

Distinguished Photographer's Industrial Prints

By James L. Wild

WHILE UNDERTAKING a routine copy job for the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum to document the photographic archives, I discovered among a batch of prints depicting Rogerstone Aluminium Works in Gwent, some photographs showing interior views. These, I found, were taken in 1968 by the distinguished industrial photographer Walter Nurnberg O.B.E.

Born in Berlin on 18 April 1907, Nurnberg followed in his father's footsteps into banking and became a member of the stock exchange, but found the work rather tedious. It was when dealing with some financial matters for the Reimann School of Art in Berlin, that he discovered a deep fascination for photography and in 1931 he undertook a course in photography and copywriting. He was greatly influenced by the works of Albert Renger-Pratsch and Selmar Lerski who, in the 1920s revolutionised photography with an imaginative approach to the dramatic presentation of mundane objects.

During 1934 Nurnberg travelled to London and set up as a successful advertising and commercial photographer, practising in a rented studio at Aldwych House. When this became too expensive to operate his good friend Robert Casson, director of an advertising agency, set him up with a

purpose built studio together with equipment, in Brownlow St., Holborn.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Nurnberg enlisted in the army pioneer corps where he served until he was invalided out in 1944. He became a naturalised British subject in 1947. After leaving the army he set up his industrial photographic business, and gained many well-known industrial clients including G.E.C., Ostermilk, I.C.I., United Steel, G.P.O., the wool industry and distillers. He described himself as one of those mad photographers who would hang upside-down on the end of cranes to achieve dynamic angle perspectives.

He preferred to use tungsten lighting, because he could see exactly the effect he wanted using lamps of up to 5kw output. He would even stop production lines if necessary and install extra power cables, to get his unique photographs.

Nurnberg's photographic technique and style stem back to his early training at the Reimann College of Art. He was influenced by the new ideas of the 'Neue Sachlichkeit' German objectivity school and experiments of the Bauhaus at Dessau, and these led him to an analytical approach, revealing precision, realism and impassive stereometry in his pictures.

His photographs show the effective use of low-key lighting, creating a dramatic cinematographic effect

reminiscent of American films of the 1940s, techniques that emphasise strong, **dynamic pictorialism**, juxtapositioning man and machine within the industrial environment.

Later on in life Nurnberg lectured at the Polytechnic of Central London and at Harrow and Ealing College. In 1968 he became head of the Guildford School of Photography at West Surrey College of Art and Design. He also wrote two standard photographic text books on photographic lighting techniques.

On his retirement in 1974 he was awarded an O.B.E. for his services to photography and industry. Other achievements included the Honorary Fellowship of the British Institute of Professional Photography, the Fellowship of the Royal Photographic Society and the Hood Medal, awarded in 1960 for outstanding advances in photography for public service.

Walter Nurnberg passed away at the age of 84 on the 19 October 1991. Collections of his photographs can be found at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford, The Royal Photographic Society and the Faculty of Engineering and Science at the Polytechnic of Central London.

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• A select on of the dramatically lit photographs taken by Walter Nurnberg at the Rogerstone Aluminium Works, Gwent