

Open pan processes

Open pan processes used a large shallow boiling pan (normally rectangular) over a fire or furnace to evaporate seawater or brine and crystallise the salt. Prehistoric methods used fired clay pans and troughs, over wood- or peat-fuelled hearths; these were replaced during the Roman period by lead pans. Medieval sites also used mostly lead pans. At the end of the Middle Ages iron pans came

into use - these could be made much larger and be used with coal fuel which would have melted lead pans. On the coasts, this led to an important seasalt industry from the 16th to the 18th centuries. The major inland centres switched to iron and coal in the 17th century, both for boiling brine and (after its discovery in 1670) refining rock salt.

Medieval



A massive medieval timber brine well was excavated in 1983-4 at Droitwich. The Upwich well was constructed in 1264. Nearby there was earlier Roman salt making activity.



A medieval 'wich house' was excavated at Great Wood Street, Nantwich in 1980 that contained a 'salt ship'. Two more 'ships' have been found, each over 7m in length, made from hollowed out tree trunks to store brine in. A section of a 'ship' is displayed at Nantwich Museum.

Trebarveth

Prehistoric salt making sites are often very fragmented. And sites such as at Trebarveth are also eroding into the sea.



The finds from excavations at Trebarveth are displayed at Helston Museum, Cornwall. The surviving briquetage material makes a fascinating exhibition.



Practical reconstructions are helping us understand how salt making sites worked such as Newlyn Art Gallery's 'Museum at Night'.

Roman Lead Salt Pans



Over 26 lead salt pans have been found from the Roman and medieval periods. Ermine Street Guard watch over a salt making demonstration in Northwich.

Post-Medieval

Coastal pan houses were mainly located on, or near coalfields; refineries were also located near the source of rock salt (ie the Mersey) and near the markets of London and southern England. A few buildings survive, and other sites have been excavated.

Inland, the Cheshire industry has left considerable remains including panhouses, brine pumps and rock-salt mining.



The salt pans at Crosscanonby, Cumbria were built around 1634 and made salt until the 1760s. A timber seawater inlet can be found on the beach at low tide, and the earthworks of the panhouse with its circular storage tanks have been protected from coastal erosion. The saltworkers' housing was beside the modern car park.



At Port Eynon in Gower, the ruins of an unusual mid-16th century salthouse have been excavated and conserved. Built on the coast by John Lucas the fortified building was altered and extended to become a salt works. It was probably the most technically advanced salt works of its day. Sea water was pumped from the cistern to the heated salt pans above to make the salt.



The outlines of all nine pan houses have been excavated and displayed at St Monans, Fife. A windmill raised sea water from rock cut tanks up to the salt pans of the Newark Coal and Salt Company from 1772.