

The Tradition of Industrial Queens

After the Great War, trade in Britain laboured on. By 1929 British trade as a whole still hadn't recovered due to the heavy losses suffered because of the war impact on industry and its people. The Great Depression spread from America in 1930 which meant trade in the UK took another downturn, Northern England home to 'heavy' Industry bore the brunt in an economic depression which remained well after the Second World War.

Another American import also made an impact, an idea to turn the tide, The American Pageant. Festival queen revivals from the late Victorian era, the rose queens, were back on the rise throughout the UK, and a new Interwar fascination with the Royal family began. The pageant was different from the traditional local township 'Rose Queens' and could be used to help publicise trade by presenting a new 'Queen' of trade for the UK.

Industry Queens may have started with the 'Cotton Queen' of Lancashire, Cheshire and Derbyshire launched by Manchester's Daily Dispatch in 1930. According to 'Bolton revisited' their Cotton Queen Tradition ran from 1930 to 1939, the annual Cotton Queen competition was a major event. So it wasn't just about a representative of the trade, but a morale booster for the working communities during the depression. The primary aim of course was to promote cotton. Most ailing trades launched such a competition; titles were created to improve the fortunes of these trades while giving a fantastic opportunity to a member of staff to live a life less ordinary. Each of the Industrial Queens had to work in the industry to qualify and each township had a chance to enter.

With the title came the duties, training, experience and photographic opportunities simply not available to working class girls in any other way. The girl chosen had to have appeal and a connection with consumers, travelling to trade events around the country. The 'Queen' had to have presence and express the represented Industries journey into a modern more vibrant world; she was the official figure head of industry. Speeches were about local cultural, social and occupational allegiances of the industry.

The general 'buy British' campaign to promote industry was carried out sometimes on mass with several Industrial Queens attending big events. This campaign was about invigoration of tourism as well as local crowds, Queens well supported by the communities and helped boost local economy and prestige. Rewards including outfits, beauty services, chauffeur driven cars and high quality luncheons, personal appearances boosted trade.

Even factory girls were being made into film stars. Popularity of such a role promoted by the popular lass of the day Gracie Fields, a previous Cotton Weaver, played the 'mill girl' role in the 1934 film production 'sing as we go'

Middlewich Dairy Queen



Images taken from Cheshire Life Magazine September 1934

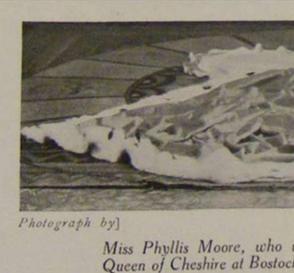
Middlewich Urban District Council decided to adopt the 'Cotton Queen' idea to use for their Dairy Industry. Separate from the Rose Queen Celebrations, which Middlewich still held; this Queen was established under the guidance of the Middlewich and District Agricultural Society.

Middlewich had a good Milk and Cheese industry supported by over 100 local farmers, at least two factories that are known of and 1,500 gallons of Milk coming to Middlewich on a daily basis. Forty tons of cheese made regular trips could be as many as three times a week, to London alone from the Middlewich Wharf. Produce also moved via the railway and road transports as well as canals.

The Dairy industry had suffered its knocks but the biggest challenge was the closure of Anglo Swiss in 1931. A crisis meeting was held by the Middlewich Urban District Council and local businesses, concluding that the Town had to think about raising the Dairy Industry Profile. The Dairy Queen was borne out of that discussion.

The First Dairy Queen of Cheshire crowned in September 1932, was Miss Barbara Thomasson.

Judges chose from "the cream of the dairies of Cheshire" a symbol of the outstanding merits of Cheshire dairy products, a chief commercial traveller for the Cheshire Dairy Industry. The primary aim was to increase the sales of Cheshire Cheese to the larger UK population, raising the profile the industry and product to consumers.



The Dairy Queen's first ever appearance was at the Middlewich Show at Bostock Hall, received by the President, Lord Colum Crichton Stuart, MP, amongst other extinguished guests. Press coverage of such an event is more effective and direct than the usual adverting campaigns. Like the Cotton Queen before, the chosen Queen was expected to make speeches on behalf of the dairying industry, be proactive in the trade shows and gain a very wide publicity presence. The Cheshire Life had stated that the first Dairy Queen had "increased the sales of Cheshire Cheese in the Potteries by a very considerable amount".

With a traditional coach, escorts and bays of four horses, the Dairy Queen was on a commercial mission to perform and represent the product, yet it still yielded a dignified traditional pageantry. The Middlewich Show, a tradition dating back to 1856, was held at Bostock Hall at this time, 'a shop window' of Mid-Cheshire Agriculture.

According to Cheshire Life Magazine article the second elected Dairy Queen was Miss Mary Dodd in 1933 and the third was Miss Phyllis Moore of Antrobus in 1934. The role of the 'Industrial Queens' cannot be undervalued as their roles were just as crucial in the UK Industry, especially representing the North of England as the Royal family have become endorsing the 'British' product. (Cheshire Life, Sept issue 1934) (Allan Earl, Middlewich 1900-1950 p134)

Winsford Salt Queen

Winsford first ever Cheshire Salt Queen!

