

HOOK – AN INDUSTRIAL HAMLET

By EDWIN COURSE

Whilst manufacturing industry is usually associated with towns, in Victorian times there was also a considerable amount of industrial activity in rural areas. In some cases, such as Eastleigh, the setting up of a large manufacturing establishment led to the making of a new town. However, in other cases, such as the Anna Valley, Messrs Taskers' works was served from neighbouring settlements, including Andover. A number of industrial concerns were started to serve large estates, but later catered for a wider market. The brickworks at Selborne falls into

this category, as did the smithy and wheelwright's shop at Hook near Warsash.

The remarkable thing about the industrial hamlet at Hook is the way in which, at least outwardly, it has retained its character. Until about 1908, the Hook Estate was held by the Hornbys. More recent owners have included the Caltex Oil company, and at present part of the hamlet is the property of the Hampshire County Council. Despite these changes, the outward appearance has changed so little that if any of the Silvesters, who for so long worked at the



Fig 1. Hook: a general view of the hamlet in the Edwardian period, from a postcard.



Fig 2. Hook: group outside the cottages in 1908, including members of the Silvester, Bartholomew, Gregory and Jeffrey families. (Photo: Courtesy Mr Bartholomew).

forge, should return, they would have no difficulty in recognising Hook. The three basic elements – the smithy and house, the terrace of four cottages and the wheelwright's shop with its house – have all undergone internal alterations, but from outside they preserve their Victorian appearance.

While the survival of Hook is remarkable and well documented, details of its construction are obscure. None of the buildings have date stones, although the date '1846' has been retained in the pavement in front of the cottages, and this is consistent with their architectural character. The house alongside the smithy is plainer, but with similar brickwork and a Welsh slate roof, and probably belongs to the same period. The house by the wheelwright's has proportions which suggest an earlier date and, if this is the case, the shop may be a later addition. A distinctive form of wing wall with a curved top is to be found associated with both the wheel-

wright's shop (Fig 3) and the cottages. There is a Silvester family tradition which places an earlier forge opposite the present building, and if this be accepted, then both this and the wheelwright's house might belong to a previous period. It certainly seems probable that both wheelwright and smithy were established on the estate at an earlier date, but the present buildings, with the possible exception of the wheelwright's house, all carry the mark of the high Victorian period.

The cottages were not reserved for estate workers, although in this somewhat isolated area most of the inhabitants were associated with the estate in one way or another. Each of the cottages was self-contained, including access from a front door, sheltered by the same type of wooden porch as that provided for the wheelwright's and smith's house. There were a number of striking architectural details, including the casement windows with iron

glazing bars (Fig 2). The chimneys were massive, somewhat Tudor in style, and lacked chimney pots. However, the most noteworthy feature was the way in which the front wall was divided into three parts, by two recesses running the full height of the building and capped by gables. The cottages were more ornate than either of the houses, and one can only assume that some aspiring builder or architect convinced the Hornby of the day that they would ornament his estate. They certainly provide one of the most striking examples of estate cottages in south Hampshire.

The wheelwright's establishment lay to the south of the rest of the hamlet, separated from it by a narrow thoroughfare which has now become a public road. In front was a small, triangular green. As mentioned above, the proportions of the house indicated an earlier date than the other buildings in the village. The facade was two storeys high and three bays

wide, with the front door placed centrally and four sash windows, two for each floor, occupying the outer bays (Fig 3). These sash windows with wooden glazing bars contrasted with the casement windows with iron glazing bars incorporated into all the other houses. They were, however, replaced by casement windows, probably in the 1920s. Plain chimneys with pots were placed at each end of the roof ridge and the roof was formed with tiles, as compared to Welsh slates on the other buildings. While the wheelwright's house had these distinctive features, in some respects it did resemble the other dwellings. In particular, special strong bricks were provided for the corners and window surrounds, and also were arranged in a bonding course running across the facade at the level of the ground floor ceiling.

