

# WARWICKSHIRE

## Industrial Archaeology Society

# WIAS

NUMBER 83 July 2024

WIAS @ 35

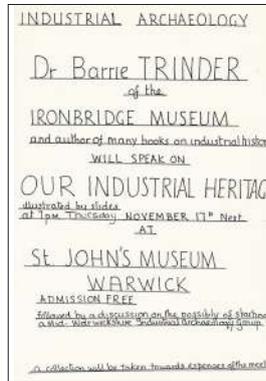
PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

We have taken the unusual step of allocating this entire edition of the Newsletter to the meeting that celebrated 35 years of the Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society. We felt this significant milestone deserved a generous allocation of space to the Chairman's presentation, and the inclusion of some of the photographs from that talk.

*Chris Barney and Mike Hurn, editors.*



We have only had two Chairmen, Lyndon 'Toby' Cave from 1989 to 2002 and Martin Green 2002-2024. Left: Toby at the Southam Cement Works Open Day. Right: with others, looking rather dubious about the water quality at Longbridge Sewage Treatment Works, Warwick. Centre: Martin presenting Toby with a gift on the occasion of his move to Sherborne. Also in the photograph early WIAS stalwarts (from L to R) Mark Abbott, John Selby, and John Haslam.



Notice of our first meeting in 1989; presenting a cheque to the Warwickshire County Record Office for the Willans Works project, with current committee members Alain Foote, Peter Coulls and John Willock; Martin's talk in progress.



Visits. Left: The last days of Vero & Everitt, hat makers of Atherstone. Centre: Webster's Brickworks, Coventry. Right: Calcott Bros. Motor Works, Coventry.

### PROGRAMME

12 September 2024 (live/hybrid)  
AGM and Members' Evening

All meetings are on the second Thursday of the month and start at 7.30 pm.  
Live/hybrid meetings meetings are held in the  
**Warwick Prep School Hall CV34 6PL**  
with a simultaneous delivery online via zoom.

NEWSLETTER

## Meeting Reports

**June 2024 (Live/Hybrid): Martin Green**

*WIAS @ 35*

It was entirely appropriate that our Chairman, Martin Green, should deliver a presentation to mark 35 years of the Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society. Martin was our first Secretary and Programme Organiser from 1989 and took over as Chairman in 2002. His broad sweep through the history of the society and the development of industrial archaeology as a subject brought back memories for some, revealed sites of Warwickshire's heritage for many, and offered enjoyment and the chance for reflection for all.

Martin took several themes during the course of his talk, including the different ways in which members of WIAS first came into contact with industrial heritage, and how they first learnt of WIAS and took the decision to join a meeting. Membership of overlapping groups and societies featured heavily, often providing the initial point of contact. It was a pleasure to welcome back some of the very earliest members of the Society such as Richard Storey

Martin's own attachment emerged from a career – schoolboy, student, teacher – absorbed in economic and social history, with the industrial revolution featuring heavily, but never getting his hands dirty with engine oil! By contrast there are many members whose working lives were heavily involved in manufacturing or mechanical engineering, have an intimate understanding of particular industrial processes and have a strong affection for – and pride in – those work experiences.

Whatever the origin of interest the end result has been a diverse membership, with a range of skills and experiences, making WIAS such an interesting group to which to belong. It has also been a driving force in trying to serve the needs of the group by laying on a varied programme of meetings. From the outset our first Chairman Lyndon 'Toby' Cave insisted that WIAS should be a broad church, with technical subjects balanced by doses of less challenging – yet equally significant – material related to the industrial heritage of Warwickshire and beyond. Having said that, we do tend to get larger numbers attending if steam or wheels – or both – are involved!

There was, of course, a developing interest in industrial heritage well before WIAS came on the scene. One such group of enthusiasts was the Warwickshire Steam Engine Society, with Peter Coulls as its long-serving chairman. Also involved were Peter Chater, Derek Billings and John Willock who developed both knowledge and friendships by regular visits to sites, mainly in Warwickshire. We were very happy to welcome them into WIAS.

