

Our ancestors made the world we live in

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COBOURG — The hard work of our ancestors made the world we live in.

At the recent Lakeshore Genealogical Society Mystery Ancestors Night, many presentations were also a tribute to the contributions made by earlier generations.

In Peter Sterling's case, the work of three generations of his Smith ancestors in England also offered a look at changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution.

The Royal Woolwich Arsenal, a large complex on the bank of the Thames River just east of London, was in operation for an incredible 330 years, starting in 1664. For 60 years, starting with Henry Smith in 1850, there would always be a Smith on staff.

The arsenal made naval guns, artillery and ammunition for the British Army and Navy. It employed 2,000, when Henry joined the work force. Over time, the complex grew to cover an area about two miles long by one

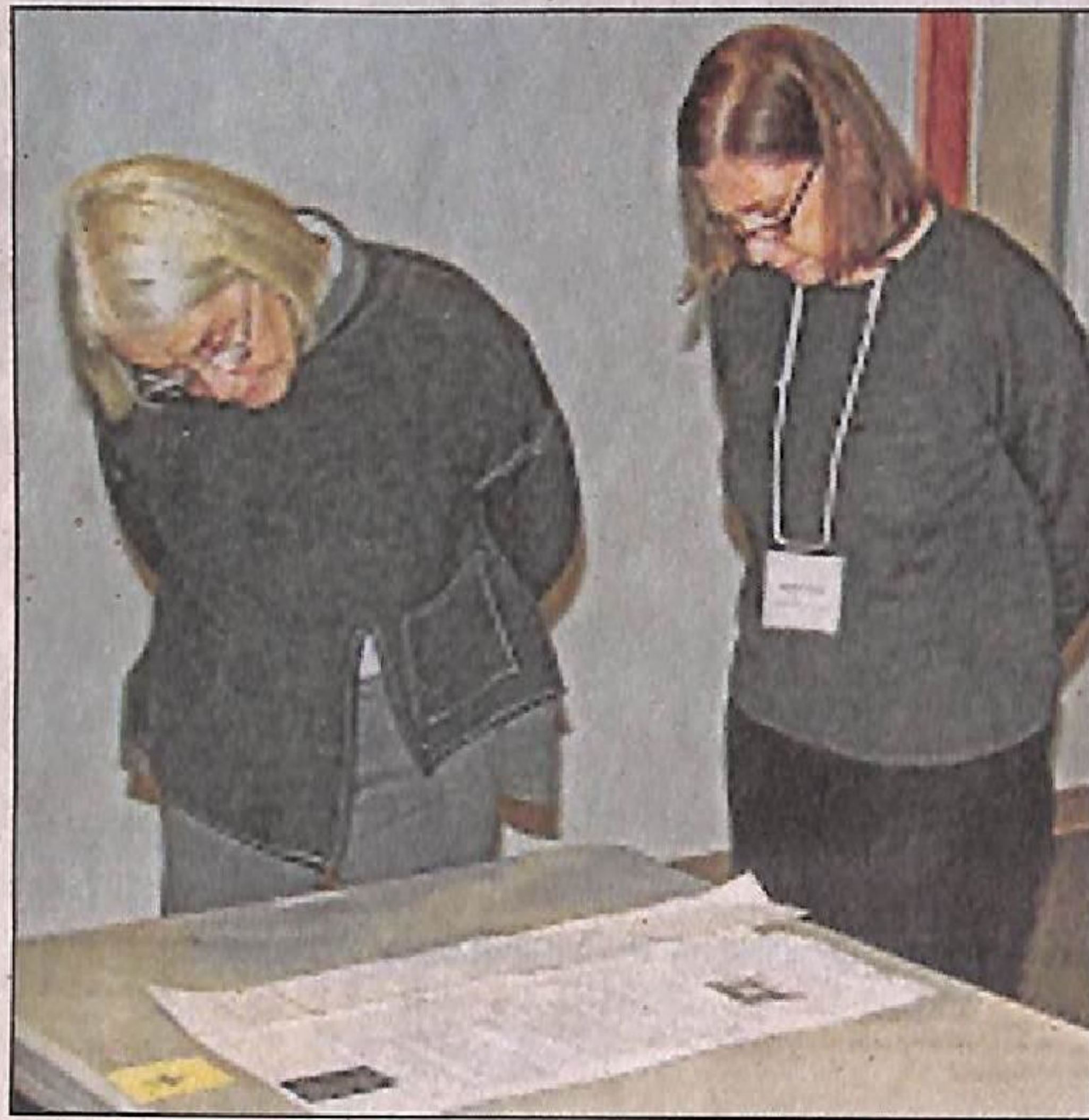
mile wide, as the Industrial Revolution brought a period of expansion.

Prior to Henry's arrival, the first steam-powered machinery had been introduced into the complex around 1805. A steam-powered saw mill was added about five years later. From the late 1840s, steam-powered mechanization spread throughout the complex, including the first steam hammers and steam-driven and cyclopean machinery.

By 1856, there were nine iron-framed buildings, 68 steam engines, 18 steam hammers and 2,773 machines for every conceivable process, operated by 10,000 men working a 56-hour week.

Around 1871, Henry's 17-year-old son Frederick (Sterling's great-grandfather) began working at the Woolwich Arsenal. The 1881 census shows that Frederick's brother Edward was working there as a carman, coinciding with further development at the Royal Arsenal.

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ABOVE - Two people attending the recent Lakeshore Genealogical Society Mystery Ancestor Night read a letter that refers to a mystery that hints at a new-found relative in Bea Makepeace's family.
RIGHT - Lakeshore Genealogical Society member Peter Sterling shared this photo of a woman operating a naval-gun rifling machine in the Royal Gun Factory at the Woolwich Royal Arsenal in London at their recent Mystery Ancestors Night.

