

WARWICKSHIRE

Industrial Archaeology Society

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EDITORIAL

This year, 2003, marks a significant anniversary in technological achievement. On 17th December it will be 100 years since Orville Wright first achieved flight in a powered heavier than air machine; at 10.35 am on 17th December 1903, at Kill Devil Hills, Kittyhawk, North Carolina. It may only have been a 120 ft, 12 second flight, and it is unlikely that Wilbur and Orville Wright could have foreseen the implications of their achievement, but that flight set in motion aeronautical research and development that led to the aeroplane becoming a key component of the modern global economy.

The original Wright Flyer is now in the Smithsonian Institute Collection, accompanied by the following on a descriptive plaque:

"THE ORIGINAL WRIGHT BROTHERS AEROPLANE: The world's first power-driven, heavier-than-air machine in which man made free, controlled and sustained flight invented and built by Wilbur and Orville Wright; flown by them at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina December

17, 1903. By original scientific research the Wright Brothers discovered the principles of human flight. As inventors, builders, and flyers they further developed the aeroplane, taught man to fly, and opened the era of aviation."

Warwickshire industry, of course, once played an important part in aviation, although sadly this is no longer the case now the technology has become the preserve of giant industrial corporations. That part was, however, significant since Warwickshire is the home of the most important element of modern aviation, the jet engine. Its inventor, Sir Frank Whittle, was a Warwickshire man; born in Coventry and an attendee of Leamington College. He undertook his jet engine development work in Warwickshire, although he laid down the principles as early as 1929 in a thesis written at Cranfield College. After initial trials at Cranwell, the first British jet-powered aircraft, the Gloster E28/39, was tested from Edgehill. Admittedly, Whittle's jet engine was not the now widely used axial flow turbine, subsequently developed in the USA using Whittle's theory and German wartime experience, but as a practical unit, the jet engine was first built here in Warwickshire and all such engines owe a debt to Whittle's work. Unfortunately, there is no significant memorial in the county to commemorate that momentous achievement.

Mark W. Abbott

SOCIETY NEWS

Programme.

The programme for the remainder of the current season is as follows:

10th April

Alan Cooke: Subject to be confirmed

8th May

Peter Cross-Rudkin: *Some Warwickshire Eighteenth Century Engineers and their Work.*

12th June

Speaker and Subject to be Confirmed.

10th July

Society AGM, followed by Lyndon F. Cave: *Brickmaking in Warwickshire*

Society Coach Trip.

John Haslam has kindly volunteered to organise a coach trip for the Society. Possible destinations being researched are Blaenavon, Saltaire and/or Armley, Leeds. The provisional date is Saturday 16th August 2003. Other suggestions are of course welcome.

Subscriptions.

A number of subscriptions remain outstanding. By now, those who have still to pay should have received a written reminder, but if you are in any doubt the Treasurer can confirm payment or otherwise! If you are in arrears, prompt payment would be appreciated; cheques payable to Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society please.

NEWSLETTER

Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

December 2002 Paul Howell:

Restoring the Royal Pump Rooms, Leamington Spa

The restoration of the Royal Pump Rooms together with the incorporation in the building of the town's library, museum and art gallery is undoubtedly a success story for Leamington Spa. It was the history of the restoration, from its start to its triumphant finish, which was the major part of Paul Howell's address to our December meeting. But he began by sketching in the origins of the building in the early years of the 19th century and by reminding us that from the very start it had a chequered history. The alternate periods of success followed by longer periods of commercial failure and neglect which characterized the late 20th century life of the Royal Pump Rooms were really only echoes of very similar events in its earlier years.

Using a fine collection of colour slides, Paul showed a record of restoration 'work in progress' virtually from Day One to the official opening. We saw the state of dereliction of some parts of the building when work began, together with many architectural features which literally 'saw the light of day again' as demolition connected with structural work took place. The original spa water spring was uncovered, as were the various grades of baths originally provided, catering for men and women and offering water at various temperatures. Underground was exposed the 'engine' room of the building, where once vast quantities of water were heated, and steam for the Turkish Baths was raised.

Part way through the restoration work, the Great Flood hit Leamington and the building, which at the time was in a quite vulnerable state, was potentially imperilled. Fortunately, the wooden hoarding which had been erected around the frontage of the building broke the main force of the surging waters. Some damage was inevitably sustained, but without the protection provided by the hoarding it would have been very much greater. During the course of the restoration work, the innovatory design of the king-post and roof structure over the de Normanville baths (now the library) was seen in all its ingenuity, and great care has been taken to preserve and highlight it.

The writer is probably not alone in saying that, following Paul's talk, he sees the restoration of the Royal Pump Rooms in a different light. Now knowing exactly what to look for, he will revisit them with even greater interest.

