

MEN OF STEEL

Film ID: 99 **Year:** 1948

Men of Steel was commissioned by the CPAS (Church Pastoral Aid Society) in 1948, and made by Charles Chislett, a skilled amateur filmmaker from Rotherham. Chislett produced a considerable number of exceptionally well made films over a period spanning from 1930 to 1967. The Charles Chislett Film Collection held at the YFA consists of over 100 films, mostly directly relating to Yorkshire, but also including many holiday films from around the world. Chislett made many types of films: documentary, fiction, and family portraits. Although Chislett was not a professional filmmaker, he brought to his films a lot of thought, great passion and considerable expertise that he built up over the years. This film was made with the support of the Park Gate Iron and Steel Company (PGIS), and gets a mention in the CPAS journal, *Church and People*, February 1949.

Parkgate were clearly impressed with the results, as in 1950 they commissioned Chislett to make another film for them, with a final edit in 1951. This film, *The Story of Steel* – catalogued as 'Park Gate Iron and Steel' – costing £400, is much longer and more detailed. This was shown at the Sheffield City Memorial Hall in October 1951 with a commentary written by Chislett and D. Smith. In 1954 Parkgate asked Chislett to add another section of film, featuring the newly opened 11" Continuous Bar Mill, at a further cost of £250. This was filmed in 1955 and 1956, with final revisions by Sheffield Photo Company in 1957. The combined film is over 70 minutes in length, detailing all the processes to produce both an instructional and a promotional film. As late as 1966 the then Managing Director wrote to Chislett expressing his thanks for the films and informing him that over 15,000 people had viewed *The Story of Steel*.

Although similar, *Men of Steel* has a much different set of aims. As a Christian missionary society, the CPA – or CPAS (Church Pastoral Aid Society) – was clearly conscious that class differences may get in the way of its work. Chislett states in his notes on the film that the film has two objectives: "to illustrate the background against which much CPA work is accomplished, [and] to indicate that CPA workers have some knowledge of the kind of work in which many people to whom they speak are engaged; thereby establishing a bond of mutual understanding and respect." An indication of this is the greater focus on the workers, rather than the production process.

Chislett was a member of the CPA and he made many important films for them in the 1940s and 50s, highlighting the charity work they carried out for children from deprived areas and for the homeless, such as [New Lives for Old](#) (1949). This film, as well as films of his family, [Dale Days](#) (1940) and [Rachel Discovers the Sea](#) (1939), can also be viewed on YFA Online.

Park Gate Works started life back in 1823 at Rawmarsh as Sanderson and Watson of Sheffield. This got taken over by a Birmingham syndicate in 1832 who named the company Birmingham Tin Plate Works, and calling the works The Park Gate Ironworks. This eventually got sold to Charles Geech and Samuel Beale in 1842. From 1854 known as Samuel Beale and Company, this supplied many miles of rails for the newly built railways, and from 1856 was the only works in the country able to supply the Royal Navy with roll armour plate, and supplying this also for Brunel's ship the Great Eastern. It became a limited company in 1864, taking the name Park Gate Iron Company Ltd., and in 1888 the Park Gate Iron and Steel Company, when steel processing was finally introduced. Two modern furnaces were built in 1905 and another in 1918, supplying steel for the automobile industry; although sheet steel production came to an end in 1946 because of the costs of Government price controls. Thereafter it concentrated on steel bars. A new continuous bar mill was opened nearby at Roundwood in 1953, producing 65 tons per hour – hence the new film.

Nationalised in 1951, it was bought by Tube Investment Ltd. in 1956 after being de-nationalised by the Conservative Government. The second nationalisation by Wilson's Labour Government in 1967 brought the Park sites together with Steel, Peach and Tozer at Templeborough to become the Rotherham works of the British Steel Corporation. The original steelworks, off Broad Street, closed in the 1970s, with the blast furnaces being demolished in 1976. The sites at Roundwood and Aldwarke continued in production and were joined in 1973 by a new bar mill at Thrybergh.

In the mid 1980s a merger of BSC's engineering interest and GKN resulted in the creation of United Engineering Steels Ltd., with Templeborough a subsidiary of this. However, the final melt at Templeborough took place on 25th November 1993, resulting in the loss of 260 jobs. The works were converted into a science adventure centre, Magna, in 2001. The rolling mills were closed in 1998. The remainder of the Rotherham Engineering Works continued under British Steel control until 1999 when British steel merged with a Dutch company, Hoogovens, to form a new multinational steel group called Corus, valued at £3.9 billion. This has rationalised production considerably with the loss of thousands of jobs, the closure of the coiled bar mill at Roundwood led to the loss of 350 jobs, although so far (as of June 2009) Rotherham hasn't been as hard hit as other steel producing areas.

A background file held with the YFA includes complete production and lecture notes of the three films, and a 1950 edition of the Guide to Works together with correspondence with the Park Gate Iron and Steel Works Company.

References

BBC Radio Ballads, [Song of Steel](#) This has an archive of interviews with steelworkers, and other information on working in steel.

