

Mention of Kennings Ltd in Darrell Clarke's and David Bevis's articles (NEDIAS *Newsletter* number 61, February 2016), brought back a few memories to me. In the late 1970s, fresh from school, I worked at a number of their premises when employed by Parsons. I particularly remember their Manor Offices on Old Road. There we were installing, I think, a new mains feeder cable for the computer room. I was particularly impressed with this facility – the first time I had seen anything like this apart from on television. Unbeknown to me at the time was that the building had a quite separate history under the company that had it built – Plowright Brothers Ltd. Plowrights had what was termed their design and administration offices opened in May 1958, at a cost of some £100,000, on Old Road, Brampton – later the headquarters building of Kennings.

Plowrights' business was originally formed in 1878 by Robert Plowright and his three sons Robert, Henry James and William Oliver. They took over John Sneath's iron and brass foundries in Shepley Street, Brampton. In a 1960s company history it was said that two brothers (William and Robert) had been trained in the Royal Dockyard, Portsmouth, later went to Russia (where they started an engineering works), before returning to Chesterfield. Apparently their father had some position in the Russian government. There was also involvement in the Walton Pottery Works from 1892, after the Briddons went bankrupt there. A partnership involving Henry James, William Oliver and Robert Plowright was dissolved at the end of June 1895 – at this time the business comprised the pottery and the 'Brampton Works' engineering business. Henry James Plowright retired at this time owing to ill health – the business being carried on by William and Robert. In the early days of the three brother's partnership Henry undertook travelling for the company, William Oliver acted as draftsman, while Robert Plowright was the works manager.

The early years of Plowrights were apparently spent continuing the existing Sneath business which serviced the beaver hat industry (in nearby Beaver Place), potteries and other local industries. The business's skill in engineering became known to local colliery engineers, who were soon using Plowrights for urgent repairs. It has also been said that the first steam railway engine used in Russia was made and exported by Plowrights. William died in 1910, Robert having died some 12 years earlier.

1902 saw the firm become a limited liability company, with expertise being demonstrated in mechanical handling and the preparation of coal. Plowright Brothers became well-known in this area being perhaps pioneers in this respect. The 1930s saw planned extension and modernisation of the works, including new offices. The post Second World War period saw the company particularly involved in the extensive mechanisation and modernisation of the coal industry, not just in the UK but in other countries such as Canada, South Africa, China, India and West Africa.

Plowrights were acquired by the Bestwood Company in 1951. This heralded a period of expansion, including construction of new Plowrights workshops in the Shepley/Factory Streets area, along with the design and administrative building – later to become the headquarters of Kennings and opened in 1959. In 1958 three divisions were formed – industrial plant & building; coal preparation & carbonisation and the colliery division. Aerex Ltd., another subsidiary of the Bestwood Company, who designed, supplied and installed might high have overstretched resources as just a few years after the opening of their new facilities – by December 1962 – only a handful of efficiency axial and radial flow fans, used the manufacturing facilities at Chesterfield along with another at Stockton. In the early 1960s the workshops occupied an area of over seven acres; complete with plate, girder, machine, fabricating, fitting and blacksmiths shops.

Unfortunately after all this expansion not many employees were left at the company, the receivers having been called in earlier. A Mr Braman, of Braman Investments Ltd., (described as 'formerly Plowright Brothers Ltd' in the *London Gazette*) told the *Derbyshire Times* that there were only a few men left at the works, tidying up. By the end of January 1963 it was expected that they would all be gone. No buyer had then been found for the impressive and nearly new office block, but PM Pathe (Engineering) Ltd. had taken over a section of the factory and were reported as being very busy. The last year or so had been a bad one for local industry with Hardwick Coke Ovens, the Midland Fruit Preserving Company, Sheepbridge's blast furnaces and Plowrights all closing.

A much fuller history of Plowright Brothers will form part of a planned Victoria County History volume in due course.

Sources:

*Brampton Trail* (Chesterfield Civic Society, no date).

R Brown 'Potteries of Derbyshire'. *Journal of the Northern Ceramic Society*, volume 11, 1994.

*Derbyshire Courier*, 26 February 1910.

'Derbyshire Industries, No. 38 – Messrs Plowright Brothers Ltd., Brampton Iron Works', *Derbyshire Times*, 8 October 1932.

*Derbyshire Times*, 7 December 1962.

