WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

WIAS

NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Annual General Meeting … and beyond

It was good to be able to report at the AGM in September that the Society had experienced a successful year, with membership numbers and meeting attendances both revealing some encouraging statistics. The treasurer reported that the financial position was also healthy and a very modest surplus had been generated over the past year. On this basis he saw no reason why subscriptions should be increased and that these would remain at current levels for the next twelve months. The major expenditure of the Society is the of hiring of the Pyne Room and speakers' expenses, and given the high proportion of members taking to the floor in the coming twelve months, it seemed likely that a similar surplus would emerge in twelve months time.

The Society operates with a small number of officers and committee, and Richard Hartree agreed to do the Treasurer's job for three years. At the end of the coming year he will have completed his term of office and we shall be looking for a replacement. This is a crucial responsibility within the Society, but it is not a hugely onerous task, and Richard would be very willing to talk to any member about what is involved.

Looking back over the past twelve months, I feel that we have had a good variety of meetings, we have maintained our contact with outside organisations (particularly the AIA) and knowledge of the Society is growing. Instrumental in this is the role of the web site. Never has information been so accessible for us to explore industrial history and archaeology sites via the internet, but others can, of course, seek information about the industrial archaeology of Warwickshire from our own website. Peter Riley has done – and continues to do – an excellent job in updating the site. However, he relies very much on the contributions of others, and several members have been generous in their donation of time and information.

Linking this with the practical difficulties of publishing written material in pamphlet or book form, I feel that the current year could be an occasion for boosting the amount of material on the WIAS website. Writing text and inserting new digital images or scanning photographs taken in the past on film strikes me as being an easy, cheap and efficient way of boosting the stock of material available on the website. More significantly, perhaps, it can be downloaded and printed by others with the costs of that printing carried by the user and not by the Society. Many societies similar to our own have a list or database of sites which can be accessed by all.

This step requires an acceptance of the impact of the information revolution, and that knowledge and photographs, once on the website, are accessible to all. Not all may be happy with this – particularly with regard to treasured photographs – and it may be possible to explore issues of copyright, but there really is a strong case for WIAS to contribute to the amount of material on Warwickshire that could be available to others. Indeed as I write these notes, the fact that the WIAS Newsletter will be available not just to the membership but, once on our website, to a potentially vast audience is an exciting prospect.

Inland Waterways Association – Urgent Action Required

The importance of the internet as a means of communication is brought home with the arrival of an e-mail from Jo Gilbertson (IWA Campaigns and Communications Manager) via Derek Billings concerning the potential sale of British Waterways' assets. An extract from the e-mail reads:

The Government is seriously considering taking British Waterways' assets and selling them in a Treasury 'fire sale' to raise cash - a decision will be taken in the next few days. Selling off its assets would mean that BW would be £85 million short of the £120 million it needs to run the canals and waterways of this country. That will mean inevitable decay and disrepair and will undoubtedly lead to closure as the organisation contracts to preserve a core network.

An e-petition is available - Please sign up as soon as possible!!

http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/protectourcanals/

PROGRAMME

December 10th 2009
Roger Cragg: *Robert Stephenson*
January 14th 2010
Dr Amelia Pannett: *Warwick Gas Works*
February 11th 2010
Richard Hartree: *The Aluminium Works at Banbury 1929-2009*
March 11th 2010
A joint meeting with the Leamington Society: *The works of William Louis de Normanville*
April 8th 2010
Dr Malcolm Dick: *Matthew Boulton (1728 – 1809) and the celebration of industrial technology*
May 13th 2010
Peter Coulls, Alain Foote and John Willock: *Willans Works*
June 10th 2010
A presentation by members: *Industrial Archaeology Abroad*

Meeting Reports

September 2009: David Close, Charlie Gilbert, Heather Cox
Chedham's Yard

The members of Wellesbourne Parish Council must have felt as though they were holding the proverbial tiger's tail when the BBC chose their conservation project for Chedham's Yard in the heart of the village as a contestant in the 'Restoration Village' programme in 2006.

