accommodating”.

3.



(Left) The workforce gather to hear what is to become of their jobs.

By the end of the second campaign in 1984, there was little left but a feeling of despair, as the men were brought together for the final news of the works closure date. Here John Thompson, John Atkinson, Jim Thompson and Les Wrightson are among a group patiently waiting.

demonstration where six-hundred people travelled by train to London to deliver six-hundred-and-thirty letters to British Rail's chairman, Sir Peter Parker, before lobbying influential Members of Parliament. Another large rally back in Shildon took place on 29 May, at which several prominent politicians of the day tried to offer rousing speeches. The working men of Shildon, however, sensed that despite the bravado of the representatives and politicians, the writing was on the wall for Shildon Works. In hindsight it could be argued that they were right. A hard-nosed Tory Prime Minister on a mission was never going to listen to their voices, or relent in the slightest. There was, however, a temporary reprieve when, on 4 June, British Rail announced a postponement in the decision to close the works. This intermission was due to a need to produce wagons for the recently announced Channel Tunnel, another of Margaret Thatcher's flagship projects. Significant redundancies were still enacted and no new apprentices were taken on, but the works remained open for a while at least. The final intention to close the works in 1984 was formally communicated on 18 February 1983. Shildon workers were offered an enhanced redundancy package,

softening the resistance of many. Shildon's works formally closed once and for all on 30 June 1984. The tracks that had passed through since its founding as the world's very first rail industry centre began to be lifted and removed even before the closure date. The

A HARD-NOSED PRIME MINISTER, ON A MISSION, WAS NEVER GOING TO LISTEN TO THEIR VOICES.

Northern Echo of 25 June 1984 perfectly summed up the moment in this one grave paragraph: "The last rites have started as Shildon Wagon Works' proud 150-year history grinds slowly to a halt. The doomed works are now echoing to the sound of the mechanical digger as the old tracks (connecting the works to the lines at Shildon station) are ripped from the ground. The remnants of a once mighty workforce looked solemnly on and knew there was no going back".

DANGEROUS TIMES

Heavy engineering, heat, powerful machinery and the movement of rolling stock on site made Shildon Works the kind of workplace where you needed to keep your wits about you, and the management needed to ensure that help was never far away should something go wrong - which occasionally it certainly did.

FEATURE

Danger was an ever present factor on such a huge engineering works site, and there are stories aplenty in the newspapers across the decades.

On Tuesday 5 March 1867, for example, Ralph Ransond was ticketing wagons on a train in motion on a branch line at the works when he stepped back on a line where another train was coming through and was thrown down on the rail with the oncoming engine passing over one of his legs above the knee. In another incident on 11th October 1871, a young wagon-wright named Peverley was

shunting some trucks when he was caught between two trucks, crushing and breaking his jaw bone and a thigh. Another accident in February 1898 saw an older man named Goldsboro knocked down by an engine leaving him with an arm almost severed at the shoulder.

Even the works management were not immune to the dangers of the workplace as this article to the right explains, telling how the works manager J T Proud was killed in an accident involving engineering machinery.

In preparation for these kinds of incident the works had a volunteer fire brigade, offered ambulance classes to train workers in first aid, and even had a society enabling workers to pay a subscription to acquire and maintain a dedicated on-site ambulance.

Shildon's workers were so well versed in first aid skills that at the outbreak of the First World War, many of the men who enlisted went straight into the ranks of the Royal Army Medical Corps where they saved lives on the battlefield.

Even into the 1890s, Shildon Works was the only part of town to have a Fire Engine.



THE SUDDEN WORK

At the Mason yesterday. Mr J. quest touching the manager of Shild previous day as th the works on Ma tended on behalf Company, and M Inspector of Fact sent. James Hun hydraulic wheel p at the time of the the tyre, and the knocked Mr Wm inflicting injuries clean out of the o pened over a year the machine. W injured on that ce foreman, said he he knew what h draw-back ram h ceased. He could this time, but p had been broken travel too far ou rains had not e dropped dead as s They intended m

TOWN, WORKS AND TEAM.

