WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

WIAS

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NEWSLETTER

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held in the first part of the September meeting, and involved the election of officers for the year 2010/2011 and the receipt of both the Chairman's and Treasurer's reports.

In terms of the primary role of the society, the holding of monthly meetings to stimulate interest and research into industrial archaeology and industrial history, the Chairman reported that 2009/2010 had been a success with a variety of well attended meetings. These had involved both talks from members of the society and a range of outside speakers, and that this formula had been retained for the planning of the 2010/2011season.

The Chairman expressed thanks for the support of the officers and committee of the Society, and of those with specific responsibilities such as membership, the newsletter, refreshments, the bookstall and the website, together with continued support from members for the monthly meetings.

After the presentation and acceptance of the treasurer's report, the formal transfer of the role of treasurer from Richard Hartree to Victor Lobb took place. Richard has done an excellent job as our treasurer, performing his duties in an effective, unobtrusive way, and, as he himself reported, hands over the finances in a very healthy condition. Victor has very much been 'treasurer-in-waiting' and we thank him for taking on this important role for the society.

No changes were made to the rates for membership subscription and meeting fees, although the outgoing treasurer did warn that a modest rise would need to be considered for next year, principally because of the rise in fees charged by visiting speakers and the slight increase in the charge for room hire. The charges have not changed for many years and it would be prudent of us to keep pace with inflation!

The meeting also heard that George and Lis Sayell had decided to end their duties as organisers of refreshments. The Chairman recorded his - and the Society's - thanks to them both for performing this role in such an efficient way. Enthusiastic volunteers are being sought to fill this gap – perhaps in some form of rota.

Outside the formal meetings, the invaluable contribution of individual and group research on specific sites and company histories continue to take place and we look forward to the presentation of the results at a monthly meeting or as part of a members' evening at some stage in the future.

WIAS continues its links with the Association for Industrial Archaeology, and four members had attended the recent conference in West Cornwall. One important announcement at conference was the confirmation of the appointment of WIAS member Chris Barney as Affiliated Societies Officer, providing links between local societies and the national organisation. It will be interesting to hear of the issues faced by other local societies, and may provide us with useful guidelines for the future.

Future Directions

It was the AIA conference and the arrival of the notice for the AGM of the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society (GLIAS) that prompted me to air a few thoughts about the future direction of WIAS. The GLIAS letter highlighted the fact that the Society was run by a few members of the committee, and that the committee had changed very little over many years. Where was the next generation of the committee to come from?

WIAS might be characterised as occupying a similar position, and, indeed, has fewer officers than many societies. For example, many local history/industrial archaeology societies have a meetings secretary separate from the Chairman, and someone responsible for walks and visits. This seems to be a fruitful direction for us to travel. Getting more people involved with highly specific but limited tasks could add a great deal to the society, as well, of course, as providing enjoyment and a sense of achievement for those involved.

Some aspects for potential development

There are a number of issues that we could seek to address. Perhaps most important is the development of the recording of industrial archaeology and industrial history for Warwickshire, and I am increasingly convinced that the website and digital recording provide the way forward.

In many instances, the first contact from outsiders with the industrial archaeology of Warwickshire comes via a search of the internet for a website. The WIAS website has been developed by Peter Riley, and he gives a good deal of time and expertise to providing an attractive and informative site. He reports that much of the material on the site depends on contributions from members, and we have been discussing ways in which we might develop this into a more formal and structured coverage of the IA sites of Warwickshire. I shall be reporting back to subsequent meetings – and via e-mail – of the suggested way forward, and there will be plenty of opportunities for members to be involved.

Other aspects for future development might be the formation of a group to work on the techniques of oral history and the creation and editing of subsequent recordings, and an individual (or small group) who might take on the responsibility for organising (a small number of) visits and/or walks, mainly for the summer months. Members may have other ideas for the development of the Society and I hope to be able to return to some of these themes at our monthly meetings, once they have been discussed within committee.

Martin Green

PROGRAMME

October 14th 2010
Mike Glassson, curator of the Walsall Leather Museum, and author of several books on the leather trade: *The Walsall Leather Industry*

November 11th 2010
Sarah Chubb, borough archivist for Sandwell Community History and Archives Service:
Chance Brothers – glassmakers of Smethwick

December 9th 2010
WIAS members who attended the AIA Conference in Cornwall: *'Aspects of the industrial heritage of Cornwall'*

Meeting Reports

September 2010: *The Last Picture Show - Some 35mm Slides from WIAS Members*

The interests of the membership of our Society are very wide-ranging as was evidenced by the content of *'The Last Picture Show'*.

