

Exciting future ahead for waterside production and film studios



Michael Hamburger tells the story of how former canal-side factory buildings have been transformed into a hub for the creative industries.

A company founded a century ago to import seashells, gums and resins has now completed another stage in its evolution by converting former industrial buildings into a waterside creative hub that features production and film studios with modern office facilities.

Michael Hamburger's family business was established in the Netherlands in 1921 and traded in raw materials for the chemical and food industries. After moving to the UK in the late 1930s, the business switched to manufacturing synthetic chemicals for the agrochemical sector on the site of a former tannery fronting the River Wey Navigation canal in Surrey.

When a significant part of the site's manufacturing space became surplus to requirements in the 1990s, it was redeveloped as a business centre and became the basis of a new enterprise in commercial and residential real estate.

In 2006, the manufacturing operation relocated to the north of England, leaving more space redundant and providing further redevelopment opportunities. Despite major obstacles – including the impact of the 2008 banking crisis – part of the mill and factory building has now become the Tannery Studios.

Top facilities at a well-connected location

Video and sound facilities at the site include five studios, with

cameras, lighting, production and crew also available to hire onsite. Both the studios and associated offices have access to the fastest and most reliable fibreoptic WiFi, and many offer views of the Surrey countryside and the River Wey. All this at a semi-rural location only five minutes from the A3, with easy connections to London by car or train.

Majority shareholder and chairman Michael says Tannery Studios has now secured various tenants from the creative industries, and a company has been engaged for the day-by-day management of the facilities.

Advertising luxury products

He adds that there's already been a lot of activity at the studios, creating advertising and promotion for "top-end, luxury products" – although he can't name names because of non-disclosure agreements. "So far, rather than TV or films it's mainly been shorter-run, high-quality stuff that other studios don't seem to cater for with the privacy that's required." However, Tannery Studios space has also been hired by TV production companies and Michael adds: "Obviously, we'd like the film industry here as well – who wouldn't want to become a new Pinewood!"

Reflecting on the challenges and successes on the journey to this point, Michael cites the considerable challenge presented by the 2008 banking crisis: "Our bank was Northern Rock, which

went into administration, so although we wanted to redevelop the redundant industrial buildings, we had no means of raising finance."

Another more immediate issue to be tackled was providing fast internet connectivity onsite. An interest-free local enterprise partnership (LEP) loan financed the laying of the requisite fibreoptic cable – as well as much-needed repairs to the nearby canal.

Working with the LEP, it was decided the best use for the old factory buildings would be in the growth sectors of film, post-production and video games. Conversion work, financed in part by a further LEP loan, got underway in 2017 and was largely complete before the 2020 outbreak of Covid. Looking to the future, there is potential for an extension of up to 100,000 square feet.

Shipleys has provided valuable support during the development of Tannery Studios. Michael says: "They haven't just supplied accountancy services – they've really held our hand along the way. They're personable as well as being efficient, they understand our business and have really helped us when we needed it."

www.tannerystudios.co.uk

Tannery STUDIOS

