Technical terms used in the brass mills in the Saltford and Keynsham area

JOAN DAY

A brass mill was started by Abraham Darby at Baptist Mills, Bristol, in 1702. When he left the area for Coalbrookdale a few years later, the company continued under the leadership of its remaining Quaker partners, and developed rapidly over the next 50 years. Several new mills were established along the River Avon and its tributaries between Bath and Bristol; Keynsham, the most suitable site, became the headquarters of the company. Other new firms were also established in this area, which was at this time regarded as the technical centre of the industry, but by the end of the century the initiative had passed to other regions with the coming of steam power and other developments. During the 19th century the local brass industry declined rapidly and most of the mills were closed, until by 1900 only Saltford and Keynsham remained, still using water as their main source of power. Saltford battery mill closed in 1908, the last brass battery in the country, but the rolling mills there remained, as did the wire and rolling mills at Keynsham, to be revived a little by the 1914-18 war effort. Saltford finally closed in 1924, to be followed just three years later by the old headquarters of the firm at Keynsham.

These local terms have been taken from tape-recorded interviews with three of the last very elderly and rather infirm old men, who remember their work in these mills. The author would be glad to hear of any similarities or differences of such terms used in comparable industries from other parts of the country.

The Annealing Process

Nealing  
A fire  
Buckle or buck hole  
Bosh  
Kiln  
Rolling Process

Slab  
Slips  
Shab  
Stranded or studded  
Pritchel  
Curls  
Battery Work

Helve  
Stell or stulsh  
Buck or Hurek

Naps  
Ferrers  
Wire Drawing

Strings  
Rumpling  
Wortle plate  
Jacobite  
Rumple pritchel  
Other Processes

Pickling  
Stamps

Lemmel (?) or lemmey (?)  
Lemmel (?) or lemmey (?)

Round shapes of brass cut on shears in preparation for hammering into shapes of pans.
Outer pan of three, placed one inside the other, whilst being shaped up by battery hammers.
Narrow brass strip prepared for wire drawing.
First stage in wire drawing.
Die or plate through which wire was drawn.
Pincers which drew wire through wortle plate.
Tool for reaming out holes in wortle plate to correct size.

Immersion of brass in 'vitrail and water', to give hard bright finish.
Crushing process for furnace ashes and other waste to extract usable metal for remelting.

Iron pot into which waste wire was hammered for remelting.

A Compass Bowl
A Guinea Kettle
A Lisbon Pan
Shuff (men's version today) Waste brass, filings, off-cuts etc., used for remelting

Shruff Same as above. This version taken from 1862 sales catalogue of Keynsham and Saltford premises. Hamilton's 'English Brass & Copper Industries to 1800', p. 340, quotes Houghton's method of making brass in 1697, in which '1/2 shruff or old plate brass', is used.

Water Wheels These provided the main source of power for mills; they were undershot, and from 15 to 18 ft diameter. Eight were in use at Keynsham until 1927, and five at Saltford, although only three were used latterly.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Floats</th>
<th>Starts</th>
<th>Stays</th>
<th>Rings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paddles</td>
<td>Wooden slats which paddles were fitted on</td>
<td>Metal rods between each float</td>
<td>The two circular frames of each wheel without floats, starts or stays</td>
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