

WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

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EDITORIAL

I am compiling this Newsletter during one of those periods of major change and resulting stress that sometimes crop up in life.

One of those changes is one of change of address and while the exact details are not settled as this is written, what is certain is that by the time this Newsletter is published, my contact details on page four will be out of date. I also anticipate a short period when I will not have a telephone line. Thus, I will not be able to collect email from the Society account. Any emails sent will remain on the server until I am able to download them, but please do not expect an immediate response. I would also ask that members *do not* use the phone number given for me at the end of this Newsletter.

Members who have provided the Society with their email address will be informed of my new details when they are available. Otherwise, I hope to have the information available at the July meeting and it will of course be published in the September Newsletter.

Mark W. Abbott

SOCIETY NEWS

Programme.

The programme through to December 2005, is as follows:

July 14th

Mr. Mike Buxton: *Milestones: Warwickshire and Beyond.*

September 8th

Mr. Hugh Compton: *The Oxford Canal.*

October 13th

Dr. Michael Harrison: *Highlights of Recent Annual Conferences of the Association for Industrial Archaeology.*

November 10th

Mr. David de Haan: *Ironbridge*

December 8th

Prof. Marilyn Palmer: *Technology in the English Country House and Estate*

Details of the programme for the first quarter of 2006 will appear in the September 2005 Newsletter. Please also note that Prof. Marilyn Palmer is not confirmed for December 2005. Her other commitments may mean that this talk is deferred to a date in 2006. Members will be advised at the November meeting of any change to the December programme.

Subscriptions

So that the AGM fits within this year's planned programme of meetings, it has been brought forward one month from the usual July date, to the June meeting. However, as in previous years, subscriptions for the next season of meetings will become due from September.

Web Site

The Society Web Site, which may be found by tapping in

www.warwickshireias.org, has been running for nearly two years under the care of Peter Riley, who recently decided that an update was needed. The redesigned site is now on line and has a much more streamlined and professional look than the previous incarnation.

The content includes back copies of the Newsletter; recent ones in the published format as pdf files for which Adobe Reader is needed (a free download from www.adobe.com or via the link on the Society site homepage), as well as the current published programme of meetings, some aspects of Warwickshire IA, and an excellent links page.

Summer Walk

This year sees the reinstatement of the annual Society summer walk under the guidance of Peter Chater. Peter will lead a short excursion from Marston Doles on the Oxford Canal (OS Landranger 151 GR 466583), on Thursday 16th June, at 7.15pm, to the site of the Napton Pumping Engine (as featured in recent back editions of the Newsletter) to look at the remains of the engine house and its watercourse. The walk will only be about a mile in length. Limited parking is available by the roadside, immediately over the canal bridge on the Southam to Priors Marston road.

Peter has an excellent knowledge of local history and his guided walks are always interesting and informative, so please support him and the Society in this venture.

NEWSLETTER

Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

March 2005 Mr. David Depledge

Coventry Airport: Past, Present and Future

In 1906, only three years after the Wright brothers had demonstrated controlled flight, Coventry took its first tentative steps into the aviation industry. The firm of Morton & Weaver (later to become Coventry Victor), designed, built and flew a monoplane*. Eight years later, by the outbreak of WW1, Siddeley-Deasey was already building planes and engines in very large numbers. The planes were flown off Coventry's very first airfield, at Radford.

The city's second airfield was established in 1920 at Whitley by Armstrong Whitworth (that Company having taken over Siddeley-Deasey), and in 1923 a flying school was opened there. The Whitley airfield was not ideal, however, either for size or for location, and in 1933 Coventry decided to follow the national trend and to have its own Municipal Aerodrome. The site chosen was at Baginton, where 237 acres of a 1,300-acre site already belonging to the City were made available.

There is often an element of 'prestige' attaching to a city having a Municipal airport but, as David Depledge explained, they are also nearly always financially precarious undertakings. Because the fixed overheads of any airport are relatively high it depends critically on the number of aircraft 'movements' (i.e. takeoffs and landings), it can attract. Few civic airports are able to reach the required number consistently, and over the years Coventry airport has been no exception to that rule.

Between the wars, Armstrong Whitworth established a large factory next to the airport, and Alvis were also building aero engines in large numbers nearby. The second world war years saw both Companies, and the airport, thriving and new large hangars were rapidly erected. AWA was soon producing aircraft at a prodigious rate. Over 1,800 AWA Whitley bombers, over 1,300 Avro Lancasters and nearly 300 Avro Lincolns were built. As the war continued, Baginton airport played a vital part in the formation and commissioning of fighter squadrons which, in due course, departed for other airfields.

