WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

WIAS

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NEWSLETTER

THIS ISSUE

SOCIETY NEWS

Programme.

The programme through to December 2007, is as follows:

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.

At the Society AGM (see below) it was agreed that the Society subscription should remain at £10.00 per person or couple for the 2007/2008 season. Members are reminded that as of September 2007, subscriptions for the 2007/2008 season of meetings are due. Until members are advised otherwise, Mark Abbott will continue as Treasurer and payment may be made to the Treasurer at meetings, or by post. Cheques should be made payable to Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society please**.**

AGM.

A well-attended annual general meeting heard our Chairman, Martin Green, describe the year under review as 'a buoyant period for our Society' during which average attendance at meetings had been such that it had been necessary to negotiate with Warwick School for larger accommodation. The venue for recent meetings, therefore, had been transferred from the VIth Form Centre to the Pyne Room. A projector had been bought by the Society for use by WIAS members and visiting speakers. Martin had spoken on the activities of WIAS to a number of organisations in the past year, and in addition had appeared on BBC 1's Countryfile programme.

In thanking the Society's committee for its work during the past year, Martin paid special tribute to the contribution of Mark Abbott. Mark had for many years served as Treasurer, Membership Secretary, and as Editor of the Society's quarterly newsletter but now wished to relinquish the first two areas of responsibility. Our chairman acknowledged the 'tremendous amount of unseen work' undertaken by Mark over the years, always in a 'quiet and unassuming manner', and spoke of the extent to which the Society had benefited from 'his diligence and efficiency'. Our profound thanks were extended to him, and it was indeed good news for WIAS, Martin said, that Mark had agreed to continue as Editor of the Newsletter.

The programme of speakers in WIAS's 2007/2008 session is almost in place, Martin reported, and it was hoped that a small number of site visits, possibly follow-ups to some of the talks delivered in the past, might be arranged.

Presenting his final Treasurer's report, Mark Abbott said that at the end of the 2006/2007 session the Society's financial position was excellent. The year's expenses had been comfortably covered, despite the expenditure of £100.00 on a second-hand digital projector, and the Society's cash reserves had increased by almost £90.00. The annual subscriptions for membership would be held at the current figure, as would the contributions per meeting for members and for guests.

For WIAS members who were unable to attend the AGM, full copies of the Chairman's and Treasurer's reports, complete with annual accounts and budget, can be obtained on application to Mark Abbott, 3 Holmes Court, Bridge Street, Kenilworth, CV8 1BP, WIAS@photoshot.com.

David Gee

It is with regret that the Society notes the death on 18th July 2007 of David Gee. Residents of Broadwell, both David and his wife Thelma were loyal supporters of the Society almost from its inception; their recent absence from meetings being due to David suffering from Parkinson's Disease. Belated condolences are offered to Thelma and their son Stephen. The Society has made a donation of £25.00 to the Parkinson's Disease Society in memory of David.

Railway Memories *by Peter Chater*

Recollections of Working as a Booking Clerk at Leamington Avenue Station

Due to health reasons I was strongly advised by my doctor to change my occupation from the footplate to something lighter, and providing more regular hours. After being on the footplate for nearly 12 years, giving up a job I liked was rather upsetting.

A vacancy appeared in the local press advertising for a booking clerk at Leamington Avenue station, so I went to see Station Master W. Bland, and he said he would be pleased to have me if I could pass the clerical entrance examination. I took this examination at Worcester Shrub Hill station and passed. As there was no line of promotion from the Locomotive Department to the Clerical Department I had some difficulty in making the change, but eventually I was told to report to Mr. Bland in February 1954.

I met Mr. Bland at his office, and we walked from the General station to the Avenue station where he introduced me to Alan Vaughan the chief clerk. His parting words to me were, "The money in your pocket is yours, and the money in the booking office is the railways".

Alan was about my age of 28, and he worked a middle turn of duty, the other two clerks worked 06.00 to 13.00 and 14.00 to 21.00 Monday to Saturday alternate weeks.

I commenced with six weeks training before taking up my duties. I found it a vastly different life working indoors and in one location.

The booking office was quite large, approximately 20` square with a high ceiling. Lighting was by gas, and it had an open coal fire for heating. The main desk was high with a sloping surface where you would stand to work or sit on a high stool. There were no mechanical aids such as adding machines.

There were three ticket cases; two held Edmondson type card tickets and there was a smaller one for the season tickets. Probably about 500 different tickets in all.

