WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

WIAS

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NEWSLETTER

THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL

In the September 2004 edition of the Newsletter I raised the idea of changing the design of the publication.

I also canvassed the opinion of members as to any shortcomings in the Newsletter. No comments have been forthcoming, so I assume that the current design meets with the approval of the readership. Therefore, I see no reason to change anything for the moment, and that includes the inclusion of photographs. Adding pictures to the Newsletter would entail considerable extra work and production of the established design is already a time consuming task, often requiring original material to be written by myself.

This additional material is something I do consider a possible shortcoming. There is a danger that, apart from the excellent meeting reports written by Arthur Astrop, the Newsletter reflects my personal interests rather than the interests of the membership.

There have been no complaints, but I would prefer a variety of material to draw upon, so written contributions from Society members would be very welcome. Articles need not be long. 500 words is ideal, but shorter filler pieces are also needed, with as few as 100-150 words. Preferably these should be submitted on disc in rtf format, but I can transcribe printed work if necessary.

Mark W. Abbott

TOM CHARMAN

Tom Charman, who sadly died recently, was a long standing and loyal supporter of the Society. Therefore the Committee, after discussion with Tom's close friends, and taking into account the wishes of Tom's widow, have decided that a donation in Tom's memory would be appropriate.

Tom was a lover of the steam engine and a member of the Tal y Llyn Railway Preservation Society, for whom he acted as a volunteer train guard in the early days of that Society. Therefore, the plan is that the Society and the Warwickshire Steam Engine Society, of which Tom was a founder member, will make a joint donation to a specific Tal y Llyn project. Ideally this will be a small project associated with the Narrow Gauge Railway Museum at Towyn, that will be identified as sponsored in memory of Tom.

Peter Coulls has agreed to liase with the Tal y Llyn Railway with the aim of identifying a suitable preservation project and a contact with whom to raise the idea of sponsoring the project in Tom's memory. The amount considered as a suitable donation by the Society is £50.00.

SOCIETY NEWS

Programme.

The programme to July 2005, is as follows:

January 13th
Dr. Mike Hodder and Mrs. Toni Demidowicz: *The Birmingham Glass Industry.*

February 10th
Mr. George Sayell: *The Old Mineral Line, West Somerset.*

March 10th
Mr. David Depledge: *Coventry Airport: Past, Present and Future.*

April 14th
Members' Evening: *The Industrial Archaeology of the Rugby District.*

May 12th
Mr. Peter Cross-Rudkin: *William James: Father of the Railways?*

June 9th
Mr. Martin Green: *Aspects of the Industrial Archaeology of New Zealand.*

July 14th
Mr. Mike Buxton: *Milestones: Warwickshire and Beyond.*

Details of the programme for the new season of meetings starting in September 2005, will be published in the June 2005 Newsletter.

Subscriptions

Members are reminded that subscriptions for the 2004/2005 season have been due since September. If you are unsure about your subscription status please ask the Treasurer. The amount payable remains at £10.00 per person or couple. Cheques payable to *Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society*, please. Prompt payment would be appreciated.

Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

September 2004 Mrs. Toni Demidowicz
The Birmingham Jewellery Quarter

From about the middle of the 18th century a relatively small area just north of Birmingham city centre began to emerge as the focal point for the manufacture of what were then known as 'toys'. Not toys in the sense of children's playthings but quite small items such as buttons, brooches, knick-knacks, fashion accessories and ultimately jewellery in precious and semi-precious metals. Such goods were eventually to be produced in very large numbers, and the trade was extremely labour intensive. At its peak, the 'jewellery quarter' as it was to become known, was employing some 70,000, many of whom were women whose natural dextrous skills were ideally suited to the intricate work involved.

Today, the jewellery quarter (which still employs some 3,000) is an important focus for conservation efforts in Birmingham's city centre, and it was to this aspect that Mrs Demidowicz chiefly addressed herself at our September meeting. The origins of Birmingham's jewellery quarter lay in the wide use of 'home working' with manufacture being sub-contracted to scores of small in-house workshops, often the top rooms in back-to-back dwellings. Natural light from windows, so necessary for the close intricate work involved, was of the essence and this imperative remained even when eventually small 'factories', purpose built to suit the industry, began to appear. Nonetheless, the design of these small manufactories, intended for multi-occupancy, still maintained a flavour of the earlier 'home working' traditions.

