

Fig. 1: Ground floor interior

Chiswick Municipal Stables

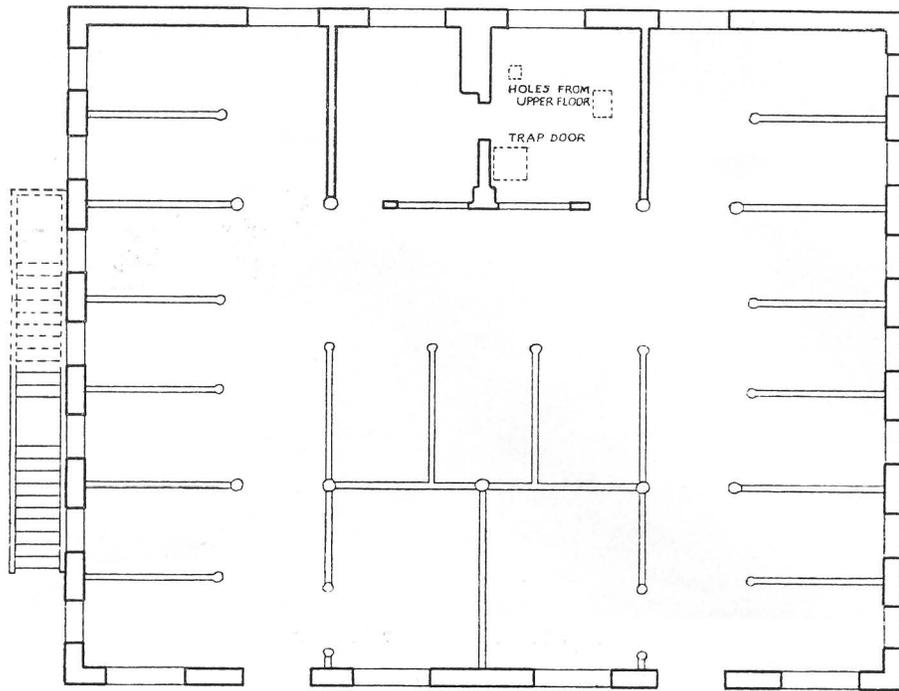
GEOFFREY BOWLES

EARLY LAST YEAR Ann Balfour Paul, curator of Gunnersbury Park Museum, told the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society of the planned conversion of the stable block at Hounslow Engineer and Surveyor's works depot, Corney Road W4. The stables were subsequently visited on various occasions by David Thomas, John Blackwell and myself and found in a good state of preservation, with many of the original fixtures and fittings remaining. It is understood that plans for conversion have now been deferred.

The stable block was built in 1910 to accommodate horses used by Chiswick U.D.C. for carting refuse. It is a substantial two-storey brick building under a slate roof; floors are concrete and the upper storey rests on cast iron pillars. The horses were kept tethered in stalls on the ground floor, while fodder was stored and processed above. Lighting was by electricity from the Chiswick Electrical Supply Corporation; the original fittings have been removed. The layout of the ground floor is shown in Fig.2. There are seventeen stalls, roughly nine feet by six, and two loose boxes of twice that size, probably used for veterinary pro-

cedures and, until 1913 when a small additional stable was built for the purpose, for isolating sick horses. The ground floor also contains two inter-connecting rooms. One of these, distinguished by a timber floor and a fireplace, was provided for the stable attendant; the other was a store room into which fodder and bedding straw was dropped from the upper storey. On the partition wall which divides the store room from the stall area are a number of large tack hooks. The walls of the stables are faced with salt glazed brick on the inside up to a height of about seven feet, and whitewashed above this level. The floor is in concrete granolithic paving, giving the effect of bevel-edge tiles, while within the stalls the surface is crossed by oblique channels which empty into drainage gullies.

