

PROGRESS PARKGATE

Film ID: 404 **Year:** 1961-1965

Donated by Rotherham Archives, nothing is known of this film other than what is in the film itself. Here Wrigleys Film Production is credited as the makers of the film. Like many independent commercial film producers from that era, Wrigleys may well now be defunct, or have changed their name – there are no entries for this company in existing directories of film production companies. The YFA does have one other film that they made, the wedding of Rachel Chislett to Roy Williams in March 1961, where they are credited as 'Wrigleys Industrial Film Unit'. Coincidentally, perhaps, Rachel is the daughter of Charles Chislett, the maker of *Men of Steel*, the other film on The Park Gate Iron and Steel on YFA Online. To be filming this event suggests that Wrigleys were a local Rotherham based company, with possible connections with Charles Chislett.

Like this film, Charles Chislett's *Men of Steel*, made in 1948, was a promotional film for the company. It isn't clear why Park Gate Iron and Steel chose to look elsewhere in making *Progress Parkgate*. That they thought highly of the abilities of Charles Chislett is demonstrated by their commissioning him to make another promotional and instructional film for them, *The Story of Steel*, in 1956/57, also with YFA. 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*. Many will be aware that Park Gate Iron and Steel was filmed as long ago as 1901 by Mitchell & Kenyon. The Context for *Men of Steel* has more on Charles Chislett.

Yet despite the expertise of Chislett as a filmmaker, *Progress Parkgate* clearly marks a step up in professional filmmaking. This is evident not least in having the well-known broadcaster Richard Baker as narrator. At the time, in the 1960s, Richard Baker was reading the news for the BBC, having been the first person to read the *BBC Television News* in 1954. Like his fellow newsreaders Robert Dougall and Kenneth Kendall, Richard Baker would also narrate instructional, educational and promotional films. He narrates a similar film to this for Brooke Motors of Huddersfield, *Winding an Electric Motor* (1968), also with YFA. See also *The Road to Fashion* (1970) in which Kenneth Kendall provides the voiceover.

The Context for *Men of Steel* also provides a potted history of Park Gate Iron and Steel. Here it notes that when the steel industry was de-nationalised by the Conservative Government in 1956 it was taken over by Tube Investment Ltd. This film brings the story more up-to-date than the two previously mentioned. As Lord Plowden digs the first turf for a new plant in 1961, the narration states that he is the Chairman of Tube Investment, which he became in this year, having previously been Vice Chairman (the Independent puts the date for taking this position as 1963). Lord Plowden was later President of the IT Group, as it became, between 1976 and 1990.

Having been made a life peer in 1959, Lord Plowden was an extremely well-known figure in commercial and public life, and was to remain so through to the end of the 1980s. In fact his public activities greatly overshadowed his business ones, being an omnipresent figure right up to the end of the Thatcher years. He was a key figure in the post-war economic planning of the Labour Government, and had many governmental posts over the next several decades for both political parties. He is probably best known as chairing a number of important committees, beginning with a committee of inquiry into the Treasury's control of public expenditure in 1959. This was followed by reports on the Foreign Office in 1964, the British aircraft industry in 1965, primary education in 1967, and electricity boards in 1975.

He had also been chairman of the Atomic Energy Authority from 1954 to 1959, overseeing the opening of Britain's first nuclear power station at Calder Hall, Cumberland, in 1956. In this capacity he was also instrumental in covering up parts of the report into the fire at the nearby nuclear processing plant Windscale (subsequently Sellafield), the following year, releasing radioactive contamination into the surrounding area. His last public position was as Chairman of the Top Salaries Review Body between 1981 and 1989.

Around the time that this film was made Tube Investment was a rapidly expanding enterprise. It had acquired British Aluminium in 1958-9, Raleigh Industries in 1960, and Russell Hobbs in 1963. Part of the works was demolished in 1961 and a new plant was officially opened on July 6, 1964 at a cost of £32,000,000. It is this new 42" reverse blooming mill for the production of wire that is shown in the film. This increased Park Gate's annual output from 425,000 to 800,000 ingot tons. By 1964 there was a continuous narrow strip mill and a new billet and primary mill.

About 6,000 men were employed on the site producing 250 grades of steel. The 'Iron and Steel Act' brought into public ownership the largest 14 steel producers (about 90% of British steel output). The mill closed in 1974, well before Thatcher re-privatised steel in 1988. The IT Group folded in 2001 after merging with the Smiths Group in 2000 (not the one with Morrissey and Johnny Marr!).

The Parkgate site itself was demolished in stages from the 1970s; with the last part going in 1982. The Aldwarke site remains open. Aside from those given high public recognition and status, however, are those in the film actually working in the steel mills producing the steel – who didn't become rich and famous. This film, at least, shows a glimpse of their lives working long hours in the heat, dust, noise and grime.

References

[Rotherham The Unofficial Website. Parkgate Iron & Steel](#)

[Parkgate Iron & Steel. Wikipedia](#)

[Rotherham Timeline](#)

[Lord Plowden Obituary. The Telegraph](#)

[Lord Plowden Obituary. The Independent](#)

Further Information

Anthony Dodsworth, *Voices of Rawmarsh and Parkgate Memories*, The History Press, 2009.