This text is reproduced from "Rail News" issue from January 1971

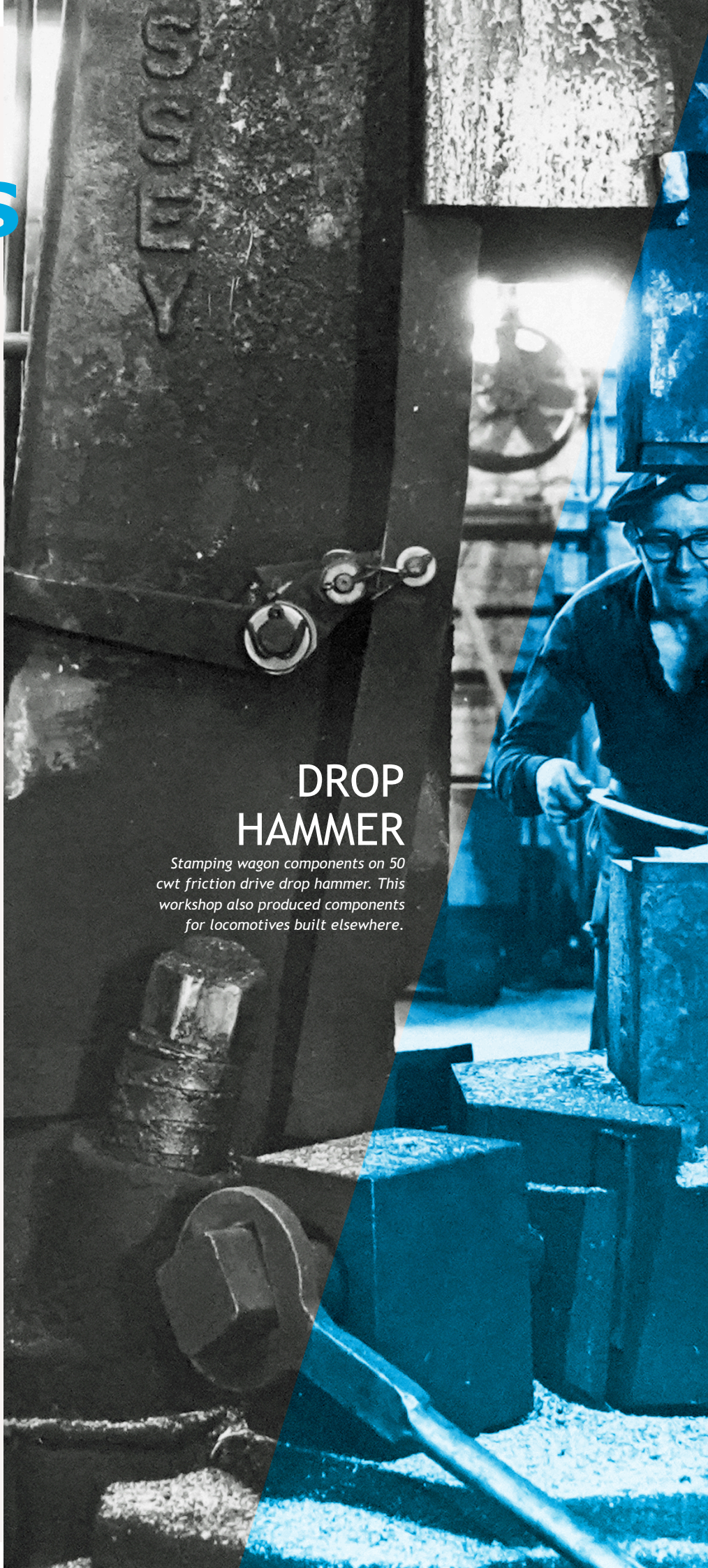
A town nine miles north-east of Darlington in County Durham. A works with a pedigree which began in 1833, whose 58 acres include the site where, in 1825, the first regular public trains in the world started their journeys to Stockton.