In Winsford, Cheshire's Open Pan Salt Works trade was still the core employer so it is no surprise to find a Winsford Salt Queen, instead of the more traditional Victorian Queen of the day. Miss Marjorie Adams was one such Queen in 1933 but this role was going to change for the following year. The on-going depression of trade opened up new opportunities for the role, if it works for Cotton why not Salt? By day a salt packer, by night a glowing representative of Cheshire salt in the UK.

At the August Winsford Carnival in 1934 the first ever 'Cheshire Salt Queen', 21 year old Miss Mabel Brookes was crowned by Miss Mabel Parker. Attending numerous public engagements, making speeches, it was certainly a busy and demanding role. Mabel was picked out from 27 entrants and worked at the Meadow Bank Salt Union packing rooms; newspaper coverage photographed her posing in her salt Union uniform and travelling with Miss England 1934, Miss Margret Hallam.

The newly elected Salt Queen duties seem to follow the Industrial Queen's pattern in fronting an industry and presenting it with pageantry and glamour. It was different to the traditional township Queen in that there were no carnival possessions involved, the position was seen as more serious ambassador role and duties were not limited to Cheshire by any means. Trade shows and store openings were all over the UK and appearances were regular in Manchester and London.

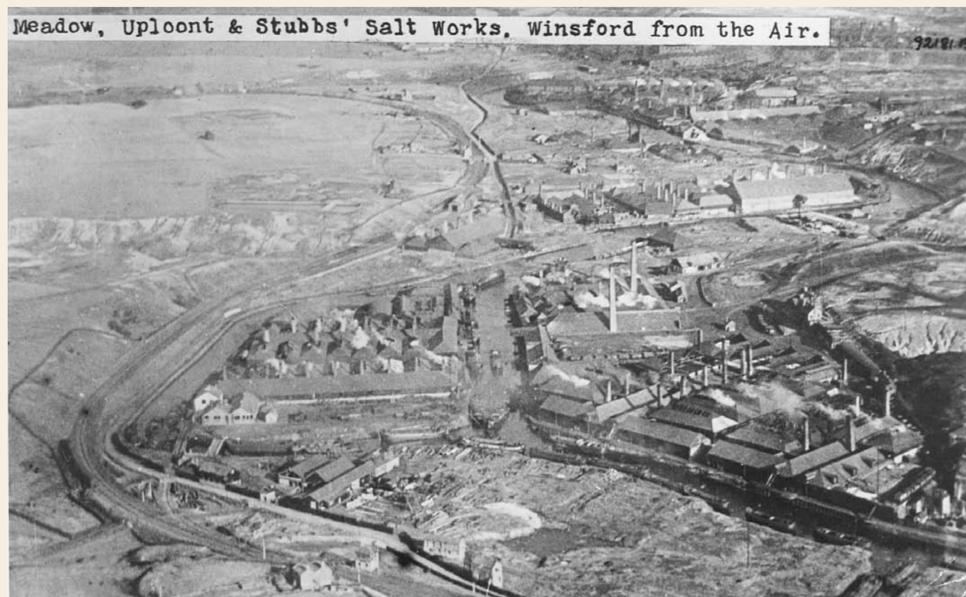
Queens were a great concept of getting industry into larger societies and social occasions, in one particular photograph the line up at Winsford Hospital fete was the Floral Queen, M Gibson, the Salt Queen, D Mason, ex-Salt Queen, M Brookes, Miss England, B Spencer and the Cotton Queen Edna Taylor, who went on to the film industry. Duties included opening stores, visiting hospitals, start football matches, fashion shows and country shows etc. "She really enjoyed herself and went to some amazing places" said Elaine Murray, daughter of Mabel Brookes, "she was very well-known when I was growing up. I'd go to somebody's house and they'd say 'oh, you're Mabel's daughter; your mum was a lovely lady'".



Image below taken of the Salt Union Queen Mabel Brookes. Standing are Dorothy Carter, Flo Wakefield and Annie Sear. Image donated by Ted Shone



Miss D Mason, second Salt Queen on parade.



The idea of the 'revival' in the Salt trade was optimistic, as the trade depression continued to grip British Industry. The role of the Queen had proven its worth for Cotton in terms of trade and local economics. A Letter from The Salt Union headquarters in Liverpool seems to confirm the optimistic view when congratulating Miss Brookes on her appointment and how pleased they are over the newspaper articles in the Liverpool Daily Post and the Mercury. Being represented in such a way shows the importance of the Salt Queen role and the Salt Union's hopes for a better outlook for their product.

The second Salt Queen was Miss Doris Mason a salt worker from Middlewich, crowned in 1935. Unfortunately, the role of Industrial Queens was short lived and the pageantry ceased on the outbreak of the Second World War and was never resurrected. In the case of salt, most works had gone out of business by the 1960's, largely through technology advancements as well as trade competition, imports and new working regulations.

In 2012 upon the discovery of the Charter of Over, Winsford Town Council not only resurrected the ancient traditions of the Fair but also of their Winsford Salt Queen, one of the few townships in the UK to do so.

The auditions were held in April 2013 and the title of 'Winsford Salt Queen' went to Cherie Lunt after a break of 80 years. "I thought that this would be an exciting opportunity to get involved more with Winsford and provide something different for the community. I am honoured to be Winsford's first Salt Queen after such a long time and have enjoyed every moment of it and every event I have attended"

(Newspaper articles in the local and daily newspapers supplied by Mrs Elaine Murray, daughter of Mabel)

(Website of 'Bolton Revisited', article on the Cotton Queens)

