# WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

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NEWSLETTER


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## EDITORIAL

One hundred years ago this month man first achieved controlled powered flight in a heavier than air craft. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, the aeroplane is an accepted part of life and a crucial component in the global economy. During those one hundred years, the speed of development in aviation technology has been rapid, in so far as the link between that first frail Wright Flyer and the modern high capacity airliner following a computer controlled course, would appear tenuous. Yet a link there is, however unclear.

That the history of aviation and its technology is a branch of industrial archaeology is unquestionable. However, how well industrial archaeology as a discipline has served the understanding of the development of aviation technology, is perhaps a matter of less certainty.

Those with an interest in aviation are no doubt aware that the aircraft enthusiast is well served by a continuous torrent of publications, and numerous museums. Yet serious original research is not as common amongst all this material as might be imagined. The Society, for example, has a full set of AIA annual and quarterly publications dating back to 1997. A quick skim through these reveals no article on any aspect of aviation, apart from short abstracts of publications. The Society's complete set of *Archive* shows more promise, with a number of articles on aviation over the years. Specialist societies often do produce good work, for example the Society of World War One Aero Historians; Cross and Cockade, while some of the publications of the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum are exemplary; witness the books published about the restoration of specific aircraft by that Institute.

Perhaps, in truth, the research is done and published, but not under the banner of industrial archaeology. Why should this be? Aviation might be considered an upstart compared with many industries, although this should not make it any less worthy as a subject for academic study. There are too, plenty of historical tangible remains to investigate. The answer might be that the industry is extremely complex, encompassing aeronautics, engineering, manufacturing, civil engineering, architecture and social history. Therefore, of necessity any study of its historical aspects is fragmented and undertaken by specialists in fields not obviously related to industrial archaeology or even aviation.

**Mark W. Abbott**

## SOCIETY NEWS

**Programme.**

The programme for the Spring meetings of the Society is as follows:

**8th January**
Dr. Anthony Streeten: *Industrial World Heritage Sites in the UK: Successful Nominations and Future Prospects.*

**12th February**
An Evening Led by Members of the Society: *The Stratford District.*

**11th March**
Dr. Alan Cooke: *Once Upon a Time - the World's Thickest Coal Seam. The Geological Story of the Warwickshire Coalfield.*

**8th April**
Mr. Ken Chapman: *Troth and Hillson: The Langley Ploughmakers.*

**Subscriptions**

Members are reminded that subscriptions for the 2003/2004 season are now due. The amount payable, as agreed at the AGM, is £10 per member. Cheques payable to *Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society* please. If you are in doubt about your subscription status please ask the Treasurer. Receipts for payments received by post will be available at meetings.

**Speakers**

The search is now on for speakers for the 2004/2005 season of meetings. With the Chairman's impending retirement from Warwick School and subsequent holiday, he is keen to have the programme arranged as soon as possible, so recommendations for speakers will be gratefully received.

# Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

**September 2003 Dr. Michael Hodder**
***The Industrial Archaeology of Birmingham***

Birmingham was once a 'new town' and a hive of industry long before it became famous as the 'workshop of the world', and certainly long before it became synonymous with metal-bashing. As Dr Michael Hodder, Planning Archaeologist with Birmingham City Council, pointed out at our September meeting, evidence of pottery manufacture as early as the 12th century has been uncovered in what is now the City centre, and in fact represents classic exploitation of the very few natural resources the area possessed. In its earliest times, Birmingham needed to rely heavily on only three raw materials, namely clay, water and wood (for firing), all of which it had in abundance. Pottery manufacture was therefore an obvious choice to maximise those three resources. Rope and textile manufacture, also tanning, were other early industries for which Birmingham's limited natural resources would later be used.

Dr Hodder has been exceptionally busy in recent years as the massive redevelopment of Birmingham's Bull Ring area has continued and almost every square-metre has been scanned for possible archaeological finds. During the Bull Ring's development in the late 1950s and early 1960s, developers paid little or no heed to the disturbance of archaeological remains, even if they noticed their existence in the first place. These days, site work cannot be started until the archaeological 'all clear' has been given, and the costs of the work needed to recover or preserve finds must be met by the developers. Finds of early pottery show the use of typical Birmingham yellow clay, together with the decorative use of white clay brought in from other areas. There was also, Dr Hodder explained, a very large and thriving brick, tile and pipe-making industry in Birmingham in the 18th and 19th centuries. From very early times, Birmingham had a cattle market and this was the source of raw material for its tanning industry, which prospered in the 16th and 17th centuries. Hides arrived at the tanneries with heads, horns and hooves still attached, which the tanners discarded. Other industries, however, soon soon found a use for them. The use of water in copious quantities is essential in tanning, as it is in rope making, and Birmingham's plentiful supply was used for those industries, also later for driving waterwheels

Waterwheels were first used to drive small machines, for polishing buttons and coins for example, but later the entire machinery of Boulton's great Soho Manufactory was driven the same way. Even when steam arrived it was initially used to lift water to reservoirs feeding waterwheels, and it was only later that Watt's engines were employed to drive Soho Manufactory's machines direct. Today nothing survives of Soho Manufactory (although thankfully Boulton's residence Soho House still stands), but in the gardens of residential housing near the site of the Manufactory evidence of how water was once piped to the works has been discovered. (Members may recall there was a TV programme in the *Time Team* series that featured a search for evidence of the Soho Manufactory).

