WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

WIAS

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NEWSLETTER

THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL

This copy of the Newsletter sees a slight change in layout compared with previous editions. The reason is the absence of the booked speaker from the September meeting, a vacancy admirably filled by the new Chairman, Martin Green, at the last minute. As his subject, Martin took the Industrial Archaeology of Warwickshire and gave a broad summary of some of the important sites in the County, followed by a video of hat-making in Atherstone. He also shared with the members some thoughts on how he would like to see the Society develop over the next few years.

Rather than going over what to many is probably familiar territory, the space allocated to the meeting report has been given over to a piece about the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre written by John Willock. This has a local link, since the Avro Lancaster that forms its centrepiece was built at Longbridge.

However, as John points out there is far more to the museum than this one aircraft. In my opinion it is probably one of the finest aviation museums in the country. The atmosphere is tangible and the supporting displays are on the one hand fascinating, yet poignant and moving, bringing home the terrible loss of life endured by Bomber Command during WW2.

This area of Lincolnshire is, after all, what came to be termed bomber country. East Kirkby was just one of many operational Bomber Command airfields in this region. Both 57 Sqn, and later 630 Sqn, operated from East Kirkby for about 18 months. Both flew Lancasters, largely on night raids over Europe. The chapel, reconstructed as part of the museum, illustrates the human cost. The side walls are lined with column after column of names in gold leaf; the members of 57 Sqn and 630 Sqn who died on active service while stationed at East Kirkby. There are over 400.

Details of the museum are appended below and I would recommend a visit. It is well worth the long journey, especially if the Lancaster is performing a twilight taxy. There is nowhere else in the UK that one can get so close to a living piece of aviation history.

Mark W. Abbott

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The museum is open all year round apart from the Christmas holiday period. Opening hours vary depending upon the season. Specific opening times and details of any special events, such as the twilight Lancaster taxy displays, are available from one of the above sources.

SOCIETY NEWS

Fenny Compton Tunnel

The current edition of *Industrial Archaeology Review* (Volume XXIV, Number 2, November 2002) sees the publication of John Selby's research into the erstwhile Fenny Compton Tunnel on the Oxford Canal, and its associated brickworks. The account covers the construction, and opening out in stages, of the tunnel and the establishment of a brickworks to utilise the clay spoil. The text is supported by some excellent diagrams and both period and contemporary photographs.

The Society is of course an Affiliated member if the AIA and so receives a copy of the *Review* that members may borrow. If you do not personally subscribe to the AIA, but wish to read the article, please speak to the Treasurer.

Members Survey

The response to this has been a little disappointing, with a slightly less than 50% reply rate. A prime aim of this exercise was to update the Society's address database, so please complete the form so the records can be brought up to date. Also, any suggestions of potential speakers would be most welcome.

Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

October 2002 Charles Catt: *Why Roads Exist*

Britain got its first roads because, as is so often the case, it was the army which needed them! In short, it was the Romans and their determination to get their occupying troops from A to B as quickly as possible (to put down the recalcitrant natives!), who saw to it that the first hard surfaces were laid down in this green and pleasant land. And it was from that starting point that Charles Catt, at our October meeting, began a most interesting talk on the development of roads in the UK.

Charles spent a major part of his career in the Highways Department of Warwickshire County Council, so he was able to relate much of his talk to roads with which we are all familiar. Major landmarks in road construction in the Midlands to which he referred included the Fosse Way, Watling Street and Icknield Way. In the South, the road from London to Dover, and thus to a channel port, was another vital route.

As a cross-section of the construction of a typical Roman road showed, the need for a 'cambered' surface which shed water to either side was already well understood. Unless the water could be shed efficiently, into ditches at either side, the tramp of countless legions would soon reduce the road to a muddy morass. And indeed, as Charles explained, water and its almost unstoppable power to penetrate remains to this day the single most common cause of damage to roads.

When the Romans left these islands, the roads they had bequeathed us progressively deteriorated and road construction, as we understand it today, did not really start until the 1800s. In fact, road construction proper in Britain started with Thomas Telford (1757-1834) and Robert McAdam (1756-1836), and their pioneering work on basic road construction and road-surfacing respectively remains unparalleled to this day. Showing a cross-sectional drawing of a modern road, Charles identified the many layers required, starting with the deep sub-base (which rests on natural soil), and including successive layers comprising the base proper, the binder and finally the carriageway surface itself. The principal constituents in road making today are stone, sand, filler and bitumen.