The wheelwright's shop was set back a little, but formed a continuous range with the house. It had three casement windows and a large door.



Fig 3. Hook: the wheelwright's shop and house in 1908. The woodworkers wear white aprons and have been joined by Mr Silvester, the smith, wearing his leather apron, and a man who may have driven the traction engine. A cart, probably a coal merchant's wagon, and a wheel also appear. (Photo: Courtesy of Mr Bartholomew).

At the time of an Edwardian photograph, a board above one of the windows bore the following inscription – ‘C J Newbury, Building Contractor, Wheelwright, Undertaker, Decorator. Estimates Given.’ Within was provided all the machinery which would normally be found in a wheelwright’s shop, including lathes, drills and planing equipment. At the rear was the timber yard. Much of the wood used in the shop came from the estate, and until the acquisition of a steam engine, a saw pit was used to convert the

tree trunks into planks. The first steam engine to be acquired was a portable, put to work about 1890, with its wheels removed, to provide power in the timber yard. A Ruston internal combustion engine was obtained for the joiners’ shop, and this ran on paraffin. According to Mr Wyn Newbury, C J Newbury’s grandson, it was neglected while his father and uncle were away during the First World War, but they were able to restore it on their return. When the portable engine was no longer serviceable, it was re-



Fig 4. Hook smithy in 1908 – Mr Silvester is the bearded figure wearing a leather apron. (Photo: Courtesy of Mr Bartholomew).

placed by a traction engine, one of Messrs Taskers’ ‘Little Giants’. This was also used for haulage, and for work on building sites. In the timber yard, a large horizontal cross-cut saw was provided; later a circular saw and a planing machine were added. In addition to wagons, carts and coffins, in the style of country craftsmen, Newburys would make almost anything from wood, provided they had a firm order.

Mr C J Newbury took over the business from

Owen Bevis in about 1875. He was active for many years and continued to take an interest in the concern until his death in 1939. The development was a logical one, from wagons to coffins and from woodwork to building and decorating. Mr Wyn Newbury recalls that his grandfather was employing up to a hundred workpeople from his modest premises in Hook. Most of them would be engaged on building sites in the Warsash and Locksheath area. While the build-

ing side of the business prospered, the more traditional work declined after the First World War. Lorries and factory-made equipment replaced farm carts and wagons. After the demand for new carts had gone work continued on repairs, but after about 1926, this also declined rapidly. At the same time, work in the saw mill came to an end. Mr Wyn Newbury's father and his uncle both entered his grandfather's business, although neither of them remained wheelwrights for the rest of their working lives. Mr

Newbury's father became a builder in 1932, and his uncle was employed in the road transport business which Wyn Newbury's grandfather had started in 1922. The wheelwright's shop at Hook had made an active contribution to the surrounding district for over a hundred years when it closed down. Now the house continues in use as a dwelling and the workshop has become 'The Nook and Cranny Restaurant'.

For many years, Newburys had sent their wheels along the road to the smithy to have iron



Fig 5. Hook: The blacksmith's house in 1908. The same men appear as those photographed outside the smithy (Fig 4), plus two ladies from the house. (Photo: Courtesy of Mr Bartholomew).

tyres fitted by the Silvesters. While the Newburys had extended their activities beyond the village, most of the work of the Silvesters was carried out in the forge. Far fewer people were involved. A photograph in 1908 shows Thomas Silvester, with his son William, and one other worker, but this may not have been the total number employed (Fig 4). As mentioned above, the character of the smithy, together with the adjoining house, would suggest a construction

date in the early or middle years of the nineteenth century. It was occupied by at least three generations of the Silvester family, including Thomas, shown in the photograph of 1908, his sons William and George, and Arthur, his grandson. Arthur worked at the forge until January 1964 and died in July of that year. His widow could not entertain the idea of anyone else working in the smithy, so it remained disused until after her death.

