

# WARWICKSHIRE

## Industrial Archaeology Society

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### FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The start of September and a new 'season' of meetings for the Society is always a time when thoughts turn to the possibilities of building one's own knowledge of the subject by attendance at courses at local colleges and universities. This process was brought particularly to mind this year when the Newsletter of the AIA - under the headline *'Where are those IA courses?'* - asked its members to send in details of courses or conferences, for there seemed to be a lack of such opportunities in comparison with previous years.

In fact, my earliest experiences of industrial archaeology began with WEA courses held locally, and I remember meeting with fellow students who were later to become stalwarts of WIAS. I was greatly impressed by both their enthusiasm and their knowledge, and showed me how much I had to learn.

Carrying out a search for courses for 2006/7 did not initially bear significant fruit. Further investigation has produced a small number of possibilities (see below), but I would be very eager to hear

details of any other courses or conferences that might be of interest to members.

Such courses and conferences are crucial in promoting the subject as well as providing possible research projects, and, of course, potential members and speakers for WIAS. They are all part of the process of preventing the subject becoming a one-generational experience, with impetus and commitment evaporating once the founders of the subject are no longer with us. It is quite a challenge to consider ways in which a wider (and younger) audience might be tempted to a study of relics of our industrial past. Perhaps WIAS should make a greater effort to spread the word. Should we have a ready-made presentation on the *'Industrial Archaeology of Warwickshire'* that could be taken around local societies and groups, and even taken into schools?

One interesting possibility is the example provided by the Bristol Industrial Archaeology Society. The University of Bristol offers a regular course on industrial archaeology and this is run by Bristol Industrial Archaeology Society who provide different speakers on a number of topics for the duration of the course (six fortnightly meetings). Could WIAS organise a similar venture via one of the local universities?

### Some local courses

Two courses on railways run by the University of Warwick Centre for Lifelong Learning and led by Martin Bloxson:

1. *'Railway to Shakespeareland' - the Stratford and Midland Junction Railway 1864-2005*. 10 sessions Tuesdays 13.30 - 15.30, starting Tuesday 3rd October at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, The Shakespeare Centre, Stratford Upon Avon. Apply via CLL, University of Warwick, Coventry. CV4 7AL 02476 573739 Quote 1288/AU06

2. *'When the Great Central came to town 1890 - 1922'*. 10 sessions Wednesdays 19.30 - 21.30, starting Wednesday 20th September 2006. Apply direct to Percival Guildhouse, St Matthews Street, Rugby. 01788 542467. Quote 1406/AU06

*Black Country History Day*. 14th October 2006: University of Birmingham Day School: Contact Sandra Ilott, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, Selly Oak Campus, Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LL.

Martin Green

### SOCIETY NEWS

#### Programme.

The programme through to January 2007, is as follows:

#### October 12th

Mr. Mike Beech: *Foxton Locks and the Foxton Inclined Plane*

#### November 9th

Mr. Anthony Coulls: *Locomotion: NMR at Shildon*

#### December 14th

Mr. Peter Cross-Rudkin: *I. K. Brund*

#### January 11th

Mr. Ron Speddings: *The Rolls Royce Heritage Trust, Coventry*

# NEWSLETTER

# Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

June 2006 Mr. M. Thompson and Mr. R. Pugh-Cook

## *Woven in Kidderminster*

‘Carpet Capital of the World’. That was once the proud claim made by Kidderminster when carpet making was the town’s single (indeed only) important manufacturing industry, and when the overwhelming majority of its citizens, male and female, depended on it for a living.

The presence of the slow-running river Stour, ideal for washing and dyeing skeins of wool, together with a climate suited for wool conditioning, initially gave Kidderminster everything it needed to become a centre of weaving. Soon, one of its principal products was ‘Kidderminster Stuff’, a heavyweight multipurpose woven material which, in 1735, led to the first manufacture of Kidderminster carpet proper, using converted hand looms. Melvyn Thompson and Richard Pugh-Cook have spent a lifetime in the carpet manufacturing industry and together, in a delightful ‘double-act’, they presented our June meeting with a history of Kidderminster’s most famous industry, from its earliest days, through its peak of prosperity, to today, when carpet making survives relatively residually.

Initially, weaving was done on an out-worker basis, families using a handloom (rented from a ‘master’), and usually installed in an upper room, not unlike the watchmakers’ top-shops in Coventry. Long hours were worked to produce the basic 25 yards of 27-inch wide carpet each week which, in those days, was the essential minimum for a family to survive financially. With the arrival of power looms, outworking gradually decreased as weavers were drawn into large mills built by ‘carpet masters’. Attempts to organise mill workers into a union were vigorously resisted by the masters, and a strike by the weavers in the 19th century against the imposition of a brutal wage cut failed, after having lasted for 21 weeks.

