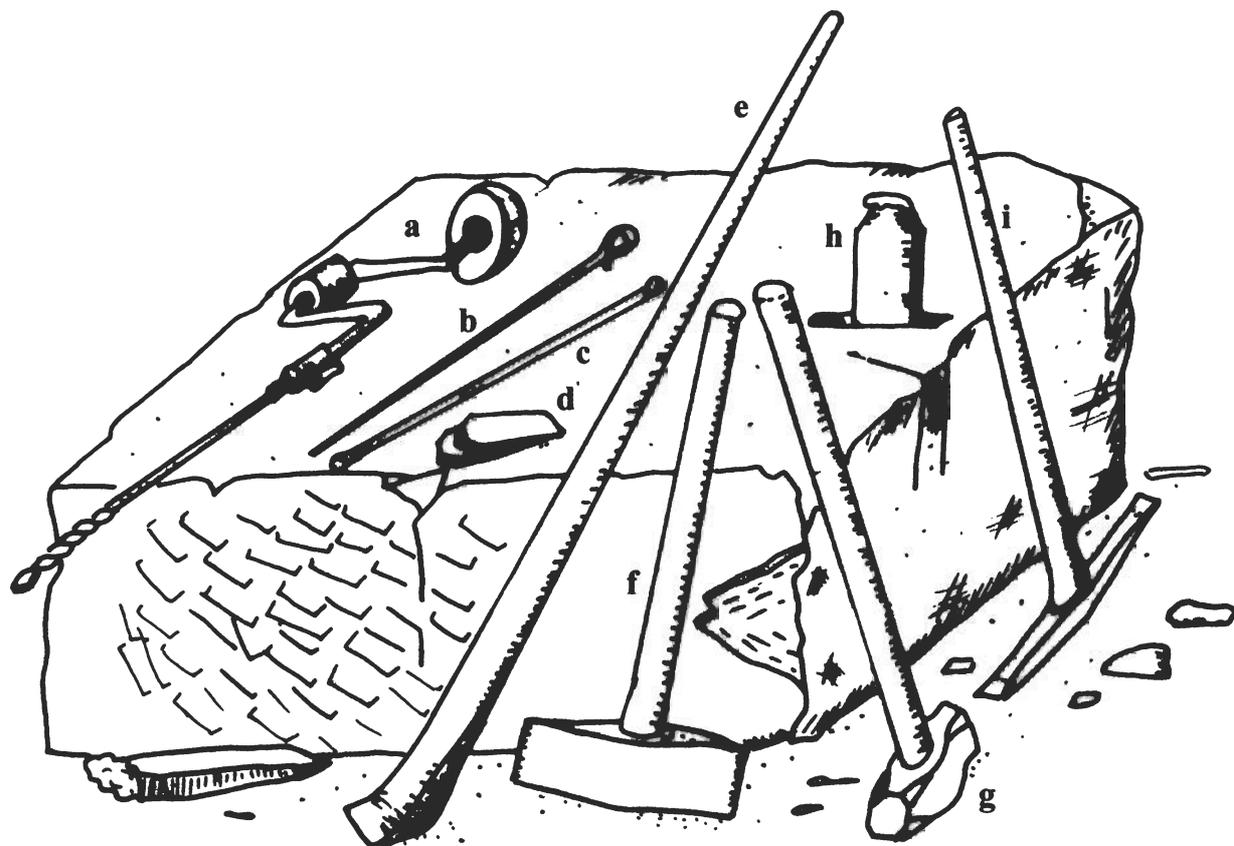


GSIA

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GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIETY FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology

Journal for 2007

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Cover

This year's cover illustration shows 19th century quarrying tools drawn by Arthur Price (a) hand drill (b) pricker (c) rammer (d) scales (e) quarry crow bar (f) scabbling axe (g) sledgehammer (h) wedge (i) jad pick (see Page 31).

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EDITORIAL

Last year's Annual Journal contained a number of contributions written by members in support of the Cotswold Canals Partnership's bid to the Big Lottery Fund. The bid was for £18.9 million for the restoration of the Stroudwater Canal from Saul Junction to the Ocean at Stonehouse. Sadly, when the results were announced in mid-November 2007 the scheme was not successful. The restoration project received perhaps a bigger set back in February 2008 when British Waterways unexpectedly withdrew as lead partners in the project. Theo Stening has provided his seventh annual report where we learn the progress made in the past year, notably the completion of the replacement Oil Mills bridge over the canal at Ebley, Stroud. At the time of writing, the Cotswold Canals Trust and Stroud District Council are making valiant efforts to secure the Lottery funding that was made available for the first phase of the restoration work. As noted in the report the determination remains to see the project not only continue but pushed forward.