According to Council records, the stall divisions (Fig. 1) were bought at auction in 1909, and the stables were apparently planned around them. They are constructed of teak tongued and grooved boards set in a curved cast iron frame and are provided with wide elm kick boards. The free end of each division is supported by a cast iron post



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FRONT ELEVATION



Fig. 2

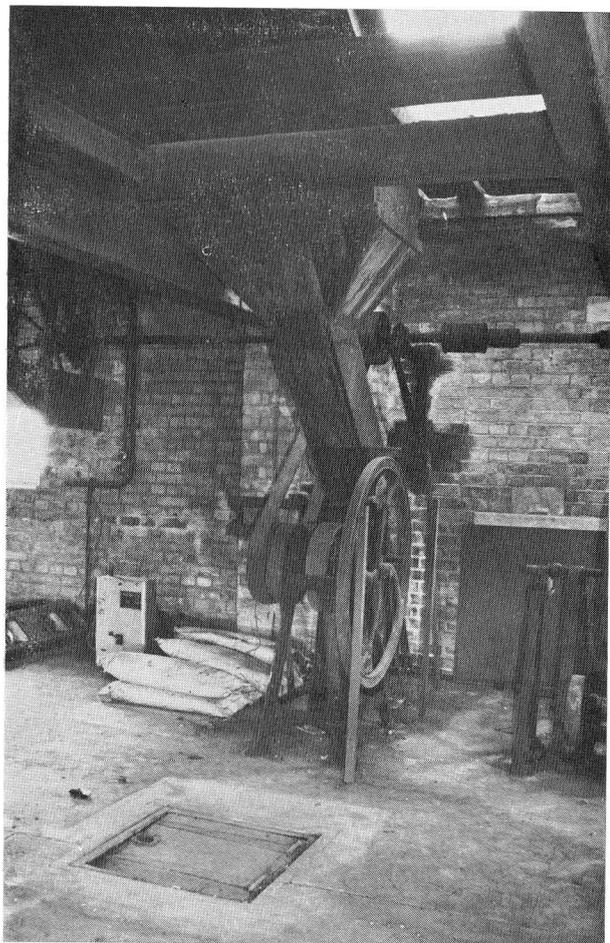


Fig. 3: Bentalls oat grinder

bearing the initials 'L.G.O.Co'. This identifies the stalls as surplus stock of the London General Omnibus Company, which was at this time gradually replacing its horse buses. Each stall contains a large iron hay rack, and in a few stalls mangers for oats and chaff remain, consisting of deep galvanized bowls fitting into a triangular framework fixed across one corner of the stall. The stalls have no permanent water supply. The construction of the loose boxes is broadly similar to that of the stalls. Here the cast iron posts, which bear no initials, take the form of double doorposts at the entrance to each box. The doors, which have been taken off their hinges, are massively built, with iron frames, teak panelling and closely spaced iron bars.

The upper floor, reached by an external flight of steps replacing wrought iron originals, is a storage area open to the roof timbers. About a quarter of this area is divided off by concrete

block and timber partitions, forming three rooms apparently used as workshops or offices; they may not be part of the original construction. Otherwise the upper floor was given over to the storage, handling and processing of fodder and bedding straw. Loading took place at double doors at the front by means of a long gantry suspended from the tie beams on rollers. A hand winch was used to wind the gantry in and out of the loading doors. No lifting equipment remains on the gantry, but a block and tackle found on the ground floor may have been attached to it for hoisting bundles of sacks and bales to the upper level. A trapdoor over the ground floor store room (Fig. 3, foreground) allowed straw for bedding to be dropped through as required. Oats and hay required more elaborate treatment, and the upper floor contains three machines for processing fodder; an oat grinder and two chaff cutters. The oat grinder (Fig. 3), placed against the back wall opposite the loading doors, was made by Bentall & Company of Maldon; it is a simple rotary machine for belt or hand drive, in which the grain was crushed between two smooth rollers. Council records mention the purchase of a 'small oat crusher' in 1909, and the machine was presumably moved to Corney Road from the previous municipal stables — since demolished — at the Fire Station on Chiswick High Road. An interesting feature of the grinder is the large timber hopper which has been added to it, allowing it to run longer unattended, but at the expense of raising the feed level so that the sacks had to be carried up a ladder (not in place in the photograph). The meal produced fell through a hole in floor into the store room below, probably by way of a chute which has since been removed.

Both chaff cutters could be hand or belt driven, and fed hay or straw on a continuous slatted conveyor through revolving blades geared to the conveyor's drive. The larger of the two, a 'Samuel Edwards Patent Duplex' (Fig. 4) fitted with a Bentalls dust extractor, stands beside the oat grinder over a hole in the floor so that the cut chaff fell directly into the store room, while dust removed by the belt-driven extractor fan passed out through a pipe in the wall. The Edwards machine is clearly a replacement for the other chaff cutter, a Bentalls machine bought in 1906, which has been moved to one side. The machinery was driven by belt from a shaft mounted on the back wall, turned, according to Council records, by an electric motor. A 20 volt DC motor now standing beside the retired Bentalls chaff cutter has obviously been used for this purpose.

