

WARWICKSHIRE

Industrial Archaeology Society

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

One of the great pleasures of my involvement in industrial archaeology has been to act as enthusiastic amateur. There has been nothing better than hearing about or discovering a site and then setting off to investigate, interpret and record that site in whatever way seemed appropriate at the time. I know many members of the society have shared this approach, and continue to do so. This amateur, individual type of assessment by our members may not have been very systematic but it has produced a great collection of material, particularly an excellent photographic record, some of which has been shown regularly at Society meetings.

I recently attended the Day School of the Council for British Archaeology at Worcester. My main reason for going was to hear a presentation on the Worcester Porcelain Works by professional industrial archaeologists John van Laun (of John van Laun Associates) and Alvaro Mora-Ottomano (of Archenfield Archaeology). This was the only 'industrial' talk of the day, and

they had trouble squeezing all that they wanted to say in the time allocation. It did make me realise how important these professional bodies are in recording industrial sites, particularly with the rigours of Health and Safety legislation making it very difficult for the amateur to engage in such activity on the larger sites. When does enthusiastic investigation (a.k.a. snooping around) become unlawful trespass?

Being part of that Day School also made me reflect on the differences and similarities that exist between archaeologists of a more traditional variety (no offence intended) and the merry band of industrial archaeologists that make up WIAS. This in turn reminded me of the Conference to be held at the University of Leicester April 4th.-6th. 2008 'Crossing Paths or Sharing Tracks: future directions for the archaeological study of post-1550 Britain & Ireland'. This aims to bring together representatives of the AIA, and the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology, (together with representatives from similar organisations in Ireland), to explore commonalities between approaches as well as unique contributions made by each organisation to study of the material heritage of the post-1550 period. I shall ensure that the Society is represented at this conference.

Whatever future direction the subject takes, it really is vital that all of us continue to investigate, interpret and record any sites that come to our notice. It has been

the essential ingredient of what we have done over many years, and needs to remain at the heart of the Society's activities.

In a previous issue I bemoaned the absence of local courses on industrial archaeology that might be of interest and benefit to the amateur industrial archaeologist. One course that is being offered on a related issue – industrial architecture – is available in Oxford in April 2008, and details are included below.

Oxford University Department of Continuing Education

Course on Industrial Architecture

Thursday 17th. April to Thursday 26 June 2008

2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.

10 Meetings

Course fee: £85

Course tutor: Hubert Pragnell

To be held at: Ewert House, Ewert Place, Summertown, Oxford

Course code: O07P659HCW

www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses

PROGRAMME

Programme.

The programme through to April 2008 is as follows:

January 10th

Anna Stocks: *Listing and Planning Issues for the Industrial Archaeologist*

February 14th

Mr. Chris Holland: *Forgotten Hero: Joseph Elkington Agricultural Pioneer 1739-1806*

March 13th

Mr. Tony Green: *Mapmaking Past Present and Future*

April 10th

Mr. Michael Derby: *Coke Quakers and Charcoal*

Continued on page 2

NEWSLETTER

Meeting Reports *by Arthur Astrop*

September 2007 Alison Clague

Working Lives: Memories of Work and Industry in Nuneaton and Bedworth

The 'oral history' approach to recording past local and regional activities is growing in popularity among archivists and industrial archaeologists. One such project is currently in hand in Coventry, in respect of the former engineering industries in that City, and at our September meeting Alison Clague outlined the project she is heading which aims to capture, often in the nick of time, essences of the many trades once practised in Nuneaton and Bedworth.

Entitled *Working Lives*, the project is designed to collect, preserve and make accessible memories, images and information relating to the people who worked in the brick and tile making, quarrying, engineering and textile industries of those areas. The final 'product' of the project, which has been commissioned by the Nuneaton and Bedworth Arts Committee, and is financed by Warwickshire County Council's Well Being Fund, will be a collection of tape recordings, photographs and written work that can be preserved for posterity.

Alison, who is based at Nuneaton Library, showed a Powerpoint presentation which included many short 'clips' from lengthier sound recordings made by those who once worked in the relevant industries. Her idea was to give a summary of the scope and quality of the project, its aims, the progress so far, and the work which is scheduled for the future. Many of the industries and their buildings in Nuneaton and Bedworth have now disappeared, and there is an urgency in the project to capture the memories of the people who worked in them before they too, disappear.

An appeal was therefore made to local history groups and to residents of Nuneaton and district to volunteer to share their memories of working days. There was a gratifying response to the appeal, and almost invariably a by-product of most interviews, along with the sound recordings, was the production by the interviewee of a few photographs. These showed records of work places, working conditions, and working processes, which might otherwise never have been seen. Permission for Alison to include these priceless images was rarely refused.

