

## Lecture Reports

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*A Poor Place for the Industrial Population: Oxford's Victorian and Edwardian industrial buildings.*

Liz Woolley

To those of us brought up on a diet of 'dreaming spires' this well-organised account of industrial development in Oxford was a revelation. For a city that largely missed out on the Industrial Revolution, Oxford in Victorian and Edwardian times had a remarkable range of linked activity even if the impact was less dramatic than in places like south Huddersfield with its massed ranks of textile mills.

Liz Woolley began by looking at the rise of public utilities, namely gas, electricity and water. Her first example was the complex site occupied by St Ebbes Gasworks and served by a spur from the Great Western Railway. Its presence spanned the years 1918 to 1960 and today observers are faced with housing and a nature reserve.

Equally significant was electricity generation at Osney though the only legacy is a lamp bracket where Cornmarket meets St Michaels Street.

Early Victorian inhabitants had a great dependence on wells for water but this led to outbreaks of cholera until a waterworks at Folly Bridge was established.

Brewing was a dominant industry in Oxford. By 1874 there were nine breweries. One of these, Morrells in the St Thomas district, was a major employer whose workforce included women who worked in the bottling department. Our speaker used brewing as a good example of an industry whose buildings' distinctive character owed much to specific architects such as H.G. Drinkwater.

Lucy's Eagle Ironworks in Jericho had a prominent place in the analysis of industrial sites. Starting in 1812 they were involved in the likes of lamp posts and shelving but today are recalled mainly through the street William Lucy Way, gates with eagles and a clock. An interesting link with the central shopping district was provided by Hughes' (later Pigotts') sausage factory. Despite an unfortunate smell the premises played a part in supplying the renowned covered market. Familiar names such as Coopers Marmalade, Salters Steamers and Morris Garages provided further examples of industrial diversity. The Longwall site of the last named was a prelude to the Cowley works.

Industrial development along with associated shops and housing for workers meant that even if Oxford avoided the clustering effect it did not escape the pollution, sweat shops conditions and wage struggles. Clearly the city of dreaming spires also had a skyline of chimneys and memorable industrial buildings. How right Liz Woolley was when she observed that Oxford deserves better recognition for its Victorian and Edwardian legacy.