

RECORDING THE DEMOLITION OF THE LISTER-PETTER FACTORY AT DURSLEY IN SUMMER 2002

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Introduction

From its humble beginnings in 1867 the firm of R. A. Lister & Co became known world-wide for the diesel engines they manufactured from 1929 onwards. For many years the company was Dursley's largest employer with several thousand employees. Virtually every component that went into the engines was manufactured on the 100 acre site. However, the firm had to face severe competition at the end of the 20th century and by 2001 the workforce had shrunk to only a few hundred. As a consequence the site was sold in 2001 to the South-West of England Rural Development Agency. (SWRDA) for £16M. The greater part of the site was demolished in Summer 2002 in readiness for redevelopment which is expected to provide 600 dwellings and 1200 jobs on the 100 acre site. The company, now called Lister-Petter Ltd, still occupies the southern end of the site where they assemble engines from "bought in" parts.

The large foundry, machine shop and all the other buildings were considered important because of the contribution "Listers" had made to the local economy for so long and the fact that so many people had worked there over the years. The Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology (GSIA) therefore sought permission from SWRDA to make a photographic record of the buildings as they were being demolished during the summer of 2002. Permission was granted and the recording was carried out by the Author. The consulting engineers for the project were Arup and the demolition contractors were L. A. Moore & Son from near Wells.

It was not intended to produce a detailed record of the buildings as part of the project. The focus was much more on the social history of the site rather than exact dimensions of buildings and nature of the materials and construction. The aim was to take representative pictures of the buildings (large and small) and features such as old air raid shelters, loading bays, bath house interiors, compressors, air plant etc. An attempt has been made to capture the scale of the site (e.g. views across the roofs) and the character of the buildings (e.g. shots down the roads & elevations). Almost all the machinery had been removed by the time the photographs were taken and the pictures of the interiors of the machine shop and foundry show vast open spaces. Other pictures show the interiors of the smaller areas such as offices, laboratories, training rooms and the drawing offices. There has been some coverage of signage, a time clock and a dispenser for copies of ListerLink (for years the Company magazine). The record includes photographs of staff at all levels - quite literally as some were at the top of an extending platform!

Enquiries of former staff have indicated that each phase of building was carried out by external contractors to meet the client's (Listers) requirements. From (albeit) a cursory examination, we were not able to identify any particularly innovative designs, the involvement of any particular engineers or engineering firms (local or national). At the time that GSIA were embarking on the recording, Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service requested Arup should have the need for an archaeological and architectural assessment examined by consultants. This was carried out by Oxford Archaeology and it is pleasing to note that in their report they state that "...Just such a recording programme is

already being undertaken by the Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology and this is considered to be ideal for the current project. (1).

Recording the Site

The 170 photographs included in the record were taken on 18 June (morning), 27 June (afternoon), 9 July (afternoon) and 22 August (afternoon) - all 2002. Fuji 100 ASA slide film was used and the slides have been digitised using a Nikon Coolscan III film scanner. The resolution of most of the scans was 1350 samples per inch (s.p.i.) but some were scanned at the higher resolution of 2700 s.p.i. Each of the resulting image files from the 1350 s.p.i. scans occupy about 7 megabytes (MB) of storage and they have been archived on a set of compact disks (CDs). A database has been constructed which includes detailed captions for each of the 170 pictures along with slide number, date and direction of shot. Invaluable assistance in the production of the captions was given by former employees David Harris, Ken Webb and Bob Tocknell at a series of meetings. The final stage was the creation of a CD containing 170 'web' pages each showing one of the images and its associated caption. There is an comprehensive index to facilitate locating a particular image or the user can simply browse through the images which are arranged according to subject. In addition the CD contains an introduction to the project, recording specification, site plan and a key to the buildings shown on the plan. Copies have been deposited with Arup, The Gloucestershire Record Office and the Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service.

Acknowledgements

The co-operation of SW RDA (Steve Holland), Ove Arup (Peter Platt-Higgins and Felix Beeston) and L. A. Moore and Son (Les Moore and Peter Moore) David Harris, Ken Webb and Bob Tocknell (ex-Lister employees) is gratefully acknowledged.

Reference

- (1) J. Gill, Oxford Archaeology Report No 1411 Lister Petter Works, Dursley Gloucestershire: Historic Building Assessment. July 2002.



Lister-Peter Site Dursley. Peter Platt-Higgins (Ove Arup) in front of the former foundry