In the 1770s, the Birmingham canal system was extended to serve the jewellery quarter and even though the French wars of the 1790s slowed the industry down it still continued to be vital to the City. By the 1830s it was really booming, and sufficiently well-established to merit the official title of 'Jewellery Quarter'. Specialization of manufacture was appearing and any plot of land large enough to site a manufactory for a few score workers (and it did not need to be very lage) was soon snapped up and the density of jewellery firms in the City increased rapidly.

Mechanisation never really made much impact on the industry, which remained stubbornly labour intensive and heavily dependent on manual skills. However, simple machines such as hand-operated flypresses, and small power presses, were eventually employed. The electro-plating processes for depositing gold, silver, cadmium, chromium etc were also required, with the result that specialist plating companies soon sprang up to serve the trade.

Mrs Demidovicz showed some excellent slides of small domestic manufactories in the jewellery quarter which have already been successfully preserved, and the drive to save others, in the face of intense pressure from property developers, is being firmly maintained. Birmingham's jewellery trade reached its peak in the immediate post-war period but then gradually, and inexorably, began to decline. This decline was caused by many factors, but chief among them was intense competition from overseas. Nevertheless, the conservation of Birmingham's jewellery quarter is extremely well established, many unique properties have been permanently saved from the bulldozer, and the impetus to save more is undiminished. Indeed, as Mrs Demidowicz pointed out, the strictures which the City has imposed to preserve remaining properties, and on the design of any new properties proposed for the quarter, are so severe as to make developers think very hard before even a single brick is moved!

Napton Engine Update II

Thanks to Hugh Compton, further snippets of information about the Oxford Canal's Napton Pumping Engine have become known.

According to the Oxford Canal Company's Distance Book in the National Archives at Kew (Ref: RAIL855/148), the ¾ mile canal arm to the engine site had Bridge No. 117 over its entrance. There is no bridge extant at that location now. Further, the arm is described as terminating at a wharf near a pumping house with a brickworks adjacent.

The reference to a brickworks is interesting. There is a flooded excavation across the minor road that now runs close to the engine house site, that could be a source of clay for bricks for the pumping scheme. That there was a documented brickworks at the end of the canal arm makes it more likely that this pit was the source of the brickmaking clay.

The canal arm is now used as residential moorings and tails off into a marshy area near the engine site. The Getmapping aerial photograph that shows the possible feeder tunnel line, does not show any crop mark that might indicate the site of a brickworks. However, the nearby excavation is small, so if it was a clay source it would suggest the brickworks was short-lived; possibly only established to provide the bricks needed by the pumping scheme.

Mark W. Abbott

Warwickshire Cheese

October 2004 Mr. David Fowler
The History of Cheese and Cheese Making in Warwickshire

There are mentions of cheese-making being practiced as far back as 8,000 BC, and many references to the industry are also to be found in the Old Testament. But at our October meeting we heard of the activities of Fowlers of Earlswood, proudly able to boast of being the oldest family based cheese-makers in England. Founded in 1840, the company still produces hand-crafted cheeses and David Fowler, grandson of the founder and current head of the firm, explained the basic stages in cheese manufacture and their importance in the maintenance of quality.

His family started as milk suppliers and at a time when it was merely the surplus milk which was used to produce cheese and butter rather than allowing it to go to waste. Today, the situation is the complete reverse, and the Company produces nothing but cheeses. It has a 110-head herd of cows, offers a range of 14 different types of cheeses in four ranges of 'strength', and it has approximately 5 tons of cheeses in store, at various stage of maturity, at any one time. In cheese manufacture, 'strength' of flavour is a product of time. Cheeses marketed as 'mild' are matured for about 4 months. Others mature for seven to eight months, and the extra-extra mature cheeses are kept for as long as 20 to 24 months before being marketed.

Many of the multiple processes involved in the hand-crafting of cheese are 'time and temperature' dependent and much of the equipment and controls employed are more akin to a laboratory than to a food-processing plant. Control of the processes, and of the procedures at every stage, are most rigorous and are also subject to strict audit by independent inspectors who can demand access to all stages at any time. They also expect to be shown the 'traceability' records of all materials used in cheese making, so that any batch can be tracked back to its origins.

Fowlers of Earlsdon have a countrywide distribution of their cheeses but it was noteworthy that today some 18 per cent of output goes to Farmers' Markets and approximately 20 per cent to the supermarkets.

Digital Archive; A Misnomer?

The term 'archive' might be defined as: A collection of documents or records or the place where such a collection is kept. Further, the term implies a collection that is conserved for use as a historical study resource.

Techniques of preserving existing paper and artefact archives are well proven and one might reasonably expect to access such collections in the future. However, a trend towards digital archives, especially amongst amateur researchers, is perhaps less welcome. The term digital archive is really a misnomer, and a better term might be digital record management.