Successive boosts to Kidderminster’s carpet industry came from the arrival of the canal system, then from steam power to drive looms, and finally the railways. To these advances were added changes in carpet weaving technologies and the productivity of looms, so that the skyline of Kidderminster was soon transformed. Throughout the 20th century, despite wars and recessions, the industry continued to prosper, reaching its peak in terms of number of companies trading, and numbers of weavers employed, in the 1950s and ‘60s. But the 1960s also saw a major change in manufacturing technique, namely the introduction of the tufted carpet.

Initially, Kidderminster carpet makers stood aloof

from this upstart process (not proper weaving!), whereas mills in other parts of the UK, including those in Lancashire and Yorkshire, embraced it. When Kidderminster eventually accepted tufted carpet it was too late, and by the 1970s the town’s dominant position in carpet manufacture was already waning fast.

Whereas employment in its mills was once measured in very many thousands, today it stands at less than 1,200. The principal market now is for ‘contract carpeting’, for laying in buildings such as airports and casinos, also for cruise liners, and the increasing fashion for plain ‘wooden’ floors in houses has further severely cut into the demand for domestic carpeting.

The enthusiasm of Melvyn and Richard for the industry they both served was most infectious, and shows itself further in the Kidderminster Carpet Museum Trust which they have founded and is dedicated to displays of all aspects of carpet manufacture. The Museum is open every Saturday from 10.00am to 12 noon, and has an excellent website at [www.CarpetMuseum.co.uk](http://www.CarpetMuseum.co.uk)

Melvyn Thompson will return in June 2007 to continue the story of carpet manufacture in Kidderminster with *Woven in Kidderminster: Part 2*.

## AGM: Matters Arising

At the Society AGM, held during the first half of the July 2006 meeting, it was agreed that the Society subscription should remain at £10.00 per person or couple for the 2006/2007 season. Members are therefore reminded that as of September 2006, the subscription for the 2006/2007 season of meetings is due. Payments may be made to the Treasurer at meetings or by post, although since I am unsure how regularly I will be able to attend meetings over the next year, the post route might be preferable. Cheques should be made payable to Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society.

Please also note that the budget projections presented in the Treasurers report at the AGM contained an error. The actual 2005/2006 budget column should total £1143.21, not £899.17; my apologies for this error. The significant difference between the actual and projected totals for 2005/2006 may be mainly accounted for by the variance in speakers’ expenses, which are difficult to accurately project.

**Mark W. Abbott**

# An Overview of North Warwickshire

July 2006 Members' Evening

*The Industrial Archaeology of North Warwickshire*

Following this year's AGM, at which reports on all aspects of the Society's activities were presented by Officers\*, our Chairman Martin Green introduced the subject for the remainder of the meeting as *Aspects of IA in North Warwickshire*. The northern sector of the County, Martin suggested, was probably the least well known by our members, and in terms of industrial archaeology possibly also the least well-recorded.

As a starting point he distributed copies of a large-scale OS map of the sector, which extends from Middleton in the West to Caldecote in the East; and from Newton Regis in the North to Great Packington in the South. Within those extremes lie many sites with evidence of past industries, notably mining and other extractive activities; of transport, including canals, railways and historic roads; and of various manufacturing industries, including hat-making in Atherstone. Hat-making in that town has virtually ceased and there is no museum to give evidence of a trade which once employed large numbers. But Martin had a few slides showing some of the processes involved and the conditions under which some hat-makers at times had to work.

Martin also showed a number of slides of IA sites in north Warwickshire including Daw Mill colliery, which in the 1950s employed 12,000, and Pooley Hill colliery. The end of mining in many parts of the County posed the problem of what should be done with the surface remains of collieries, and aerial and ground shots illustrated how these difficulties have been overcome, and mostly to the benefit of the countryside. Other sites covered included Baggeridge Brick Works, Kingsbury Water Park (formerly a sand and gravel working), and the splendid Atherstone railway station.

Picking-up from that point, Roger Cragg then presented a Historic Civil Engineering Review of North Warwickshire, starting with the Roman road Watling Street, which sweeps across the county and a part of which is now the A5. The Coventry canal, extending over 38 miles and with 13 locks, was started in 1768 and not finished until 1790, mainly because the original estimates of cost were soon exceeded and additional cash had to be raised from somewhere. (Nothing new there then!).

Roger then moved on to the Trent Valley railway, opened in 1847, whose engineers included Robert Stephenson and George Bidder. Finally, Roger homed-in on historic bridges in north Warwickshire together with water towers at Tuttle Hill, Nuneaton and at Corley.

Roger was succeeded by Peter Chater who had a score of interesting slides, many concerned with railways and railway stations but also some showing unusual items such as 30-cwt wooden jib cranes once used in Coventry Goods Shed. The Harley tunnel had needed to be modified, by lowering the track, to pass modern rail container traffic, and other shots showed Atherstone canal wharf, Hawkshill boat repair yard, and Stockingford brick and terracotta works. Peter finished with a slide of the pillory and whipping-post at Coleshill, an early version of an ASBO!

