



LVR-Industriemuseum
OBERHAUSEN

St. Antony-Hütte – The Cradle of the Ruhr-Industry

Quotations

„Only single, dying trees could be seen into infinity, along with piles of sand blown away by the wind, which lay between some juniper bushes and dry grass. It was seldom that we saw a few straw huts, inhabited by poor farmers who mowed the grass with which to make their fires. We drove up to higher ground, in the hope of discovering a pleasant horizon. But things remained as they were. As far as the eye could see, there was no trace of any agricultural activity to be seen. It was truly a barren wasteland.“

PIERRE-HIPPOLYTE-LEOPOLD PAILLLOT, circa 1794

„Just like a desert in Arabia, wherever the Mohammedan caravans on their pilgrimage to Mecca encounter nothing but featureless, desolate barrenness, it is extremely rare to meet anyone who is not a traveller passing through this region.“

CHRISTIAN FRIEDRICH MEYER, 1794

„What a wretched area ! Interminable expanses of sand, only interrupted here and there on the horizon by sparse woodlands and solitary groups of trees. – [...] From scattered juniper bushes the plaintive shrieks of young lapwings sound like seagulls, as they slide around in the reeds like diving birds in their thorny sanctuary [...]. Then, about every mile, a hut in front of whose door a couple of children roll in the sand and catch beetles [...] – and we have named everything which enlivens a long day's journey through an area that has no other poetry to show than an almost virginal loneliness and a soft, dreamlike light.“

ANNETTE VON DROSTE HÜLSHOFF, 1824

The painful birth of the first iron foundry in the Ruhr Region

The heath at Osterfeld conceals treasure – iron ore under the turf! Freiherr von Wenge wants to dig it up. He negotiates with the bordering states about extraction of the ore. In 1741 the Archbishop of Cologne grants him the right to mine.

In order to extract iron from the ore, Wenge plans to build a foundry. Premiums awarded to Cologne officials – in the form of Westphalian hams – hasten the progress of his plan. In 1752 the building of St. Antony is begun, the first ironworks in the Ruhr Region.

However, a court case concerning water rights with Sterkrade Abbey delays its construction. It is not until 18th October 1758 that the first iron flows out of the furnace of St. Antony. None the less, the master ironworker and the leaseholders face difficulties: not until after 1780 does the foundry yield a profit. And before long, Wenge gets competition in his immediate neighbourhood.

From Crime to Major Company

After the death of Wenge, his heirs sell the St. Antony foundry twice in 1793. By force of arms, the Royal Abbess of Essen – owner of the Neu-Essen foundry - attempts to assert her claim against the second buyer, Pfandhöfer – founder of the Gute Hoffnung (= good hope) foundry.

When the Royal Abbess loses her land as a result of the French Revolution, she sells her shares in the foundry to the Haniel brothers in 1805. Meanwhile, the foundry's director, Jacobi, has already become a joint owner.

In 1798 the third foundry in the neighbourhood, Gute Hoffnung, is acquired by Helene Amalie Krupp, after Pfandhöfer's bankruptcy. She then sells it in 1808 to Heinrich Huysen, brother-in-law of the Haniels. In 1809 these four proprietors amalgamate into the „Hüttengewerkschaft und Handlung Jacobi, Haniel & Huysen“ (JHH)

Hard Work, innovative technology

The year 1800 sees 80 men toiling at St. Antony's: mining ore and burning charcoal, washing ore, and hammering, or casting and moulding at the furnace. During 30 week campaigns they work around the clock in 12 hour shifts.

Ore comes from under the ground, charcoal from the surrounding forests, but there is a growing shortage. Attempts to replace charcoal with anthracite fail, as do tests by the Prussian technician, Eversmann, to smelt iron with coke.

However, Eversmann spies out innovations in England, which make St. Antony one of the leading foundries between the cities of Wetzlar and Wesel. A so-called cupola furnace makes it possible to produce cast iron goods of such high quality that he even gains the respect of his competitor Friedrich Krupp.

Pots, Cannon balls and Machine parts

The St. Antony foundry manufactures goods made of cast iron. Only after 1766 does a hammer mill also process bought-in malleable iron for a few years. Up till 1820 and from 1827 until 1842 St. Antony produces iron in its own furnaces. Thereafter the ironworks is a casting foundry, producing cast iron by recasting it in the cupola furnace.

