WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

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NEWSLETTER

THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL

The photographic image is undoubtedly a key resource in the study of Industrial Archaeology from the middle of the 19th Century onwards. It is unique in its ability to give a visual record of an instant in time and to show how things were, as opposed to maps, plans and written descriptions which can be inaccurate.

This role of the photograph was most convincingly shown by Peter Chater's March presentation about aspects of railway civil engineering and architecture. The most striking feature of these images was how much the appearance of our surroundings has changed, even over a relatively short period of time. Such change is typically slow and imperceptible; often unnoticed. It is only when presented with, for example, a street view taken as little as 15 years ago that change becomes startlingly apparent. The road vehicles, the style of street furniture and fashions; all such minute details suddenly become noticeable when compared with the modern scene. Yet at the time these things were unremarkable, just as a car in the street or a particular road sign are today.

This is perhaps the key hidden value of photography as a resource in industrial archaeology. It is often the details that are incidental to the subject photographed that become of interest later.

Nevertheless, the expansion of this valuable resource is in danger of becoming lost to future generations, overwhelmed by a tide of digital data.

A photograph is an instant visual reference. Even as a negative, the content can be assessed easily. However, a digital image needs technology to translate the binary data into a picture, be it on screen or a print. That technology is changing fast and there is no guarantee that it will be possible to view images archived to CD, for example, in as few as 10 years time. Remember the Betamax video format?

Yes, a digital image can be printed, but how many are? Research company IDC estimates that 78 billion digital pictures were captured world wide in 2002. At best, half may have survived in-camera editing and other research by Lexmark, suggests that three quarters of digital pictures are never printed. Thus, 68.25 billion images may never be printed from 2002 alone!

Film exposures for 2003 are estimated to be 85 billion world wide. Many of these will not survive long, but at least those that do endure should be accessible to future generations.

Mark W. Abbott

SOCIETY NEWS

Programme.

The programme for the remainder of this year is as follows:

10th July
Society AGM, followed by Lyndon F. Cave: *Brickmaking in Warwickshire.*

August
No meeting.

11th September
Dr. Michael Hodder: *The Industrial Archaeology of Birmingham.*

9th October
Mr. John Boynton: *Railways to Stratford-upon-Avon.*

13th November
Regional Survey: A presentation by members of the Society on the industrial archaeology of the Warwick District.

11th December
Dr. Barrie Trinder: *The Industrial Archaeology of the Market Town.*

Society Coach Trip.
The date of the coach trip, organised on behalf of the Society by John Haslam, is confirmed as Saturday 16th August 2003. Saltaire and Armley, Leeds are the planned destinations. Please show your appreciation of John's hard work for the Society and support this venture.

Leamington Gas Works
Thank you to all those members who answered the appeal for information about Leamington Gas Works in the last Newsletter. It is intended the facts be submitted to *Archive* as a short follow up article to the photograph published in Issue 37.

Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

March 2003

Members' Evening

The Society was 'batting in depth' at its March meeting when, the scheduled speaker being unable to attend, three members came forward with a full programme of illustrated presentations, each of exceptional interest. First in was Peter Chater, who drew on his wonderful collection of slides to talk about railways, but with barely a mention of locos or rolling stock!

Instead, he dealt almost exclusively with all those aspects of the railway industry which were needed to support the actual trains themselves. Thus, he looked at everything from stations to hotels, from bridges to tunnels, from booking offices to waiting rooms, from arrival/departure boards to signal gantries, and from station advertising boards to railway workers' houses. Railways stations and railway hotels came in a wide variety of architectural styles, some for example rather pretentiously echoing the Italianate or even French *chateaux*, while others, specially in major cities, projected the air of solidity and permanence which was thought essential to persuade apprehensive passengers that their lives were in safe hands.

Passengers' fear of the 'new technology' also led to some other strange ideas which were designed to reassure. The portal entrances to some early tunnels, for instance, were deliberately made unnecessarily high and wide so that passengers would not get the impression they were plunging perilously into a small dark hole. A few hundred yards further into the tunnel, however, the workings returned to a more appropriate height and width! A tunnel in Sussex had a twin-tower portal with, between the towers, a small cottage. This building was occupied by the man responsible for the gas lighting inside the tunnel, again provided to reassure passengers.

Some excellent slides of permanent, swing- and tilting bridges followed, also a variety of viaducts some with 'stop piers' included to avoid the possibility of the arches falling in domino-effect during the construction. The 150-ft high by 700 ft long railway viaduct near Consett had supporting piers added as a precaution following the Tay Bridge disaster. Moving nearer our own times, Peter showed some slides of the advertisements which were commonplace in stations and alongside railway lines, including the never-to-be-forgotten Hall's Distemper men carrying a plank on their shoulders!