In 1946, the airport was handed back for civil use, under the management of AWA, and in 1948 its first control tower, destined to be used until the mid-1990s, was built. Two years later, in 1950, Coventry City Council took over running the airport, a responsibility it was to carry for the next 47 years. There followed a long period of uncertain futures, ambitious plans, short periods of profitability, longer periods of unprofitability, and a general striving to find a viable role for the airport.

Its first use for scheduled passenger work came in 1952, when DH Dragon Rapides of Jersey Airlines came into service. Other hopeful ventures included hosting the King's Cup Air Race and the Lockheed Aerobatic Championships. In 1960, a 5,300-ft hard runway was built, part of an ambitious 4-stage expansion plan the rest of which never transpired.

As the years passed freight services seemed to be the answer to the airport's problems, and for a period were successful. In 1998, however, the Council handed the airport over to the Atlantic group who, in 2003, persuaded TUI (UK) that passenger services could be run profitably. In 2004, in fact, over 460,000 people flew from Baginton to a variety of destinations, and at present it would appear that low-cost airline operation may be the viable future for the airport.

* *Issue 44 of Archive, available on loan from Mark Abbott, carries an article on Morton & Weaver with details and a picture of this aeroplane.*

Warwick Gasworks Addendum

Following the reproduction of the *West Midlands Archaeology* report on the remaining Warwick Gasworks buildings in the March edition of this Newsletter, Peter Chater has kindly supplied the following description of how coal was supplied to the Gasworks:

About sixty years ago when I was working on the footplate my mate and I used to shunt Warwick Cape Goods Yard and this included setting the wagns of coal in a siding for the Gasworks.

This siding where the coal-wagns were set was adjacent to the Down Mainline just west of Cape Road bridge, and would hold about ten wagns. At a point near this siding was a narrow gauge railway, which took a curving course on a falling gradient to the Gasworks.

To unload these coal wagns the Gasworks used one open topped manually propelled truck. This was positioned close to the coal wagns and a man would shovel the coal out of the wagn into this truck until full, possibly about a couple of tons. As it was a falling gradient, once the brakes were released, this truck would start to roll and the man in charge would step onto the back of it and ride to the Gasworks, a distance of about 150 yards.

I would guess that the Gasworks used about forty tons of coal a day.

Does any member know the period over which this narrow gauge line operated? It was almost certainly not an original feature of the works and does not appear on the 1889 1 inch OS map.

Rugby District

April 2005 Members' Evening

The Industrial Archaeology of the Rugby District

The area of Warwickshire designated the 'Rugby District' is among the smallest in the County but among the richest in industrial archaeology, much of which still needs recording. Indeed, as Martin Green pointed out, it is a veritable 'mine' waiting to be dug. As such, it is a splendid prospect for members of WIAS to tackle with notebook and camera, and Martin urged members to think seriously about what they can do to increase our records of the area.

To set the scene, he gave an overall view of the subject, touching briefly on the wide variety of IA topics to be found both in the town of Rugby itself and in its environs. As far as the town is concerned, three features dominate historically, namely: the railways and their associated activities; engineering works, some of which operated on a very large scale; and of course the manufacture of cement. Rugby featured prominently in the railway 'fever' which gripped Britain in the first half of the 19th century. The London & Birmingham line was the first to affect the town and among others which followed were the Midland Counties, the Trent Valley, the LNWR and, at the end of the 19th century, the Great Central. Rugby had no fewer than three rail stations over the years.

Heavy engineering started in the town when Willans & Robinson transferred there from Thames Ditton, and eventually came to be dominated by such giants as English Electric, British Thomson-Houston, GEC, AEI and, today, Alstom. The Boughton Rd works of BT-H had associations with Frank Whittle's early experiments with jet engines. Modern manufacturing technology means, of course, that the giant factories of Rugby's past, employing many thousands of workers, are no longer needed. But residual evidence of their existence still survives and should be recorded.

The Rugby Cement Works is to be the subject of a talk by our President, Toby Cave, later in the year, but other topics touched on by Martin included the factories of Lodge Plugs, Bluemels, Peugeot (at Ryton, in the Rugby District), the Rugby Radio Station and its masts, also the town's cattle market.

To augment Martin's talk, Peter Chater and Roger Cragg then gave presentations which reinforced the view that Rugby District is rich in IA subjects. Peter showed slides of a number of fine houses and other items of architectural and technological interest in the vicinity of Rugby town, including Newbold Lodge, the gates to Newham Paddocks, and Pugin's splendid Princethorpe Priory.