A team of 2,600, the vast majority born in this railway cradle - every single one a worthy successor to the "Father of the Locomotive" Timothy Hackworth, whose bust stands in the entrance to the works administrative block.

Last year (1970) every new apprentice was the son of a Shildon works man and most of them could pass the pepper to an elder brother over lunch in the modern canteen. Though conscious and proud of its history, Shildon does not live in the past. Works manager John Begg heads a prosperous concern with its face firmly set towards the future. Latest modern aid is the computer controlled machine loading system - the first on BR. Every Friday information about every job to be tackled is fed into an IBM computer in Newcastle, and on Monday a work schedule is available spelling out the most effective and economical load pattern for machines.

DROP HAMMER

Stamping wagon components on 50 cwt friction drive drop hammer. This workshop also produced components for locomotives built elsewhere.



FORGING AHEAD

Oil fired furnaces were fully temperature controlled, receiving fuel supply from a 48,000 gallon bulk storage installation, while drop hammers ranged from 10 cwt to 5 ton in weight.



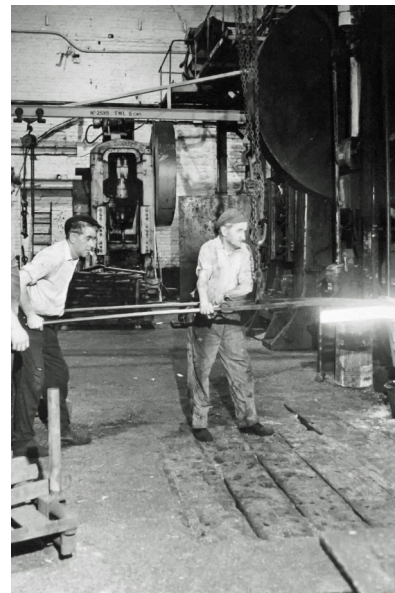
Special Treatment

There is plenty of work to keep the computer busy. Production is fairly evenly divided into three sections - wagon repairs, new wagons, components for Shildon and other BRE works as well as for private firms.

Last year more than 20,000 wagons limped into Shildon in various states of disrepair. Some were stripped down completely, fitted with new bodies - designed at Shildon - and went back into traffic indistinguishable from new.

Some needed less work to give them a clean bill of health but every wagon got its share of specialised treatment from the top consultants of BR.

Experience is there in depth. New designs have been built and proved many times at Shildon.