The digital archiving of material typically occurs in one of two ways. First, there is the digital record of an existing collection. This uses digital technology as an extension of existing record management methods. The original material remains intact, while access to it for study or research is made easier. Further, the problems of conservation of the original material are eased, as it rarely needs to be removed from storage. As technology advances all that needs to be ensured is that the digital management of a collection keeps pace with technology to maintain efficient access.

Second, there is the true digital archive. This is a technique that is common amongst amateur researchers. The documents and records are stored only in a digital form. Whilst this is exceptionally convenient in the short term, it is really only digital asset management. It is an archive in the sense that it is a collection of documents, but if 'archive' also implies conservation, then a digital archive falls short of this aim.

Anyone who has owned a computer will testify to the ephemeral nature of digital data. Corruption and loss is commonplace and only avoided by systematic back up of data. This in itself is not straightforward for archival storage and access.

CDs are often recommended as a means of archiving files, but these are not a proven long term solution. Currently, ten years is thought the likely life of laser written CDs and DVDs. Also, it is unlikely that devices to read data CDs will be available in as little as ten years.

Removable hard drives are another option. However, long term stability of such data remains unproved and a change in technology could render the data unrecoverable.

So for the amateur researcher, what might be a solution to archiving information? Realistically, the answer is to keep paper copies of everything and use film for images. This will ensure a lasting record that does not rely upon technology for access. View the computer only as a means of record management and transmission.

Mark W. Abbott

Rails to Birmingham

November 2004 Mr. John Boynton

The London and Birmingham Railway

Undeterred by the fact that there was effectively a substantial 'gap' in the rails, large numbers of people in Birmingham nevertheless queued in 1838 for tickets on a newly opened railway in order to be in London on 28 June that year for the coronation of the young Queen Victoria. The discontinuity in this historic line, the construction of which was masterminded by Robert Stephenson, was caused by delays in completing the 1½-mile long Kilsby tunnel, a mammoth civil engineering undertaking at the time. To span the 'gap', passengers *en route* from Birmingham to London had to de-train north of the tunnel and travel by coach before rejoining the railway some distance further south.

The 110-mile London and Birmingham railway, John Boynton reminded us, was historic in a number of ways. It was certainly the most important in Britain at the time, could claim to be the first long-distance railway in the world, and it laid the foundations of a nationwide railway network in the UK. Unlike Brunel's Great Western railway, the route of the L & B line lay 'across the grain' of the countryside's topography and so, besides the challenge of the Kilsby tunnel, numerous cuttings and embankments also needed to be built. John's description of the excavation of the cuttings, using only picks, shovels and wheelbarrows and with the spoil being hauled up steep slopes by roped donkeys, made them seem an inconceivable, if not an impossible, task today. A major obstacle encountered in driving the Kilsby tunnel was unexpected ingress of water, which was a serious cause of delay. John pointed out that more than 30 different contractors were involved in the tunnel, and at least 10 of them were bankrupted by the project before it was completed.

At its London end, the line had Euston station, with its proud Doric entrance arch incorporating 45 ft high pillars. At the Birmingham end of the line stood Curzon St station, equally impressive in its way and with its pillars just 12 inches taller, at 46 ft! John also pointed out that the L & B line was extremely concerned with safety and security of passengers, and was the first to have 'railway police'. Men stationed along the line could signal to each other when necessary, and were in fact the forerunners of the railway signaling system we know today.

Two years after the L & B line opened, Bradshaw published the first edition of his railway timetables, which was an attempt to integrate the services offered by all the routes in the UK. A copy of the first 'Bradshaw' can be seen in the Birmingham City Library, and is noteworthy for the number of advertisements for 'quack medicine cures' which it contains! To round off his talk John showed a fine collection of slides, tracing the L & B line northwards from Euston to Birmingham, and including many early photos of stations, locos and rolling stock in the Midlands.

Publications

The latest edition of *Archive* has recently been received by the Society: *Archive*, Issue 44, Lightmoor Press, 2004. Steam locomotives and railways feature heavily in this issue, in celebration of the 200 years since Trevithick demonstrated his Penydarren locomotive, thereby showing the way forward for railways and industrial railways in particular.

However, perhaps of more interest to members is a further article in a developing series on Coventry's industrial history, on this occasion an account of William Arthur Weaver and the Coventry Victor Company Limited. The Victor Company specialised in horizontally opposed IC engines and made a range of motorcycles and cycle cars between the Wars. An excellent selection of photographs accompanies the article.

The journal may be borrowed from the Treasurer.

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