WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

WIAS

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NEWSLETTER

THIS ISSUE

- ¢ Meeting Reports
- ¢ From the Chairman
- ¢ Pump House Follow Up
- ¢ 2007 Programme

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Your committee is constantly monitoring ways in which services to members of WIAS might be improved and the New Year seems an appropriate time to bring some potential changes to the attention of the membership. Despite more grandiose ambitions set out in the past, we have come to realise that the monthly meeting is the mainstay of the Society and we are delighted that these are so well supported.

Increasingly, speakers for these meetings are delivering lectures with the aid of digital pictures and/or PowerPoint presentations. This requires a digital projector and laptop. Sometimes the lecturer brings their own equipment, but increasingly speakers expect venues to provide these facilities. The equipment can be provided by Warwick School as part of the room hire, but this has not been without the occasional hitch. It is infuriating when all seems to be in order, and then the actual delivery of the evening lecture is frustrated by technological problems, compounded by the Chairman's lack of ability to rectify the situation.

There seem to be two ways around this situation. Perhaps a member of the Society might be prepared to spend some time with the Warwick School technician to develop expertise. This has time implications, not least for the Warwick School technician, and no guarantee that we would have the same equipment for every meeting.

A more radical step would be for the Society to purchase its own laptop and projector. This would be available for all meetings and, of course, would also be available for speakers from WIAS when going out to other organisations. Indeed, the Society could develop a series of presentations, stored on laptop and CD, that could be available on request. This would do much to ease the pressure of preparing individual lectures, and would support the long-term goal of spreading the IA word.

The cost implications are considerable. The Society does have funds in reserve, in the region of £1500, and purchase of equipment could take at least £1000 of this. This significant step will not be taken without full consultation with the membership, but the committee felt it should be brought to members' attention to give adequate time for thought and debate. We would seek to make a decision at the AGM in July 2007.

Given that the monthly meeting is the mainstay of the Society, any recommendations for speakers, or topics that members would like to see covered, are vital to continuing success. You might even be willing to offer a 15-minute presentation yourself for the last part of a meeting. Furthermore, it is important that all aspects of the meeting go smoothly, and there are areas where assistance from members would certainly ease the pressure on the committee. Refreshments is one example: Is there anybody out there willing to take on responsibility for purchasing refreshments (fully reimbursed of course!) and organising the rota for refreshments? Do feel free to contact any member of the committee if you have any ideas for improvement, or would like to be more actively involved.

SOCIETY NEWS

Programme.
The programme through to July 2007, is as follows:

January 11th
Mr. Ron Speddings: *The Rolls Royce Heritage Trust, Coventry.*

February 8th
Mr. Roger Cragg: *Thomas Telford.*

March 8th
Mr. Jeromy Hassell: *Joseph White: Watchmaker.*

April 12th
Mr. Hugh Jones: *The Building Stones of Warwickshire.*

May 10th
Mr. Derek Billings: *Aspects of the Industrial Archaeology of Cornwall.*

June 14th
Mr. Melvyn Thompson: *Woven in Kidderminster Part 2.*

July 12th
AGM and Members' Evening: *The IA of Nuneaton and Bedworth.*

Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

September 2006 Mr. B. Jones
The Birmingham Pen Trade

"They come as a boon and a blessing to men,
The Pickwick, the Owl and the Waverley pen"
(And most of them were made in Birmingham!)

In the 19th century, when the steel pen industry was at its peak, Birmingham had very many different pen makers producing an estimated 100,000 different types. Most of the firms were small and specialised, but there were some giant companies who dominated the trade and whose names became known the world over. Today, most of them are represented only in the Birmingham Pen Museum in Frederick St, whence historian and author Brian Jones came to address our September meeting, together with his colleague collector Colin Giles.

After a brief reference to the early history of 'writing tools', Brian Jones focused in on Birmingham and on the arrival there in 1790 of Samuel Harrison. Harrison introduced steel pen manufacture to the city already famous for the production of small items in metal, and its existing workforce and their skills offered a natural home for steel pen manufacture. John Mitchell soon came down from Sheffield to join the fray, and shortly afterwards Joseph Gillot also appeared on the scene. These names, together with others which included MacNiven & Cameron (originators of the advertising jingle above), Brandauer & Petit, and Josiah Mason (destined to become the largest company making pens in the world), eventually employed many thousands of workers. Their founders were also to be numbered among Birmingham's great philanthropists.

For most of the 19th century the production of steel pens, mainly by women, was highly labour intensive. A typical pen factory, designed to maximise the entry of natural light, had multi floors and rows of long benches at which young women sat, shoulder to shoulder, operating hand presses. The work required manual dexterity, for each pen was dealt with individually, and required a number of different single-stroke operations. These included blanking, piercing, splitting, raising the form etc, and typically only two seconds were allowed for each operation. Typically also, an operator would specialise in just one type of press operation for the whole of her working life!