Sheep Washes: John Brace

To conclude the December meeting, it was appropriate that John Brace should also give a short

talk on baths, this time not for people but for sheep! Sheep manage to get their themselves appallingly filthy and shepherds very soon recognised that a clean fleece fetched more money than a dirty one. John traced the history of 'sheep washes' in the Midlands from the early use of the village pond, in which the poor creatures were forcibly dunked. He went on to describe the progressive design and development of specially constructed 'washes' where one-way in and one-way out, plus running rather than static water, significantly increased both the effectiveness and the productivity of the process. Moreover, with the specially built washes it was only the sheep which got wet, and not the shepherds as well! If you know where to look, and John surely does, remains of some of these 'sheep washes' can be seen to this day.

Leamington Gas

The current edition of *Archive* issue 37, has under its *Skimpings* header, a familiar (to my eyes anyway), aerial photograph of Leamington Spa Gasworks taken in 1933. This is accompanied by an informative and detailed half page caption, within which a number of minor points are raised that, as a Society, we ought to be able to follow up in a letter to the publication.

Therefore, I would be pleased to hear from any member who can provide information about this now lost local industry, however minor the detail might seem. In particular, confirmation of the date when the gas holders were finally demolished would be welcome. They were standing when I first came to Leamington in 1981 and I seem to recall that they lasted at least a decade longer, but I have no record of the date that demolition took place. I also recollect hearing from an unknown source that the bridge under the railway between Waverley Road and the Sydenham industrial estate, was provided for the passage of horse drawn carts carrying coal from the GWR yard to the gasworks. Can anyone confirm or deny this too?

Should any member wish to borrow the relevant edition of *Archive*, this is available from the Treasurer. Quite apart from the view of the gasworks, it is an interesting exercise to compare other buildings with the modern scene.

REFERENCE:

Skimpings; Archive Issue 37, Lightmoor Press, Whitney, 2003.

Mark W. Abbott

Fairgrounds and Steam

January 2003 Peter Coulls:

Fairground Machinery

One of the most attractive features of the study of traditional fairground machinery must be that it allows one simultaneously to combine the joys and recollections of early childhood (i.e. roundabouts, swings, helter-skelters etc) with the serious grown-up business of coal, water and fireboxes (i.e. steam engines)! Both ends of this continuum were on display at our January meeting, when Peter Coulls made a most welcome return visit to the Society. This time to remind us of the magic of the fair as we saw it as children, combined with an insight into both the technology and the sheer hard work and raw muscle power which lay behind that magic.

Starting with the earliest simple machines, such as hand-driven roundabouts and swings, Peter sketched in the development of fairground machinery through the 19th and 20th centuries, and particularly the great leap forward which occurred with the advent of the steam engine as the prime mover for so many different types of fairground 'rides'. Steam was also the 'puff' and actuating force behind the magnificent organs which were progressively developed, and became such an essential part of fairground magic.

Peter's collection of colour slides of fairground machinery, from plain Roundabouts to Gallopers, from Swing Boats to Big Wheels, and from Steam Yachts to Showmens' Engines must surely be one of the finest, and his knowledge of the technology, also the makers of the machines and the history and tradition of fairs and fairground folk, is encyclopaedic.

Slides included shots of the Warwick and Stratford Mops in the early years of the 20th century and reminded us that, as today, the arrival of the traditional fair in a town was a once-a-year longed-for event. We were also reminded of the amount of physical effort which goes into transporting, setting-up and dismantling the rides, much of which necessarily takes place in the early hours of the morning. Fairground folk zealously guard their traditions and pitches in the towns which they visit at set times each year. For a local authority to attempt to make even the smallest alteration to these traditions, or to change the precise position of the 'pitch' traditionally reserved for a given 'ride', is almost impossible.

The steam-driven engines which hauled the fairs around the country are a subject for study in themselves, and Peter spent some time on them. Here again, one was reminded of the effort and

physical endurance involved. Typical recorded journey times for early engines with iron-shod wheels, hauling heavy loads from town to town, were:-12 hours to cover 91 miles; 14 hours to traverse 109 miles (a single continuous run); and three days to cover 240 miles. It was most gratifying to see just how many of these magnificent 'showmens' engines' have been saved by enthusiasts.

All the w's.....IA on the Internet

Increasingly, the Internet is promoted as a source of entertainment. However, this overlooks this modern phenomenon's greatest resource; information. The access to information that the Internet provides is unrivalled and a common problem met is finding exactly what is required, especially if starting with a somewhat general term such as industrial archaeology.