The story, however, begins a few years earlier and provides a good example of industrial archaeology in practice. Chedham's Yard is a purpose-built, but unlisted, wheelwright's workshop and blacksmith's forge within the Wellesbourne conservation area. It is located at the end of a narrow lane, in an area of predominantly historic buildings, many of which are listed, and largely surrounded by residential property.

The Chedham family's association with the site dates from 1813 when Thomas Chedham moved to Wellesbourne and began to work as a wheelwright, renting a yard and accommodation. The business remained in the Chedham family from that time and operated as a wheelwright, blacksmith and general agricultural engineer until the late 1960s when the Yard ceased to be used commercially. It then entered into a state of suspended animation until 2002 when Bill Chedham, the last owner of the Yard and who had started work there in 1942, approached Wellesbourne Parish Council (WPC) in November 2001 and offered to sell the property for £10,000.

David Close was Chairman of WPC at the time and after setting the scene with some of the history surrounding Wellesbourne Hastings and Wellesbourne Mountford, which included links with Joseph Arch and the agricultural workers movement, he explained how the Parish Council approached this unusual offer. From the outset it was driven by the belief that in Chedham's Yard there was something worthy of preservation and whose loss would have been regrettable. WPC, therefore, purchased the Yard in February 2002.

A working party was established which included members of WPC, neighbours to the site, other residents of Wellesbourne and, critically, experts from the Warwickshire and Worcestershire Museums. The working party soon had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve. This included: the preservation of the existing atmosphere, the maintenance of the Yard in the context of Wellesbourne, the creation of a lively working environment, the enablement of the wider community to understand and enjoy the work of historical crafts and the inclusion of the Yard into the broader tourist aspect of Wellesbourne.

To achieve this vision, a specialist consultancy, PLB, was appointed. PLB offers a complete range of heritage consultancy and design services and soon produced a conservation statement which concluded that Chedham's Yard was a time-capsule of rural craft skills dating back over the centuries. When work at the Yard ended the workshop, benches and equipment remained untouched for decades. With over 7000 original tools, it was a nationally significant collection of rural life and trade.

In 2004 English Heritage became involved, beginning with a preliminary photographic record and subsequent site visits and culminating with a Statement of Significance in November 2004. This concluded that, in terms of the local context, there was no doubt that Chedham's Yard was highly significant in representing the community's rural past and the type of small-scale craft industry that stood at the centre of village life and the local rural economy and as such was well worth preserving.

With this endorsement behind them, WPC moved to appraise its options. To repair and preserve the site for research or to move the buildings to another site were rejected but it was agreed that to create a visitor attraction for traditional crafts and to re-use as workshops could be a viable option. By early 2006 WPC had spent some £100,000 (largely funded by English Heritage) and PLB was estimating that upwards of £1,000,000 would be needed to achieve the objective. Furthermore, the issues of management and an ageing membership (a familiar refrain) only added to the problems now facing WPC. It looked as though moth-balling was the only option when the BBC announced that it was seeking entrants for a new series of 'Restoration'.

An application was duly submitted, the BBC representative sent to investigate had 'never heard of this place' but thought that it held possibilities. This led to a hectic round of interviews, open days, exhibitions and local media interest for the Midlands Heat which was won, thus leading to a place in the final. This resulted in much more of the same promotional activity plus managing the growing local concern at the invasion of Wellesbourne by so many outsiders.

At the final in September 2006 it was felt that Chedham's Yard was an also-ran but when Griff Rhys Jones interviewed the feisty Iris, a lady in her mid-80s who knew Bill Chedham and had a wealth of anecdotes, then interest ignited, the telephone lines grew hot with supporters' votes and Chedham's Yard ran out the surprise winners with access to £1,000,000 of funding.

WPC now had to set up a steering group and put in hand essential repairs, submit the application for Heritage Lottery Funding and organise contracts and briefs for further work. Clearly, some outside help was needed and after interviewing three possible consultants PLB was reappointed to manage the process of writing the necessary policies, supervising the archaeological and bat surveys, updating the conservation statement and much else. All the 7,000 tools had been removed for cleaning and restoration before the site was flooded in July 2007, fortunately without causing any serious damage to the buildings.

