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WASC 1803

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North London's munitions factory that just suddenly vanished

Edmonton Hundred Historical Society will hold a special one-day conference on November 7, which will be open to the public, to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of the First World War. The subject of the conference will be the role of Enfield in that war.

The area had what was probably the largest military hospital in the United Kingdom in Edmonton, a great manufactory of small arms at Enfield Lock, and an enormous factory for the production of shells at Ponders End. Of this latter, little has yet been written.

It was on December 22 1914 that the Rees Rototurbo entered into a contract with the War Office for the production of eight-inch and six-inch shells.

The Government paid £80,000, eighty per cent of the capital expenditure, and further advanced £137,000 to the firm as working capital.

Rees Rototurbo, before the Great War, was making electric dynamos and motors, centrifugal pumps and other highly specialised engineering products under various patents.

From August 1914, the firm devoted all its

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resources to war work.

Mr. H.S.B. Brindley was the London manager and he alone had detailed knowledge of shell manufacture. Early in 1915, the firm procured a works at Ponders End where mantle-pieces had formerly been made.

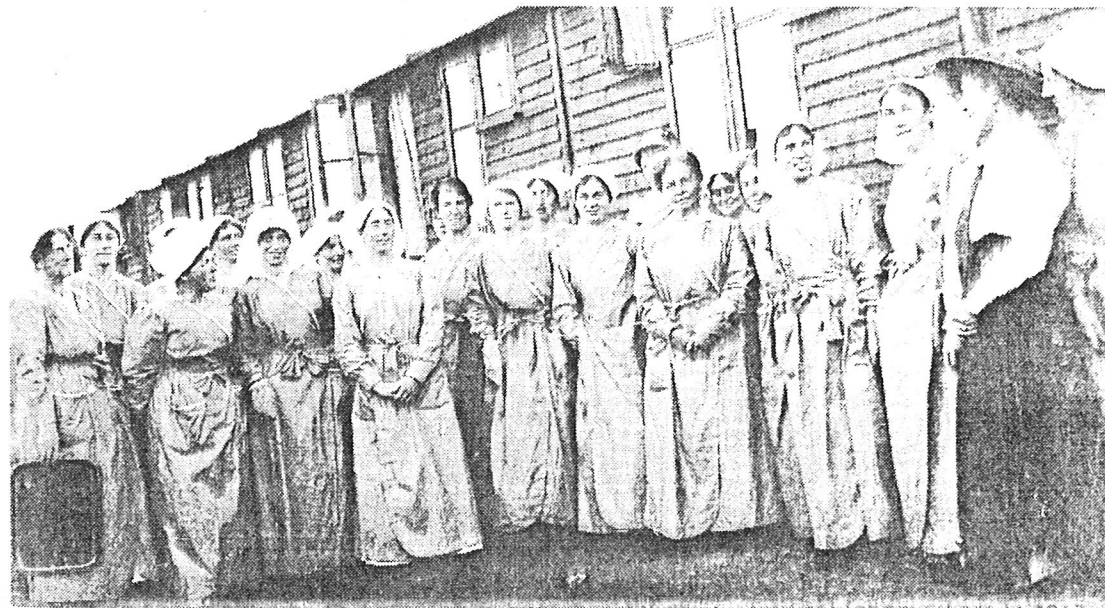
On this site was set up the Ponders End shell works. Ample land existed for expansion. Brindley was placed in charge and the production of shells expanded so rapidly that by June 1916 114,827 eight-inch shells had been delivered to the forces.

During the first year of production, a serious dispute arose between

Brindley and his directors. The company at Wolverhampton was drawing so much money from the Ponders End account to cover its own losses that shell production was nearly crippled.

At this same time, Brindley faced trouble with his work-force. In June 1915, the night shift held a meeting outside the factory and refused to start work. It was a dispute over piece-work rates. The men at length agreed to go in but at 8 o'clock, 60 of them walked out.

The rising cost of food was leading to wage demands throughout the district. Even the



Women and girls working at the factory with one of the voluntary canteen workers in 1915.

labourers working on the council roads threatened to strike and secured a pay rise from 7½d to 8d an hour. A settlement at the shell works was speedily agreed.

Lloyd George visited Ponders End in February 1916 to see the new dining-room recently opened there. Six-inch, eight-inch and heavy howitzer shells were then in production.

Mr. Brindley continued to quarrel with or ignore his management. His

contract with the company provided for no fixed remuneration. He was broadly entitled to 25 per cent of the net profit, which was very large indeed. So large was it that in September 1916 all the profits made at the Ponders End works were impounded by the Government.

The works were greatly extended in April 1917. The contracts were altered, and Government machinery was installed for re-lining and making

guns.

The War Office now determined to take over the factory. The company was offered £150,000, which would appear to have been generous since the Government had largely funded the original costs. Nevertheless, the company asked for £200,000.

The factory was finally taken over by the Ministry of Munitions in September 1918. It closed down at the end of the war and many of the

buildings were demolished in 1920.

I would like to hear from anyone who knows anything about this important factory. It grew suddenly from nothing and became one of the largest munitions works in the country. It then disappeared and seems to have been forgotten locally. I would also be interested in any other factory doing war work during the 1914 to 1918 war.