

Conservation Statement

Portland Works, Randall Street, Sheffield S2 4SJ

Background

Portland Works was built in 1877, and is a fine example of a courtyard-style multi-workshop cutlery factory. In 1914 it became the first place in the world to manufacture stainless steel cutlery. It is a Grade II* Listed Building and now provides an affordable workspace for small manufacturing businesses as well as independent artists and craft workers. In 2009, it still housed craftspeople despite its decrepit state but was threatened with conversion into flats. A four-year campaign saved the Works; since 2013 it has been owned by Portland Works Little Sheffield Ltd (PWLS Ltd), a social enterprise with over 500 community shareholders. A Business Plan has been created for the site (2014) and a programme of renovations is now ongoing in a phased process as funding is secured.

Scope of the Conservation Statement

This document is a Conservation Statement for Portland Works. It has been prepared in reference to a number of surveys and reports that have been produced in the last few years as a precursor to the renovation programme. The purpose of this document is to provide a broad policy framework around which to plan, prioritise and undertake renovation and repairs into the future, whilst protecting and enhancing the historic significance of the site.

In 2014 a Conservation Plan was produced (Wessex Archaeology 2014). The Conservation Plan focussed upon the significance of the site, with detailed examination of the spaces within the Works, and it was recognised from the outset that policies and issues of vulnerability would be developed in greater detail at a later date, when additional funds were available. This Statement is the next stage of development following on from the Conservation Plan.

Statement of Significance

The following general statement of significance is based upon the 2014 Conservation Plan.

*Historical Significance: **Exceptional***

Harry Brearley and Ernest Stuart, manager under R. F. Mosley, produced the world's first stainless steel knives in 1914 at Portland Works. Under the name 'Rusnorstain', they were the first ever to be forged and marketed commercially.

Portland Works' association with the invention, forging and marketing of stainless steel knives is momentous internationally within the cutlery industry and within Sheffield's and the UK's manufacturing history.

*Evidential Significance: **Considerable***

The retained design and layout of Portland Works, and the ability to 'read' the surviving historic fabric of the works from which manufacturing processes can be inferred, is of high importance. Although many of the fixtures and fittings relating to the original specific functions of the different parts of the complex have been lost, the quality of the fabric and finishes of different areas of the building continues to provide visual clues as to the original processes located there.

The evidential value of the works is further enhanced as it is a rare survival of a building/complex type that was once plentiful within Sheffield, but over the last decade has become increasingly rare.

In addition, the documentary and oral evidence for the history and development of the Works is substantial and extremely valuable, and contributes a major element to the evidential significance of the site.

*Aesthetic Significance: **Considerable***

Portland Works has retained much of its original design and layout, which was very specific to a range of specialised processes. Its design, form, massing, materials, decoration and detailing are unique to integrated complexes within Sheffield and are therefore of high regional significance. Some of these aspects have been impacted upon at Portland Works by modern additions, alterations and partitions.

Previous surveys

Information about the building has been gathered during a number of different episodes, and together form an extremely valuable resource for understanding the historic significance of the building, its condition and the challenges that it presents.

Coldspots Report carried out by Studio Polpo in 2014: This report summarises the results of previous surveys and identifies gaps in knowledge. Using new research and survey work, it provides tools and suggestions as to how Portland Works might develop in the future to maintain a creative, lively and innovative hub in a characterful historic building.

Conservation Management Plan carried out by Wessex Archaeology in 2014: This document summarises the historical development of the site, gives room-by-room analysis of historic significance, and gives an overall statement of significance for the Works. Issues of vulnerability are touched upon, but a full suite of Conservation Policies was outwith the remit of the commission.

High-level fabric condition/building survey carried out by Bond Bryan Survey in 2011, with costed health and safety and repair proposals.

Type 2 Asbestos Survey carried out by First Red in 2011: Some asbestos is present in the building, but mainly in textiles.

Energy and Sustainability Report carried out by Sustainable Building in 2013.

Live Project 2011: A project carried out by students of the University of Sheffield's School of Architectural Studies, mapping the use of individual and communal spaces, the flow of processes and materials, and consultations with the public and tenants.

MA in Sustainable Studies 2012: Another project carried out by students of the University of Sheffield's School of Architectural Studies, investigating options for more sustainable and efficient heating and lighting systems.

Drawings: Scale CAD drawings (from several different sources) exist for all floor plans, and some elevations. The provenance and accuracy of these drawings is not always known, and some are not available in their original digital form.

Various: A photographic survey (2012), funding bids and other background research all contain valuable information about the site.

General guidance

The purpose of this section is to provide Policy Areas and overarching guidance to help frame ongoing and future restoration and management of the site. These may be subject to change as work on site progresses, and as further research reveals additional information about the site.

A number of guiding principles will apply to all Policy Areas

- No work will be carried out which will harm the significance of the Works as a building of national significance, both architecturally and historically.
- All renovation/repair/alteration work will be undertaken in accordance with best-practice and following conservation standards and methods.
- Appropriate surveys will be conducted, as necessary, prior to any works.
- All appropriate permissions will be gained before, and conditions adhered to during, any programme of works.
- A record will be maintained of any changes made to the fabric of the Works.

