WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

WIAS

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NEWSLETTER

THIS ISSUE

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

It is very reassuring to know that at least one member of the Society reads the Newsletter, and we publish a response by one of our members, Richard Storey, to the Chairman's notes of the last edition.

Mark Abbott

I am sorry to report that Mark Abbott wishes to hand over the responsibilities of Treasurer and Membership Secretary of the Society after many years in the dual posts. Mark does a tremendous amount of unseen work, and has been a crucial cog in the smooth operation of the Society. He has done everything in a quiet, unassuming but highly effective manner and the Society has benefited enormously from his diligence and efficiency. The good news is that he is willing to carry on as editor of this Newsletter!

Martin Green

DRIVING ON

The Chairman's elegiac survey of our local motor industry in the last Newsletter has prompted me to submit these few extra thoughts.

Shortly before the bad news about the Ford Foundry broke, some good news appeared when David Cameron opened a new factory at Binley in March for the production of the Modec electric van, which was previewed in 2006. With a payload of two tonnes and a range of 100 miles on a single charge, it had attracted orders for over 100 vehicles by March, including 15 for Tesco. Glimpse of a prototype in Coventry last summer indicates that it is a handsome machine.

Amongst the commercial vehicles which can now be displayed in the Coventry Transport Museum (as we must now remember to call the former MBRT) following its makeover is the one-off 'Ecomobile', a utility van prototype of 1937, the brainchild of Alfred Wild of Leamington. This was apparently offered, without success, to both Austin and Morris; 'Eco' referred to its alleged economy, rather than to our current ecological preoccupations.

It is a sad, but unavoidable, fact that few physical remains of motor manufacturing survive (P. Collins & M. Stratton, *British Car Factories from 1896*, 1993). This makes archive collections, especially those in the public domain, of even greater importance. As well as the archive collections in Coventry and Gaydon, it is worth remembering Warwickshire County Record Office, with such sources as the excellent series of vehicle licensing registers and the records of Eagle Engineering, and the Modern Records Centre of the University of Warwick Library. Amongst the Centre's holdings is a very large sequence of records of the Standard Motor Co. (MSS.226/ST), which are perhaps unique in their detail on post-war operations. At the other end of the scale, the present writer's modest collection in the Centre includes a fine 1938 catalogue of Midland Vehicles of Leamington, electric van makers, and a scrapbook of collected material relating to Buckingham of Kenilworth, tanker makers (MSS.457). Outside the geographical remit of WIAS, but central to any study of the UK motor industry, were Rubery Owen of Darlaston, suppliers of chassis frames and numerous pressings to many vehicle manufacturers. It awaits a business historian to take up the major task of producing a company history, but in the meantime its records are held in the Centre (MSS.338) and are described in the Sources Booklet on sale on our monthly bookstall. Next door to the Modern Records Centre is the BP Archive, which is, of course, world-wide rather than just Warwickshire-oriented.

Richard Storey

SOCIETY NEWS

Meeting Location

The consistently high attendance at recent Society meetings, typically around 50 people, has been difficult to accommodate comfortably in the original meeting room in Warwick School's Sixth Form Centre. This, coupled with the proximity

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Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

March 2007 Mr. J Hassell

Joseph White, Coventry Watchmaker and Business Man

When Britain's clock and watchmaking industry was at its peak, in the19th and early 20th centuries, the main centres of the craft were to be found in the north-west (Prescot and Liverpool), in London (Clerkenwell) and midway between, in Coventry. In Coventry its practitioners were clustered in the Spon Street/Spon End area, in Chapelfields and in Earlsdon. At its peak, several thousand were employed, some by relatively small firms in equally small premises and others in much larger numbers by one or two dominant companies, among whom Rotherhams was possibly the best known.

In his address to our March meeting, Mr Hassell spoke vividly about the life and career of his ancestor Joseph White, born in 1835 the son of weavers and who, in 1851, was set to an apprenticeship with watchmaker Nathaniel Hill in Chapelfields. His apprenticeship was for seven years during which he worked a 12-hour day, six days per week. In 1860, two years after his apprenticeship ended, Joseph married, moved to a small house in Mount Street, Chapelfields, and started his own business. He was thus on his way to a notable career in the manufacture of high-quality high-precision timepieces, and subsequently to remarkable achievements in other areas as well, including bicycle production, land development and (through one of his sons), engine manufacture (White & Poppe).

His watchmaking business prospered and after a series of house moves, each one 'upwards', he eventually bought Earlsdon House, Earlsdon, together with a row of workers' cottages. The British watchmaking industry was now nearing its peak, and by the 1870s Coventry was producing two-thirds of all timepieces made in Britain. Joseph White was specialising in the higher quality sector of the market, striving always to meet the most exacting demands. His company regularly entered watches and chronometers for the rigorous timekeeping trials organised by the Greenwich Royal Observatory and the Admiralty, and consistently featured high in the tables of performance published by both. In 1911, in fact, a White watch was placed first in trials by the Admiralty. The highest quality watches made by White incorporated the famous *tourbillon* device developed by Breguet and designed to compensate for variations in timekeeping which occurred when a watch changed its position from vertical to horizontal.