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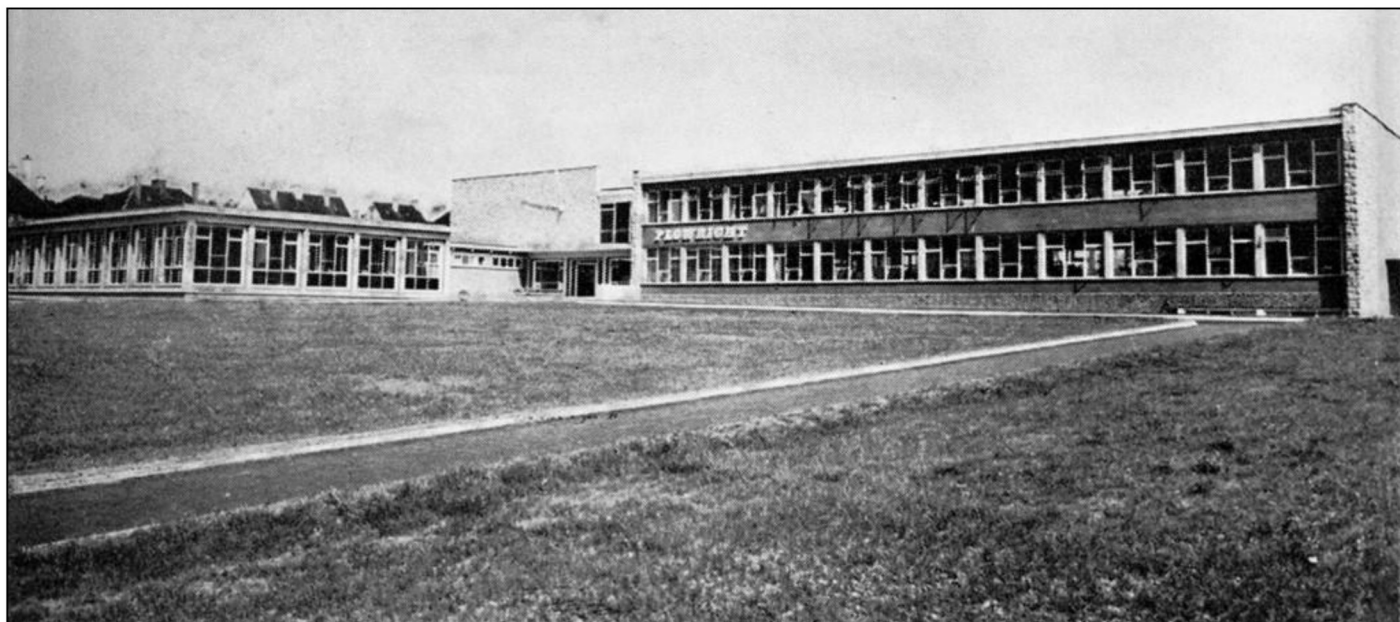
G R Micklewright, *The Chesterfield and District Story*, (Chesterfield and District Story Exhibition Executive Committee, 1950).

*Local History in Brampton* (Brampton Parochial Church Council, 1981).

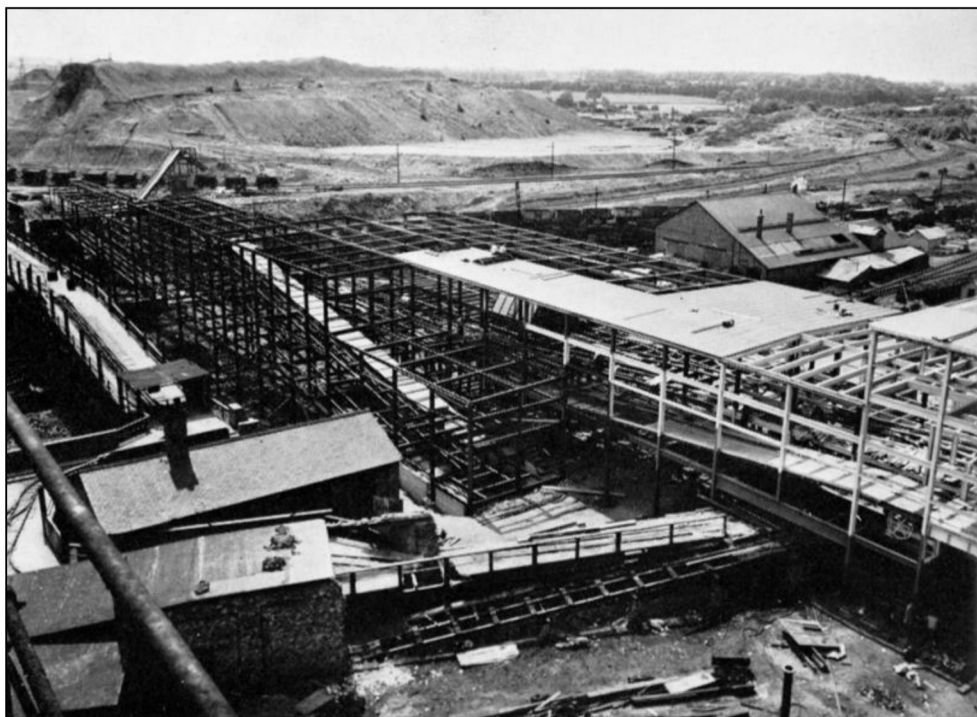
*London Gazette*, 2 July 1895, Issue 26639, p. 3765.

