WARWICKSHIRE Industrial Archaeology Society

WIAS

NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

As the 2015-2016 season draws to a close, it is perhaps appropriate to review some of the activities of the society over the past twelve months, including some of the decisions taken by the WIAS committee.

We are very much a meeting-based Society, with much effort and energy put in to our monthly gatherings by a small but dedicated team that seeks to ensure a varied programme, the efficient functioning of the meetings themselves, and the provision of opportunities for members to contribute – both by presentations and by comments and questions to visiting speakers at these meetings.

Beyond the basic aim of covering costs and having a source of funds to deal with any unexpected eventualities, the Society aims to make a small surplus which can be used, for example, to support local initiatives in preserving the industrial heritage, such as the Willans project and the Healey Archive. This is a continuing ambition, although the potential level of support is necessarily quite modest. Issues are also raised when exploring potential support for many worthwhile projects outside our area (such as The Chance Glass Works Heritage Trust in the Black Country)

For the 2016-2017 season, a new system of subscriptions is to be implemented, as agreed at the AGM in September 2015.

Subscription rates will change from September 2016 to an annual membership subscription of £16.00 (single) and £20.00 (joint) and members will then not be asked to contribute £1.00 when attending meetings.

Members will be asked to'tick' an attendance sheet so that we can monitor the numbers attending meetings and to meet safety requirements.

Visitors to our meetings will continue to be invited to contribute £2.50.

Please contact Victor Lobb on (01926) 512136 if you are eligible to complete an HMRC 'Gift Aid' declaration and have not already done so (or you have forgotten if you have done so!).

Your committee will monitor the situation very carefully to see whether the new system produces a net benefit to the Society.

After an initial flourish, the level of input into the database has inevitably slowed, but this should not deter members from making entries. Full details of how to do this is on the website www.warwickshireias.org.

The question of publications is another issue to which the committee has devoted much attention. At a recent committee meeting it was agreed that we would not produce an AIA-style Gazetteer, largely on the grounds that much of the information is already available on the database, plus uncertainty over the potential market. More support was given to the idea of a fuller account of (for example) the 30 or 50 most important industrial heritage sites in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull.

Another ingredient in the debate is the level of support that the Society might give to publication projects brought to the attention of the committee. These may be pieces of research carried out by individuals that will need the support of the Society in order to achieve publication as an occasional paper, and the nature of that support – financial; editorial; printing – may differ according to circumstance. There may be possibilities of securing funding/assistance from outside sources. We need to find out what these are, and whether WIAS publications would qualify. There may also be possibilities of joint publishing venture with other societies. These issues are very much on the committee's agenda.

One of the most significant developments over the past year has been the revival of a programme of visits by the Society to important industrial heritage sites. This has been masterminded by Alain Foote, and shown below is what is available over the summer of 2016.

The programme of meetings for 2016-2017 is virtually settled and those for the remainder of 2016 are also shown below.

I do hope that we can rely on your continued attendance at these meetings. The greatest strength of the Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society is the knowledge, enthusiasm and support of its membership.

PROGRAMME

June 9 2016
Members' Evening.
***VISIT* June 19 2016**
Ditherington Flax Mill & Coleham Pumping Station.
***VISIT* July 8 2016**
Cementing Relations Exhibition, Southam and Nelson's Wharf, Stockton.
***VISIT* July 21 2016**
Braunston Canal Guided Tour.
September 8 2016
AGM followed by Tim Clark:
The Parkes, Brookhouse and Crompton Mill at Warwick.
***VISIT* September 12 2016**
Toye Kenning & Spencer, Bedworth.
October 13 2016
Yvonne Jones:
Japanned Papier Mâché and Tinware.
November 10 2016
Chris Barney:
The Work of The Association for Industrial Archaeology followed by a Report on the AIA Conference 2016.
December 8 2016
Alain Foote:
The Kempton Great Engines.

Meeting Reports

February 2016: Dr Barrie Trinder
Industry in Banbury: an Overview 1700 to the 1960s.

Barrie Trinder gave another large audience his very personal view of 'Industry in Banbury' with a wide-ranging look at the changes in and around this archetypal English market town from 1700 to the 1960s.

Whilst talks on industrial archaeology can easily fall into the trap of being a travelogue or mere description, this speaker's lifetime knowledge of the town, its people and its industries brought its well, and lesser, known parts vividly to life.