Policy Areas

Policy Area 1: A Historic Place for Makers

Portland Works was designed for a specific purpose, albeit in several phases, and that purpose is still clearly legible in the fabric, form and finishes of the complex today. Although integrated works such as these were once fairly common in Sheffield, their survival is now rare; Portland Works is a fine example of its type, and one that has, very unusually, retained a working community of craftspeople and makers. The site also demonstrates a number of *ad hoc* alterations to the

fabric over time; whilst some of these may detract from the significance of the site, it is important to acknowledge that these may contribute to the site's character and capture the phasing of the site – a completely uniform appearance is neither desirable or appropriate to the Works.

- 1A The site will continue to be managed as a workplace for craftspeople and makers for the long term.
 - 1B Attracting and keeping a community of tenants most suited to the Works will be a priority.
 - 1C The layout, form and use of the internal spaces will continue to reference the historic layout and functions of spaces. This legibility will be enhanced wherever possible in the physical arrangement of spaces, access routes, the activities undertaken and the finishes applied.
 - 1D Features and previous alterations that harm the significance of the site will be removed/reversed when possible, subject to obtaining the appropriate consents (but see 1E).
 - 1E The 'Wild History' of the site (Coldspots Report 2014) may be seen as an integral part of the Works' evolving character; features such as graffiti or signage may have some intrinsic interest. Careful thought will be given to their removal, and such features will be recorded if it is deemed necessary to remove them.
 - 1F An agreed palette of colours, materials and finishes (internal and external) will help to promote continuity of overall appearance, whilst allowing differences in phasing (e.g. between blocks) to be acknowledged.
- 2A

Policy Area 2: Ownership & multiple occupancy

The Works is owned and managed by a social enterprise comprising several hundred community shareholders. In addition, it currently houses over 25 tenants, some of whom have, or wish, to take responsibility for the decoration and fit-out of their own spaces. This is a complex site, and with so many stakeholders it is critical that effective communication is maintained, in order that the conservation aims and management approach are fully understood, and contributed to, by all.

- 2A The site will continue to be run as a social enterprise in the future.
- 2B Clear paths of communication will be maintained, with suitable record of all stakeholders being kept, to facilitate this.
- 2C The shareholders and tenants will be consulted on major proposed changes or new ideas for management/facilities.
- 2D Tenants will be made aware of the conservation-led approach to the management of the Works, and will be bound by their tenancy agreements to ensure their activities do not harm its significance.
- 2E All tenants, sub-contractors and volunteers will be required to abide by the guiding principles, and the conservation approach.

Policy Area 3: A Special Sheffield Place

The significance of the cutlery and tableware industry to Sheffield and the development of its international reputation are universally acknowledged. Portland Works has high social value, being of direct relevance to the people of Sheffield within living and recent memory. The fabric and appearance of the building is significant and makes a major contribution to the local streetscape, and in its completeness is an unusual survival of this type of building in Sheffield. The level of community interest in the building is tangible and evidenced through attendance at Open Days and other special events, as well as by the strong and active support of over 500 shareholders and a volunteer workforce of around 15 people.

- 3A Public access to the site will be maintained through Open Days and special events, and consideration will be given to a more permanent mechanism for public interaction with the site (e.g. through the development of exhibition/social space) in a manner that will also benefit the tenants.
- 3B The significance of the site will be promoted as widely as possible and interest in the site will be valued and encouraged.
- 3C Partnerships that develop a greater understanding of the site will be sought and developed (e.g. high quality project work/student research with Universities).
- 3D The contributions of volunteers to the maintenance and renovation of the site will be supported and nurtured. Volunteers will be encouraged to share their wide experience and skills.
- 3E The results of research into the site will be made publicly available.
- 3F The importance of the Works' external facades as a major contributor to the character of the local streetscape will be considered when programming works.

Policy Area 4: A Place of Innovation & Traditional Skills

The site's international significance is gained through its connection with the development, working and marketing of stainless steel. This historic association will be celebrated, and businesses which seek to innovate with new materials or processes will be encouraged, as will those that preserve traditional craft skills that are at risk of being lost. The Works should be a creative and supportive environment for creative enterprise and small businesses.

- 4A Innovative crafts/manufacturing will be encouraged.
- 4B The Works will be a creative centre for traditional and new craft skills.
- 4C Mentoring programmes and apprenticeships will be supported.
- 4D Partnerships with local providers will be sought to develop formal opportunities for skills training relating to conservation/repair activities embedded within the ongoing upkeep of the complex.
- 4E The use of innovative building materials/techniques will be sought (where this does not compromise the aims of conservation), especially where this will reduce the carbon footprint of the complex.

Policy Area 5: A Safe Place

The building has suffered from neglect over the last decades, and degrading fabric is not only unsafe, but also causes harm to the significance of the place. Health and Safety principles must underpin all activities and proposals for the Works, but in some cases these must be sensitively addressed in order to protect the character and significance of the site. Some parts of the building are currently uninhabitable.

- 5A A costed Maintenance Action Plan will be developed.
- 5B Any outstanding health and safety requirements will be a priority addressed in all parts of the building, with those areas within the public realm taking absolute priority.
- 5C Subject to resources being available, all buildings will be made weathertight to avoid further deterioration, and the unused parts of the Works will be brought into use as soon as funds allow.
- 5D Welfare provision for the workforce, volunteers and visitors will be fit for purpose.
- 5E Appropriate fire escape routes will be provided – where possible these will incorporate or echo original access routes, which form an important mechanism for understanding the historic processes within the Works.
- 5F Security measures will be developed sufficient to address the needs of a multi-occupier complex.