One of the earliest questions to answer was exactly what constituted 'Warwickshire' for our purposes. The original wording of Toby Cave's poster advertising the possibility of the formation of a society had modest ambitions for 'the possibility of forming a Mid-Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society'. In the end we opted essentially for the pre-1974 boundaries with Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull included. We have been based at Warwick School for our meetings from the very start, and have willingly recognised that Nuneaton and North Warwickshire are

expertly covered by the efforts of men such as Peter Lee and Mike Kinder, particularly in terms of the extractive industries such as coal mining and brickmaking. We have had strong support over many years from the Coventry contingent – men such as John Haslam, Martin Woolston and Keith Rogers, with talks from David Fry, and we greatly value these connections.

Each industrial heritage society has its own strengths, and for WIAS this continues - to this day – to be the monthly meeting. We are very fortunate to have David Daniel and Victor Lobb handling the hybrid meetings, with in person delivery simultaneously broadcast online via Zoom. We are one of the few societies to come to grips with this hybrid option, and they have both devoted a great deal of time and effort to master the technology, and the Society is very grateful to them both.

Every month a digest of these meetings is recorded for the purposes of the Newsletter, and Mike Hurn did this for many years, before recently passing on responsibility to Chris Barney, former editor of the AIA Newsletter. Writing up a meeting is one of those unseen tasks that help the Society to function smoothly, for the Newsletter represents a primary record of what we have achieved over the years.

Talking of hiding one's light under a bushel, our meetings have also benefitted from the unfailing provision of refreshments by the team of Janet Coulls and Margaret Rushton despite several changes of venue and facilities at Warwick School. WIAS is lucky to have such a team, and for the help of others from earlier times such as Pat Billings and Barbara DuBois.

In recent years the website and database have added great opportunities for expanding the Society's 'published' material, and we are very fortunate to have Peter Riley masterminding the website and Roger Cragg at the helm of the database. The WIAS website has a growing reputation in the wider world, and nothing ever seems to faze Peter.

Roger, of course, has been one of our longest-serving members, bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience to civil engineering sites, and has delivered probably a record number of talks to the Society. That the database now stands over 500 entries is a credit to the work of Roger, with able assistance from Peter Riley.

The Society has produced a number of publications over the years, with occasional Papers by, for example, Arthur Astrop on the Machine Tool Industry of Coventry and John Willock on the Rise and Fall of Coventry's Airframe Industry. John also used the lockdown experience to enormously boost his input of articles for the website, a real bonus to the Society at a difficult time for us all. John Brace has also been a prolific scribe, taking public utilities as his principal theme. There are also, of course, publications by members operating under different umbrella organisations e.g. Peter Coulls co-author of 'The Leamington and Warwick Tramway' for the Leamington History Group and Peter's son Anthony – an enthusiast for the industrial heritage, it seems, soon after birth - has become a prolific

author, mainly on steam-related themes.

Looking back at past Newsletters (and its predecessor Retort!) visits and walks have always featured in the programme. Many of these were led by members of the group such as John Haslam and Peter Chater. Visits organisation has now passed to Alain Foote and he is always ready to welcome fresh participants or, indeed, ideas for potential visits. One particular ingredient that is always popular is the visit to a site still in operation – Toye, Kenning & Spencer in Bedworth, Hudson's whistles in Birmingham, and Charlecote mill, the last remaining working watermill in the county.

No Society can function unless its finances are in good order. WIAS has an exceptional treasurer in Victor Lobb, who has followed on from the success in that role displayed by Mark Abbott and Richard Hartree. Attention to detail, efficient book-keeping, and prompt delivery of accounts characterise Victor's approach and he is one of the main reasons the society's finances are in such good shape. We do not have a secretary in the Society, with those functions spread amongst several individuals, and Victor also features heavily in that distribution.

Our committee has changed only slowly over time, and there have been some very effective members in the past such as long-serving membership secretary Sue Hammon. However, this means that the average age of the committee continues to creep up and we are always looking out for willing enthusiasts ready to share in the responsibility and pleasure of running a society.