Gloucester is represented by two articles this year and both sites are virtually opposite one another on the Bristol Road. Hugh Conway Jones recounts the history of Nicks & Co, timber merchants from 1855 and still a thriving concern today. Stephen Mills tells the story of another well-known Gloucester firm, W.S. Baron, which later became the firm of Simon-Baron Ltd. which specialised in the manufacture of milling equipment until they closed in 1993. Simon-Barons attractive office block dating from the 1930s is now looking very dilapidated. It is very likely that the whole site will be cleared in the near future in favour of a large residential development.

This redevelopment is just one of many that have started or are planned as part of the *Gloucester Renaissance* project led by the Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company. The Society has been active in monitoring the impact of the project on the industrial past of the city. Where appropriate we have made representations to the relevant bodies. We are particularly pleased that stone sleeper blocks from the Gloucester & Cheltenham Tramroad have recently been reinstated in Gloucester Docks at the instigation of the Society. Original rails will be fitted to the blocks and a pair of replica trams are to be built for the site. We hope to provide a full account of the project in the next issue of the Journal.

We have two articles this year from a particularly important area regarding the industrial archaeology of the county, the Forest of Dean. Both are on stone quarrying but consider two very different aspects and periods of the industry. Ian Standing explains the regulation of quarrying in the Forest of Dean in 1841. Arthur Price has recorded the memories of Jakob Schwarz, one of the last surviving underground quarrymen. The article portrays a vivid picture of the harsh conditions under which stone was extracted as recently as 50 years ago.

Amber Patrick continues to investigate and record malhouses in the county. This year the subject is The Malthouse at Woodmancote, Dursley. We again had a very interesting and enjoyable programme of summer visits, both within the county and further afield. As in previous years, our visits organiser (and Chairman) Frank Colls has written a detailed report of the events. As ever, we are grateful to our contributors for the interesting articles. The Editor wishes to thank Hugh Conway-Jones for his assistance with the production of this issue.

Ray Wilson *May 2008*

GSIA VISIT REPORTS FOR 2007

Once again the Society's thanks are due to Frank Colls who organised a full programme of local visits and one excursion further afield by coach. The following reports have been compiled by Frank Colls unless indicated otherwise.

Sunday 25 March 2007

Forest of Dean coal mining and transport, the Moseley Green area

We had a fine afternoon for this first outing of the year when 22 members met at the Rising Sun pub for a walk led by Frank Colls as the final part of the series begun in June 2006. Copies of some 25" OS maps from 1878, 1901 and 1922 were available to help our interpretation of the developments in the area. Frank had also obtained some recent survey pictures of the Moseley Green area from the County archaeology service. These used a technique known as LIDAR, laser infra-red detection and ranging, by which aerial survey data is analysed by computer. These were very effective in showing surface features in tree covered areas usually obscured in conventional aerial photography. The LIDAR pictures were obtained as a result of GSIA's Delves project which had studied an area near Brierley, looking at surface depressions and other features related to a period of coal working. The project team had worked closely with the County archaeology service to add their findings to the Sites and Monuments Record. This contact had enabled GSIA to see some LIDAR survey results for the Forest and the team were currently assessing a print of a nearby area in relation to actual surface features.

We began by following the line of the Birches Branch tramroad, part of the extensive Severn and Wye Railway system which reached this area around 1835. We passed spoil heaps and a fenced shaft top of a pit known as Independent No. 6. We then continued north to the main road where the tramroad had joined with the S & W Kidnalls Mill Branch, now overlain by the new road down to Moseley Green. Just to the east we went up to the route of the S & W mineral loop railway and headed back south, hearing about this standard gauge line, completed in 1872, which largely superseded the horse drawn tramroads.

We paused at an area which, supplementary to the Delves Project, had been surveyed in conjunction with a local dowser. As we stood around a crater-like depression (a delve) about 5m across, we discussed the possible explanations for such features, which ranged from surface digging to bell pits, and possible underground passageways using 'pillar and stall' working.

We moved south to follow a section of the route of the Kidnalls Mill tramroad and a branch from the mineral loop, to reach the site of Crown Colliery adjacent to one of the ventilation shafts (now capped) of the mineral loop railway tunnel. The Crown pit was sunk in 1900 but only operated for a few years and, after recent capping, nothing remains to be seen. We continued along the tramroad route to see a short tunnel, with an 1842 date on the keystone, which carried the line under the Parkend to Yorkley road. A rough track took us to the Moseley Green New Engine pit (known as Brick Pit) where remains of several brick and stone structures survive. Since these are in a ruinous state the area has been fenced and interpretation was difficult. A copy of a sales particulars document, probably from 1895, gave some interesting details. Brick Pit was served by a branch from the mineral loop as well as the earlier Birches tramroad and we followed the tramroad northwards back towards the Rising

Sun. The extensive spoil heaps on either side were well shown on the LIDAR images as well as on the 1922 OS map. Back at the start we thanked Frank for an enjoyable and interesting afternoon.