The historian of Banbury is well served by its excellent town and parish records from the beginning of the 18th century. As a result, there is a wealth of information available, both personal and occupational, which allows detailed analysis of social developments over the period under consideration.

A map of 1838 focussed our attention on the town and showed how its development from the 13th century resulted in a compact, prosperous centre and market area surrounded by poorer, outlying communities to the East and West across the River Cherwell. This river supplied power to several corn mills whilst a tributary, the Cuttle Brook, provided process water but no power for dyeing and tanning works to the North East of the town.

Banbury's subsequent evolution falls into five periods. From 1700 to 1780 the conventional town trades developed; food, clothing, blacksmithing, brick and tile making, mill and wheel-wrighting. Over the next 70 years the canals helped brewing, foundries and specialist textile manufacture to flourish. The succeeding half century saw the further development of foundries and especially the rise of the railways. From1880 until 1930 the heavier manufacturing businesses such as foundries declined but were, to some extent, replaced by a variety of consumer goods. The town's fortunes improved markedly from 1930 with expansion of the railways and notably with the arrival of the Northern Aluminium Company in 1931. Member Roger Hartree has published a full account of the 'Ally' and spoke to the Society in February 2010 (Newsletter 37).

The political and cultural background to this evolution runs from a strongly puritanical, parliament supporting period through deference to reformation and innovation before stagnation until the revival brought by aluminium and marshalling yards.

Essentially, Banbury remained a market town with many of the expected characteristics. Today, there is still evidence of old burgage plots, outbuildings that have been rebuilt many times, warehouses and other infrastructure along the Oxford canal that reached the town from Coventry in 1778 and then went on to Oxford in 1790. This led to the importation of goods from adjacent sources (boots and shoes from Northamptonshire) and especially coal. Local fuel sources were limited by the treeless heathland around Banbury. Coal from the Warwickshire coalfield had only been deliverable overland during the summer as roads soon became impassable in winter. A newspaper comments, on the opening of the canal on 4 April 1778, that the first freight delivered was 200 chaldrons of coals.

In the 1790s Banbury was the Metropolis for the carriers' carts. A growing network saw produce and passengers from the outlying districts coming into the town and commissioned goods leaving on the return trip. In 1851 Banbury was the third largest such centre in the Midlands with 189 carriers recorded making 427 journeys a week into the town.

A survey of the town's commerce showed the expected activities including corn milling with substantial granaries, widespread small maltings (none of which survive) usually separated from the breweries, bakeries (Banbury Cakes a speciality), tanning and currying which disappear during the 19th century, rope-making (the rope walk survives), brick and tile works (including the Tip-Top mouse trap) and brewing. Of the last, Hunt Edmonds survived into the 1960s as an independent business. A painting by Maurice Draper brought the old buildings into sharp focus.

A more unusual industry was plush weaving. Plush, a long cut pile fabric, varying from very light to very heavy had popular applications from Japanese kimonos to heavy duty upholstery and uniforms. Complicated to weave, this meant a closed shop with one son only being allowed to follow his father. In the mid-1800s many plush weavers migrated to Coventry where they dominated the small local industry, albeit dwarfed by the ribbon weavers.

Of much greater importance to Banbury's fortunes was the growth of a foundry industry. The Lampitt family were established wheelwrights who founded the Vulcan Foundry. Although employing only 30 people at most they enjoyed a reputation for high engineering standards and a product range that included steam engines, one of which was supplied to the Hunt Edmonds brewery.

We learnt from the journal of the artist Thomas Butler Gunn, who worked for many years in America, how James Gardner drew on his own experiences in America to develop an agricultural machinery business in the town. This business became Samuelson & Co who in turn had connections with McCormick in the USA. The Samuelson tramway was built in 1870 to link the works with the main-line railway. Another engineer was Burrows & Carmichael who specialised in steam engines, often for ploughing.

The Banbury Co-Op combined retailing with horse cloth manufacture and Henry Stone, who had a box manufactory, is recorded as having married into the Cash family from Coventry. Paxman's butter and other dairy produce enjoyed a good reputation.

Moving into the 20th century, we saw varied evidence of the growth of the railway with many railwaymen being recorded in census data. Steam engine enthusiasts in the audience enjoyed many examples of local and national traffic passing through Banbury and utilising the extensive marshalling yards that had been developed.