Charlie Gilbert and Heather Cox brought us up to date with the activities of The Friends of Chedham's Yard and vividly demonstrated the trials and tribulations facing an amateur and volunteer organisation when it is thrust into the national spotlight. Some sixty members, of which only twenty five are active, were responsible for the organisation needed for the BBC programme. They now are preserving and cataloguing the artefacts as well as producing the newsletter *Chedham's Chatter*. Any new members will be very welcome.

Whilst the frantic pace has settled down, much is still to be done and the workload will accelerate again now that planning permissions have been granted (announced mid-November) which will lead to the release of funds for the preservation work and the construction of visitor amenities in anticipation of an opening in October 2010. Four working groups are in place covering: garden, website, collections and Chedham's on the Move. Other possible activities are a book based on the history of the Horse and Chedham's Yard, a shop and educational visits to schools.

It would be very sad if the work and enthusiasm of the Friends of Chedham's Yard were not to have concrete results but during the discussion following the presentation members voiced concerns about the future of the project and its long-term viability. The unfolding story of Chedham's Yard will indeed be watched with great interest.

October 2009: Steve Bagley

Three Cycling Pioneers of Coventry - James Starley, William Hillman & George Singer

Steve Bagley, the Head of Collections, and his colleagues at the Coventry Transport Museum have delved deeply to unearth the extensive links that bind together three pioneers of Coventry's cycle industry - Starley, Hillman and Singer.

The research had been prompted because, whilst much has been written about the Coventry cycle industry, there were many errors and inaccuracies that could only be resolved by going back to the original sources. These included: census returns; birth, marriage and death records; wills and not least trade directories.

The story began with James Starley (1830-1881) who was born in Albourne, West Sussex but moved to London where he worked as a gardner to John Penn, a marine engineer with works in Greenwich (and well known to some members). Starley developed a reputation for his abilities with mechanical devices and when Penn bought a sewing machine for his wife which broke down, James effected a repair and devised improvements to the mechanism.

Penn knew Josiah Turner, one of the makers of the machine, and Starley was taken on at the London factory. In due course, Turner and Starley moved to Coventry, where workers employed in the failing watch industry were considered able to adapt to the intricate work of sewing machine production, and started their own sewing machine company in in the early 1860s. First called the European Sewing Machine Company, later the Coventry Machinist's Company.

William Hillman (1848-1921), as evidenced by the census returns, lived close to Starley in Lewisham and was also apprenticed to Penn. He is then found in 1871 in Coventry in partnership with Starley making their first bicycles and registering numerous patents.

The last member of the triumvirate, George Singer (1847-1909) also lived in Lewisham in the 1860s and was apprenticed at Penns. He is found listed as a bell ringer and unsurprisingly on the same programme is one W Hillman! Early evidence of the social contact between the men which continues when Singer moves to Coventry in 1871 and is found lodging with Hillman.

Looking in more detail at the development of the cycle industry Bagley first traced the progress of Starley, known today as 'the Father of the Cycle Industry'. Starley had been captivated by this new mode of transport, and began making improvements to its design. Before long he decided to work for himself, making sewing machines and working up designs for cycles in collaboration with William Hillman in St John Street where he is recorded as a 'machinist' employing 4 men and 2 boys. There is evidence of advertising for the 'Ariel' cycle, the first all-metal cycle fitted with 'Lever Tension' wheels, which was a vast improvement on the previous French designs.

Hillman, who married in 1873, left to pursue his own future but Starley carried on the business until he teamed up with W. B. Smith in 1873 as Smith & Starley - located on a site in St Agnes' Lane where Coventry Transport Museum now stands. This enterprise lasted until 1878 when Starley began working for a cycle business that he helped to establish with his sons - Starley Bros.

James Starley was one of our great inventors with many patents to his name including the Coventry lever, the open differential (still used in some tricycles and ready and waiting when the car needed the device) and tangent spokes. The Aerial Velocipede will always be associated with him. Starley died in 1881 and is buried in the London Road cemetry and has a memorial statue at Warwick Green.