But the British watchmaking industry was coming under increasing competition from abroad. Import tariffs were being abolished, and the USA in particular was 'automating' watch production, introducing interchangeability of components, and by launching the 'dollar watch', for example, was bringing a pocket timepiece within the reach of all. White continued to produce the highest quality watches but his business acumen also made sure his Company diversified, firstly by taking an interest in Coventry Machinists Works (later Swift Cycles), and then by buying land in Earlsdon and developing it for upmarket houses.

In 1899, one of his sons, Alfred James White, went into partnership with Peter August Poppe, to found White & Poppe, and Joseph was involved in that venture as well. As Jeromy Hassell explained in his talk to our Society in March 2006, W & P went on to prosper mightily. At its peak, that Company was producing petrol engines in very large numbers for use by a number of world-famous car makers. After WW1,White & Poppe was bought by Dennis Brothers, Guildford, and in 1926 Harry Harley (later Sir Harry) bought Joseph White & Son and with it Earlsdon House. Harley eventually discontinued watch manufacture, and Earlsdon House became the HQ of his own company, Coventry Gauge & Tool Ltd.

Society News *continued*:
of the refreshment facilities giving unacceptable levels of background noise, has prompted a search for a better location. Recent use of the Pyne Room has proved quite successful and will continue for the time being, but with some effort to overcome the poor audibility of speakers. Use of the Society's existing radio microphone, or the purchase of a new portable radio microphone and amplifier system are being investigated.

Programme.

The programme through to December 2007, is as follows:

September 13th

Mr. Ron Moss: *Chain-making in the Black Country.*

October 11th

Mr. Martin Bloxsom: *Stratford and Midland Junction Railway.*

November 8th

Mr. David Bright: *The Mill and Engine House at Warwick Castle.*

December 13th

Mr. John Frearson: *The Lime and Cement Industry of North Warwickshire.*

Warwickshire Building Stones

April 2007 Mr Hugh Jones
The Building Stones of Warwickshire

Our County was blessed with both an abundance and a variety of different types of naturally occurring stone, all of it laid down many millennia ago, and most of it suitable for building purposes. But little of it is immediately visible to the eye, since there were only small outcrops to give a clue to the presence of seams potentially suitable for quarrying. And of course, well below even the deepest of our seams of stone lie even more valuable seams of coal, some of the richest deposits of which are at depths which make mining both difficult and economically doubtful. Nevertheless, economically viable or not, many of us will recall the time, a few years ago, when the prospect of deep mining the Warwickshire part of this coal seam was real enough to cause considerable anxiety among residents.

Hugh Jones is not just an accomplished geologist. He is a geologist with such an engaging passion for his subject that he kept our meeting spellbound for an hour and a half, followed by questions. Starting by displaying a map of our County with the its many and various stone deposits shown in different colours, Hugh then showed diagrams of the seams in cross-section, revealing how they stack one on top of the other, curving gently down from visible surface outcrops to considerable hidden depths.

Our County has basically sandstone and limestone, and a number of different variations on each, producing typically distinctions such a blue and white lias, etc. Some are soft, and suitable mainly for facing, other are hard and can do service in supporting buildings. However, for a comprehensive view of what our County can offer in varieties of stone, the real evidence is clearly on show in its use externally and internally in our historic buildings. And it was that approach to his subject which Hugh predominantly took.

By concentrating on the exteriors, and to a lesser extent the interiors, of Warwickshire churches, mansions, stately homes and other types of public buildings, he was able to show both the diversity of Warwickshire stone employed and the different ways in which it was exploited architecturally. Many of the examples shown were familiar to his audience, but familiar or not it is doubtful if the significance of the stone used to build them had been adequately appreciated before Hugh pointed it out.

First the Romans and then the Normans exploited Warwickshire's stone for their buildings, and many Norman churches proudly display it to this day. Stoneleigh Abbey, parts of which date from 1500, is built principally in red sandstone, and Haseley church shows three different types of Warwickshire stone side-by-side. Warwick Castle is an example of the use of stone cut to blocks and surface dressed, as is Mancetter church. Wootton Wawen church has a Saxon stone tower and Loxley church is, in Hugh's words, 'a positive museum of stone'. The quarry at Southam provided blue and white lias, clay and limestone used principally for the manufacture of Portland cement.

It is fair to say that, following Hugh's talk, many WIAS members will probably take a fresh look at many of our County's historic buildings, seeing their exteriors in a new light.