Two lesser known but important activities were the National Filling Factory No. 9, a shell filling facility in WW1, the site of which can be visited today by arrangement, and the Oxfordshire Ironstone Company which distributed iron ore widely.

The arrival of the Northern Aluminium Company in 1931 led to substantial employment as its rolled, extruded and powdered aluminium products found increasing demand, especially from aircraft manufacturers in the rearmament programmes of the late 1930s. NAC became Banbury's largest employer for some time but sadly, changes in ownership and competition eventually led to its closure. For a time a large Automotive Products operation offset the decline but that in turn has now closed. An aluminium bridge built by NAC apprentices remains as a reminder of the past.

In the 1960s Birds and Maxwell House brought employment and today huge distribution warehouses flanking the M40 benefit from Banbury's central position.

As Barrie so well showed us, Banbury is indeed the archetypal English market town that has passed through many transitions since 1700.

March 2016: Mike Gould

Rover - the Marque Doomed to Die.

Mike Gould used his thirty years of experience with Land Rover to give an insider's view of the Rover Company's history. It was a 'warts and all' approach and his insights into the personalities, especially those operating during the final years, were particularly interesting as were the anecdotes that peppered his iconoclastic presentation.

Many in the large audience had experience of some part of the motor industry and were, doubtless, reminded of events or people from the past; and of how quickly recent history can be forgotten. Although it is the industrial conflicts that bedevilled the midland's motor plants that tend to linger longer in the memory.

The sub-title 'the marque doomed to die' set the scene. And the final question in a vigorous session after the talk could well have been its introduction; what caused the demise of the British Motor Industry and what could have been done to prevent it? Time only allowed a few comments, and certainly no conclusions, but the example of the Rover story did throw a little light on the subject.

We were gently introduced to the origins of the company which, like so many others, grew out of Coventry's skills in light, precision engineering driven by entrepreneurs who combined technical skills with commercial acumen. In the case of Rover, the Starleys were followed by the Wilks brothers, Spencer and Maurice, who joined the company from Hillman in the late 1920s

This was a tough time as recession followed the post-war boom but after the racy 1927 Meteor 20 (the Rover works were named 'Meteor') and the small 1931 Scarab coupe, the company moved up-market with the P1 Rover Fourteen, fondly remembered as the first of the 'Doctor's' cars; solid, dependable but not flamboyant.

Rover was appointed by the Air Ministry to run Shadow Factory No. 2 in Solihull. Built in 1938 and completed in 1939 for the production of the Bristol Hercules air-cooled radial engine that powered a variety of fighters and bombers. A model of the camouflaged factory was shown and even today traces of the war-time camouflage can be seen on certain buildings.

Rover suffered with the rest of Coventry in the infamous moonlight sonata blitz of November 1940 when the old city-centre factory was destroyed with some loss of life.

Rover's involvement with aero engines took a startling turn in 1940 when the Air Ministry approached them as a firm with production experience and suitable plant to work with Power Jets to undertake the development and manufacture of Frank Whittle's revolutionary jet engine. In the event, the relationship soured and Rolls Royce took over. Rover, however, retained an interest in the gas turbine engine for potential vehicle applications.

After the war Rover leased the Meteor Works in Solihull from the Air Ministry and with commendable foresight acquired substantial areas of adjoining farmland for future expansion.

Hitherto, Rover had built solid, well-engineered, dependable up-market cars but thanks to the Wilks' brothers holidays on Anglesey, where they used an old army Jeep for transport, the concept of the 'Land Rover' as a jeep replacement was born in lines drawn in the sand of Red Wharf Bay The first example was on show 6 months after its conception but its development came through production. Exports were key in those post-war years and the tough, go anywhere, do anything Land Rover was much in demand.

Rover steadily expanded its passenger car range whilst at the same time evolving the Land Rover to widen its appeal. Styling changes did lead to production headaches such as door sealing problems that were never fully resolved.

Perhaps Rover's greatest technical experiment was with the gas turbine powered 'jet car'. Never to see commercial success this nevertheless generated much press coverage for the firm, not least with the Rover-BRM racing car memorable for its whisper-quiet appearances at the Le Mans 24 hour race.

That Rover was unafraid of technical innovation was again demonstrated with the P6 or Rover 2000 launched in 1963. An innovative concept with an engine bay and front suspension configured for a possible turbine engine, a new 4-cylinder engine, a new gearbox with a new factory at Pengam in South Wales and a new assembly hall at Solihull. Was this fantastic or folly?