The blacksmith's house consisted of three bays with a central front door (Fig 5). In common with the wheelwright's dwelling it had window surrounds, corners and a bonding course built with a distinctive brick. In other respects, it differed. For instance, the roof was hipped, and consisted of Welsh slates. At first floor level there were three windows instead of two, and all the five front windows were of the casement type with iron glazing bars. The accommodation was roughly comparable to that of the wheelwright's house, including two sitting rooms, four bedrooms and a kitchen. The well and water closet were outside, and lighting was by oil lamps. Perhaps the most striking contrast between the two houses was in the proportions, the blacksmith's house being wider and lower.

The smithy was a typical, one-storey building, about 39 feet long by about 16 feet deep (Fig 6). The brickwork resembled that of the other buildings in the hamlet, consisting of red bricks with some grey headers, mostly laid in Flemish bond. Over the years, two extensions were added in the form of lean-tos. One at the north

end filled the angle between a wing wall and the north wall, and was originally weatherboarded with a slate roof, with repairs of corrugated iron. The lean-to at the south-west corner consisted of timber framing with corrugated iron for both walls and roof. The wheelwright's shop formed a continuous range with the dwelling, but the smithy was free-standing, separated from the house by a narrow passage (Fig 5). The facade was symmetrical, with two casement windows in the centre, flanked by doors, and with a window at each end. The southerly door was a half door, but that at the north end was a conventional full door. All the windows were provided with shutters, a feature confined to the smithy. There was another door in the south end wall and two in the back wall. Another feature of the back wall was two low windows, providing additional light for the hearths. The roof was hipped, with two skylights, one on each side of the ridge, and consisted of Welsh slates. There were no gutters or down pipes. The roof trusses consisted of a king post with two raked queen posts.

By May 1975, most of the tools had been



Fig 6. Hook smithy and the Blacksmith's house in 1975 (Photo: Author).



Fig 7. Hook: interior of the smithy in 1975, showing the hearths (Photo: Author).

disposed of, but the building, with its two hearths, remained almost as Mr Silvester had left it in 1964. The two work benches inside the front wall remained, both equipped with vices, while one retained a drill. In the yard, leaning against the back wall, was a hand trolley and the remains of one pair of bellows. The 1908 photograph (Fig 4) shows a mandrel, for making small hoops and a wheelbarrow outside the forge, but both of these had gone by 1975. (Mr Silvester, in his old age, would sit outside the smithy on a stool or in the wheelbarrow.) The plates used in shrinking the tyres on to the wooden wheels were not found, nor any of the numerous tongs, hammers or horseshoes which existed in every smithy. Most of this material

had been given away by Mrs Silvester and, in a number of cases, has been preserved. Particularly striking was the complete absence of any form of power, either steam or electric – in contrast to the steam power available at Newburys.

However, the interior was dominated by the two hearths (Fig 7). These were identical and were constructed of brick, iron and stone. The fireplaces had stone sides which, with the iron flues, were set in brick. The flues were marked with the name of their maker, Lankestons of Southampton. There were ash pans below the hearths and water troughs in front. Later, one of the hearths went to the Test Valley and the other to Southampton for preservation. Perhaps the most characteristic piece of equipment in a

smithy is the anvil, but there seems to be no record of the whereabouts of that from Hook.

At the present time, the external character of Hook has been preserved. The wheelwright's shop is a restaurant and the smithy houses a metal worker on motor car bodies, but in both cases conversion has been done with care. Despite this, it takes an effort of the imagination to visualise Hook as an industrial centre, providing ironwork and woodwork, initially for the Hook Estate, and then for the whole district of Warsash and Locksheath.

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This contribution to *Proceedings* has been based almost entirely on archaeological and oral evidence, and therefore lacks the confirmation and additional detail which might have been provided by documents. Because of this, any further information on the story of Hook would be welcomed by the author.

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