

# Stocksbridge Steel

By Roy Mallinson

In 1842, Samuel Fox, a Derbyshire man, had established a wire drawing plant in an old water mill close to John Stock's bridge on the Little Don River, nine miles North West of Sheffield. The output was mainly hackle and gill pins for the textile industry. Later the works became famous for the production of umbrella frames and crinoline steels, Fox's Paragon umbrella frames, patented in 1852, became the basic model for all modern folding umbrella designs. These products were being sold internationally, by 1856, sales offices had been established in New York and Boulogne (France).

In 1862 Stocksbridge became one of the first producers of steel using the Bessemer process, and were soon supplying engineering steels to railways worldwide. The company even promoted a private line, The Stocksbridge Railway Co. to speed its links with the outside world. The increase in production created a greater need for labour and this caused the town of Stocksbridge to grow in response.

Production of rails, tyres, axles and springs for railway companies remained as important products until well into the twentieth century, in 1899 Open Hearth steelmaking was adopted to complement the Bessemer process. The light products were another important outlet, especially as the umbrella department was the only large scale employer of female labour within the area. Rationalisation of output took place in the 1920's and 30's as the works began electric melting processes and producing 'SILVER FOX' brand stainless steels in addition to the alloy steels already being made. The 1950's saw notable achievements being made, a newly commissioned 60 ton electric arc furnace proved to be Europe's largest at the time of commission, the even greater expansion in the 1960's increased electric steel making capacity to a degree that meant that open hearth steelmaking was phased out.

1967 saw nationalisation arrive and the name of S. Fox & Co. was lost and the works became part of the British Steel Corporation. This brought about further rationalisation and some activities were moved to other parts of BSC. The Spring works and Wiredrawing activities became known under other

names, the stainless sheet and narrow strip processing became part of the British steels stainless division.

In 1986 Stocksbridge Works became part of the United Engineering Steels Ltd, this merger created Europe's leading specialist producer of engineering steels and forging, with production facilities in South Yorkshire Lincolnshire, the West Midlands and Scotland. Further to the merger Stocksbridge became Sheffield's largest steelworks capable of producing 500,000 tonnes/year produced to customer requirements, mainly from recycled scrap raw materials, the purpose designed Remelt Steels Department can produce steels of the highest quality for aerospace and defence industries.

In 1999 the merger of British Steel and the Dutch company Hoogovens brought about an international company, Corus. This brought about further rationalisation with steel melting and other parts of Stocksbridge industries being moved to Rotherham. Whether this will prove successful is open to conjecture as already parts of the works have been reopened to fulfil outstanding orders. Now in 2007 Corus has been bought by the Indian company TA TA. And it is said that a supermarket and shops will fill the Low Yard, it does not look too promising for British Industry.