

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Western Region Industrial Archaeology Conference 1988

The Society was host to the Western Region Industrial Archaeology Conference which was held on 26 March at Wycliffe College in Stonehouse. The theme chosen for the morning session was the restoration and re-use of industrial buildings and in particular those in the Stroud Valleys.

The day was well supported with over one hundred and thirty people attending. They were welcomed by the Society's President, Rev. W.V. Awdrey who then handed over to our Chairman, Miss Amber Patrick.

Lionel Waldron set the scene by giving a concise but informative history of the Mills in the Stroud Valleys. From the past we turned to the present and future with a talk from David Ashly, Stroud District Council Planning Officer, who informed us of current developments and hopes for the future of the valleys under the co-ordination of the Stroud Valley Project Limited. Having looked at one part of the county attention was turned to the County town of Gloucester where projects for the restoration and re-use of the docks have been in progress for several years. As with the Stroud region, Hugh Conway-Jones commented on the history as well as current and prospective developments. We were then transported over the county boundary to be brought up to date with the work of the Avon Industrial Buildings Trust by Will Harris and Mr B. Bentham.

The morning session was then brought to a close. The lunch break allowing for the informal flow of ideas and to catch up on current developments throughout the western region.

Having been suitably fortified we returned to an enthralling talk by Mr R. Williams on the History of the Braithwaite Engineering Company of South Wales which was accompanied by many slides of contemporary photographs which have survived as part of the company's records. Mr T. Bowen then gave us a progress report on the excavations at Nailsea Glassworks and Mrs M. Miles on her study of the Halse Maltings in Somerset.

After tea we returned, with the help of Ray Bowen, to South Wales and in particular to the Barry Docks and Railway Company which was celebrating its centenary. This talk being both entertaining and informative provided an excellent finale to the formal sessions.

After the conference had been formally closed thirty visitors went to Stanley Mill where Neville Crawford was able to take them round with the kind permission of Messrs Marling and

Evans. a further group of twenty toured the Dudbridge area of Stroud with Lionel Walrond.

The conference was thus brought to successful conclusion.

Sue Brown

AIA Conferences: The Affiliated Societies Working Week End 1988

This conference is held in the spring every year at Ironbridge and it provides a forum for discussion between individual members of Affiliate Societies and Members of Council. Also a number of talks are given, sometimes by members but also by professional people on aspects which it is hoped will be of value to Societies and their members.

The programme always starts with an informal evening on the Friday. The formal sessions of talks and lectures are held on the Saturday and Sunday mornings. The Saturday afternoon is free so that delegates have the opportunity to look round the museum sites at Ironbridge and see the new developments which are always taking place. There is also always an interesting dinner at the New Inn in the Blists Hill part of the Museum. The dinner is followed by some form of quiz which always causes great merriment.

The main topic for the 1988 week end was public relations for one's societies' activities. The first talk was given by David Morgan Rees a professional in this line and he was able to make it an interesting, even an exciting subject. There was also a session on computers and their benefits for small societies.

Amber Patrick

AIA Annual Conference, 1988, Swansea.

From a personal point of view I was particularly pleased that this year's conference was at Swansea. (When doing research work on the Tamar's copper ore trade I noted much of it went to Swansea. Like so many things I never quite found the time to go to Swansea. So this year I made up that deficiency.)

The conference started on the evening of Friday 9 September and with one short exception the weather was marvellous. No doubt many people who visited the beautiful Gower peninsula would have been pleased to have had such weather last summer. The conference delegates were there to consider the once less attractive aspects of the Swansea area, its industrial heritage, although it must be said that not all industrial sites are in dark and derelict surroundings.

On the Friday evening we started with the Swansea Maritime quarter and the Maritime and Industrial Museum. Swansea was an important port in the nineteenth century and in fact still has working docks and the Swansea-Cork ferry runs from there to Ireland. However the old dock complexes which were designed to suit sailing vessels bringing in copper ore and taking out coal have long since ceased to be suitable facilities for a modern port. Once derelict, the area has now been developed into a marina with housing and restaurants etc, and most important from our point of view, the museum.

The Saturday morning was devoted to lectures on the major industries of the area: coal mining, copper smelting and iron, steel and tin plate manufacture, with excellent lectures from Graham Humphreys, Robin Craig and Paul Jenkins respectively. On a somewhat different subject, David Lees spoke on the problems of listing industrial buildings.

In the afternoon there was the usual choice of visits and it is always for me difficult to decide which to go on. The choice was: 1) Aberdulais Falls (a National Trust property) and the Tennant Canal aqueduct and basin; 2) The very derelict remains of the copper smelting industry of the Swansea Valley and other sites in the area; 3) The now very derelict Llanelli Docks. I chose the last and went on the tour of the remains of the once very extensive docks complex of Llanelli. Some of the docks have been completely infilled, others are silted up and only have the rotting skeletons of vessels lying on their muddy banks, so much in contrast to the busy days when coal was exported and copper ore imported. The tour was led by Robin Craig, who has an excellent knowledge of the area.