Roger Cragg dealt with 'civil engineering aspects' of Rugby District, especially examples of its canals, railways, roads and bridges. As far as roads are concerned, Rugby can boast two by the Romans (the Fosse Way and Watling Street), and of course Telford's Holyhead Road. A perennial problem in the recording of IA topics is trying to decide what merits a passing mention, what warrants extensive detailed recording, and what really doesn't need recording at all! So Roger concluded his presentation by looking at the criteria which The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) uses for assessing and 'grading', the significance (or otherwise), of an industrial archaeological 'find'.

Roger's presentation of that subject is too extensive to be included in this report, but is a system which member's could obviously use to advantage in their own investigations. It will be detailed further at the June meeting.

The Construction History Society

The Society has recently been supplied with details and membership application forms for the Construction History Society, an organisation that may not be familiar to members, despite its field of interest having links to industrial archaeology.

The CHS is a registered charity founded in 1982, the aims of which are: To disseminate research findings and general information about historical buildings and construction techniques, mainly, but not exclusively concerning Great Britain; to encourage contemporary industry to pay more attention to the safe keeping of its records, and to demonstrate the fascination and cultural value of construction history through an active programme of visits, lectures, symposia and conferences.

The CHS is not solely concerned with famous monumental buildings and major construction projects, but with all types of building and building methods as evidence of the material culture of a people. The Society is open to everyone with an interest in construction history, irrespective of their professional specialism. An annual journal, supervised by a specialist editorial board, is published to international academic standards.

Further information about the CHS may be found at their web site address at www.constructionhistory.co.uk, and an information leaflet and membership application form is available from the Treasurer.

Mark W. Abbott

An Early Railway Engineer

May 2005 Mr. Peter Cross-Rudkin

William James: The Father of the Railways?

The son of a Henley-in-Arden solicitor, William James (1771-1837) initially followed his father into that profession and began his practice in the same town. But William was not long content with the humdrum work of a country lawyer and was soon casting his eye on wider horizons. In a very well-crafted talk to our May meeting, Peter Cross-Rudkin drew a picture of James as a man whom today would be undoubtedly be recognized as an *entrepreneur*; a visionary and, some might say, also as something of a social climber.

His first 'step-up' came in 1801, when he was made Land Agent to the Earl of Warwick, an appointment which subsequently gave him the *entr e* to such luminaries as Lord Redesdale, the Earl of Dartmouth, the Duchess of Dorset and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Through successfully advising such clients how best they might exploit the mineral resources of their huge land holdings James began to build up his personal wealth, and by 1816 he owned several coal mines. His career advanced through further prestigious public appointments, but he had also caught, through a meeting with Richard Trevithick, the 'railway' bug. Later, after meeting with George Stephenson, James became convinced that the steam locomotive was to be the motive power of the future.

He was now set on a different course, namely the vision of a rail network spreading across Britain, and turned his enormous energy to planning, and actually surveying, a variety of potential routes. He had already played a part in the Stratford Canal and the Moreton tramway, and his early work on railways proper included schemes for lines between Canterbury and Whitstable, Chatham and Portsmouth, and Padstow to Fowey.

His most significant venture, however, was the projected 35-mile long line between Liverpool and Manchester, for which he produced a highly detailed survey. He now had an agreement with George Stephenson for the supply of steam locos for this

line, but perhaps for the first time in his career James was about to meet with obstacles to what had so far been a series of successes. Financial problems arose, not just in raising money for the venture but also deriving from a family feud, and there was the difficulty of getting the necessary Acts through Parliament. Suffice to say that in 1823, at a critical point in his career, James was declared bankrupt and even spent some time in gaol.

Disputes also arose over who should be in overall charge of the Liverpool-Manchester work, with Stephenson or the Rennie brothers being alternately 'on top', but with James now necessarily in the background. He eventually settled with his creditors and retired to Cornwall, where he died. James has been rather sidelined in the histories of 'great Victorians' but some claim he was the real 'Father of the Railways'. An important figure of his time certainly, in Peter's view, but not quite up to the claim 'the man who invented passenger railways'.

18th Century Steam Engines

Members in search of a day out with an Industrial Archaeology bias, might like to consider a visit to Julie and David Hulse's Eighteenth Century Steam Engines in Miniature. This collection of working model stationary engines comes highly recommended by John Selby and consists of seven model engines ranging from Newcomen's Dudley Castle Engine of 1712 to a typical beam engine of 1860. The models represent over 20 years work and employ the same materials and construction techniques as the originals.

A preview of the engines is available at www.btinternet.com/~historical.engines and David Hulse may be contacted on 01785 818773 or at david.hulse1@btinternet.com. The address of the collection is Quern House, 133 Oulton Road, Stone, Staffordshire, ST15 8DS. Visits are strictly by appointment only.

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