These tickets comprised of single tickets and ordinary returns at full fare. Workmen's tickets issued where you must reach your destination before 08.00. Day return tickets were issued, Coventry being the busiest destination. Commercial travellers tickets which allowed the traveller to carry extra luggage/equipment. Forces on leave tickets, which were at a reduced rate, Government tickets permitting Forces to travel free. Reduced rate tickets for rail staff. Tickets for dogs, bikes and prams. One higher fare dog ticket used to be in the form of an envelope where a pull-out slip advertised Spratts dog biscuits.

Season tickets, which could be issued for a period of a week, one month, three months or months and odd days up to one year.

Most tickets issued were third class but where demand justified a few first class were held.

The bookings were varied, many tickets were issued via Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire and interior Irish stations, also Liverpool and Belfast, and Heysham / Belfast.

Sleeping berths were arranged and booked to Scottish destinations for passengers joining at Rugby, Birmingham or Crewe.

A certain amount of accountancy work was done here, and then totals transferred to the Leamington General station.

The parcels traffic received was considerable and livestock of one form or other were dealt with daily. Day old chicks arrived in biggish numbers, mainly from Mytholmroyd.

Guide dogs arrived for the Blind Association Training School, which was at Leamington and young sheep dogs, often collies, arrived for local farmers. Many farmers were not on the telephone and a telegram was sent to advise them to collect.

Racing pigeons in baskets arrived to be released as part of their training.

Once a year, a train load (probably a dozen vehicles) of pigeons in baskets consigned from stations in the Erewash Valley arrived in the early hours of the morning accompanied by many helpers. During the morning these helpers would unload the pigeons and stack the baskets about five high along the unloading dock. The pigeons were fed and watered and at 13.00 if the weather was fair, all would be released in the space of a very few minutes. The pigeons did one circle above the station then headed in a northerly direction, and for a few moments the sky was full of birds.

The forwarded traffic at passenger rates was quite varied, from small packages to machine parts weighing several hundred weights. Live stock (from pigeons to prize cattle) were regularly dealt with, also the occasional corpse, which was charged at three shillings a mile on the journey made.

One incident I remember where a very small package was in transit to an address at Daventry. This package was only the size of a matchbox and clearly marked with a live stock label. A live stock label measured about four inches by two and this

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Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

June 2007 Mr. M. Thompson and Mr. R. Pugh-Cook
Woven in Kidderminster Part 2

Twelve months after their first presentation* of *Woven in Kidderminster*, Melvyn Thompson and Richard Pugh-Cook returned to WIAS to give an update on events in the life of the Kidderminster Carpet Museum Trust, and to continue the story of the rise and fall of carpet manufacture in their town. Their presentation this time picked up the story at the point where carpet manufacture in Kidderminster was now firmly established on a factory basis, with the town dominated by mills located cheek by jowl, and with its skyline punctuated by scores of tall chimneys. The carpet weaving industry at that time was providing employment for many thousands of men and women, and the early 20th century pattern of sons and daughters following their fathers into the mills was commonplace.

The story of the development of Kidderminster's carpet factories, their design, their architecture, and the care which was taken to make them attractive to the eye – including the widespread use of polychromatic facing brickwork – was splendidly illustrated by a series of slides, many of which showed the mills at the height of their prosperity in the early decades of the 20th century. These slides demonstrated vividly the crucial importance of recording by photography, and other means, the buildings and equipment of any industry when it is at its peak. Indeed, Melvyn Thompson's talk pointed this lesson very strongly, because time and time again he needed to add, as a dismal postscript, "this factory, of course, is now demolished and on its site stands a massive supermarket" (or a DIY store, or a multi-storey car-park, or a retail park, or whatever).

Without the photographic records held by Melvyn and the Kidderminster Carpet Museum future generations would have little idea of what the town looked like when it was recognised as being 'the carpet capital of the world'. It was in the 1960s and 70s that the industrial heart was torn out of Kidderminster, much as was the case in Coventry. 'Redevelopment' was the thing and historic buildings including most (but mercifully not all) Kidderminster's carpet factories were torn down, often willy-nilly, in the drive to build ring-roads, shopping precincts, pedestrianised areas, multi-storey car parks, and the like.

Melvyn's pictures covered most of the stages in the manufacture of carpets, from the shearing of sheep, through skeining, dyeing, bobbin winding, weaving, and finishing. Finally he included pictures of the showrooms in which they were displayed, one of which he explained escaped the bulldozers and is now a nightclub! In the 1920s, when most of Melvyn's photographs were taken, there were large numbers of women employed in the mills, the objections to their presence which had caused serious rioting 20 years or so earlier having been overcome. Machinery was driven by scores of belts from overhead shafting, the noise was overwhelming, and the conditions in which the weavers worked would today be a safety inspector's worst nightmare. Mercifully, not all of Kidderminster's carpet-weaving buildings succumbed to the demolition ball, and in the nick of time a few have been listed and preserved. In one of these, in fact, the Kidderminster Carpet Museum (www.carpetmuseum.co.uk) will almost certainly soon find a permanent home.

