

Staff help write book about their working lives to preserve a piece of region's industrial heritage

Workers tell foundry's history

Andrew Robinson

WORKERS made redundant from a Yorkshire foundry have helped write a book about their working lives.

Staff at Hydro Aluminium Motorcast in Hunslet, Leeds, contributed memories and poems during the final days of production.

By next year all 630 jobs will have gone, bringing to an end almost 60 years of smelting and, for some families, ending three generations of foundry work.

When the closure plans were announced by its Norwegian owner, staff members of the Amicus union were keen to ensure that the contribution made by all the workers was recognised in some way.

They decided that the history, and the impact on the industrial heritage of Leeds, should not be lost alongside the jobs.

Through a partnership with the arts organisation Heads Together Productions, a programme of work began to capture the images, stories, sounds and memories of the foundry.

Supported by a £33,000 grant from Heritage Lottery Fund, Heads Together worked alongside workers past and present while Bradford-born photogra-



pher Ian Beesley took the pictures.

The end result is a book, *Meltdown: Words and Pictures from a Yorkshire Foundry*, and an



Foundry life: Pictures in the new book show, left, furnaceman Peter Carter; above left, the four Parr brothers, all of whom worked at the foundry and have been made redundant; and above right, a knock-out in Foundry One.

accompanying exhibition at Leeds Industrial Museum at Armley Mills, Armley.

A spokesman for Heads Together said the book was more than an historical account of an aluminium foundry.

"It is a way of commemorating what has been for some workers their whole working life, so that they can feel proud of their time spent at work. The book is meant to show others outside the foundry, and future generations,

just exactly what it was like working in one of the last aluminium foundries in England."

The creative director at Heads Together, Adrian Sinclair, said: "This has been a chance for the men to look to look back, but also to look forward to the future and see opportunities. Whatever the future holds, I know that today they are going to be very proud of this book."

Labour MP Hilary Benn, whose Leeds Central constituency cov-



ers the foundry site, said: "The Clarence Road foundry was part of Leeds's manufacturing heritage for many years. Its closure brings to an end another chapter in our industrial history. Despite the closure, manufacturing remains fundamentally important to Leeds and to the region. Leeds is still home to a wealth of skill, experience, creativity and passion.

"All our experience should tell us that, if you give people the

opportunity, the means and the encouragement, then you will be amazed by what they can achieve. *Meltdown* is proof of this. It tells the story of the foundry - in the words of those who worked there - and it looks forward, as well, to the new lives that those workers are anticipating. It's a unique and imaginative piece of living history."

The exhibition is at the Industrial Museum until January 30. andrew.robinson@ypn.co.uk

How Big Louie felled a cheeky youth at the bus stop

ONE worker's memories of colleague Louise Tomassi, alias Big Louie, who worked in the core-shop from 1962 to 1996 - a living legend among her fellow operatives.

"She could shovel sand as well as anybody. I remember the first time I met Big Louie - there were some men carrying base plates - it took two of them to carry each one. Big Louise strolled up - she had one under each arm. She was a strong woman.

"One time, the foreman introduced her as 'everything a woman shouldn't be'. He had to run for his life!

"One night, queuing for the bus outside the factory gates, a lad pushed in

front of Big Louie and jumped on the bus. Big Louie grabbed him and said 'Oi, there's a queue here.'

"'Get stuffed, you old bag,' he shouted back.

"Big Louie felled him with a single punch. He fell into the gutter. Everyone stepped over him to get on the bus.

"Big Louie went up to the bus driver and told him to drive off, leaving the bloke unconscious by the side of the road. You didn't mess with Big Louie."

Philip Herron recalls a worker's anger at receiving a cheap watch:

"Long-service awards were made after 25 and 40 years. For 25 years you would

get a watch - they were provided by Rover and cost £26.

"One man had been given one of the £26 watches. He went straight back on the shopfloor to an anvil, took a 5lb lump hammer and smashed it, with one blow. 'That's what I think of that', he said.

"His mate, who was watching, and had also received a watch for long service, said 'Can I have the strap as a spare?'

"When I showed one to Mr Horstkamp - our first German MD - he said 'You can't give a man who has given 25 years of his life to the company a watch that cost £26 - that's an insult. Go and get a watch that's solid gold.' So that's what we did and that's what we still do now."

A poem by Bob Parr describes his feelings at the end of an era.

*I work hard me.
In a hostile environment
Of molten metal and fumes
Whilst an air-conditioned man
In a suit, assumes
I'm just a number in personnel.
A plastic-coated barcode
Someone he's never met - and yet
I'm just a symbol of the manufacture
sell-off
In a town full of political lies and
paisley ties.
A metamorphosis of commerce and
riverside luxury.*

*I work hard me.
In Viking negative equity.
Thirty minutes for dinner
And ten for a cup of tea.
Whilst an air-conditioned man
In a Daimler, presumes
That I've become a liability.
A blot on the landscape of the
company stats.
An industrial failure
No longer able to feed the fat cats
They blame the strength of the pound
On why I can't make it pay
Even though I've done everything I
can, the Norway
Never mind, let's hope it's only our
work goes Hungary.*