William Hillman, after leaving Starley, joined forces with William Herbert (brother to Alfred) in 1875 and in 1876, together with a racing cyclist named Cooper, founded the "Hillman and Herbert Cycle Company", later renamed the 'Premier Cycle Co'. in 1891. In the 1880s the Sparkbrook Cycle Company was purchased. Hillman developed the 'Kangaroo' cycle which was safer than the Penny Farthing and was both successful and profitable. It led to the foundation of the Auto Machinery Company for which the Museum has Minute Books from 1891. In that year the census shows Hillman as the Managing Director of a Cycle Works living in Stoke Green at Abingdon House (still extant). That the business prospered is evidenced by him building Keresley Hall (now the Royal Court Hotel) in 1894.

The boom years of the 1890s continued for Hillman who indulged his love of golf by turning land behind the Hall into 'The Golf Field' and setting up his brother-in-law, Henry Brockas as a golf ball manufacturer.

Hillman moved with the times and was early into the motor industry with the formation of the Hillman-Coatalen company with the Breton, Louis Coatelen, as designer and chief engineer. The works were located in the grounds of Pinley House, owned by Harold Smith, one of the Coventry business men behind the nascent motor industry. However, after a disagreement purporting to relate to one of Hillman's five daughters, Coatalen left in 1909 to join the Sunbeam Car Company.

Hillman died in 1921 and is buried in St Thomas' Churchyard, Keresley. His gravestone marks the family's connections with other motor industry pioneers, the Wilks of Rover and the Blacks of Standard, with the burials of two grandsons, John Spencer Wilks and John Black.

The third of the trio, George Singer (1847-1909) was born in Dorset and moved to Coventry in the late 1860s. Working under Josiah Turner and James Starley at the Coventry Machinists Company, Singer gained a wealth of experience in the new cycle trade.

In 1873 he left the Coventry Machinists for a higher position at the Paragon Cycle Company, a much smaller business but one that was concerned completely with cycle production.

Singer met and married Elizabeth Stringer the following year, and in 1875 established his own cycle business – Singer & Co. Ltd. in partnership with father-in-law James Stringer making 'Ordinary' or 'Penny-Farthing' type cycles as well as tricycles of high quality under the 'Challenge' name. As an example of the close-knit cycle industry Singer held the important DHF trademark jointly with Hillman.

Singer seems to have been more involved with civic and religious matters than the others. He was a Deacon in the United Reform Church and sat on its finance committee. He donated £200 and laid the foundation stone of Brownshill Chapel. Through the 1880s he became increasingly wealthy and by 1890 he had a grand house, Coundon Court, built for him and his growing family. In 1891 he became Mayor of Coventry, a position he held for a further three years.

Singer sold the business in 1896 for £543,000 but retained the Managing Directorship at a salary of £1,500. Very considerable sums indeed. He died at Coundon Court in 1909.

Steve Bagley showed us what a wealth of information is contained in the source documents available to us all. It does, however, require dedication and perseverance to build up the picture that he presented of the pioneering days of Coventry's cycle industry.

November 2009: John Crossling
Warwickshire Breweries - Past & Present

Darling Buds, Enigmatic Variations, Hog Goblin, Autumn Bliss, Barristers and Gavel Bender, Newton's Cream and Davy's Glow, Gold and Ubu are but a few of the names created by Warwickshire's real ale brewers. Equally varied are the names of the breweries, but more of these later.

John Crossling, looking every inch the welcoming landlord, but in reality a geologist turned local government official via the museum service, gave us a whirlwind survey of Warwickshire's breweries and brewers (plus the occasional brewster). No doubt some members were more familiar than others with the product but by the time John had finished the scent of hops, malted barley and fermenting mash was almost palpable. Sadly, no samples were available but there is the prospect of a WIAS commemorative bottle - for which an appropriate name would be welcomed by the Chairman.