Southam Gasworks Addendum

From the Warwick Advertiser of 8th November 1856 comes the following piece:

'Southam Gas Company. We find that the report of this Company, lately published by the Directors is very favourable in its results, and there appears every reason to anticipate that ere long it will be a very lucrative undertaking. Southam is a small parish in Warwickshire, containing only 2,770 acres, and numbering no more than 1,711 inhabitants; yet it has an established gasworks which pay four per cent on the outlay. The accounts are small in amount, but rigidly correct, with the right figures in the right place. The works were commenced in September, 1853. The drawings being furnished by Mr. T. A. Hedley, engineer of the gasworks, Banbury. The Company's engineer being Mr. Alfred Penny, of London. The total cost, including the buildings, apparatus, and mains was £1,380. The capital being £2,000 in 400 shares of £5 each. The buildings were executed by Messrs. Taft and Reynolds, builders, of Southam, and the apparatus was constructed and erected by Mr. G. E. Deeley, engineer of London. The total length of the main is 3,000 yards; the trunk main being four inches in diameter. The works commenced working in February, 1854, and have now been in operation two and a-half years; during that period no renovations whatever have taken place. The retorts, which are 12 inches by 7 feet six inches D.'s, cast and supplied by Messrs. Cochrane and Co. of Woodside, Dudley, are up to this time in working condition. The works are compact, and every credit continues to be accorded to Mr. Hedley for his design, and to Mr. Deedley for the efficient manner in which he executed his contract.'

With thanks to Roger King.

Cornish Industrial Archaeology

May 2007 Mr. D. Billings

Aspects of the Industrial Archaeology of Cornwall

If the English counties were to be rated according to the density of their industrial archaeological sites per square mile then Cornwall would surely come very close to the top of the list. That much was evident from WIAS member Derek Billings's talk to our Society in May when he took a sweep through our westernmost region, during which the accompanying slides illustrated his expertise with a camera.

He started his talk by entering the county from Devon, over Brunel's Saltash bridge, and left it with a shot of a typical Cornwall sunset. In between, he visited a multitude of sites representing the many different industries of the county. Shots of a Peerless lorry built in the USA in 1917, used first in WW1 and subsequently in Cornwall's china clay industry were followed by a slurry pumping engine originally installed in 1852 and now restored and driven by compressed air. The Calstock viaduct, opened in 1908 he explained, was built from cast concrete blocks delivered to site by a then unique overhead wire-rope system.

The Delabole slate quarry, first worked in the reign of Elizabeth 1, is now 1.5 miles in circumference and 425 ft deep, and using modern technology still delivers an average of 120 tonnes of slate per day. Slides of the Sennen Cove capstan house, used to haul boats up a slipway, were followed by views of the iron girder bridge crossing Petherick Creek, and a shot of the Marconi Memorial at Poldhu Cove. Many slides of Cornish tin and copper mines followed, including one of the ill-fated Levant Man Engine which, in 1919, failed when carrying a full load of miners and 31 men fell helplessly to their deaths.

Richard Trevithick was a Cornishman and Derek showed several shots of the events which are staged annually in his honour on Trevithick Day, always held in Camborne on the last Saturday in April. Slides of the impressive 92-ft high, 21-span, 443-yard long GWR Truro rail viaduct, built in 1904 to replace Brunel's wooden version, were followed by views of Devoran where tin-smelting works, railway repair shops, and boat yards once flourished.

A splendid example of a late 18th C industrial harbour is seen at Charlestown, from which copper ore was once shipped to smelters and china clay to potteries. At Calstock again, the remains of some 20 lime kilns can be seen and in nearby Danescombe Valley there are remains of a saw mill. Perran Foundry was one of Cornwall's earliest engine works and in it were cast, for example, many great beams for steam engines. Later, the partnership of Hayle and Perran built the massive engines used to drain Dutch dykes. Derek showed many examples of tin mines in Cornwall, also the Basset Mines from which ore was taken to feed no fewer than 96 crushers driven by two connected steam engines.

The St Just area is one of the oldest mining areas in Cornwall, and is believed to be the home of cliff and coastal mining. Derek's pictures of engine houses, perched perilously on the rocks with their shafts (especially at Botallack), leading miles out under the sea, were as impressive as they were frightening. Space in our Newsletter is unfortunately insufficient to do proper justice to the full scope of Derek's record of industrial archaeology in Cornwall, which is really deserving of publication as a booklet.

Disposals

Model Railway Journal. Issues 0 - 76.

The Treasurer has for sale an almost complete unbound run of the *Model Railway Journal*, from issue 0 to issue 76 (numbers 69 and 74 are missing), including the two additional compendium specials published within that period. It is preferred that this collection goes as one lot to a good home, so any realistic offer will be considered. A figure based on the original cover price of £1.50 to £2.00 each would probably be acceptable for the magazines.

WARWICKSHIRE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

www.warwickshireias.org email: 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	3 Holmes Court
Leamington Spa	Warwick	Bridge Street
Warwickshire	Warwickshire	Kenilworth
CV32 5LT	CV34 4DD	CV8 1BP
(01926 313782	(01926 401072	(01926 850114

AFFILIATED TO THE ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Credits

Design and editing:
Mark W. Abbott
Additional material:
Arthur Astrop
Martin Green
Richard Storey
Printing:
Southam Office Supplies