Were the acquisitions of Alvis and the GM 3.5 litre all alloy V8 engine in the mid 1960s further steps down the slippery slope? Nonetheless, there were promising hints of jam tomorrow with the P8 saloon, the mid-engined sporty P6BS and the 100 inch Station Wagon. Only the last survived the absorption of Rover into Leyland in 1966 and became the now iconic Range Rover.

After this, and the subsequent mergers that resulted in BL, Rover cars struggled as the meat in the sandwich between Triumph and Jaguar but did manage to introduce some interesting cars. Notably the SD1, a great car beloved of managers and police forces, but poorly built and unreliable.

In 1978, BL established Land Rover Limited as a separate subsidiary. It took over Range Rover production whilst the volume car operations, having tackled their labour problems, sought a future in collaborative deals with other manufacturers. Honda was the third choice partner after rebuffs from Chrysler/Simca and Renault and new models resulted.

Meanwhile, at Solihull Land and Range Rover production began to rise under new management. Notably, the combative Tony Gilroy who had ambitions for a management buy-out but in 1986 was turned down at Cabinet level.

At this time the rather sad remains of the British Motor Industry were renamed the Rover Group. Perhaps in recognition of the quality behind the name. In 1988 another government sponsored move saw BAe acquire the Rover Group with an £700m dowry but was forced to keep it for five years. There was no real investment during this period and property and other assets were sold off. The link with Honda continued and resulted in the Rover 200 and 800 cars followed by a proliferation of other models.

The project crash landed in 1994 and BMW bought the Group hoping to cash in on 'Britishness' with leather and walnut interiors. However, by 1999 in the 'Twilight of the Gods' BMW offloaded 'the English Patient' selling Land Rover to Ford (where it joined Jaguar) for 3Bn Euros.

The rump of Rover went to the Phoenix Four where it was plundered before being given the coup de grâce by Labour's Mandelson and Hewitt after suppliers refused to deliver.

However, in another twist to the story, Ford sold Land Rover and Jaguar to the Indian Tata conglomerate and today JLR seems to be thriving. The marque doomed to die?

April 2016: Peter Lee:
Nuneaton's Mills and Factories.

Peter Lee, or 'Mr Nuneaton' has spoken to the Society on three previous occasions on different aspects of Nuneaton's industrial past.

Past is the operative word, of Nuneaton's formerly extensive engineering activities as with the extractive industries, nothing remains extant. However, Peter's seemingly inexhaustible succession of evocative illustrations were constant reminders of what had been.

Nuneaton's strategic position at the centre of the trunk road and mainline railway systems of England boded well and plentiful natural resources resulted in the two largest brickworks in the country plus other collieries being sited there.

A list of 'Made in Nuneaton' products and companies was a catalogue of industrial heritage and is worth quoting at length for it dramatically shows the changes in our industrial affairs over the past half century or so.

Alfred Connor, cardboard boxes; Premier Stone, concrete goods; Union Wool & Leather, leather; Rollason & Jones, elastic webbing; Clarksons, small & machine tools; Courtaulds, rayon & synthetic fibres; Robinsons, underwear; Moorhouses, jams; H Slingsby, silk goods; Listers, velvet & plush; Nuneaton Flour Mills, flour & animal feed; Stanley, Haunchwood & Ansley Hall, bricks, tiles & clay pipes; Sterling Metals & Nuneaton Engineering, iron & aluminium castings; Midland Sheet Metal, car bodies & sheet metal work; Biddles, heating & air conditioning; Hart & Levy, fine tailoring & military uniforms; Tanseys, needles; Judkins, Jees & Man-Abells, roadstone & railway ballast; Finn, boots & shoes; Intalok, spring seating & mattresses; Haunchwood, Ansley Hall, Nuneaton & Stockingford Collieries; A W Phillips, tennis balls & sports goods and Hall & Phillips, Hats.

Most of the jobs found there have gone, never to be replaced. Today, only 48% of the working population can find jobs in Nuneaton & Bedworth. There are only half the number of businesses per head of population in the Borough than all surrounding municipal areas.

After this thought-provoking opening Peter examined Nuneaton's industrial past in some depth. An early industry was flour milling, with a number of substantial mills, and brewing where considerable over capacity (output not input) was evident by the 1880s.