Martin illustrated many of these themes with a fine collection of photographs of sites from around the county, in some cases showing the changes in these sites over the 35 years 1989-2024. It illustrated – as if we needed reminding – that Warwickshire has a diverse industrial heritage, with much still to be learnt about particular industries and specific sites. There have been successful retentions, listings, conversions but also dilemmas, disappointments, and demolitions. The difficulty of dealing with a site was illustrated by reference to the Fenny Compton brickworks and the work of John Selby (and others) in investigating and clearing the site. Carefully researched and written up in the AIA Journal, there was hope – with the aid of the Guild of Bricklayers – that a restoration could be achieved. Unfortunately, disagreements resulted in the cessation of activity, with the brick kiln left in a frustratingly parlous state.

One of the great changes in recent years has been the desire to convert industrial premises to other uses rather than the premature demolitions that characterised earlier periods. Martin concentrated on a few sites to illustrate this – for example, the story of the decline of the Coventry Canal Basin under the pressures of de-industrialisation, the Second World War, and post-war re-building of the centre of Coventry, its survival and subsequent revival as a haven for the local artistic community as well as new buildings providing opportunities for fresh occupants of the basin e.g. Riley Archive Heritage Trust was a shining example of

what could be done.

All the main topic areas of industrial heritage were covered – mining and quarrying, power, transport, manufacturing, public utilities, housing and welfare. Transport – both in terms of networks (canals, railways, roads, bridges, airfields) and in the users of those networks – naturally features heavily in any account of Warwickshire's industrial heritage, with Coventry at its core. We possess three world class museums – The British Motor Museum at Gaydon, Coventry Transport Museum and the National Motorcycle Museum, and many famous names have very strong Warwickshire connections from Sir William Lyons and Jaguar cars to Sir Frank Whittle and the jet engine.

Even so, other, less likely, candidates also appear. The former gelatine works of George Nelson Dale in Warwick is one such example, with the Nelson family having connections with the development of the local cement industry, but also in pioneering the shipment of frozen meat from New Zealand. We also have a few gems – the Warwick gas works serving as the Society's logo, and the Whitacre and Bedworth waterworks, not forgetting, of course, Peter Stanworth's converted water tower.

Martin also demonstrated ways in which WIAS had embraced the roles of photographers, artists, and architects in its broad approach to the subject. Photographs are an invaluable aid to recording sites, and has been at the heart of WIAS's efforts, but it can also portray the nature of the industrial experience.

An outstanding example of this can be found in Ian Beesley's evocative prints of the last days of Vero & Everitt's hatting factory in Atherstone. The skills of artists such as Falcon Hildred and Arthur Lockwood give an extra dimension to particular sites. There is much debate over whether architectural elements of industrial buildings merit inclusion in industrial archaeology and Martin used the former office block of Carrs Packaging business in Shirley, designed by renowned 'brutalist' architect Ernő Goldfinger, to illustrate this.

Having looked back over the past 35 years, he finished his presentation by throwing open the question of 'Where next for WIAS?'

- More of the same?
- A continuation of the hybrid option enabling
- The continued benefits of meeting in person
- Access for the less mobile, those unable to travel, including, of course, those in other parts of the country
  - Greater utilization of digital and online resources: audio recording of oral history; the podcast; video recording of both industrial sites and industrial experiences
  - Discovering new information; seeking out those nooks and crannies of Warwickshire's industrial heritage; revisiting themes with fresh ideas and new techniques

Martin's talk was a very appropriate way to mark 35 years of WIAS and the meeting ended with presentations to the Refreshments Team and to Martin, both for the evening's talk, but also for his dedication to the task over the past 35 years.



Listed: Hunningham Railway bridge; uncertain future: Fenny Compton Brickworks; demolished: Princes Drive Pumping Station, Leamington Spa.



Three fine examples of public utilities in Warwickshire: Warwick gas works; Peter Stanworth's conversion of Burton Green water tower; Whitacre waterworks.



Coventry Canal basin; 'Hatton Locks on the former Warwick and Birmingham - now Grand Union Canal'; Edstone aqueduct, Stratford canal, the longest cast-iron canal aqueduct in England.



Cash's factory, Coventry; The Nelson Club, social club for Nelsons' Gelatine Works, Warwick; Priory Needleworks, Alcester.



Visit of the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society to Chesterton Windmill; Charlecote Watermill: Warwickshire's only working watermill; Rock Mill, Leamington Spa.