Finally, Dr Hodder turned his attention to another of Birmingham's almost 'forgotten' industries, namely glass making. Flourishing in the 19th century, the glass makers made full use of the City's complex canal system as a mean of both bringing in their raw materials, and then 'gently' shipping-out their fragile finished products.

## End of an Era

September marked the end of an era in aviation history. Overshadowed by the impending withdrawal of Concorde from service, another aircraft made its final flight; the LVG CVI owned by the RAF Museum and based at the Shuttleworth Collection. This too is a very special aircraft. It is a genuine World War 1 survivor of German origin, one of very few such machines left still capable of flight. That so cumbersome and vulnerable a device should even have survived the war is remarkable. Still to be airworthy 80 years later, makes LVG CVI No.7198/18 an extremely rare aircraft.

Sadly, the machine was only on extended loan to the Collection and has now moved to RAF Cosford to be prepared for museum display. The final official flight took place during Shuttleworth's Twilight Air Display of 20th September; strong winds preventing a sortie, as planned, at the October event, although the aircraft appeared on the flight line and had its engine run for the benefit of the crowd.

However, I was extremely privileged to see the actual last flight of the machine late on the evening of the 20th September. In the deep purple twilight, by the Collection's Hurricane, gently ticking as it cooled in the evening chill, I watched as Air Commodore Keith Dennison piloted the LVG into the air: his first and only flight in the machine. A fitting finale for a fascinating relic of aviation history.

**Mark W. Abbott**

# Railway History

## October 2003 John Boynton
### *Railways to Stratford upon Avon*

Railway sidings and a wharf where the Stratford-on-Avon canal basin is today, and before that a very primitive horse-drawn tramway, were some of the milestones with which John Boynton started his talk on railways to Shakespeare's birthplace. Relics of the tramway, of course, remain on display in Stratford to this day; a wagon standing on a short section of track mounted on stone setts, rather than sleepers, so that the horses could walk in relative comfort. Some of the setts, John pointed out, can also be seen incorporated in the walls of the rose gardens in front of the theatre. The tramway bridge over the Avon remains too, now a footbridge . Principally, however, John concentrated on the Stratford & Midland Junction Railway (the SMJ). He traced the route of this line from its beginning in Birmingham and followed its meandering through a series of stations, some of which genuinely warranted that title whereas others were no more than either 'halts' or 'platforms'. He touched on the historic main line stations in Birmingham, mentioning their current restorations, and then took us on a wander down the SMJ calling at stations of particular interest *en route*.

The 'halt' at Earlswood for fishermen visiting the lakes; the station at Danzey with its elegant stone bridge designed to be 'in sympathy' with nearby Umberslade Hall; the use of pine trees to provide shelter for passengers on station platforms; and the Bearley aqueduct. All these and many others had honourable mentions and featured in excellent colour slides. John also stirred memories with shots of historic locos, signal boxes, station canopies, footbridges, and even station furniture, including a penny-in-the-slot platform ticket machine.

**Newport Transporter Bridge**

The meeting concluded with a talk by John Selby on the Newport Transporter Bridge over the river Usk, which he visited while attending this year's IA Conference in Wales on behalf of WIAS. Opened in 1906, the bridge has been the subject of a major restoration project, after many years of neglect, and is well worth a visit. It carries vehicles and foot passengers on a 'platform' which is suspended above the Usk on cables and is moved across the river by an overhead 'traveller', rather like that of a gantry crane. The motor house with its huge cable-winding drum is on the east bank of the river, while on the moving platform itself there is a charming control house the design of which is not unlike that of a Victorian ice-cream kiosk! John's slides showing the structure of the transporter and its supporting columns outlined against a brilliant blue sky were quite memorable.

## A Subject for the Tip?

A neighbour recently approached me explaining that, although her husband died over three years ago, she had only recently got round to sorting out his 'hobby'. The latter turned out to be a collection of books, photographs, slides and other items associated with the history of the airship. There was even a small section of the frame of R101!

Everything was carefully catalogued, and there was even a monograph he had written on lighter-than-air craft in the 1930s. She confessed to having no interest whatsoever in the subject, and neither, she added, had her children or her grandchildren. Did I think anyone else would possibly be interested, or should she just take the lot round to the tip?