The stables formed part of a small complex of buildings concerned with cartage and refuse dis-

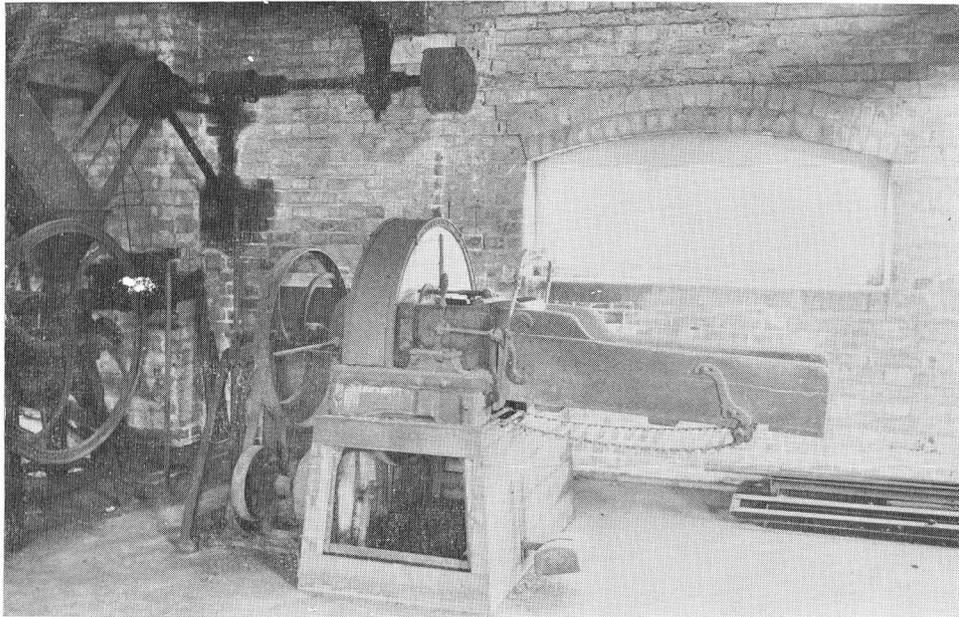


Fig. 4: Edwards chaff cutter

posal, built on an existing sewage pumping and treatment site. The only remaining building associated with the sewage works, which employed four steam engines and one diesel engines, is the superintendent's house (see Fig. 5). In 1908 a cart shed, housing dust vans, road sweeping and watering machines and the municipal steam roller, was added to the depot, probably at the site now adjoining the East wall of the stable block. The stables were, as we noted, built two years later. In 1911 a farrier's shop was added to an existing smithy and in 1913 an isolation stable was erected; the sites of these buildings cannot now be identified. Cartage functions became concentrated at the depot largely because of its easy access to the river, where a wharf had been built for unloading coal and building materials. When, in 1899, the Council lacked a convenient rubbish tip they employed contractors to barge refuse away. Three years later the practice was discontinued, partly for health reasons, and a dust destructor was built at Corney Road, which combined refuse and sewage functions by incinerating the refuse along with chemically treated sewage sludge. During the 1900s, therefore, refuse disposal was increasingly being concentrated at the depot and the advantages of stabling the horses on the site were obvious. The depot was the final destination of the refuse, the carts were already being kept there and fodder could be unloaded direct from the wharf. Moreover the old stables on the High Road were inadequate and had been supplemented by renting

from the George IV pub next door. The new stables, therefore, paid their way despite the need to service a large loan from the Local Government Board.

The stables clearly made financial sense, but the wider confidence in the future of horse traction they represented had a less obvious basis. In fact the decision to continue with horses represented neither ignorance nor conservatism, but sobering previous experience of the limitations of contemporary mechanical alternatives. In 1897, three years after its formation, Chiswick U.D.C. took