Next in was George Sayell, who started by showing a short Government film, made in the middle of the second WW and simply entitled *Life in an Aircraft Component Factory*. The factory, it transpired, was in fact Automotive Products, Leamington Spa, a company for which George worked for 35 years and in the preservation of whose history he has played a crucial part. In fact, the last six months of George's service with AP included heroic efforts to save priceless Company records, including vast numbers of photographic negatives, which were being wantonly tossed into skips. Almost entirely due to George's efforts, which are in the best traditions of Industrial Archaeology, the County Records Office now has in safe keeping a treasure trove of data on AP which would otherwise have finished up in the incinerator.

The third presentation was by Roger Cragg, who spoke on the original ill-fated Tay Bridge, its conception, basic design, construction and finally the findings of the enquiry which was charged with investigating the causes of its tragic collapse. Roger brought to life both the night of the tragedy and the findings of the enquiry, which were as devastating in their criticism of the design of the bridge, the quality of the workmanship, and the standard of maintenance, as they were of the culpability of its designer Sir Thomas Bouch.

Anthony Coulls and Miniature Railways

Members may be interested to learn that Anthony Coulls, who has spoken at Society meetings on two occasions in the past, has an article in the current edition of *Industrial Archaeology Review (Volume XXV May 2003 Number 1).* Titled *The Ephemeral Archaeology of the Miniature Railway*, the article seeks to establish why miniature railways both merit and require archaeological study, as an aspect of the industrial archaeology of leisure and a form of 'mimic technology' of the industrial period. It further shows how a study of their surviving material remains illustrates the worth of some unusual sources which have survived as evidence of a railway's existence.

The article is easy to read and supported by some fascinating period photographs, which invoke happy memories of family seaside holidays.

Other articles of interest include: *Technology as Culture: The Tom Rolt Memorial Lecture 2002* by John R. Hume and *The Archaeology of the Canal Warehouses of North-West England and the Social Archaeology of Industrialisation* by Michael Nevell, together with the usual book reviews and shorter notices.

The *Review* is available for loan to members from the Treasurer.

Members Presentations

April 2003
Members' Evening

Rarely has the phrase 'circumstances beyond my control' been more appropriate than when applied to Paul Cook, the speaker scheduled to address our April meeting. On the day in question, Paul was literally still 'grounded' at Dallas airport, Texas, USA, by a combination of a security alert and a tornado! Nevertheless, our chairman Martin Green and member John Brace stepped in at extremely short notice to provide members with a most interesting variety of topics.

Martin dealt first with Rock Mill, the former water-powered cotton mill on the Avon between Warwick and Leamington and now a prestigious residential address. His slides showed various views of the mill prior to development, and then as it is today, when sympathetic conversion has enabled various aspects of the character of the original buildings to be preserved. Close to Rock Mill is the Potterton Works, now unoccupied and with the site currently the subject of substantial (and needless to say controversial!) development plans. To the rear of the abandoned factory, Martin found the remnants of the greyhound track which once flourished there, including a small wooden building inside which the remnants of the electrical switchgear once used to control the 'running of the hare' can still be seen.

Turning to the Automotive Products factory on Tachbrook Road, Leamington, so recently swept away and already fast fading in local memory, Martin then showed excellent slides of the Works in the days when the names Borg & Beck, Lockheed, and Thomson meant so much to the town. Today it is virtually only the AP water tower (used now as a support for a number of telecommunications aerials), and parts of the Sports and Social Club buildings, which remain standing on the site.

Emotive shots included the mosaic paving in the entrance hall carrying the name Lockheed, and views of the water feature in the forecourt. Even more nostalgic were the shots of *Miranda*, the bronze mermaid which once graced the water feature and which one night simply 'vanished'. Believed to have been 'stolen to order', *Miranda* was sculpted by a German artist who fled the Nazis in the 1930s and was first shown publicly at the 1951 Festival of Britain. Cast from the sculptor's original by the lost-wax process, *Miranda* has never been recovered and is still on the 'wanted list' of stolen art treasures maintained by Interpol.

John Brace's account of the fire in the Channel Tunnel, with its grievous loss of life, was in some respects not unlike the inexorable unfolding of a Greek tragedy. From the moment when it was reported by an observant member of staff that a train carrying a vehicle on fire had been spotted entering the tunnel there was a sequence of events, a veritable 'chapter of accidents', in which confusion became worse confounded and the tragedy developed unchecked and in a nightmare of wrong decisions, and/or lack of decisions.

