

Lost Industries of Southwark

Proposal

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Introduction

Southwark once was a major centre of Industry – it hosted large scale Industries associated with the Sea, shipbuilding and transport. It was also the home to many processing industries including the Europe's largest Leather Industry and Rope Making workshops. Southwark was home to many household brand names such as Jacobs Cream Crackers, Courage Beer, Sarsens Vinegar and Peak Frean Biscuits.

They are now virtually all gone – either bankrupt or subsumed into International Conglomerates. Areas of Southwark are still suffering from the closure of these factories and workshops, even parts of the otherwise glamorous Riverfront still seem like a post-industrial waste land (Butlers Wharf – Rotherhithe for example). Other parts of Southwark have been 'rescued' by the introduction of new industries and commerce – particularly the extension of the City into Southwark and the advent of the cultural industries in Bankside.

These changes are vitally important not only to commemorate but also to learn lessons from. The project aims to create an educational resource for Southwark that will ensure that the Lost Industries of Southwark are not forgotten; that the workers who lost their jobs are remembered and that lessons are learnt so that the effects of industrial change can be more successfully ameliorated in future.

There are three main target groups for the project. The first are the school children - an educational resource will be set up to allow pupils to learn about the lost industries. Issues it will cover include: the Industrial Change; consequences of unemployment; society's role in helping reduce the impact on communities; and the need for people to learn new skills to keep up their job prospects. The second target is the older people in the area who were once part of those industries whose memories will be used to bring the project to life – this will include of course both existing communities and immigrant communities. The third target will be new arrivals into Southwark so they can learn how the area has changed, the impact that change has made and so they can hopefully feel proud of the continued strengths of the area.

The outputs from the project will be:

1. Educational Resources to be distributed free to local schools.
2. A walk marked with plaques marking the sites of the lost
3. A series of events, a conference, lectures and walks

The resources will be made available both in hard copy and on a web site so that the longevity of the project is not restricted to the life of a particular print run.

The Project

The genesis of the project came from a feasibility study undertaken by the author and Paul Herbert to investigate the production of a sign-posted walk between Tower Bridge and Rotherhithe. One of the aims of the walk was to 'bridge' the decayed area between Butler's Wharf and Rotherhithe Village. A visit to the Local Studies Library and examination of street names, old maps and records indicated what a vast number of industries have been lost in Southwark. Many of them, such as Sarsens, Jacobs, Peak Preans, Courage etc. are or were household names. As well as this the area hosted a huge rope making factory, many tanneries, ship building, and the many industries associated with the world's biggest port (as it was in the 19th Century). In addition, in the 16th Century Southwark also had a world famous glass making factory, published Miles Coverdale's famous bible in English and had a sculpture industry that, for example, probably produced the famous statue of Shakespeare in the Holy Trinity Church at Stratford on Avon.

The methodology of the project has been borrowed from a project in Berlin to commemorate the old Jewish Ghetto. In Berlin they decided that instead of having large information panels marking the site of various horrendous and heart reading stories of the destruction of the ghetto they would mark sites with a simple and small enamel graphic panel. Each panel had a simple image on it. Local bookshops and museums sold or gave away a leaflet with map and explanation of the story behind each panel. The effect was very moving.

If the "Lost Industries" Project can attract the support of the Museums in the area we can create perhaps the world's first distributed Exhibition in which the Museum is taken outside of the building and is returned to the streets.

Project Aims

Awareness of Industry – Past, Present and Future. One aim of the project is to make people aware of the incredible industrial heritage in Southwark and to ask questions about the loss of that industry. Has the presence of the Lost Industries had any influence on Southwark today? Could the authorities have done anything to keep Southwark as an industrial centre? Do we need to worry about 'Lost' Industries when new industries have taken their place? Was the decline of the old Industries necessary for the renaissance of the new industries? Could better planning have reduced the period of decline? These questions and more will be raised in the lectures, walks and conferences that will accompany the project.

People's Stories. Many of the local people remember the lost industries either as workers, or as consumers. The project will therefore include a strong element of oral history to record local memories of working in the Lost Industries or moving into the area in what now seems like a by-gone era.

Unemployment and Social Inclusion - The focus on unemployment, its impact and its consequences with the local focus of the project will enable teachers to bring these issues up in class in a natural and sympathetic manner. It will hopefully create a group of children aware of the problems of unemployment sympathetic to those who suffer it and aware enough to realise the value of education, the need for community solidarity and the responsibility of government to coordinate policies to counter the corroding influences on society.

Bringing Southwark together – the project will be invaluable in bringing organisations together in Southwark – working together on a joint project. It will encourage movement between museums,

from Bankside to less fortunate locations. It will bring people into the derelict area to the east of Butlers Wharf. It will reconnect people with their pasts and hopefully reconcile them to the exciting future.

Details of the Project

The Panels and the area to be covered

The site of major industries in Southwark is to be marked with an iconographic enamel panel designed by a local artist. There will be no writing on the panel except perhaps for a single word describing the industry such as 'Rope-making' and at the bottom the web page for the project:

www.lostindustry.org.uk

The suggested area to cover is from Bankside to the Pool of London, Bermondsey, and Butlers Wharf to the eastern end of Rotherhithe Street and inland from London Bridge to Elephant and Castle. A free leaflet is to be produced to give details about the lost industries with a map marking the plaques.

The Teacher's Resources

The resources will include a booklet of background information for the teacher and worksheets and information sheets to cover major areas of the National Curriculum.

The Web Site

The information in the teacher's resources will also be on the web site – which will be designed so attractive and practical printouts can be created easily from the web site.

Special Events Programme

Other organisations will be asked to cooperate in creating a special events programme. Some of the links between present day Southwark and its lost industries are outlined below to give an idea of the special events that might accompany the project.

Views of Lost Industries – Bankside Gallery

The Church Industries – Southwark Cathedral (stained glass, bible publishing, memorial sculpture)

Vinopolis – the Southwark Brewing Industries

Clink – the Lost Red Light and Prison District?

Borough Market – the Food Industries

Bramah Museum – Tea and Coffee importing

Old Operating Theatre Museum – the medical industries of St Thomas St.

Hays Gallerie – Import/Export

HMS Belfast – ship-building in Southwark

Butler's Wharf – the Spice Trade and the Lost Artist's colony

Design Museum – Designed in Southwark

St Mary's Church Rotherhithe – Dockland Communities

Brunel Engine House – Engineering on the Thames

Rotherhithe Educational Museum – Surrey Docks
Writer's Factory – Globe

The centre-piece of the Events programme would be a one-day conference, which looks at both past industries and future industries. Leading members of the new industries in Southwark would be paired with a speaker looking at an appropriate lost industry. The synergies are exciting: Financial Times/printing of the first Bible in English, Tate Modern/Tudor Southwark Sculpture workshop, a modern architect/Brunel's Tunnel, Art buyer/Glass making industry, Organic Food Stall holder/Refrigeration in Hays Gallerie. Other events such as guided walks, and lectures would be tied into the programme.