

Tinplate Production

Steel bars were received from steelworks about ten or twelve ft. long as per customers needs. These would be cut to about eighteen inches approx. The furnaceman would place between thirty or forty of these in a furnace and heat them to blood red. When the rollerman was ready two bars were taken out, and dipped in a "bosh" of cold water briefly. This would cause the dirt and scales to fall off. The bars were slid across the metal floor to the rollerman, who would insert one bar into the rolls.

The behinder on the other side of the rolls would catch this with his tongs, lift it to return to the rollerman over the top of the rolls, The rollerman would now enter the second bar into the rolls. The rolling of the bars was repeated five to six times and the thickness of the bars were reduced each time. Both rolled bars were then returned to the furnace to be reheated. Each bar, by this stage, had become a sheet or plate twice its original length. After being reheated and rolled again, the sheet was passed to the doubler, who folded the sheet over, and holding it with his foot, held it with his tongs, and lifted it into the squeezer, which flattened the folds.

The folded sheets were reheated again and rolled several times. The original bars had now being transformed into a pack of eight sheets. The rough ends of the sheets were now trimmed in the shears. At this stage the pack of eight sheets were separated into single sheets by female workers, at the same time they would remove any faulty sheets.

Because of the numerous rollings, the sheets had hardened. Now they were taken to the annealing furnaces, where they were piled into a stack, covered with sand and reheated and allowed to cool slowly. After being annealed or softened they were rolled again, but this time in the cold rolls which corrected any unevenness and gave them a shiny appearance. They were now taken to the pickling section and placed in a cradle which was plunged into a tank of weak sulphuric acid which removed the scales off them. Next they were taken out and placed in a tank of water to be washed and acid and dirt removed.

The next stage was to be dipped in a tank of molten tin, and removed to the warehouse, where each plate was inspected and assorted for any flaws. They were then given a dusting of bran and packed in cardboard boxes for shipment.

Women were employed to separate the plates in the hot mills, and to feed plates into the cold rolls. They were also employed in the pickling and cleaning of plates in the wash tanks, and the sorting of plates in the assorting room. Their arms were protected by rags which were tied to them from wrist to elbow. When separating the sheets after rolling, sometimes they would come across a pack of "stickers". Standing the pack on edge they would strike the edge with a "plumb" which was a lump of lead about 4 inches by 2 inches. This caused the sheets to open a little. If further methods were needed a knife similar to a machete was used. It was hard work.

Names given to the workers employed in a tinworks, bar cutter, furnaceman, rollerman, behinder, doubler, shearer, bundler, plate opener, cold rollers, annealers, picklers, washman, tinman, assorter, duster, and packers.

There were three sheet mills in Llanelli; the Wellfield Galvanising, Gorse Galvanising and Llanelli Steel Sheet Mills. The Wellfield made corrugated sheets between eight and ten foot long. These were curved and used to make "Anderson" bomb shelters. They were erected in peoples back gardens and covered with earth. They would not sustain a direct hit, but were suitable for cover from splinters. The Wellfield closed mid war and was then used as a military store. The Gorse Works made sheets which were used to make lengths of roof guttering and downpipes, all needed to restore Britain's bomb damaged houses.

Sandy Sheet Mills made steel sheets for the car factories, and Llanelli Steelworks made steel ingots for engine blocks for the car trade.

By Gerald Grant
Local Seaside Historian

Seaside Community Association has published this information on this website with permission by the author, for the interest of the local community. Seaside Community Association cannot vouch for the accuracy of this article or validity of the research undertaken. Readers should contact the author direct and examine the source documents in the case of any conflict of information.