Male operators were used only for the heavier work, such as barrelling (deburring) and heat treatment of the pens. Brian Jones showed many slides of pen factories, externally and internally, and together with the amazing collection of different types of pens brought to the meeting by Colin Giles, also examples of the boxes in which they were packed, they combined to bring the whole subject to life. At its peak, the industry was noted not just for its output but also for the proportion of its products which was exported, and which made their makers' names famous internationally.

The advent of the fountain pen, the first attempt to 'separate' a pen from an inkwell, was the initial wind of change to blow through the industry. But at least fountain pens still needed nibs! But it was, of course, the arrival of the ball point pen in the mid-20th century which finally saw the end of the steel pen industry as it had once been known. Pen manufacture still survives, to serve specialist needs of artists, calligraphists, map makers etc, but the days when virtually everyone, from a child at school to an OAP, needed a steel pen, a holder, and an inkwell, are long gone. The Birmingham Pen Museum, however, is devoted to preserving their memories.

Pump House Follow Up

Thank you to both John Brace and Peter Chater who provided some information about the Old Pump House, Avon Dassett, following my query in the September 2006 Newsletter.

The pump house was built to provide water to Avon Carrow house, possibly around 1899 rather than the originally quoted date of 1889. At the pump house, water was pumped by a Ruston and Hornsby oil engine, as required, from a borehole to a header tank in the pump house and then gravitated by a feed pipe to the house. The house had several lead lined water tanks in the roof space, enough to hold a number of days water supply, although these may not have been part of the original supply scheme, but rather a response to severe water shortages experienced in the village until a mains supply was provided. Water was also supplied to other properties on or adjoining the estate. A wind pump was added to augment the oil engine some time after 1925. In 1913, the water supply was extended to Bitham Hall, but seems to have become disused fairly soon after.

The pump house is now a private dwelling although the original structure is obvious despite a not altogether sympathetic extension. Avon Carrow house has also been converted into a number of individual properties.

Mark W. Abbott

Foxton Inclined Plane Progress

October 2006 Mr. M. Beech

Foxton Locks and the Foxton Inclined Plane

Throughout the 19th century competition from Britain's railways as a freight carrier was hitting working boats on the country's waterways very hard. The reduction in time required to get freight from *A* to *B* was a trump card played by the railway in its competition with waterways, and a typical 'choke point' for the latter was, for example, the 10 narrow (7-ft wide) staircase locks at Foxton. These locks could accommodate one boat only at a time, and it took a boat 45 minutes to negotiate them.

So it was proposed to build an inclined plane which would transport four narrow boats at a time, two-up and two-down the 75 ft 'rise', in only 12 minutes. The plane would not only speed up passage of boats but would also save loss of water. It was not surprising, therefore, that there was considerable support for the scheme. Work on the inclined plane, designed to completely circumvent the Foxton locks, was started in 1898 and was completed in 1900, at a cost of £37,500.

Mike Beech, Museum Keeper of the Foxton Inclined Plane Trust, is a leading authority on the subject and delivered an excellent talk to our October meeting. The design of the inclined plane was innovative in that it carried each pair of boats *transversely* in a water-filled 'dock', and boats going 'down' effectively counterbalanced those going 'up'. Each wheel-mounted dock measured 80 ft by 15 ft and they were connected by steel hawsers running around large pulleys at the top and bottom of the incline. A 25-hp steam engine drove a hydraulic system, providing the extra power needed to assist movement of both sets of docks.

For a few years, the inclined plane worked well and for a time it staved off some competition from the railways. And in 1909 refurbishment work on the Foxton locks was started, aimed not least at increasing the width to allow two boats to enter side-by-side, and to allow for overnight passage. This work was completed, and the staircase was reopened in 1910. But both the Foxton ventures, that is the inclined plane and the refurbishment of the locks were, of course, too late to save competitive commercial traffic on the waterways. In 1911, the inclined plane was closed, and in 1928 it was demolished. By the time the waterways were nationalised in 1948, Nature had effectively reclaimed the entire site, and when the Foxton Inclined Plane Trust was founded in 1980 a truly mammoth task faced its volunteers.

Very many trees needed to be felled just to reveal the foundations of the inclined plane, and many more had to be planted elsewhere to compensate for them. In 1989, the Trust opened the reconstructed boiler house, now housing a museum, and in 1998 major refurbishment work was carried out on the lock side ponds. The Trust has been successful in obtaining a grant of £1.8million from the Lottery Fund, and in addition has raised a further £1m from its own efforts. This money will enable it to undertake a number of additional restoration projects, including re-watering part of the canal, reviving the stop lock and building a bridge identical to one erected in 1900. The long-term aim, however, is to rebuild the inclined plane complete.