The meeting was drawn to a close by a DVD from our Chairman of the Dunedin NZ Gas Works, the site of which is now dedicated to a museum of steam. Wonderful shots included huge stationary engines rotating slowly and majestically, and massive steam shovels working in a quarry. One felt the shade of the late Fred Dibnah would be nodding approvingly.

\* For those unable to be present at the AGM, copies of the Chairman's and the Treasurer's reports are available on application to the Society's Secretary, Denis Crips.

## *The Old Pumphouse Avon Dasset*

Close to the summit of the road between Fenny Compton and Avon Dasset, there stands a building now converted into a house called *The Old Pumphouse*. Next to it is a cottage carrying a date stone for 1852 called *Pumphouse Cottage*. This has unusually large diamond paned windows and an ornate tiled roof. Does any member know anything more of the history of these structures?

Presumably water was pumped, but to what end, and was the pump steam powered? There is no obvious reservoir or tank and Avon Dasset seems a small village to merit such a mains supply scheme. Perhaps the answer lies with one of the two large country houses in the village, *Avon Carrow*. This dates from 1889 and in architectural detail is very similar to the original portion of the pump house. Was perhaps the pump house part of an estate water supply scheme, rather than to benefit public health?

The cottage has some features in common with service buildings at the other big house, *Bitham Hall*. These and its location suggest a connection with that estate, standing as it does at the end of a long thin enclosure, parallel with the road, that leads back to the top gate to the house.

**Mark W. Abbott**

# Mine Explorer *by Mark Abbott*

## An appreciation of a web site featuring mining exploration and industrial archaeology

I have long had a fascination for underground places, born it would seem out of curiosity and a dread of the dark and unknown. Many times in Yorkshire, Wales and Cornwall, I have peered into the cold dank adits and down the shafts of some of the numerous mining remains that litter the landscape of these counties and have wondered at what lay underground beyond the light and familiarity of the landscape around.

Therefore the chance discovery of the Mine Explorer web site at [www.mine-explorer.co.uk](http://www.mine-explorer.co.uk) was a welcome find.

The aims of the site are succinctly summarised by its own home page statement:

“This website provides photographs and information on many of the disused mines found across the UK. It is intended as a comprehensive resource for not only Mine-Explorers, but cavers, historians, industrial archaeologists and professional bodies. It relies on content provided from Mine-Explorers out in the field who continually update the database.”

In practice, the database amounts to 213 mines with posted content. The majority of these are metaliferous mines (principally lead, copper and iron ore) and slate mines. In terms of content, slate mines predominate. This is perhaps not surprising as the Webmaster lives in Penmachno, and the slate mines of North Wales are amongst the most easily accessible and impressive underground workings in the UK. Not all the mines in the database are mines in the accepted sense. As an example, while the slate quarries around Blaenau Ffestiniog did undoubtedly develop as mines, sites such as Dinorwic were quarries with a limited amount of tunnelling, but are included in the database nevertheless.

The one major criticism that might be made of the site given its aims stated above is perversely its greatest strength too. Information other than photographs is distinctly lacking and the site is far from a comprehensive source. True, there are some

useful notes about access and recent collapses in important mines, but much of the other ancillary content consist of scans of information probably already available to the serious enthusiast. However, the photographic content, once beyond the obvious surface pictures, is good and for some locations superb.

The Webmaster in particular is an accomplished and developing photographer and there are many underground images, mainly from slate mines, that are quite simply excellent. To convey the huge scale of a typical slate extraction chamber, together with a sense of mystery and danger in one photograph is difficult, but a feat that is accomplished in many images. There is poignancy to some pictures too, especially those of the rather sad remnants of the closed Gloddfa Ganol mine tour in the now eviscerated Oakley Quarry.

Further excellent features of the site are the downloadable illustrated trip reports in pdf format. Again these nearly all feature slate mines, and the best are outstanding in content. That for the infamous ‘Everest’ of mine exploring, the Croesor Rhosydd through trip makes terrifying reading, worthy of the opening quote: “This trip is dangerous. In fact it’s the most dangerous thing I’ve ever done.”

It should also be noted that access to some of the posted material requires registration, seemingly to ensure only ‘responsible’ visitors can view it.

Few of us with an amateur interest in the industrial archaeology of mining will ever venture underground, and the value of this web site is the pictorial insight that it gives into just what lies in the darkness of some of the classic mining sites in the UK. It is too, an admirable advert for the digital image. Little of what the site contains would be so easily accomplished with a film camera or so easily made available to such a potentially wide audience. Altogether a highly recommended web site and one for repeated visits, as the site is updated almost daily.

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