The oral side of the project not only brings 'history to life', but also records local accents and dialects, technical phrases and terms which might otherwise have been lost, together with some of the emotions felt by workers at the time. Alison started her talk with the textile industry, and the works of major employers such as Courtaulds, Listers, Lester & Harris, Abbey Hosiery and Toye, Kenning &

Spencer (incidentally, still trading in Bedworth), featured prominently. In many instances, a photo of an interviewee and a brief sound recording recalled some aspect of his or her working and social life.

Turning to the brick and tile industries, Alison showed photos of Stockingford, for example, when its skyline was dominated by tall chimneys and brick kilns. Haunchwood Brick & Tile also specialised in making the very tall heavily ornamented chimney pots often seen to this day on stately homes. In the engineering field, Sterling Metals and Clarkson were prominent in Nuneaton, and the former with its works covering 26 acres was once the town's largest employer. Finally, Alison turned to the stone quarrying industry of Nuneaton and district. Judkins quarry started in 1840, and a worker who served as a driver and driller with various companies shared his memories of blasting and crushing procedures.

When the oral-history project is complete it will represent a comprehensive record in pictures, documentation and in sound of industries and companies long gone from Nuneaton and Bedworth, their buildings demolished and (in the case of quarries), with their sites filled-in and landscaped.

Some WIAS members may feel they have something to contribute to this project, and if so Alison Clague can be contacted on 02476 384027, or by e-mail on alisonclague@warwickshire.gov.uk

Society News *continued*

New Treasurer

Mr. Richard Hartree has agreed to become the Society's new treasurer, and our thanks are due to him for taking on this task. Richard has, amongst many other things, been the treasurer of the AIA in the past, so we are lucky to have such an experienced person to take on the job. It is intended that he will assume responsibility for the Society's finances from the New Year and contact details may be found at the end of the Newsletter.

Subscriptions

Members are reminded that subscriptions for the 2007/2008 season are due. The amount remains at £10.00 per person or couple and should be paid to Martin Green, acting Membership Secretary. Cheques should be made payable to Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society please.

Membership Secretary

The post of Membership Secretary remains vacant, but it is hoped to announce the name of the new nominee shortly.

Railway History

October 2007 Mr. Martin Bloxham

The Stratford & Midland Junction Railway

The Stratford-upon-Avon & Midland Junction Railway ambled its way cross-country, up hill and down dale, broadly from Towcester in the East to Shakespeare's home town in the West. Some cynics said that the initials (SMJ) of this 65-mile line stood for 'slow, miserable and jolty'. As lovingly described by Martin Bloxham, however, the line seems to have been more the potential subject for a poem by John Betjeman which he never got round to writing.

The name Stratford & Midland Junction Railway amalgamated four others, each with a name longer than the next, with the E. N. M. & T. R. & O. Junction Railway (sic!) triumphantly claiming to be the longest. The arrival of the initials SMJ, therefore, must have come as a great relief to passengers of the line, few though they were. Envisaged initially to carry iron ore, principally destined for South Wales, and only secondarily for carrying passengers, the line never had more than 15 coaches at its disposal for the latter, usually coupled in threes. The first section, opened in 1866, joined Blisworth to Towcester, and five years later Fenny Compton was joined to Kineton. Thus, bit by bit the line gradually inched its way westward to Stratford-upon-Avon, and the final section eventually linked that town to Bidford-on-Avon, at Broom Junction.

The single-track line passed through predominantly rural parts of the Midlands, calling at stations with such Olde-English names as Blakesley, Moreton Pinkney, Byfield, Fenny Compton and Ettington. Sometimes, *en route*, distinguished passengers like Lord Willoughby de Broke and the novelist Marie Corelli would leave their country houses to be welcomed aboard its coaches, but passenger-carrying business never paid for itself. Indeed, the whole venture, from laying the very first sleeper, seems to have been based much more on optimism than on hard-headed business acumen. For a start, the line ran 'against the grain', that is, it travelled east-west across the land when the real thrust of Britain's railways in the 19th and early 20th centuries, not to mention virtually all the serious financial backing, was focussed on developing the more profitable north-south routes. The SMJ always had powerful, and at times threatening, neighbours.

The traffic it found in iron-ore freight varied erratically, as sources beyond the reach of the line were exploited, and SMJ shareholders waited in vain for the dividends they had once been confidently promised. Instead, they were all too often appealed to for further 'investment', and at one time the line

went into receivership and passenger-carrying was suspended. When, some years later, passenger traffic was introduced once more, yet further substantial investment was needed in order for SMJ to bring its coaches up to the standards then set by the Board of Trade.

