



ENGLISH HERITAGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

JW Evans Silver Factory Birmingham January - April 2011

Introduction

“The Evans works offers complete immersion in a lost industrial world, represented by the buildings, machinery, stock, and archives of the business, and by the last owner of the business, the grandson of the founder. Here, in the physical remains, lies the evidence of three generations of the Evans family and the people that worked for them: lives of enterprise and hard work from 1881 to 2008”.

English Heritage purchased the grade II* listed buildings and their contents because the entity is of exceptional significance as an exemplar of the conversion from domestic to industrial use which characterised the development of the small-scale metal working trades industries both locally and nationally.

Vision

“The Evans works should be more than just another museum in the Jewellery Quarter. To retain its significances it needs to remain active, carefully looked after to provide the experience of an historic workplace.

The site should reflect its past as a part of the interwoven network of trades and skills that make the Jewellery Quarter so distinctive. There is great value to be gained from an exemplary development of the Evans works for the regeneration of the Jewellery Quarter. The site holds the evidence of the networks which were such a key part of the way in which the Jewellery Quarter functioned. The comprehensive nature of the evidence that exists here for a business such as J W Evans & Sons is rare. It is, as yet, only partially understood, so there is a commitment to researching the place in all its components in order to provide a deeper understanding”.

Abstract from JW Evans Conservation Philosophy - English Heritage



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Delivery

Ian Clark Restoration was awarded by competitive tender the contract to supply specialist engineering and metals conservation consultancy specifically tasked to work in partnership with English Heritage and the project stakeholders to deliver a bold and intellectually challenging conservation philosophy for the JW Evans Silver Factory project.

ICR was contracted to carry out an extensive machinery audit and condition survey and to propose a pragmatic and sensitive conservation method statement. This statement had to be able to satisfy the core preservation mission statement which positively embraced both a policy for conserved static machinery as well as one that was able to be refined to promote live operation as an integral strand of any future interpretive enhancement.

Although the overarching policy statement had clarity and direction ICR needed to provide clear conservation guidelines that had at their core an explicit appreciation of the unique historical and contextual significance of the site and machinery.

A very important and complex strand within the consultancy entrusted to ICR was a comprehensive health and safety audit of all the static and working machinery. The Evans site is an extremely challenging public theatre which demanded sensitive and unobtrusive safety recommendations and hard solutions. ICR worked closely with EH to mitigate an acceptable level of risk to sustain public access.

As part of the phase 2 works package ICR was also selected to carry out the practical conservation of the historic machinery. Consistent with the EH Evans policy these works where applicable had to be implemented with minimal intervention to the surrounding micro environment with all existing and original physical interrelationships recorded and mapped. This element was restrictive and demanding but ICR carried out this task with professionalism and clarity.



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Conclusions

ICR became a very supportive and collaborative partner within the project and helped to deliver very complex and challenging preservation solutions on time and budget. Advocating and implementing a clear conservation strategy for the built environment is demanding and sometimes fraught with unquantifiable elements but when an architectural regeneration project is inextricably forged together with in house historic machinery then a deeper and more focused understanding of how the building synergises with the machinery is essential.

This project was bold in its aspiration and delivery but by engaging with a specialist conservation engineering company the complex decisions surrounding the conservation, preservation and indeed the interpretation of the historic machinery were evaluated and resolved by promoting an informed and collaborative approach.

ICR worked closely with English Heritage to formulate a conservation policy that was pragmatic, sensitive and above all deliverable when evaluated against the intellectual, curatorial and fiscal parameters embedded within the project.



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