An earlier comment from 1764 noted that 'Nuneaton is a good well-built town, with a free school, and a manufacture of wool cloth.' The town also possessed a fine Market Cross which incorporated a weaving shop.

Silk followed wool and by the 1850s some two thirds of the population was involved. Usually with low-productivity, one person looms housed in top-shops above the weaver's house. This weaving tradition led to one of the country's largest manufacturers of regalia – H Slingsby & Son. Masonic and civic regalia was supplemented with the great banners favoured by the burgeoning Trades Union movement and proudly paraded at meetings behind the brass band. Slingsby was eventually taken over by Franklin of Coventry.

A W Phillips manufactured tennis balls (authorised by the LTA) and footballs. The company remains, but now products are sourced from China. Another niche product was snuff, now relocated to Leicester.

Trent Valley Mills produced silk adjacent to the railway, the factory turned to hat manufacture in the 1860s and was later burnt down. Other offshoots of the silk trade included: Rufus Jones & Co., (taken over in 1873 by Lester & Harris Ltd) producers of elastic webbing for the shoe industry, clothing, gentleman's braces, ladies undergarments, gas masks and army uniforms.

Anker Mills housed cotton and woollen manufacturers including: The Nuneaton Cotton Spinning & Weaving (1861-1886) and Fielding & Johnsons, who later moved to Attleborough. The mill was once home to two steam engines, Annie and Elizabeth which were later replaced by electric motors.

In the 1860s a leather industry flourished alongside the wool and this in turn led to Lister & Co developing velvet and plush manufacturing with a deserved reputation for hard wearing fabrics which included a Coronation blue velvet for 6,000 seats at Westminster Abbey.

Hall & Phillips opened a hat factory in a disused ribbon factory in 1868 which flourished, and whose products included the largest fez in the world. Again, the mill was lost to a fire. Hats led to tailoring and clothes manufacture; working conditions at The Reliable Clothing Company looked crowded but were typical for the period. One competent girl could make 2,500 button-holes a day.

In the twentieth century, Courtaulds came to Nuneaton with a new factory whose clock tower housed a timepiece by the manufacturers of Big Ben and serviced by a dedicated 'clock man'. Another series of photographs gave a comprehensive picture of life there with full employment, social facilities and a works fire brigade should the need arise.

A variety of other businesses included cardboard boxes, shoes, military uniforms, hosiery and tennis racquet manufacturers. Further photographs gave insights into these employers. A surprising number passed out of the founders control, sometimes moving elsewhere, and subsequently failing.

Nuneaton's engineering activities were widespread, from small family affairs to national names. H P Carter with the 'Colonial Motor Cycle' and Birch & Co with the 'Foleshill' and 'George Eliot' cycles followed the Coventry lead. Birch, incidentally, moved to New Zealand in 1905 where he built the first local motor car, and never returned to England. Hall & West were a good example of the general engineers and boiler makers to be found in every sizeable town. Stanley Bros developed colliery equipment whilst Nuneaton Engineering were iron founders – and the foundry building is one of the few survivors from that time. Oram, a dyer was bombed out in 1941 and the Tansey needle works became the NCB laboratories.

Chilvers Coton began as a foundry but later specialised in sheet metal work. Notably prototype car bodies and the one-off Armstrong Siddeley rail car project. Intalok were major suppliers of seat springs for cars as well as mattresses. Biddle supplied heating and air conditioning equipment world-wide. Clarkson, with a well-respected name for machine tools, was absorbed into Thorn EMI and closed.

Perhaps the best known name amongst the town's engineers was Sterling Metals who were, at the end, with some 3,000 men, the largest employer. Specialising in light alloy castings the company had close pre-war links with its German counterparts. Its activities were, therefore, well known and precipitated the move from Coventry before the outbreak of hostilities. The pictures of Sterling Metals were, perhaps, the most interesting of the evening for those in the audience with a motor industry background and a poignant reminder of what had been. Identifying castings and processes became competitive! The company's social activities, sports teams and workplace amenities contrasted vividly with the working conditions in its mid-twentieth century foundries.

Peter's final slide (out of 243) showing a factory yard, deserted but for a lone black cat, and captioned *'would the last member of staff put the lights out'* aptly summed up Nuneaton's contribution to the history of the Midlands.