The two world wars saw periods of increased activity for the line, when it was called upon to carry troops and ammunition, and in WW2 it played its part in the build up to D-day. At one time, business was also found in carrying bulk supplies of bananas destined mainly for London, and spare heat from its steam locos was ingeniously diverted to the trucks to encourage ripening of the fruit, from green to yellow, during its journey.

But the SMJ was simply a sitting duck for Beeching. It stood no chance of survival, by 1965 it was gone, and all that survives today is a short section connecting Fenny Compton with the MOD's Ordnance Depot at Burton Dassett. As Martin Bloxham said, "The SMJ was good for views but bad for shareholders!"

www.windowsonwarwickshire.org.uk

The number of WIAS members who are 'on-line' is increasing. In light of our Society's special interest, perhaps one of the most rewarding for random surfing is Warwickshire County Council's *Windows on Warwickshire* site.

The site divides the County into five areas, named North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth, Rugby, Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon. It can then be explored by way of four main categories, namely Theme Viewer, Maps Explorer, Advanced Search and Spotlights. Clicking on Theme Viewer will open a list of towns in the County, and in turn a town can then be opened to show a list of streets. Thus, by clicking on Leamington Spa and then on Bath Street, pages of photos of premises in that street are displayed including, for example, some fascinating interior views of various departments in E Francis & Son taken in the year 1900!

The section of the site entitled Maps Explorer explains itself, and that labelled Advanced Search enables one to seek a specific photo by keyword, date or type. The Spotlights section offers a number of self-contained interactive web sites. Warwickshire County Council is to be congratulated on providing this site and on-line WIAS members are recommended to visit it.

Arthur Astrop

Industrial Archaeology at Warwick Castle

November 2007: Mr David Bright

The Mill and Engine House at Warwick Castle

In 1894, to celebrate the thirty-third birthday of his wife Daisy, Countess of Warwick, the Earl of Warwick laid on a rather special present. That evening, a massive switch was closed, and some 500 electric light bulbs throughout the Castle came on. Closing that switch meant that countless candles, oil lamps and gas mantles hitherto used to illuminate the noble pile, were on their way out, and there was doubtless much rejoicing 'below stairs'!

The bare wires carrying current (DC) to the bulbs could be traced back, through wooden (sic) twin-channel conduits, down to the mill house just outside the southern wall of the castle, and it was this structure which was the starting point for David Bright's talk to our November meeting. The first record of a mill on the Avon close to Warwick Castle locates it about 100 yards farther downstream, but at the end of the 14th century it was moved to its present location. Sketches and paintings of the castle, including some by Canaletto, show the mill house clearly and David had maps and drawings revealing how, over the years, various changes were made to the weir and mill race.

Up to the mid-1800s, paintings and sketches of the mill house were the only records, and 'artists' licence' aimed at showing the castle in its best light was always present to some extent. By 1860, however, the first photographs of the mill house appeared, and there was thus more certainty about its design. But in 1880 a fire destroyed the building. The building which replaced it, however, became known henceforth as the 'mill and engine house', because the water-wheel(s) were used firstly to work pumps to lift water to the castle and, ultimately, to drive the dynamos and charge the batteries which provided its electricity. Warwick Castle was embracing the latest technology.

Each day, the mill and engine house was busy charging the banks of batteries in readiness for the demand for electricity which would come from the castle when dusk fell. If distinguished company was

being entertained 'up above', then great was the responsibility on the Superintendent of the mill and engine house to have all the batteries fully charged. And there were also the batteries in the castle's Peugeot electric car to be kept ready for whenever the Countess wanted 'a spin' in the castle grounds. Soon, the demand for a totally reliable supply of electricity meant that the variability of water flow in the Avon was a problem, and even the dynamo driven by an underwater turbine was insufficient. Oil and gas engines were therefore installed and state of the art electrical switch- and control-gear was fitted to monitor the dynamos.

The final part of David's talk concentrated on the many year's work involved in the restoration of the mill and engine house, bringing it 'back to life' and ultimately to the condition where today it provides a permanent exhibition of how it once looked and operated. David played a leading part in that project, including working out how the complex circuits and electrical switchgear were arranged. Among the many impressive sights are: the restored waterwheel; the double-helical cast-iron gears which originally transmitted its power; a few of the original lead batteries; and the remains of the Thomson Vortex underwater turbine. A visit is strongly recommended.

Southam Gasworks Addendum

Redevelopment work has now started on the site of Southam Gasworks. The house has apparently been refurbished, at least externally, and has acquired some slightly inappropriate looking new guttering, together with a fresh coat of white paint on the rendering. Elsewhere, all other buildings have been demolished, although it is not known which, if any, of these related to gas production. The size of the site would suggest that further new houses may yet be built.

Mark Abbott

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