

WHEAL MARTYN MUSEUM

With the backing of the producers of china clay in Cornwall, work is now actively in hand to establish a Museum of the China Clay Industry at St Austell. This new open air museum will aim to show all aspects of the history of china clay and the trades connected with the winning, refining, drying and transporting of clay. As an industry of major economic importance in the county, china clay has taken over the position traditionally held by tin and copper mining; now almost 3,000,000 tons of clay are produced each year to use all over the world in paper making, porcelain, and innumerable other products. Despite this position, today, the industry is still barely 200 years old, although it has progressed as increased demand has encouraged new improved methods of production to be adopted. The museum site is an example of one of the earlier stages in this development.

After extensive surveys of the area, Wheal Martyn has been chosen as the central museum site, since it is one of the best preserved china clay works from the end of the last century, and in spacious and wooded surroundings at the top of the Trenance Valley. This makes it ideal for the establishment of an open air museum.

The existing pit, originally established about 1820 by Elias Martyn, a draper from St Austell, was taken over by John Lovering from Elias's son, Richard, in about 1880. The works as they are today probably date from the modernisation which followed this takeover and they were then in use until about 1968. Apart from the traditional coal fired pan kiln and a small mica kiln forming a single "L" shaped building the works also include a series of mica drags, settling pits and settling tanks, typical of the period from about 1880 until the Second World War. There is also a fine 18 ft diameter water wheel which operated a pump about 100 yards away by means of a cable held in tension by a large balance box. This is now in working order and it is

also intended later to restore the much larger 35 ft diameter water wheel which operated the main pumps at Wheal Martyn Pit some quarter of a mile away, by similar system of cable and flat rods. It is intended to restore the works to their original state to show the complete process. In part of the pan kiln there will be a display to tell the story of china clay from the very first discoveries of William Cookworthy in the 1740s, through his first clay pits in the St Austell area in the 1770s, up to the present day, showing the technological advances that have enabled the Industry to double production in the past twelve years.

It will also be possible to walk up from the museum site to see the modern pit workings at Wheal Martyn from a viewing platform.

As soon as possible a cooperage (clay was traditionally exported in casks) will be re-created as well as a blacksmith's shop and a typical clay workers cottage of the last century. The old clay waggons, once a familiar sight in the narrow streets of St Austell, will also be on show.

It soon became obvious that no one site could tell the whole story of the Industry and it was therefore decided that a number of sites—satellite sites—would have to be created to show those aspects which it would not be feasible to move to a central museum site. These plans include the Cornish beam pumping engine at Parkandillick and the china stone grinding mill at St Stephen-in-Brannel, while the visitor should also see the uniquely preserved Georgian harbour village of Charlestown where china clay was, and indeed still is, exported. At the central museum site the visitor will enter the museum through the Reception Centre—one of the old clay tanks which will be roofed in—where there will be a sales counter and provision for refreshments as well as an audio visual theatre for an introductory sound and slide show. It is hoped that the museum will also act as a centre for the study of the history of the Industry, helping to rectify the extreme lack of information, especially in printed form, on the early years of the Industry. A photographic library has already been established and the production of a series of booklets on various aspects of the china clay industry is now in hand.

The Museum has been established as an independent non-profit making company with twelve trustees and run by a Management Committee. The Museum project has been supported by the whole of the china clay industry with a substantial loan from English China Clays, in particular, as the largest producer. Support is also being received from the English Tourist Board and the South West Area Museums Service in the form of grants for capital works. It is intended to open the Museum initially in the spring of 1975 although work on the site will continue for some time after that date. Further information on the Museum is available from the Director, John Stengelhofen, John Keay House, St Austell, Cornwall PL25 4DJ. (Tel: St Austell 4482, extension 329).