John's interest in the development of the brewing industry began in Derby. His research showed that a graphic picture of social development could be drawn from the records of meetings in public houses and taverns for events such as bear-baiting, cock-fighting and the like. Similar information was found in Warwick. John also has a practical interest in brewing and beer through his active role over fifteen years in the organisation of the Harbury Beer Festival, which now has a national following.

Reviewing a list of the mid-Victorian brewers that preceded the Warwick & Leamington Brewery was reminiscent of a roll-call of local solicitors as various combinations of individual names evolved over relatively few years. Such amalgamations continued and the industry eventually became what it is today, dominated by a few giants and often ultimately non-British. However, and happily, there has been a resurgence of small, local breweries around the country and Warwickshire seems to have been especially blest in this regard.

What we are seeing is indeed a reversion to an earlier business model. In earlier times most towns had a brewery and many taverns also had their own brew-house. The Victorians created the phenomenon of the large central brewery with a network of outlets, either brewery-owned or tied-supplied. Improved distribution channels undoubtedly assisted this process. In the recent past the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) has campaigned successfully for the introduction of guest beers into previously tied houses and this has greatly helped the development of small breweries, notably the trend to micro-breweries since the 1970s.

Before looking at some of the breweries in more detail it is useful to have a brief resumé of the brewing process. Malted barley is added to water in a mash tun where the enzymes are extracted. The resultant hot liquor is transfered to a copper (now stainless steel) tank and wort and hops added before boiling for 1 to 2 hours and then sieving into a fermenting vessel via a heat exchanger (cooler) ready for the addition of yeast. After 2 to 3 weeks fermentation the brew spends a further week in a conditioning tank before being racked off into barrels for distribution. In an interesting parallel with the Highland malt whiskey industry, the characteristics of the local water is an important factor in the finished brew. For example, the gypsum-infused aquifer under Burton-on-Trent was ideal for brewing pale ales and London became the specialist area for porter.

John's well illustrated tour of Warwickshire's small breweries showed many common themes as far as equipment was concerned, although the premises varied widely - from old slaughterhouses to large garden sheds via some impressive purpose-built units and even the former laboratory of the Studley Needle Works. The equipment showed a propensity to recycle, often from other industries and especially from the dairy field where large stainless steel tanks are commonplace as are the modular plate-type coolers that seem to predominate in the micro-breweries. Tank insulation was prominent and varied from quilted lagging to elegant slatted wood finishes reminiscent of early steam engine cylinders. Proper storage for ingredients such as hops is important and cool conditions were found in chill cabinets and large refrigerators. Hops now come from many sources beyond Kent and Herefordshire, and America, Europe, New Zealand and Japan may flavour your next pint.

The breweries are classified by their output measured in barrels per day with a barrel containing thirty-six gallons or 288 pints. Warwickshire's breweries vary from one and a half barrels to thirty-eight and incidentally up to an extremely strong 17.5% ABV! Brewing recipes are closely guarded by their owners and sadly, can be lost when a brewery fails or, more likely, is absorbed into a larger business.

It would be invidious, and probably boring, to repeat John's lengthy list of breweries but a number of conclusions can be drawn. It is particularly sad to note the short life of many of the breweries reviewed. Whilst some were forced to move premises for various reasons and others survived after a change in ownership, all too often pressure from 'the big boys' and restrictions on outlets seems to have led to the failure of a fragile business model. In contrast, one of the local success stories is led by two marketing men from Bass who have emphasised innovation and quality for a limited range of beers. Funding has been secured from DEFRA for new plant and eco-friendly reed beds are used to filter effluent in a sustainable manner. A French brewer is employed and a very attractive visitor facility has been created. It must also be said that visitors are welcomed by all of Warwickshire's brewers but please telephone ahead to avoid disappointment.

What of the future? The small brewer of real ale caters for the discerning drinker through a network of specialised public houses. Thanks to earlier changes in legislation, guest beers do feature increasingly in the mainstream houses and there is a thriving programme of beer festivals across the country. Nonetheless, the enthusiast for real ale who decides to branch out into commercial brewing faces many challenges but fortunately there are enough such brave individuals to ensure that we can enjoy a tasty, local pint throughout the County.