The following selection of subjects attempts to encapsulate those interests and, as with the presentations, has to suffer from space constraints. Apologies are, therefore, due to everyone whose special interest has been omitted and to those who have little or no interest in the subjects that have been chosen.

Roadside furniture is frequently used to illustrate the work of local foundries as well as different design styles. Typical examples are fingerposts and milestones or markers.

The cast iron Finger post to Myton Hamlet was made in 1938 by Richards (Leicester) Limited and is in good condition apart from a missing finial.

Photograph: Richard King

The Milemarker on Pittern Hill near Kineton was cast by the prolific local foundry of Glover & Sons in Warwick and is a good example of this ubiquitous item.

Photograph: Peter Chater

The restored bridge load warning plaque on the Lighthorne road at Kineton. originally erected by the Stratford on Avon and Midland Junction Railway

Photograph: Richard King

Buildings encompass many aspects of Industrial Archaeology and a wide variety of industrial processes are involved in their construction. Not only do we get a sense of period and purpose from the architecture but also of manufacturing technologies from brick-making through glazing and furniture to the production processes that took place within the building.

Princethorpe College chapel built on the site of the former St Mary's Priory in Ruabon Red Brick to designs by Pugin.

Photograph: Peter Chater

T*he former Nelson Dale Gelatine Works known as Emscote Mills, subsequently the home of English Rose Kitchens and now a furniture store.*

Photograph: Richard King

Behind St Mary's Church in Leamington is an example of the early prefabricated buildings offered by many manufacturers and widely used as churches, village halls and clubhouses.

Photograph: Richard King

The town livestock market has largely disappeared in Warwickshire, together with many of the buildings, but Rugby held on longer than most. Shown here is one of the sales rings at Rugby Market.

Photograph: Martin Green

Industrial Archaeology can rub shoulders with conventional Archaeology, often to mutual benefit. Whilst engineering innovation is of great importance it is often useful to examine how earlier 'engineers' solved similar problems, especially in the realms of civil engineering.

Stare Bridge at Stoneleigh, built by 13th Century Monks is a splendid example of Medieval architectural and building practice.

Photograph: Peter Chater

One of Warwickshire's most famous land marks, Chesterton Windmill, attracts visitors from all over the world. On this occasion, the visitors were members of the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society.

Photograph: Martin Green

A major part of the work of any Industrial Archaeologist is the preservation, if only as a pictorial record, of our industrial past.

The Potterton Works site in Leamington had long been associated with engineering. It has now been replaced by housing, offices and a medical centre.

Photograph: Martin Green

Warwickshire's association with the motor industry has suffered serious decline in the past 25 years. The once-proud frontage of Automotive Products, Leamington Spa, is now just a memory.

Photograph: Martin Green

Needle making has always been a relatively small-scale industry in Warwickshire. The Minerva Works in Alcester were unusually large and are now converted to multi-occupancy.

Photograph: Martin Green

Small scale industry, often with an agricultural connection, has always been an important part of Warwickshire's economic activity. Sawmills are one such example. Shown here is the (now demolished) Cubbington Sawmill.

Photograph: Martin Green

In every subject there is a place for a miscellany of examples that do not fall into any clear category. These two arbitrary selections give some idea of the wide range of potential subjects that can catch the eye.

The evocative sculpture by Peter Hollins over the entrance to he Birmingham Gun Barrel Proof House.

Photograph: Peter Chater

The unusual wicket gate at the entrance to a churchyard in Upper Shugborough. Combining the skills of blacksmith and carpenter or joiner it must have presented some challenges to those who used it.

Photograph: Peter Chater

June 2010: Bernie Cope
Toye Kenning and Spencer

Not a slide to see all night, but what a feast for the eye was Bernie Cope's survey of the products of Toye, Kenning and Spencer, by appointment to Her Majesty the Queen suppliers of gold and silver laces, insignia and embroidery.

The name of Toye, Kenning and Spencer has long been synonymous with quality, craftsmanship and service. For over 300 years members of the Toye family have been skilfully creating identity products for civil and military markets. The firm's founder, Guillaume Henri Toyé, arrived in London in 1685, a penniless Huguenot refugee who began weaving gold and silver laces for the military. Today, the family tradition is unbroken and although the Toye Group of Companies has grown and diversified, the original aim is unchanged - to design and manufacture the highest quality identity products.