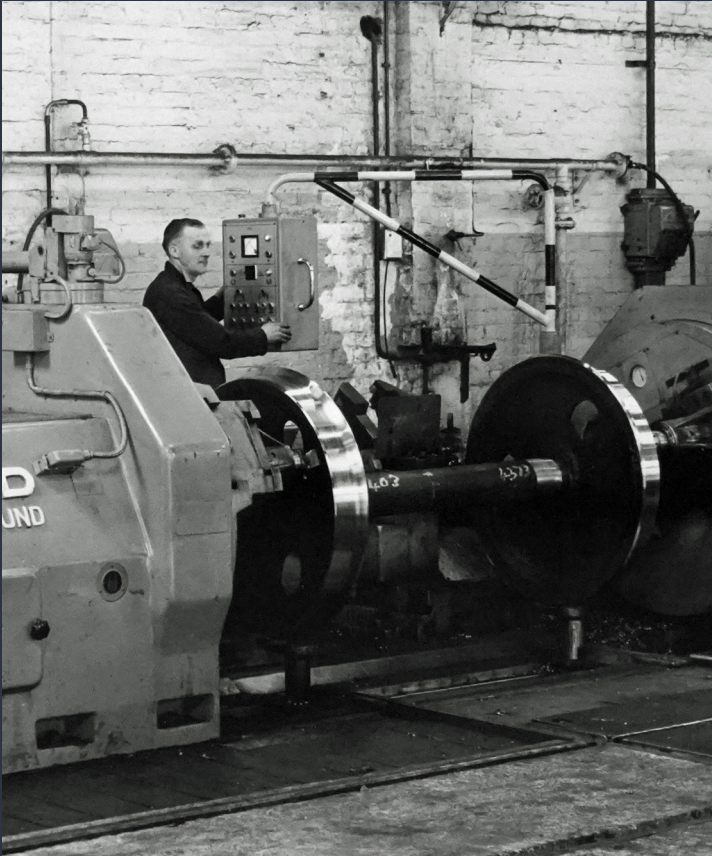


Pioneered here were the "Presflo" air discharge cement wagons, the Freightliner wagons, the 56 ton iron ore wagons for the Tyne Dock to Consett run, special vehicles for the atomic energy commission and, of course, the high-capacity merry-go-round coal wagons. Over 6,000 of these 32 tonners - all Shildon built - are serving power stations throughout the country.

Expertise is such that one of these sophisticated air-braked wagons leaves the production line every two hours.

A new one - from raw materials to finished job - takes just a week.

In the production line at the present time are 150 vans for Malays - BRE's first ever export order for wagons. This year sees the start of an order for 105 giant 100 ton tippler wagons for the British



1. BIG WHEELS TURNING

In the Wheel Shop wheels were fitted to axles, reprofiled and tested for flaws.

2. PIPE WORKING

Fitting air braking pipework to the underframe of an Open AB Wagon in the New Construction Shop.



Steel Corporation and, again, Shildon will build the whole wagon - including the bogies - from scratch.

Income from work for outside industries will leap from last years £37,000 to £75,000 for 1971. Work includes engineering on caterpillar tractors, parts for Union Carbide, while the works has also completed a job for 1,000 tons of steel tubes for oil pipelines of the Middle East.

Products are as good as the efforts of the men who make them. At Shildon the approach is:

"If it's good for the works it's good for me."

"Staff and management work hand in hand, it's a 'work together works'," say the Big Six.

The Big Six? - Ray Burney, Fred Tait of the Boiler makers' Union, Ken Rymer, Ray McCormack of the NUR, and George Robson and Sid Dixon of AEF.

Ever open door

The management's door is always open they say, and though the two sides may have their differences, problems are always approached with "whats best for Shildon" as the yardstick. The works has had its own welfare with annual orphans dinners and trips to football matches. It even has its own private ambulance, to take staff and families to hospital when needed, which the staff bought themselves.

John Begg's right hand men include production manager Andrew Hume whose office production chart has a healthy Himalayan look about it, personnel and administration officer Jim Reid, who had a spell in Shildon with the Royal Artillery during the war and was happy when he moved to the works from Scotland in 1969; and chief superintendent of wagon construction Bill Baldry, who claims his men can do jobs no one else can.

"We can 'stack cut' body plates twelve at a time," he says, "which is really something and my chief foreman, Tommy Stewart, is the best flame cutting man in the game."

"When we asked outside industry for a price for cutting and profiling sole-bars they quoted £14." Bill adds. "We can turn them out for 45 shillings."

Stack cutting? Profiling? If you live anywhere in Shildon you not only know what it's all about: you learn it in your cradle.

LIFT & BRAKE WORKSHOP



Here four wheeled vehicles were lifted to enable fitting of reconditioned wheels, suspension and brake gear.

THE WORKS & YOU

Many of you reading this, whether former workers, or family of former workers, are as much a part of the story of Shildon Works as anyone else we've included here. Now could be the perfect time to pass on your memories of your own connection to the works. We've added these pages to get you started writing.

WHAT'S YOUR CONNECTION TO THE WORKS?

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER OF THE WORKS?

WHAT DID YOU OR YOUR FAMILY DO AT THE WORKS?

A PICTURE FROM YOUR/THEIR TIME AT THE WORKS?

*Produced by Shildon Heritage Alliance CIC in
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