

Research – an introduction

“As often happens, one question answered raises other questions to which an answer seems unlikely” (J S Owen : The ironworks at Runswick, Cleveland IA Research Report No 5, 1988)

Since the Backbarrow Ironworks Trust was formed in 2018, we have continued the quest to learn more about the history and operation of the ironworks. This is complicated by the long history of the site, the constant changes to how it worked, and the patchy information available about it.

The impetus to create these articles was the question asked by a visitor on one of our Open Days. Fascinated by what she had heard on the guided tour she asked “is all this written down?” and we had to admit that no, it really wasn’t, at least not in a form that others could easily follow.

So we started to write down what we knew, or thought we knew, about various aspects of the works. The draft versions led to more comments and discussion, more research and changes to the articles. This process could go on forever, but now is the time to start making them more widely available so that anyone interested can join in and add to our knowledge, bearing in mind the quote at the top of this page.

Further information that comes to light as a result of more research or your feedback will be noted at the end of each article under Afterwords. This may lead in time to the publication of a revised version of the article.

The idea behind putting them on our website rather than into print (although some have been) is so that we can easily update them in response to new information. Please get in touch if there is anything you think we should know.

Sources of information. References are given in the articles themselves, but in general our sources of information are:

The remaining buildings and machinery

Documents in archives

Published writings

Unpublished research

Photographs

Memories and interviews

Newspapers