The discovery of North Sea oil and natural gas had an unforeseen consequence for Britain's road builders. Traditionally it was tar, a by-product of town's gas, which was used as a binder on top dressing of roads. But with the advent of natural gas, and the progressive closure of gasworks, tar first became scarce and then disappeared. Bitumen was its replacement, but the properties of bitumen are quite different from tar and road builders had to learn a whole new technology. Unfortunately, bitumen is not as 'sticky' as tar but, on the plus side, it is not, like the latter, carcinogenic.

Charles quoted some figures for the weight of materials required for making various types of road. For the very simplest hard surface on which a vehicle can be driven (i.e. a drive), 1 ton per sq metre is needed, for an estate road 1.5 ton is needed, and for a motorway it rises to 2.5 ton per square metre. Most of us from time to time have complained bitterly about the state of our roads, but Charles put the problem neatly in perspective with his last slide. This showed a large water-filled 'pothole' in a metalled road in an unidentified third-world country alongside which sat a man……..fishing!

A MYSTERY

Thanks to David and Thelma Gee, I have recently been able to scan a couple of old photographs of the local lime and cement industry. Both reputedly show workers from the Blue Lias works of Greaves, Bull and Lakin. This was alongside the canal by the *Blue Lias* public house, between Stockton and Long Itchington. The site is now occupied by Dowdswell Engineering. This works was also known locally as *The Cally*; Cally being a corruption of California, the original name of the *Blue Lias* perhaps?

The more recent of the two pictures contains a slight mystery. It shows a gang of workmen posed in a works setting, one of whom is holding a roughly chalked sign on which the words *Silent Ones* and *Rotary 1923* (or possibly *1928*) are just visible. This presumably refers to the gang's work location or job, but just what this job was, is not clear.

My best guess is that *Rotary* refers to either the rumblers which screened the quarried rock to remove the unwanted clay, or to the crushers used both to reduce the limestone to a fine powder suitable for the kiln and to mill the kiln output, known as clinker. These processes would have been very noisy and any supervising men could only have communicated by hand signs or lip reading and thus might have been known as *Silent Ones.* However, it must be stressed that this is only conjecture. A more reliable explanation would be very welcome.

Mark W. Abbott

Warwickshire Coal Mining

November 2002 Dr. John Bland:
Coal Mining in North Warwickshire

A splendid pictorial pageant of an industry which once dominated a large section of our County, and indeed became a way of life for many thousands of families, was unrolled at the November meeting by Dr John Bland. Dr Bland was a GP in the Arley area for over 40 years and as a consequence had intimate contact with the coal mines of north Warwickshire, the miners themselves, their families and their daily lives. Over those years he painstakingly amassed a very large number of pictures, maps, drawings and anecdotes of practically every aspect of the mining industry in the midst of which he practised, and consequently was able to present a fascinating story of an activity and a way of life which so swiftly came to an end in the 1980s.

Dr Bland started by showing a map drawn by Bateman in about 1600 AD on which the sites of a number of primitive pits in north Warwickshire were included. He touched on early mining methods, including the bell-pit used in outcrop working, the adit mine, and the 'dig a bit, leave a bit' method where natural pillars of coal and rock were left as roof supports. Early mining practices, which included the employment underground of women and very young children, were also described.

The North Warwickshire coalfields saw some of the earliest applications of Newcomen atmospheric engines and later of Boulton & Watt steam engines. Around this time the names of Warwickshire collieries also began to gain fame and prominence, including Griff, Bedworth, Hawkesbury, Exhall, Newdigate, Binley, Arley, Dawe Mill and, of course, Coventry. Dr Bland had some fine slides of many of these pits and the men who managed and worked them. Inevitably, from time to time, there were pit disasters and other slides showing scenes around the pitheads, and the early rescue squads with their primitive breathing apparatus of the time, were grim reminders of the real price which was paid for coal.

Fathers, sons and grandsons followed each other successively into working in the pits, and the infrastructure which gradually grew up around the collieries and their workers, to meet their needs and those of their families, included hospitals, schools and a very wide range of social and cultural activities. Religion also played an important part and many churches, chapels and organizations such as the Church Army and the Boys' Brigade, flourished mightily. To many of these movements, including the brass bands, the colliery owners were substantial benefactors with gifts of land, or money, or both. In fact, when one by one the mines closed the loss of this support was felt as keenly on the social and cultural levels as it was in terms of employment.

In addition to his talk and slide presentations, Dr Bland also mounted an exhibition of maps, photographs, models of engines and wagons, and mining memorabilia which added even further to the interest of a very successful evening.

ANOTHER BRICK KILN

An Imaginary Conversation with a Donkey

I met this donkey in a small paddock at Norton Lindsey. He was very proud of his surroundings and home, and kindly invited me to look over his little bungalow.