*London Gazette*, 26 March 1963, Issue 42953, p. 2769.

For some further information on the Plowright brothers see also a thread on the 'Chesterfield Forum' at URL: <http://www.chesterfieldforum.net/threads/walton-pottery-updated.4867/#post-49754>



Taken from an early 1960s book *The Plowright Story* is this photograph of the company's 'new design and administrative offices opened May 1959'. This later became Kenning's headquarters on Old Road, Brampton.



LEFT: Also featured in the same publication was this 'aerial view of Plowright surface re-organisation at Brodsworth Colliery'. Other photographs included a fabricated pressure vessel, surface handling plant at a South African drift mine, 'squeezer type rail brakes for retarding railway wagons', a fabricated lattice girder, a 10 and a 100 ton storage bunker and a 'complete colliery headgear installation'

Following the article on Sir George Kenning in the last edition, Darrell Clark adds that the motor group's offices/ HQ for the whole group were originally built for Plowright Bros., a heavy engineering company producing castings for mining head gear and all the bits and pieces which go with it.

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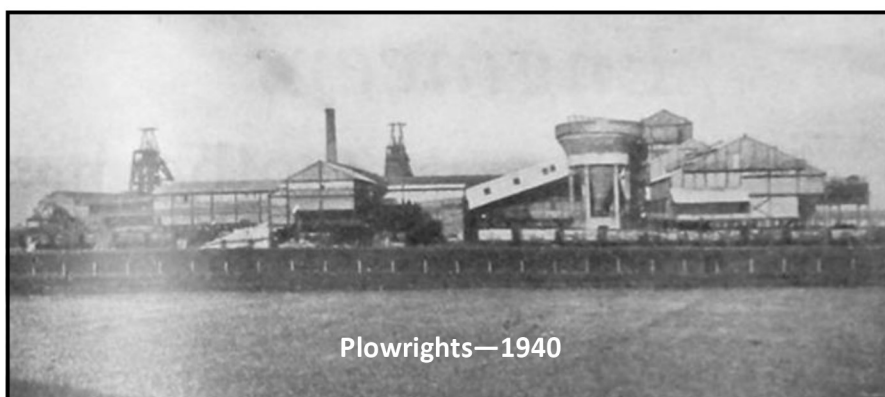
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Telegrams: "Plowright, Photo, Chesterfield."      Nat. Telephone: No. 2186, Chesterfield.

*Representatives:*  
W. OATES,  
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Darrell goes on to add, that as far as he can remember, Plowrights never occupied those brand new offices on Old Road, because just at the time their main customer, the NCB, was in massive decline so Plowrights went into liquidation.. The office block and factory building was bought by Kennings around 1961/1962.

Sir George's early beginnings included the distribution of oils particularly paraffin which he sold from a travelling horse and cart – hence Kennings eventual large involvement in fuel and oil distribution.



## IA News and Notes

### Industrial Heritage Day EMIAC 90

The Railway and Canal Historical Society are organising the next Industrial Heritage Day/ EMIAC 90 which will be held on Saturday 14 May 2016 at The National Forest Waterside Visitors' Centre Bath Lane, Moira, DE12 6BA.

The subject is to be the Ashby Canal which was built between 1794 and 1804 to serve the eastern basin of the Leicestershire and Derbyshire coalfield. Originally 31 miles long, running from Ashby Wolds to the Coventry Canal at Marston Junction, it continued to serve this purpose until the 1960s, despite being taken over by the Midland Railway Company in 1845. The canal suffered decline and gradual partial closure in the 20th century but the section from