Fortunately, I was able to put her in contact with someone who was delighted to take over the collection. However, the incident gave me cause to think. Most amateur industrial archaeologists have 'collections' of one sort or another. How many, I wondered, had thought to make sure there is some indication as to whom they might at least be 'offered' before they eventually end up in the skip?

## Favourite IA

Continuing the recent Newsletter theme of favourite IA, members might like to consider a visit to the following sites:

**Grassington Moor, North Yorkshire.** Extensive and well preserved remains of lead mining including an impressive condensing flue and chimney. Follow the narrow road up through Grassington town centre and park on the verge where the tarmac stops, near a house called *Yarnbury.*

**Cwm Bychan Copper Mines, North Wales.** Remains of a concentration plant and aerial ropeway up the valley. The upper terminal of the latter is largely intact. Park at the Nantmor National Trust car park, near Beddgelert.

**Menai Suspension Bridge.** A classic, best appreciated by a walk from Church Island, Menai Bridge; along the Belgian Promenade; under the bridge approach viaduct and then up Cambrian Road to the Anglesey end of the bridge. Complete the excursion by a walk across the bridge and back.

# Members' Presentations

### November 2003 Members' Evening

### *Some Aspects of the Industrial Archaeology of Warwickshire*

So great was the amount of material presented by members to the November meeting that it considerably overran its allotted time. The evening started with a rallying cry from Martin to the effect that surely the time had now come for our Society to stop hiding its light under a bushel and to publish some of its accumulated data, thus letting others have the benefit of its researches to date. Martin suggested that our Society should henceforth not just aim to list and record but should then go on actively to publish. And as far as the latter was concerned, he suggested that the release of its records of IA sites in the area defined as 'Warwick District' would be the ideal place to begin.

That there is an abundance of data for our Society to publish was made very clear when Roger Cragg stepped up to review the work already carried out by members on bridges, canals and water towers alone in the area. As always, Roger's unrivalled collection of slides on all three subjects splendidly illustrated the points he was making, and in addition served as examples to members of precisely the types of IA sites we all should be researching, photographing, and where appropriate recording in detail. Roger added a fourth category to his list, naming it 'miscellania', and then showed several slides of the unusual roof structure which once covered the swimming baths in Leamington's Pump Rooms. Designed by de Normanville, it has been beautifully preserved, refurbished, and today it shelters the town's new library.

To give members some typical examples of the types of IA sites associated with railways in Warwick District, Peter Chater then dipped into his extensive 'library' of slides. He showed subjects as disparate as the London Illustrated News's 1844 picture of Kenilworth's station (part of which is now incorporated into Drummonds night-spot in the town!), to Leamington's Avenue station in 1861; and from the coal yard at Claverdon station to a loco picking up water from a between-the-rails trough.

To round-off the evening, Denis Crips concentrated on the splendid example of IA which lies within the walls of Warwick Castle, namely the electricity generating plant which was opened in 1894. Its inaugural task, which at first switch-on must have caused the Mill Engineer Mr Bissell great anxiety, was to light the Castle for A Great Celebratory Ball. The plant supplied current at 100 V DC from a massive array of batteries which, in turn, were charged-up by dynamos. The latter were driven either by the mill wheel or by one of a pair of gas engines. There was also an underwater turbine, driven by the river, which was used to charge a pressure accumulator that forced water up from approximately river level to serve the Castle. The subject of recent extensive restoration, the complete electricity generating plant is open to view by the public and, being extremely well presented, is highly recommended for a visit.

## Warwick Gasworks

The distinctive structure that once housed the gas holders associated with Warwick Gas Works, and now converted to offices, has been empty for some time. Over the months it has gradually become more shabby, culminating recently in a more concerted attempt at vandalism. Windows were broken and a small fire started in the ground floor of the right hand tower that once housed a gas holder. Now, smoke stained, the building scarcely looks the important industrial monument that it is; probably the earliest extant gas works structure in the UK.

However, salvation is seemingly at hand. A sold board has appeared on the building, so hopefully it will soon be restored to its former self. The structure is of course of particular interest to the Society since it was the subject of the Society logo for a number of years.

**Mark W. Abbott**

**WARWICKSHIRE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY**

E-mail: WIAS@photoshot.com

| CHAIRMAN | SECRETARY | TREASURER |
|---|---|---|
| M. J. Green | D. M. Crips | M. W. Abbott |
| *Argyll* 2(b) Union Road | 27 St. Nicholas Church Street | 53 Stowe Drive |
| Leamington Spa | Warwick | Southam |
| Warwickshire | Warwickshire | Warwickshire |
| CV32 5LT | CV34 4DD | CV47 1NZ |
| ( 01926 313782 | ( 01926 401072 | ( 01926 813155 |

AFFILIATED TO THE ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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