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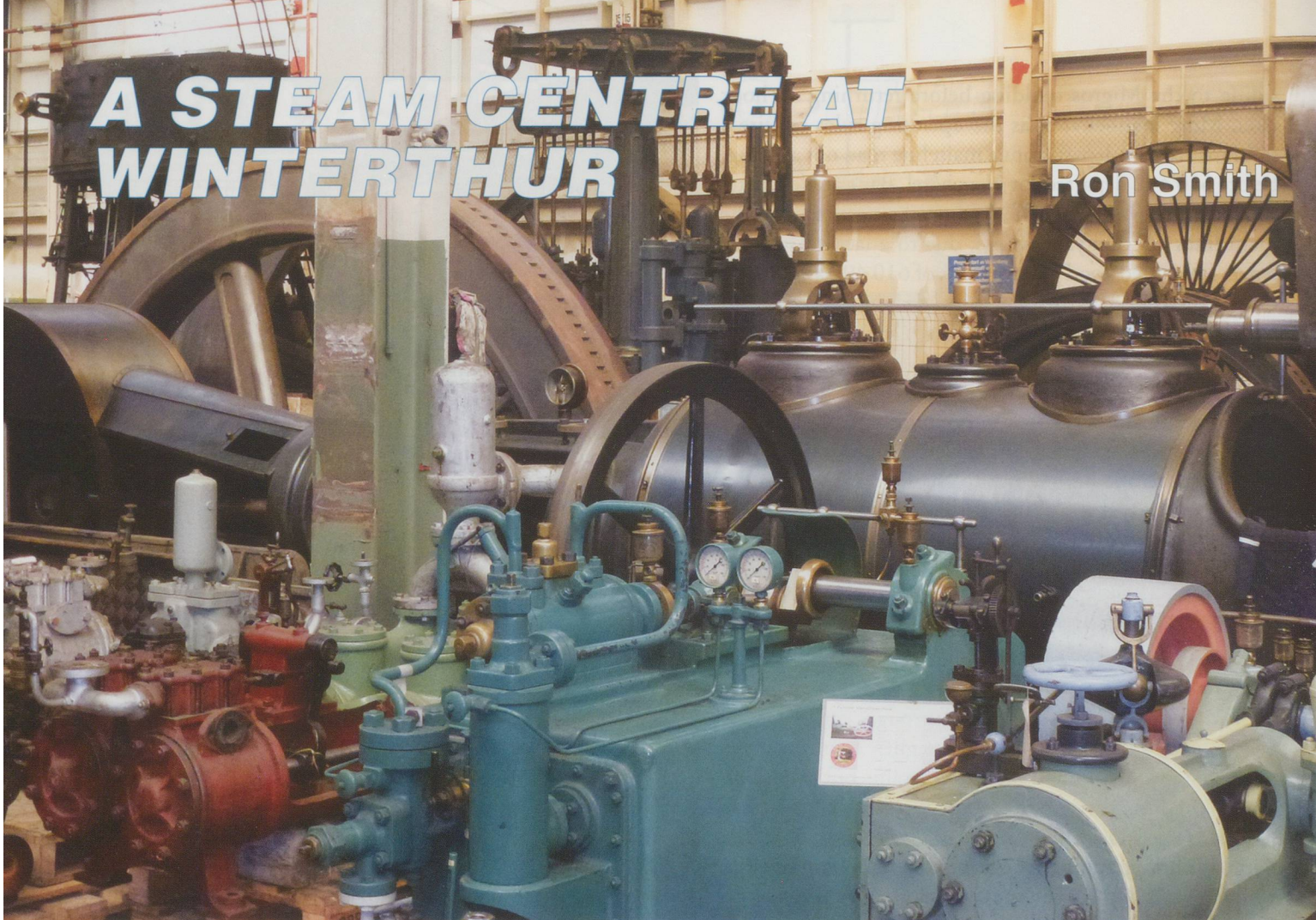
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A STEAM CENTRE AT WINTERTHUR

Ron Smith



View across part of the museum's collection.

Photo: Ron Smith

A new museum, the *Verein Dampfzentrum Winterthur* (VDW), dedicated to steam engines of all types – although currently there are no railway engines – has recently opened its doors. Its origins go back to 1971 when the steam paddle ship ‘*Blumisalp*’ was decommissioned, needing extensive repairs. This was at the time when several steam ships were taken out of service and this encouraged enthusiasts to form VAPORAMA to save and restore such beautiful ships. A steam engine museum was founded in Thun and the Association began collecting interesting steam engines. One of its successes was the restoration of the paddle ship ‘*Blumisalp*’ which the Association took over in 1982. In 1992 she took to the water again, and is still there today, operated by the BLS although still owned by the Association. Although their hopes of gaining the use of part of a former metal factory in Thun to exhibit their growing collection of engines were frustrated in 1993, using the former nursery of Schadau Castle VAPORAMA went on collecting and restoring steam engines. One of the masterpieces of that time was the restoration of the oscillating engine of the paddle steamer ‘*Giessbach*’. Unfortunately, the City of Thun became no longer interested in supporting the steam collection. The nursery was sold for redevelopment and the valuable collection had to be removed despite it being difficult to find a new place and new financial support. However, in 2009 a miracle happened when Robert Heuberger – a real estate tycoon in the City of Winterthur made a generous donation allowing the move of the collection from Thun to a

former Sulzer Brothers factory in Winterthur, not far from the main railway station - a walk of some 15min. Directions to the VDW are on their web site (www.dampfzentrum.ch), or download a PDF of their German-only magazine ‘*Dampf-info*’ which has clear pictures of the site.

In summer 2011, at the site, Hall 181 was handed over, and the massive task of transferring all 600t of machinery from Thun to Winterthur was begun. These included: steam engines; traction engines; steam road-rollers; a rocket motor; a steam powered dredger, and a 1859 German beam engine. Most of the exhibits are of Swiss manufacture, particularly by Sulzer, including a big three-cylinder steam engine that was exhibited at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1889. There is an Escher Wyss oscillating ship engine; MFO generators; Burckhardt compressors, a unique experimental steam engine of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology; steam turbines; models, and a belt driven workshop. By February 2012 the Association was ready to open the doors to the public. Winterthur already had 18 museums, and the city did not want another plain “museum”, so the steam facility will be an active facility with working steam engines, displays, repairs and educational activities. The steam centre operates at the moment on the basis of volunteers and has been successful in attracting many of these. At the moment it is not open every day but the VDW can be visited by booking a conducted tour in advance. More details can be found on its website – it is well worth a visit for anyone interested in the development of steam power. 