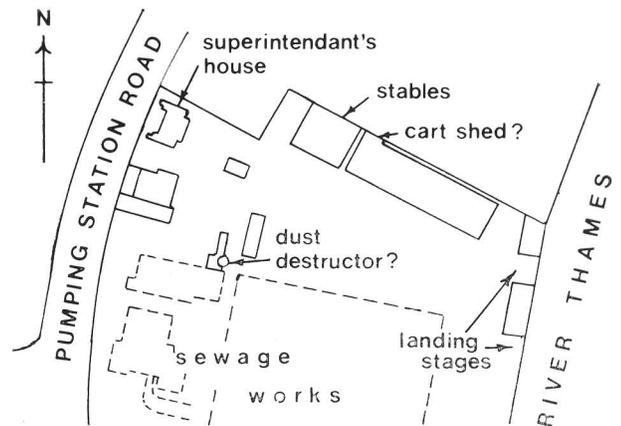


Fig. 5: Sketch plan of the depot in 1915 (from Ordnance Survey)

over refuse collection and disposal from contractors, when the district surveyor, Arthur Ramsden, obtained the Duke of Devonshire's permission to tip refuse on part of his estate. Ramsden was an advocate of steam power, and on his advice two steam wagons each of three tons capacity were ordered from the local firm of J. I. Thorneycroft, which had made its name in the field a year before by constructing a steam powered commercial van. For various reasons the experiment, witnessed with interest by delegations from other local authorities, was not a success. The wagons proved costly to maintain and while fairly efficient for bulk tipping were less suitable for feeding barges or, from 1902, the dust destructor, and in that year the steam wagons were sold at a large loss. It seemed that the mechanical alternatives had been tried and found wanting, and horse traction was adopted with some relief.

By 1914, as the vehicles available became cheaper and more reliable, the question of horse versus mechanical traction had been reopened, and an ad hoc committee recommended the purchase of two steam and two motor lorries. The first of these was delivered the following year and from this time a combination of horse and mechanical traction was used. By the early 1920s the number of horses had declined from its peak of around twenty to thirteen, and a garage for motor vehicles had been built at Corney Road; a Fordson tractor, among other vehicles, was in use. The Coun-

cil's horses occupied only part of the stables; an adjoining firm, the Lep Transport and Depository, rented the remainder, at first for horses and later for storage purposes. During the 1920s and early 1930s the use of horses for carting refuse in Chiswick gradually declined, as low-loaders suitable for either form of traction replaced the worn out horse vans. By the mid 1930s the dust destructor required replacement, and the system of refuse disposal for the combined boroughs of Brentford and Chiswick was rationalized, all refuse being taken to a new destructor on Brentford town meadow. Though a small number of horses seems to have been retained beyond this date, the re-organization effectively brought the primary use of the stables to an end.

Acknowledgements

Photographs are by David Thomas, and the plan and elevation are based on working drawings provided by Hounslow Engineer and Surveyor's Department, who also gave permission to visit the site. I should like to thank Ann Balfour Paul, John Blackwell and staff at Corney Road depot and at Chiswick Library. A copy of this report, with additional photographs and drawings, has been deposited at Gunnersbury Park Museum.

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Excavation Round-up (continued from page 166)

Removal of the house floor after dismantling revealed a medieval wall. Examination of an adjacent area after machine removal of overburden located a line of 14th century, partly-glazed, oxidised drain pipes leading downhill from the High Street. About 25 complete pipes were recovered. The line ended with a perforated lead cover. This is thought to be the first pipe line from a medieval town.

The Old Vicarage, Church Street, Reigate. TQ 257 503. (David W. Williams). Work on this site was completed in late 1980. A glass jar found in 1979 has been indentified as Anglo-Saxon, 7th century. This is the first Saxon evidence from the town and it is now likely that the skeleton found in late 1980 beneath the 'Cherchefelle' deposits is of similar date. A Saxon cemetery now seems certain. It is intended further to examine the site of the

jar's discovery for a connected burial.

Stanwell

Surrey County Archaeological Unit. (M. O'Connell). Excavation continued on the multi period crop mark site which is under a long term threat of gravel extraction. The most significant discovery was that the two large paralld ditches that appear on aerial photographs of the site did not mark the line of Roman road as originally supposed but in fact belonged to a much earlier feature, that is a Neolithic cursus. One of the ditches of this feature was investigated and produced a few sherds of late Neolithic pottery from the ultimate fill. It was cut by a massive late Bronze Age pit which contained domestic refuse and quantities of well preserved wood. The function of this feature is still uncertain but it may have served as some form of well. Other features investigated included part of a trackway associated with a prehistoric field system, a pagan Saxon pit and gully, part of a medieval droveway and a number of post-medieval postholes and pits.