One after another, with a terrifying 'cascade' effect, the forward planning, strategies and automatic systems installed to deal with just such an emergency either simply failed to cope, were not followed, or were overtaken by events. At root, the catastrophe may well have started because all the advanced systems were designed to react to a fire which started *within* the tunnel. What had not been foreseen was a fire which started *outside* the tunnel, and was then carried into it.

Finally, mention may be made of the fact that the Coventry Watchmakers' Project Ltd has succeeded in acquiring premises to the rear of the Shakespeare pub in Spon St, Coventry. The building is in a rather poor condition, with a great deal of work needed to be done, but it is hoped that in due course it will house a museum dedicated to a trade which flourished in Coventry from approximately 1660 to 1960.

The Shuttleworth Collection

Members attention is drawn to the Shuttleworth Collection, a private collection of historical aircraft, many unique, and motor vehicles, originally begun by the late Richard Shuttleworth and situated near Biggleswade. It is now a charitable trust, but differs from other similar collections and museums in that during the summer, the aircraft are flown from the Collections own grass airfield and the motor vehicles are regularly driven.

Displays are held at roughly two week intervals from May to October and are an atmospheric experience. No where else in the UK is it possible to see operational historical aircraft at such close quarters, while the remarkable sight of a Bleriot taking to the calm evening air, is an event unique to Shuttleworth.

The Collection is open as a museum throughout the year and apart from the aircraft and vehicles, contains many aviation and motoring artefacts. Full details and a 2003 display programme are available from the Treasurer.

Warwickshire Civil Engineers

May 2003 Peter Cross-Rudkin
Some Civil Engineers of Warwickshire

Distinguished civil engineers with notable achievements in the County of Warwickshire formed the core of Peter Cross-Rudkin's presentation to the May meeting, and many of them in fact occupied the post of County Surveyor at one time or another. Peter started with brief reference to Sir William Dugdale, a well-known name in our area and author of an early book (1662) on the civil engineering of 'banking, draining and the construction of sea defences', with special reference to The Fens and East Anglia as a whole.

The post of County Surveyor originated principally in connection with the care and maintenance of bridges, after it was laid down by the King's Bench Division that any bridge which had established itself as 'being useful to residents of a County' should thereafter become the responsibility of that County. This ruling applied nationwide, and thus overnight to no fewer than 77 bridges in Warwickshire! From that point, it was obvious that the post of County Surveyor was one of considerable importance and responsibility.

Henry Couchman (1738-1803), although born in Kent, first made his mark as Clerk of Works at Packington Hall. As his career developed he became Bailiff of Temple Balsall Hospital, Surveyor of Buildings and then, in 1790, Bridgemaster (i.e.effectively County Surveyor) of Warwickshire. He also had considerable involvement with the county's canals and when he died he was succeeded as County Bridgemaster by his son Henry Couchman Junior. Eventually, many bridges required rebuilding as distinct from regular maintenance, and Henry Couchman Jr, born in Packington in 1771, was responsible for many County projects in that respect.

Next, Peter described some of the work of William Wright of Barford, contractor for the Staffs & Worcester canal, Clerk of Works of the Birmingham Canal, and associated with Wolverhampton Locks and the Stroudwater Canal. Charles Handley (c1750-1812) was also associated with Barford and was a prominent contractor on the canal network, including the Warwick to Napton stretch. Tamworth-born Thomas Sheasby Senior (1740-1799) was originally a stone mason who turned to canal work and notably bridge building. He contracted to demolish and rebuild the stone bridge at Polesworth and worked on the 5-arch Dukes Bridge at Coleshill. Extensive work on canal systems in a number of counties followed. His son, Thomas Sheasby Junior, followed in his father's footsteps and is credited with designing and building the first canal aqueduct to be lined with hydraulic cement.

The work of Thomas Baylis on the Gloucester to Sharpness ship canal impressed Thomas Telford and as a consequence the two men co-operated on a number of civil engineering projects thereafter. Baylis was involved considerably with Telford on work on the Holyhead Road, mainly concerned with evening-out the gradients, and his contract in that respect included work on the Braunston, Meriden, Hickcliff and Brickhill sections. A colourful character, Baylis tackled a wide variety of work and had a chequered career, including going bankrupt in 1829. Nevertheless, eight years later he was 'afloat' again and went on to complete a distinguished career.

ADVANCE NOTICE OF THE AGM

The AGM of the Society will be held on Thursday 11th July at 7.30 pm. The attendance of all members is requested so that any decisions about the future of the Society accurately reflect the wishes of the membership. Please advise the Secretary, Dennis Crips, as soon as possible, if you have a particular matter you wish to bring to the attention of the Society.

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