In the evening there was the conference dinner and the presentation of the awards. The AIA Fieldwork and Recording Award was presented to John Bentley and Brian Murless of the Somerset Industrial Archaeology Society for their excellent survey work on the turnpike road of Somerset. The other award which was presented was the Dorothea Award for Conservation and it is particularly pleasing to report that this was won by the Mid-Gloucestershire Preservation Society for the work they had done on the restoration of a Fielding 80 H.P. oil engine. This engine is now in an engine house at the National Waterways Museum at Gloucester Docks. The society hope to arrange a visit in due course. The judges particularly praised the high standard of workmanship and the good conservation

records. The award was collected by Mr T Hill who is a member of GSIA and Mr Evans.

After dinner there were the usual members contributions, which were of a very high standard. This time provides for individual members to give a short talk on their own or, their society's work.

On Sunday morning Stephen Hughes gave a most useful lecture on the historical results which can be obtained from fieldwork. Then John Butt, a former president of the AIA gave the Rolt Memorial Lecture: Landscape with Machines: A View from America. Then followed the AGM and the conclusion of the formal conference business.

The additional, supplementary programme started after lunch with again a choice of visits: 1) Neath Abbey Iron Works and the Cefn Coed Colliery winder and 2) Burry Port and the Kidwelly Tin Plate Museum. I chose the latter and saw Burry Port, now used by pleasure craft, in brilliant sunshine, making it almost impossible to believe that it had been built for the export of anthracite and that the nearby impressive buildings had once been used for tin plate manufacture. Kidwelly Museum, the winner of the President's Award, had begun the manufacture of tin plate in 1737 and did not cease production until the 1940s. The surviving remains are not complete but the visitor can trace well the process of manufacture.

In the evening there were lectures: Alan Williams on the Bearhaven Copper Mines of Southern Ireland and their connection with Swansea; and Richard Pool on the Aberdulais Falls site.

Monday was devoted to visiting a number of sites in the Swansea area, starting with the much overgrown Clynne Valley Arsenic and Copper Works. We then went onto the Swansea Maritime and Industrial Museum Workshops. These are situated in the buildings of the former Morfa Copperworks and there was also time to visit the adjacent Hafod works, derelict but with surviving machinery. Lunch was taken in Swansea which allowed a little time to look round the town, the castle and bookshops. In the afternoon we visited the bleak site of the once extensive White Rock Copper Works, Gwenlwynch Engine House, Scott's Pit and finally bleak Morris Castle above Morrisston. It was very windy up there but the views over Swansea Bay were magnificent. Whether the workers for whom the castle was built appreciated this is doubtful.

In the evening there were again lectures: Paul Wilkinson on excavating Port Eynon salt house on the Gower (and the difficulties of excavation so close to the sea); and S.K. Jones on Brunel and the South Wales railway system.

Tuesday started with a visit to the barge lock at Red Jacket Pill which enabled vessels to transfer from the river Neath and so reach Swansea by canal. Next was a visit to Britonferry Docks, constructed in 1861 and here there was a massive downpour, the only rain of the week. We continued what was a packed day with visits to the incline of the South Wales Mineral Railway (we walked up and down) and then onto the Welsh Miner's Museum where we also had lunch. In the afternoon was the most exciting visit of the conference: Port Talbot Steel Works. The enormous site including coking plant and docking terminals for the iron ore import and the blast furnace were toured in our coach. However, we were privileged to see some inside areas: the basic oxygen steel plant, continuous slab casting and the strip mill (we followed the progress of a slab from rough rolling to final coiling). We were privileged to be one of the few parties to be allowed to visit the plant.

Tuesday evening's lectures were Marin Caln on Anthracite Iron in South Wales and the USA, and Alan Crocker on Gunpowder. This latter talk set the scene for Tuesday's visit to the now attractive and in places very overgrown site of the gunpowder works at Pontneddfevchan, along the now pretty river Mellte. (Not all industrial archaeology is in unattractive locations!) After lunch there was a steep climb to the Dinas Silica Mine. We also visited Venallt blowing engine house and the Banwen furnaces, another site in a rural setting.

At this stage I left the conference but on the Thursday in continuing good weather there were visits to the Brecon Forest tram road and the Swansea canal. Finally on the Friday those delegates who remained went over Cribath Mountain to see limekilns and more tram roads.

This was a highly successful and enjoyable conference and thanks must be given to the organisers Paul Reynolds of the South West Wales Industrial Archaeology Society and to Stephen Hughes who ensured that the conference was so smoothly running.

Next year, or perhaps I should say this year, 1989 the annual conference of the AIA is to be held in Huddersfield. If you are interested in coming please contact Ray Wilson or myself.

Amber Patrick