

Totem 2

The Electrometallurgy Factory

The factory was built in 1891 close to the port and to the railway, on an uncultivated plot of land stretching across 25 hectares, between Dives and a canal that was used to drain the marshes. Its founder, Eugène Secrétan (1836-1899), after having gone bankrupt from speculating on the price of copper, made use of an English patent for the manufacturing of copper tubes without soldering through electrolysis (Elmore process).

The factory, which had started production in 1892, was immediately liquidated. In 1893, Secrétan founded the **Société française d'Électro-métallurgie**, which manufactured copper wires, tubes and sheets.

In 1901, the company became the **Société d'Électro-métallurgie de Dives**. Its production became more diversified: brass, aluminium, tin, duralumin (a copper and aluminium alloy).

By 1917, the factory was employing 2,147 workers, producing shell cases for the French artillery, and blanks for the production of coins.

The lack of a local workforce encouraged the factory to recruit workers from further afield.

Then the copper industry was hit by the global crisis of 1929. In 1933, the factory became part of the **Compagnie Générale d'Électro-métallurgie** (CGEM), which made redundancies, reducing staff numbers from 1,800 to 1,350. June 1936 was marked by a major strike, including an occupation of the facilities.

After reaching a production peak in 1939, work stopped at the factory during the Second World War.

In 1943, the **CÉGÉDUR** (Compagnie Général de Duralumin et du Cuivre) was founded, bringing together 8 factories, including the one in Dives.

Production resumed after the liberation of France at the end of the War, following major refurbishment works.

1956 saw the opening of a plastic tube manufacturing workshop. CÉGÉDUR and Tréfinmétaux were incorporated into the Péchiney group in 1967, and the Dives factory became **Tréfinmétaux**.

From 1975, the factory's prospects darkened. In 1983, the **Pechiney Ugine Kuhlmann** group announced that it was closing down the factory, which still employed 930 people. The agony of the company was met with a long struggle for social justice.

The factory closed down in 1986. It was knocked down in 1990 to make room for the *Port Guillaume* marina.

Legend

Workers leaving the factory at the end of the day, early 20th century, from left to right: the first housing estates, the factory, the belfry, the guard post, the big offices. Jacques Gauthier collection.

Legend

Groups of workers, 1896, album of the Société française d'Électro-métallurgie, Médiathèque de Dives-sur-Mer collection, digitised by La Fabrique de Patrimoines en Normandie.

Legend

The cartridge factory, 1917. In 1916, the factory employed 460 women. The female workers at the cartridge factory worked for 12 hours at a time on day and night shifts. Photo-card, Jacques Gauthier collection.

Legend

Occupation of the factory during the 1936 strikes, Robert Ledorze collection.

The Belfry and the Offices

The big offices, which were converted into a multimedia library in 2004, are the last remaining traces of the site, together with its splendid director's house, which is adjoined by the belfry, whose clocks beat time for the local population. The director and his family left this environment, which had become too noisy for them, in 1927, in order to move into a calmer villa in Cabourg and then in Dives. Their former residence was then used to house the factory's dispensary.

In 1876, Eugène Secrétan supplied the laminated copper for the Statue of Liberty. Auguste Bartholdi carved a bust of him in thanks. Following Secrétan's death, the Société d'Électro-métallurgie had a brass replica of it installed in front of the belfry in July 1900. In October 1986, during the social struggle connected to the closure of the factory, this bust was taken apart by the workers and taken to the headquarters of the CGT trade union, which returned it two months later.

Legend

The director's residence and the belfry, 1896, Album of the Société française d'Électro-métallurgie, Médiathèque de Dives-sur-mer collection, digitised by La Fabrique de Patrimoines en Normandie.

Legend

Mr Schmitt, the director of the factory, and his family in front of their residence, 1900. Album of the Société française d'Électro-métallurgie, Médiathèque de Dives-sur-Mer collection, digitised by La Fabrique de Patrimoines en Normandie.

Legend

Removal of the bust of Eugène Secrétan during the 1986 demonstrations, Sophie Lanois collection.