The Trust has a website www.fitp.org.uk, which organises guided tours and runs the Museum.

Action Needed

Recently, both my personal email address, and the Society email address, have been targeted by a large number of junk emails. A certain amount of spam email is inevitable, but the majority of the emails that have caused concern, up to 70 at one time, are not unsolicited advertising, but the product of a computer virus.

The characteristics of a false address at a real domain and a subject and message body of random words, indicate the culprit is probably a mass mailing worm. However, the point that has to be made is that the unwitting source of all this email traffic is probably a computer belonging to a Society member, as only such a computer is likely to hold both email addresses.

The solution is simple. Please make sure your computer has up to date and working anti virus software. All such software must be kept up to date to detect new virus threats as they are identified. These updates normally take the form of a small download from the software suppliers web site, and recent anti virus software can usually be configured to automatically download and install updates as they are available. Typically, such updates are free for the first year and thereafter by annual subscription, or a new version of the program should installed. Do not think that because your computer had anti virus software installed at purchase, no further intervention is required!

If need be, there are very good free anti virus programs available. Try AVG at http://free.grisoft.com/doc/1.

Mark W. Abbott

NMR Outstation

November 2006 Mr. A. Coulls
Locomotion: NMR at Shildon

As a schoolboy (and a one-time pupil of our Chairman), Anthony Coulls developed a great interest in industrial archaeology in general, and for 'steam' in particular. That youthful enthusiasm was, in fact, destined to determine his career path, and today he is Collections Care Manager of *Locomotion,* the National Railway Museum at Shildon, County Durham.

Opened in 2004, *Locomotion* is an £11m joint venture between the National Railway Museum at York and Sedgefield Borough Council and has three principal themes. Namely, to be custodian of vehicles which are national icons; to house vehicles of particular significance to the North-east; and to cherish vehicles in need of conservation. Its collection started with some 70 to 80 vehicles which were transferred from the National Railway Museum at York where, for lack of covered space, they stood open to the weather. Today they are under cover, far safer and their conservation is assured. The position of *Locomotion*, in Shildon, puts it at the very heart of locomotive history in the UK. Indeed, it includes refurbished buildings of Timothy Hacksworth's Museum, and although it is still very young it has already logged 300,000 visitors. Its arrival can also justifiably claim to have reinvigorated Shildon, one of the world's oldest railway towns.

Locomotion is very much a 'live' collection and while it is designed to appeal to all ages, it has a special eye on the young (and the young at heart!). At one end of the spectrum it has a working replica of the famous *Non Pareil* loco, which took part in the 1829 Rainhill Trials, and at the other end there is a diesel-electric Deltic 50 loco, the introduction of which in 1955 was effectively to signal 'the end of steam' for UK's railways. Other 'live' attractions include demonstrations of shunting (a truly arcane art to the young!), and 'Cab It' events where, for a fiver, one can stand on the footplate alongside the driver of a steam loco.

The centre piece of *Locomotion* is undoubtedly its splendid purpose-designed Collection Hall, a very large open-span building housing seven tracks. Mr Coulls showed a series of shots of items in the collection, including such locos as an APT (tilting train), a Great Northern Atlantic, an underground train for transporting miners to a coal face beneath the North Sea, a Severn Valley line loco currently on 'exchange' for a Shildon 1901 contractor's engine, and many others. Shots of rolling stock in the collection included a flat wagon carrying a WW2 Crusader tank and an 1886 coach the reconditioning of which will be a project for apprentices from Ettington College.

There is a loco built by Hawthorne Leslie on the Tyne, to celebrate that area's contribution to railways, a 'fireless' engine, a North Eastern loco and snow plough and a Kent coast electric loco. Space in this Newsletter is insufficient to cover Mr Coull's lecture in full, for he gave members an exceptional wealth of information. Suffice perhaps to say that the content of his presentation, and the enthusiasm of his delivery, must surely have ensured that many present at our November meeting have made a note of *Locomotion* in their diaries! The museum has a website www.locomotion.uk.com which is also well worth a visit.

Local information source?

Spotted recently in W. H. Smiths in the *Local Books* section were reproductions of old Ordnance Survey maps under the Old Maps title. Only two sheets were in stock, those for north and south Leamington Spa. These proved to be excellent reproductions of 1923 twenty-five inches to the mile maps, and contained much detail of interest, including the brickworks that stood at the end of Campion Road and the once quite complex railway network within the town.

At around £2.00 each they represent excellent value for money and are recommended.

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