As an example, the Google search engine; www.google.com, returns 12 700 references to the term "*industrial archaeology*". Note that the quotation marks ensure that only references to the two words together on web pages are presented. Without the quotation marks, the search looks for both words, irrespective of whether they are together on a page or not, and 161 000 references are returned! Apart from the sheer number of references listed, the other problem with this general approach is that many sites or pages with IA content will not contain the words *industrial archaeology* anyway, and so will be overlooked.

The key is of course to use more precision in the term selected for the search, or start from a comprehensive page of links that lead to specific IA content.

With the latter in mind, a particularly useful website is www.iarecordings.org. IA Recordings are probably well known to many members as producers of videos about industrial archaeology, but their site is a useful general IA resource and contains a links page with over 520 links to websites with specific IA content, all conveniently categorised under subject headings. Thus, for example, it is possible to view a list of links on mining, or general organisations connected with IA. As is frequent with such listings, not all the links work, but these dead links are few and the standard of the linked sites is high. Altogether an excellent starting point for anyone with a general interest in IA and one that is recommended to members.

Mark W. Abbott

Archaeology and Planning

February 2003 Edward Wilson

Archaeological Recording in Warwickshire

Today, the submission of a planning application to a Local Authority routinely triggers an enquiry to see if any archaeological sites or monuments are likely to be affected by the proposed development. In his position as Planning Archaeologist, in the Sites and Monuments Office, Warwick, Edward Wilson is therefore often among the first to know when anything of archaeological interest in the County, including industrial remains, is likely to be affected by building developers, and at our February meeting he gave a most interesting insight into the workings of his Department.

His remit covers everything from Roman times up to (broadly) the 1920s and the onus lies with the developer who makes a planning application to carry out, and pay for, investigations appropriate to ensure that no site or monument, industrial or otherwise, is inadvertently destroyed for lack of proper professional investigation. As an example, Edward showed pictures of Coombe Abbey, Coventry, (now a hotel), for which planning application for an extension to one side was made. It was believed that the extension would intrude over an area where late 19th century kitchens may once have stood, and trial trenches were ordered to be dug. Sure enough, not only the foundations of the kitchen were found but, unexpectedly, the remains of an ice house were also exposed. The development to the hotel was not stopped, but the archaeological items of interest found were meticulously recorded before building work was allowed to start.

Trial trenches dug on the Potterton Factory site prior to impending redevelopment have shown that all relics of 19th century industrial activity in the area have disappeared, but evidence that there was once a medieval bridge over the Avon, near the present Portobello bridge, was uncovered. By the same token, the recent development of Rock Mill, adjacent to the Potterton site, into residential properties, was preceded by an investigation and

recording of the interior of the mill, before conversion work began.

Edward went on to describe similar finds which have been triggered by planning applications including: the foundations of a windmill at Lower Quinton; Bridge 51 over the Stratford upon Avon canal; an aqueduct at Yarningale, where work also revealed a hitherto unrecorded quarry site; unusual aspects of a late 19th century railway bridge at Brinklow; and the remains of a private sewage plant at Cawston House, near Rugby.

Moving towards more modern times, some interesting slides were also shown of a group of anti-aircraft gun platforms and associated buildings erected on the outskirts of Coventry just before the outbreak of the second world war, and forming part of a ring of defences for the City. The details of the site were carefully recorded and photographed. This investigation was triggered, Edward explained, by a planning application (subsequently approved) by the land owner to turn the remains of the wartime buildings into stabling for horses!

Much of the burden of Edward's talk was to stress just how many archaeological sites and evidence, including industrial, still remains to be recorded. Many, indeed, are far from concealed and only lack the interest, effort and manpower required to photograph and record them. The minimum of photographic evidence and written description, Edward stressed, is needed to get a site 'on record'. His message was plain. WIAS members were being cordially invited to help! Edward Wilson's office is in The Butts, Warwick; his telephone number is 01926 412734, and his e-mail address is ewilson@warwickshire.gov.uk.

Sir Frank Whittle Addendum

An excellent précis of Sir Frank Whittle's career, together with much other aviation history, can be found at www.raf.mod.uk/history/whittle1.html.

WARWICKSHIRE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

E-mail: WIAS@photoshot.com

CHAIRMAN

M. J. Green

Argyll 2(b) Union Road

Leamington Spa

Warwickshire

CV32 5LT

(01926 313782

SECRETARY

D. M. Crips

27 St. Nicholas Church Street

Warwick

Warwickshire

CV34 4DD

(01926 401072

TREASURER

M. W. Abbott

53 Stowe Drive

Southam

Warwickshire

CV47 1NZ

(01926 813155

AFFILIATED TO THE ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Credits

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Mark W. Abbott

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Arthur Astrop

Mark Abbott

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