* Reviewed in WIAS Newsletter No 24, September 2006

Note that back copies of Society Newsletters are available on the Society web site (www.warwickshireias.org) in pdf format and may be downloaded and printed if required. Back copies are also available from Mark Abbott at the address given overleaf, although some editions are now out of print. No 24 is still available at present.

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Railway Memories *continued:*

wrapped completely around it. Bert Jarrett the parcels porter brought it into the office during the morning and placed it on the office desk in a conspicuous place ready to be put on the only train of the day to Daventry at 14.43. Everybody who came into the office tried to guess what was in it as a buzzing noise could be heard from inside. The favourite suggestion was a queen bee. Station Master Bland always visited the station about 11.30 and he also examined this package. The 14.43 train regularly stood in the platform for about ten minutes and some member of the staff was calling out, "Anymore for the sunshine line," and the next moment the train departed without this package. The next service was in twenty-four hours time.

Mr. Bland came at his usual time the next day and instantly saw this little box. He addressed Jarrett and said, "What's this still doing here"? and Jarrett instantly said, "Its another one sir".

Peter Chater.

Industrial Archaeology Miscellany

July 2007 Members' Evening

The Industrial Archaeology of Nuneaton and Bedworth

As is customary, the Society's AGM was followed by the annual members' evening, when those who normally 'sit and listen' are encouraged to 'stand and deliver'! This year, Richard King started the evening by offering an interesting miscellany of items of archaeological and general historic interest in our County which, over the years, he has seen, photographed and recorded. Some of them might come under the heading 'unconsidered trifles' but, as Richard said, they illustrated the truth behind Sherlock Holmes's gentle reproof that all too often 'people see but they do not necessarily observe'.

In Barford, for example, there is preserved a simple cast iron water pump made in the mid 19th C by T. Roberts & Son of Warwick, one of many such pumps originally used to lay dust on our roads. Built over a century later, a graceful footbridge spanning the M42 nevertheless today carries part of an ancient route whereby salt was once transported from Cheshire to Leicestershire. Near this bridge there is a tower erected in the 1950s for microwave communication in the Cold War period, and at Pailton there are radio masts originally used in WW2 but still in operation today.

From microwaves to canals, where Richard found an unusual boat, the Laplander, with a BCN (Birmingham Canal Navigation) plaque. Thought to be an icebreaker it has a 'bow' at each end. An abandoned section of the Oxford Canal at Newbold on Avon once looped through the village, and passed through a tunnel *underneath* the churchyard. A long-forgotten disused cutting near Willey, north of Rugby, once carried part of the only rail route from London to Yorkshire.

In WW1, the massive 980ft long by 200ft wide Ordnance Factory in Coventry manufactured 15-inch naval guns for the dreadnoughts of that age. They left the Works on specially built bogies by a railway line (still visible), which was laid to connect the Works to the Foleshill line, thence to a junction with the Coventry and Nuneaton line. In the back streets of Leamington, Richard found a bridge on the former GWR line with a strangely complex arch-construction, and he concluded his talk with slides of a variety of different items which many of us may have 'seen' in our travels, but not necessarily 'have observed'.

Following Richard's presentation, Roger Cragg showed a 10-minute DVD, issued by the Institute of Civil Engineers, on Thomas Telford, its illustrious first president. A very professional production, the DVD covered the life, projects and legacy of this remarkable man, possibly the world's greatest civil engineer, many of whose works are still with us today.

The evening was rounded-off by an address from our Chairman, Martin Green, in which he took an overall view of the future of our Society. While our field of activity is Warwickshire as a whole it must be recognized, Martin said, that our records show we know a great deal more about IA in Warwick and Stratford districts than we do about it in Rugby, north Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth. Yet those areas once had many diverse industries which, even though the demolition men have wrought their usual havoc over the years, should still be potentially rich fields for us to plough.

Martin's plea was for greater attention to be paid by members to the former coalmining and stone quarrying industries of Nuneaton and Bedworth, to the railways and canal systems of those areas, and to such once massively productive firms as the brick-making companies founded by Reginald Stanley and James Knox. Textile related industries also once flourished in north Warwickshire, as did brewing, engineering and boot and shoe manufacture. Little remains to be seen of many of these enterprises, but there is still some evidence to be had for those diligent enough to find it. Only when we have recorded, however minimally, more of the IA of that part of our County, Martin suggested, can we really live up to our name as the *Warwickshire* Industrial Archaeology Society.

WARWICKSHIRE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

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