

JOHN HILL

Iron:Man

The sculpture in Victoria Square was originally named Untitled but gained the nickname Iron Man, which is a track from 'Paranoid', an album by heavy metal band Black Sabbath. The sculptor Anthony Gormley, requested that the name be changed to Iron:Man, now the official title for it. A gift to the City of Birmingham from the Trustee Savings Bank, where in 1993 it was erected outside their (at the time) headquarters. The statue was removed in 2017 to make way for extensions to the city's tram network and returned to a nearby site after five years absence. Cast in Willenhall, it is 6 metres tall, weighing 6 metric tons and commemorates the skills of the Industrial Revolution.¹

Matthew Boulton set up a manufacturing business in Nineveh Road Soho, Handsworth in 1775 with partner James Watt - producing silverware, buckles, buttons and medals. Watermill power soon proved to be inadequate and unreliable. After many years of endeavour Watt developed a static steam engine with 75% improved efficiency. The patents allowed them to build Soho Foundry, a dedicated works at Foundry Lane, Soho. William Murdoch was employed to oversee the assembly of these engines, mainly in Cornish copper and tin mines. This kept Murdock busy whilst also developing gas lighting for the purpose of extending the working hours of factories.²

John 'Iron Mad' Wilkinson invented a machine for the manufacture of cast iron cannons, which he adapted to the process of boring accurate cylinders for James Watt's steam engines. Wilkinson erected an empire of blast furnaces*, including one at Bradley Works in Bilston near Wolverhampton - beginnings of the Black Country. He became extremely wealthy, making everything in iron, including bridges, window frames, the first iron-hulled boat, a church pulpit, even iron coffins.³

SS Great Eastern launched in 1858: Brunel's final and largest ocean-going monster, was six times larger by volume than any other ship of its time. It had five steam engines, each with its own funnel, driving two paddle-wheels that were 58 feet across. And a four-bladed screw propeller at 24 feet across that was manufactured at Soho Foundry.⁴

* An innovation linking engine power with metal bellows to achieve the high temperatures required for casting.

RMS Titanic had five anchors. The largest, weighing 15.5 tons was cast at Hingley & Sons Ltd, Netherton in 1911, intended for emergency only but was never used. Chains and fittings weighed around 100 tons. A replica anchor (built in Sheffield in 2010) was displayed at Black Country Living Museum before being moved to Netherton - a couple of miles away.⁵

After the success of the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games the mechanical bull, has a new home (Grand Central, Birmingham) and a new name (Ozzy).

References

- (1) Wikipedia - Iron:Man
- (2) Soho Foundry by W. K. V. Gale, F. R. Hist.S. - W. & T. Avery Ltd
- (3) John Wilkinson, King of the Ironmasters by Frank Dawson - The History Press
- (4) Fred Dibnah's Age of Steam by Fred Dibnah and David Hall - BBC Books
- (5) Wikipedia - N. Hingley & Sons Ltd

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