

The Stoke Works Chimney

This article was first published in the April 2018 United Parish Church Community Link Magazine. We thank the church for allowing us to publish this article on the Stoke Parish Council Website

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One hundred years ago the skyline of our parishes was dominated by the salt works chimney. This impressive structure used to stand on the north side of Westonhall Road.



The chimney was built in 1836 by the British Alkali Company, whose works lay on the east side of the canal. It was 309 feet high with a diameter of 26 feet at the base and 9 feet at the top with brickwork 2 foot thick. It stood on a base of limestone blocks and was built using half a million bricks. Building it took nine months and was achieved without the aid of the tall cranes used to construct modern tall buildings. The main purpose of the chimney was to dissipate into the upper atmosphere the harmful hydrochloric acid fumes produced in the process of making sodium sulphate from salt. Inside the main chimney was a smaller chimney about one quarter of the height which was used to recover most of the hydrochloric acid.

The British Alkali Company went bankrupt and in 1852 John Corbett leased the works. By concentrating on salt production he made them profitable once again, adding the rival Imperial Salt and Alkali Company on the west side of the canal to his business.

With overseas competition trading in salt becoming less secure and in 1889 John Corbett sold out to the Salt Union which acquired most of the salt producers in England. In 1919 the works were electrified and the steam engines which used to power the pumps were replaced by electric motors. A coal powered power station was built beside the chimney whose main function then became to act as chimney for the boilers. In 1924 The chimney was considered unsafe and its height was reduced by 57 feet still leaving an imposing structure 252 feet high. In 1937 the Stoke works were taken over by the salt division of ICI and salt production continued.

In 1972 ICI closed the salt works at Stoke and the site was taken over by Bayer. In 1950 the power house was closed and the chimney was no longer used. However it stood a further six years until demolition work started. Demolition was done the old fashioned way with steeple jacks without safety harnesses using sledge hammers and taking down the chimney brick by brick. Demolition was completed in 1977.



The ground beside Westonhall Road where the works stood is now being cleared for a housing estate (Henbrook Gardens) and all trace of the chimney has gone. A stained glass window depicting the chimney in the vestry of Stoke Prior Church is all that remains to remind us of its existence.

Authors Note

In writing this article I am well aware that many of my readers will remember the chimney and know a great deal more about it than I do. They may wish to describe their memories for later issues of the Community Link.

John Kemm