

R & J Reeves & Son - Bratton Iron Works

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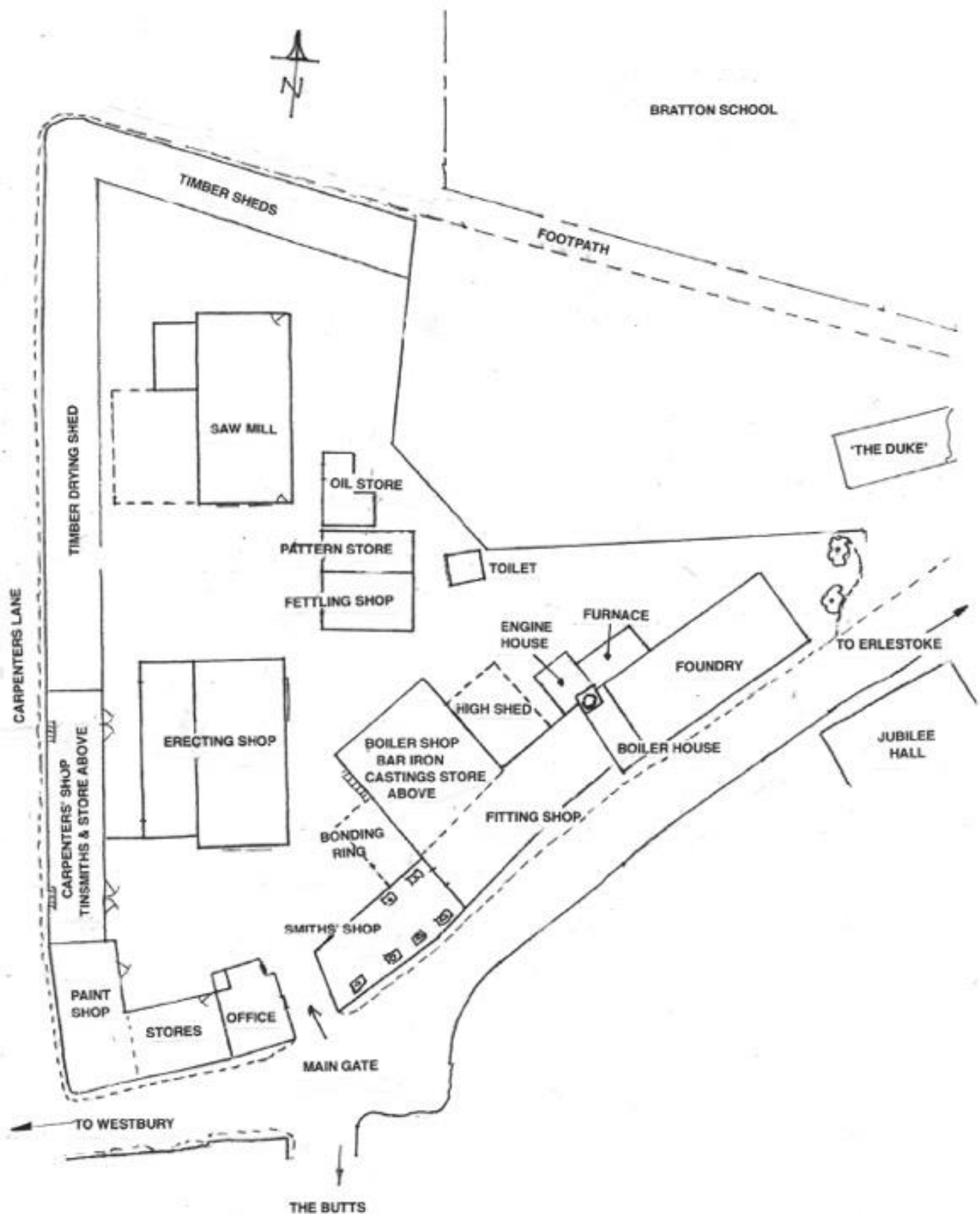
View west along the main road - 1970

Bratton was at one time a very industrial village with several woollen mills along the stream, a blacksmith's shop, and occupying a prominent position in the centre of the village were the factory buildings of R & J Reeves & Son. The site is now the village green, and the only obvious reminder of the firm is the commemorative plaque, unveiled in 1993 by Kathleen Reeves.



Kathleen Reeves unveiling the plaque in 1993, with William Gale and Jean Morrison
Many ex-employees attended this event.

The works dominated the village, and became the largest employer in the area. Bratton was ideally suited to serve the needs of farmers on Salisbury Plain (sheep) and in the vale to the north (arable). The firm manufactured a tremendous variety of agricultural implements and machinery, almost entirely from raw materials.



R & J REEVES & SON - BRATTON IRON WORKS

(traced from Wiltshire County Council road widening scheme drawing, 1960)



Reeves 'Advance' elevator, with troughs raised. Chains are driven by a Fairbanks Morse portable oil engine, through belt drives. The two-storey building in the distance houses the carpenters' shop (ground floor) and tinsmiths' shop above. Circa 1912

There was a foundry (adjacent to 'The Duke') for making castings in iron and other alloys, a smiths shop for wrought iron work, a fitting shop for machine and bench work, a tinsmiths shop for sheet metal components, and a large timber works - seasoning sheds, saw mill and carpenters shop - the latter running parallel to the present Carpenters Lane. A boiler house, with its tall chimney, provided steam power for machinery, and a large two storey office building stood to the left of the main entrance opposite The Butts. Several large houses in this road were purchased or built for important members of the Reeves family:- The Wilderness, The Butts and The Elms.



Foundry team with sand mould. Wooden pattern for elevator on right



Smiths' shop 1953. Four hearths on the left. Charlie Lawrence and George Chapman in foreground - posed photo for Wiltshire Times supplement



Smiths shop, fitting shop (with many windows), foundry and 'The Duke'. Boiler house chimney behind



Sawmill. Note the railway to bring uncut tree trunks in from outside. Circular saw is at far end of the floor-mounted rollers, on the right.

The firm achieved national and international fame, exhibiting at the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace, Hyde Park in 1851, and won many awards all over the country. Their largest machine was an elevator - for raising straw and hay on to a haystack - and the troughs could be folded for travelling. It was designed by Henry Reeves in 1896. The iron casting on the plaque is one of a pair which formed part of the trough raising mechanism - they can be clearly seen in the elevator picture. The wooden pattern for this casting is visible in the foreground of the photo of the foundry team, and it was one of their largest items to be cast using a sand mould.

After the Second World War Reeves were not able to compete with the larger international firms, and never really updated their products - elevators were still being built in the 1950's to the original design! Final receivership was in 1970, and the whole works was demolished in 1973.



Demolition 1973 View from end of The Butts, looking across the main road. Smiths' shop and half the fitting shop already gone, and chimney on the way down!

Those with sharp eyes can still find Reeves items around - some road drain gratings, cast iron name plates, and a few preserved implements in gardens. We also have Reeves to thank for the installation in 1904 of a gas main pipe from Westbury, still in use for many households.



Preserved Reeves plough, once belonging to Jimmy Stokes of Horse Croft Farm

Marjorie Reeves' book 'Sheep Bell and Ploughshare' is worth a read - it contains a chapter on Bratton Iron Works. Ken Rogers' book 'Warp and Weft' gives much information on the local woollen industry.