Not only everyday objects (such as pots, pans and weights) are produced, but also ammunition and machine parts, e.g. for steam engines, belong to the product range. They are delivered to surrounding regions, as well as to the Netherlands, Denmark and to Russia. Distribution all over the world is managed via the seaports of Hamburg and Lübeck.

Between 1820 and 1826 St. Antony is a paper mill.

1758 till 1820

Products are manufactured according to norms, ordered from catalogues, or made to the specifications of customers. At first, mostly everyday objects and utensils are cast: pots, pans, kettles, irons, mortars, waffle-irons, panels, grilles, weights and similar cast iron goods.

Towards the end of the 18th century products such as stoves and ammunition are added to the range, from 1800 machine parts are also produced.

1820 till 1826

From 1810 the main focus of the JHH foundry shifts to Sterkrade. The St. Antony foundry loses its significance. In 1820 the furnace is shut down.

St. Antony becomes a paper mill, in which Carl Teschenmacher, under the company name „Jacobi, Teschenmacher und Comp.“ produces paper from 1821. However, the factory fails to yield sufficient profits. Teschenmacher gives up in 1825. A new leaseholder for the paper mill cannot be found.

1827 till 1842

In 1827 a new blast furnace starts operating at St. Antony. The products are similar to those manufactured before 1820, but more stoves are now made than previously. In 1834 the Deutsche Zollverein (= German Customs Union) is founded, which means weights and measures are standardized, leading to increased demand for cast-iron weights.

From 1837 a special clay moulding shop is used for the manufacture of boiler pipes. In 1838 cast iron rails and fittings are added to the range of products supplied to the railway companies. These are followed in 1839 by parts for the few locomotives which the JHH produces in Sterkrade.

1842 till 1877

In 1842 St. Antony becomes a casting foundry. A newly erected blast furnace, which could have been operated using coke, is not even started up.

Machine parts and equipment spares, frequently for the company's own use, become the most important line of production. In addition, parts are also produced arising from civil and bridge engineering projects by JHH. At times, the manufacture of ammunition again becomes important.

One pottery kiln is converted to weapons manufacture, and also becomes a supplier to mechanical engineering firms.

It's no longer worth it – the closure of St. Antony

In 1876/77 the effects of the financial crisis reach the ironworks. Only a few years previously, the cupola furnaces and casting foundry were modernized. Now the company report of the enterprise „Gutehoffnungshütte, Actien-Verein für Bergbau und Hüttenbetrieb“ (= Good Hope Foundry Joint Stock Association for Mining and Smelting) (GHH), founded in 1873, states that the foundry at St. Antony has been closed. Apart from the residential and office building, one workshop, the clay moulding shop and the blacksmith's forge, all the buildings are demolished in 1880.

The GHH develops into an internationally successful company – without St. Antony. From coal and ore mining, to blast furnaces, steel and rolling mills, up to the manufacture of machines and other products – one company controls all of these operations.

And until 2006 the remains of the first ironworks in the Ruhr Region slumber under the earth...

The Gutehoffnungshütte (Good Hope Foundry) – A Photographic Portrait of the Ironworks

From 1873 the GHH develops into one of the largest enterprises in the Ruhr Region. Numerous other works come into operation, not only all around Oberhausen, but also throughout Germany and beyond.

The products range from raw materials to specialist machines, from cast iron parts to ships, from rivets to bridges. Numerous charitable institutions are established for the welfare of employees, such as housing estates for workers.

From 1889 a photographic department records the development of the enterprise. The Negatives Archive, with about 16,000 glass negatives, 170,000 plan-film negatives and countless 35mm negatives is taken over by the LVR-Industriemuseum in 1995. A selection of prints from glass negatives is presented here.

Living at St. Antony

Today's museum is the last remaining building of the St. Antony foundry. Erected in 1758, it was rebuilt after a fire in 1835. It consists of the two-storey residential house, the office wing with storehouse, and a stable.

During 200 years the house was where the directors and management staff of the GHH lived and worked. None the less, it shows no signs of bourgeois ostentation. After all, it was not designed for the owners of the foundry, but „only“ for the foundry masters.

Parts of the office wing were also used as residential space for workers from 1838. In 1877 there was a conclusive change of use – without any regard to the comfort of living there. The small apartments could not be heated adequately. Those workshops which had been used as apartments since 1880 were demolished by the wrecking ball in 1969.