TKS craftsmen and women are experts in weaving, gold and silversmithing, enamelling, screen printing and in hand and machine embroidery. Traditional skills and computerised technology are combined to design and create individual items or a range of products to promote an organisation's identity.

These activities are undertaken at a number of locations in the UK. The main textile factory is in Bedworth where a huge variety of ribbons are woven, now using computer-aided design, and exquisite hand embroidery is created. In Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter are found hand-painted enamelling and machine engraving whilst at Ogmore Vale in South Wales there are die-sinking and presses for high relief medals. Machine embroidery at Preston, hats and caps at Weston in Hertfordshire and ties and scarves at Bury St Edmunds complete the Toye Group's manufacturing facilities. A shop in Great Queen Street, London alongside the Masonic Rooms caters for those seeking regalia and other items.

Bernie Cope is the production director of TKS and after over 30 years with the company there seems to be little about it that is unfamiliar to him. As a result we were treated to a virtual tour of the business, illustrated by a bewildering display of its product range.

Bernie also gave us considerable insight into the difficulties faced today by a long-established British-based company with long serving employees, many with unique skills, competing against overseas suppliers from Pakistan to China. Not the least of the problem appeared to be the attitude of major customers, such as the Ministry of Defence, who issue a high specification for tender, then give the contract on price without checking the quality that comes with a low price! As a result TKS have lost out on some long established contracts. In addition, the overseas competitors are improving their quality all the time.

Fortunately, TKS themselves are winning substantial export business, notably from Commonwealth countries and especially where the very best quality is required. Bernie explained that the two shuttle looms at Bedworth are weaving the best ribbons in the world and his samples included a special watered silk Masonic ribbon and many examples using gold and silver threads. These ribbons have many uses including: braces, watch straps and medal ribbons where quality is paramount. Colour matching is very important with repeat orders and TKS is able to refer back to original specifications and patterns, some going back to the early twentieth century. However, the UK's specialist dye houses are a disappearing breed, again through the fall off in demand.

Another problem facing manufacturers like TKS is the loss of machinery from the UK as British firms move equipment to lower labour cost countries such as Pakistan. If you can't beat them, join them! However, not all machinery skills have gone from the UK and Bernie was justly proud that TKS had restored the shuttle loom that can be seen in the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry and, moreover, the accompanying video is of a similar loom working at Bedworth.

Examples of hand embroidery, especially a large coat of arms, impressed greatly but served to provide another salutary tale. Thirty years ago TKS regularly employed 30 to 40 women at this work but today most of their requirements are bought in from Pakistan! The fate of the company's traditional outworkers is the same, declining from 80 to less than ten today. It is difficult to train up new skilled people when the available pay rates are close to the minimum wage. However, all was not gloom and TKS continues to be a Royal Warrant older and the samples included a medal cushion produced annually for Prince Charles, horse cloths and trumpet banners.

Another product line with plenty of interesting examples came from Western Cap; sporting headgear jostled with military and police caps but this business is also suffering from reduced demand and serious overseas competition.

Machine embroidery uses sewing machines having up to 15 needles and an automatic colour change mechanism to produce school badges on shirts, badges on hatbands and similar applications. Ties have been manufactured in the past but now only a few are made in the UK because of overseas competition. For example, a silk tie costing £8 made in the UK is only £3 when sourced in China. Screen printing is used on mugs and other substrates.

Bernie closed his talk with examples of hand painted enamelling including the insignia of various Orders of the British Empire which also featured ribbons woven at Bedworth. Other examples of the very best of workmanship were elaborate pole tops where there is a good export market in developing countries.

An extended question and answer session gave Bernie plenty of opportunity to expand on his earlier comments and we were left with few illusions about the difficulties, the trials and the tribulations of being a specialist manufacturer in the UK today. Fierce, low cost competition from overseas, customers who issue high specifications for tender but place the order with the lowest price. There are plenty of examples of contracts won by overseas suppliers at prices below TKS's cost!

Nonetheless, Toye, Kenning and Spencer had a turnover last year of some £8.5 million and are quietly confident about the future. There is certainly a long and proud history to be continued by future generations of the Toye family.