It was a building of substantial brickwork with battered outside walls and on entering this cosy single room of about 15'x 9', one noticed it had been well heated as there were the remains of twelve fireplaces and to prove they had at one time been used there was vitrified brickwork above them. The donkey commented that he much preferred his new corrugated iron roof to the old brick one as it was safer and kept him so much drier, he also liked his new concrete floor as it was so very easy to keep clean. He also loved his little sunken paddock (former clay pit), which protected him from the winds and is now covered with luscious grass.

I asked if he would reveal his address to me so I could write a 'thank you' letter and others could come and see him. He said it had a name and a very long number, which he kindly gave. The Brickyard, Curlieu Lane, Norton Lindsey. O/S Grid Reference SP 222635.

This kiln and old clay pit are visible from the roadside gateway.

Peter Chater

This brings the number of extant brick kilns in Warwickshire, known to the Society, to three: Fenny Compton Tunnel; Elms Farm, Bishops Itchington and now Curlieu Lane, Norton Lindsey. Do any members know of others that may be added to the list?

A site that I have recently discovered is Toft Cottage Farm, Toft, just south of Dunchurch on the A426. There is no kiln now, but an obvious claypit remains, together with a two-storey house that was originally an office or workshop according to a contact I made at a Local History Fair in Coventry.

Mark W. Abbott

Further Afield

The Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre

by John Willock

This very interesting museum, which is situated on the site of a former RAF wartime airfield, was set up by the Panton brothers, Fred and Harold, to commemorate their brother, Christopher, who was killed whilst flying on operations with Bomber Command in 1944. The Heritage Centre is also dedicated to the memory of service personnel of No's 57 and 630 Squadrons, who operated from East Kirkby during the war.

The Pantons have re-created at East Kirkby all the atmosphere of an operational wartime Bomber Command airfield, complete with original, fully equipped Control-Tower, NAFFI, Huts, Air Raid Shelter, Hangar and Chapel. Housed in the museum are extensive collections of memorabilia relating to the RAF Escaping Society, together with the remains of many aircraft and artefacts found on various excavations carried out by the Lincolnshire Aircraft Recovery Group. Also displayed is a genuine Bouncing Bomb, designed by Barnes N. Wallis. It is similar to those used on the famous Dam Raid, although the example exhibited is a practice bomb, retrieved from the sea at Reculver, in Herne Bay.

Centrepiece of the museum is Avro Lancaster B Mk VII, NX611, *Just Jane.* This aeroplane was built by Austin Motors at Longbridge, Birmingham, in April 1945, and therefore is quite a late wartime Lancaster. One of a batch of 150 machines built to Far Eastern Tropical standards, NX611 was intended for use in the Pacific theatre of operations. However, the war ended before it could be deployed and the aircraft had a very chequered service career, including maritime reconnaissance use in the Pacific with the L'Aeronavale. It finally ended its operational life in August 1964 at Bankstown, Sydney, Australia.

At about this time a number of individuals started to take an interest in the aeroplane with a view to securing its preservation. NX611 was eventually flown back to the UK, to what was to be a rather uncertain future. After spending time in various locations and appearing at a few air displays, NX611 ended up at the Squires Gate, Blackpool, Aviation Museum where, in poor condition, the aircraft was eventually offered for sale by public auction. The outcome was unsuccessful and the aircraft remained unsold, failing to reach its reserve price of £12,000. Eventually the owner of NX611 offered the machine on extended loan to the RAF, and after some conservation work she became the Gate Guardian at RAF Scampton in 1974. In September 1983 the Panton brothers bought the aircraft, although it remained for another five years in RAF custody, before being removed from Scampton to East Kirkby.

Just Jane has undergone a considerable amount of conservation work since her arrival at East Kirkby. This has primarily centred on bringing the aircraft up to a ground engine-running standard. The four Rolls-Royce Merlin 24 engines have all been refurbished and can be run at full-power for public demonstration purposes. Some tail-up taxy runs have also been performed, during filming of a BBC drama production in the early spring of 2001. The writer of this report, together with his son, were fortunate on the 19th October to be aboard *Just Jane* during one of these ground-running and taxiing sessions at East Kirkby; a tremendous experience. On the same evening the machine's engines were again run-up in front of an enthusiastic crowd. It was an amazing sight to see jets of blue flame, and occasional showers of sparks stabbing the darkness, from forty-eight Merlin exhaust stubs. An altogether unforgettable experience; a true working museum of the twentieth century, and an absolute must for all aviation enthusiasts.

Errata

The meeting report heading which reads *April 2002*, in the September edition of the Newsletter, should read *July 2002.*

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