

The language of Bristol Brass

A Brass Mill was established by Abraham Darby at Baptist Mills, Bristol, in 1702, and when he left this area for Coalbrookdale a few years later, the company continued under the leadership of its remaining Quaker partners. It developed rapidly during the next 50 years and set up new mills along the River Avon and its tributaries between Bath and Bristol. Keynsham the most suitable of these new sites became the headquarters of the company. Other firms were also established in this area, which, at the time, was regarded as the technical centre of the industry, but by the end of the century, the impetus had passed to other regions. During the 19th Century, it declined rapidly, and most of the mills were closed. By 1900 only Salford and Keynsham remained, and they were still using water as their main source of power, and for the most part, the same methods of production as a century before.

The battery mill at Salford closed in 1908, the last brass battery in the country, but Salford rolling mills remained, as did the wire and rolling mills at Keynsham, to be revived a little by the 1914-18 war effort. Salford Finally closed in 1924, and Keynsham just three years later. These technical terms have been taken from tape-recorded interviews, and conversations with three of the very elderly, rather infirm men who remember their work in these mills. I would be glad to hear of similarities or differences in local terms used in comparable industries of other parts of the country.

THE ANNEALING PROCESS - in which brass which had 'work-hardened' was heated to make it workable.

Nealing	Annealing (in general use in comparable industries.)
A Fire	A furnace load
Buckle or Buck Hole	Ash pit of annealing oven.
Bosh	Trough or large bowl of water kept in front of oven
Killott	Three-legged stand to take trays carrying wire.

ROLLING - Billets of metal were flattened and elongated between steel rolls driven by water power.

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Moulds	Cast billets of metal made in preparation for rolling
Slabs	Rectangular billets for rolling into sheet brass
Slips	Long billets for rolling into strip brass
Shab	Dross or impurities in surface of brass sheet which had to be removed before final rolling.
Stranded or Studded	The jamming of rolls when incorrectly adjusted for the thickness of metal being worked (invariably accompanied by unmentionable language as it was difficult to put right)
Pritchel	Punch or pointed tool for marking sheet sizes to pattern.
To strick	To mark out sheet sizes with pritchel
Curls	Strip metal which was curled round after going through slitting mill.

BATTERY WORK - large tilt hammers 'battered' sheet brass into the shape of pans.

Helve	Arm or shaft of tilt hammer (made of wood)
Stulch or stulsh	Sprag or length of wood used to prop under helve to disengage from cogs. The usual method of stopping the hammer from working.
Husk or Hursk	Metal ring enclosing helve on which the hammer pivoted.
Naps	Round shapes of brass sheet, cut out on shears in preparation for hammering into shape of pans
Ferrier	The outer pan of three, placed one inside the other whilst being shaped up by battery hammers.

WIRE DRAWING - narrow strips of brass were gradually fined down to wire.

Strings	Very narrow brass strip, prepared for wire drawing.
Rumple	Wire in the first stage of rounding off the edges
Wortle Plate	Die or plate through which wire was drawn
Jacobite	Pincers for drawing wire through wortle plate.
Rumple Pritchel	Tool for reaming out holes in wortle plate to correct size.

OTHER PROCESSES

Pickling	Immersion of brass in 'vitriol and water' to give hard bright finish. (In general use)
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Stamps	Crushing process powered by water wheel, for Furnace ash and other waste in order to extract usable metal for remelting.
Lemmel (?) or Lemmey	Iron pot into which waste wire was hammered for remelting
Shuff (men's version today)	Waste brass, filings, off-cuts, etc., used for remelting
Shruff	The same as above. This version taken from 1862 Sales Catalogue of premises. Hamilton's 'English Brass & Copper Industries to 1800', quotes Houghton's method of making brass in 1697, in which '1/7 shruff or old plate brass', is used.

WATER WHEELS	providing main source of power for mills, were undershot from 15Ft - 18ft. dia.
Floats	Paddles
Starts	Wooden slats on which paddles were fitted
Stays	Metal rods between each float
Rings	The two circular frames of each wheel
Thorows	Water Channels to and from wheel, i.e. mill-race