Tuesday 15 May 2007

Afternoon visit to Millikens at Cam Mill

19 members enjoyed a fascinating visit to Millikens Woollen Speciality Products at their modern plant at Cam. Cloth for tennis ball coverings and for snooker, billiard and casino tables is made at Cam, before sending to the company's plant at Lodgemore mill for finishing (GSIA visited there in 2001). We were shown round in small groups by the production manager and other supervisory staff, starting at the point where bales of raw wool fibres and nylon fibres were fed into the blending plant. This cleaned the wool and prepared the correct mixture (depending on the type of cloth being made), carrying the output by air flow to large storage chambers. All the waste from this stage was also stored and eventually sent for use in other textile production, illustrating the company's approach to minimising waste and recycling almost all the surplus materials and packaging which they used. We then saw the carding machines, with their sets of large rollers covered with stiff wire bristles which formed the fibres into linear strands known as slubbing. Then came the spinning process, and the sight of hundreds of spindles on the many machines was most impressive. Getting consistency in the exact size and strength of each thread was essential for the superior quality of the cloth. The size was further checked in the next stage where the thread on each spindle was transferred to a large spool, with the machine checking for thickness and automatically cutting out and discarding lengths outside the tolerance but rejoining the ends to maintain a continuous thread.

We then went to the weaving building where we saw how the spools of thread were used to make up the assembly of warp threads. On this plant the individual threads from 300 spools were fed through an intricate guide framework to feed onto a large roller which would eventually be fully wound with all the warp threads for a single roll of cloth. These rollers, almost 3m wide, are then set up on the looms ready for weaving of the weft threads. We went into the weaving area where dozens of looms were working away at high speed. We were able to see a loom at close hand when it was stopped briefly for the operator to show us how the rapier shuttle system worked. When it was switched back to the normal operating speed, we could appreciate the ingenuity and precision of the technology which is designed into such equipment. We finished alongside some of the large rolls of completed cloth which would soon be transported to Lodgemore Mill for the finishing stages and heard more about the very exacting standards which the company have achieved for producing cloth used at the top end of world tennis and snooker. We were all very impressed with the way that the plant was organised and with the obvious level of skill which the staff have had to acquire. Before departing, we thanked our hosts for a fascinating couple of hours.

Sunday 3 June 2007

Hereford and Gloucester Canal, the Ledbury Railway and the Newent Windmill

The original plan of a long walk covering all the sites had been changed because of some footpath closures near the M50 motorway arising from a major gas pipeline installation project. We had a shorter walk to see the canal and railway features and then drove to the windmill site later. Fifteen of us met up at Dymock with Nigel Jefferies of the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust, and we headed south to pick up the line of the canal. We

came to a stretch still in water and then to a fine brick bridge near Boyce Court, before heading along a very overgrown path to a point overlooking the north portal of the Oxenhall Tunnel. Nigel related the basic history of the building of the canal between 1793 and 1845, a very long period beset with delays and difficulties. The tunnel was a source of much more expense than originally estimated but its completion enabled the opening of the route from the Severn to Ledbury by 1832. The final stretch to Hereford wasn't completed until 1845 by which date railway developments were gathering pace. Nigel related one of the incidents about the canal tunnel which his research had uncovered. With its narrow bore it was worked by "legging" and there was no room for boats to pass each other. In 1851 two boats met in the tunnel and neither skipper would back out causing a total blockage for about 2 days. After this incident a system of alternate periods of northbound and southbound working was introduced. Traffic on the canal was barely profitable but it survived through to 1881 when construction began on a new railway following much of the canal route. As originally envisaged the railway was to have used the Oxenhall Tunnel but this idea was abandoned in favour of a line further to the west. We retraced our steps to the brick bridge and followed a farm lane to meet the line of the railway which had superseded the canal.

We went up to an embankment which took the railway northwards and heard about the original plans to link Ross-on-Wye with Ledbury, via Dymock, and also a separate line linking Dymock with the Great Western at Over, going via Newent. The Ross to Dymock connection was never pursued but work on the line south from Ledbury to Dymock and on to Newent and Over was started in 1881. The canal was used to bring materials from the Severn up to Ledbury. The formation we were walking on was built for two tracks but only a single track was laid south of Dymock. The line was opened between Over and Ledbury (on the Hereford to Worcester line) in 1885. While initially prosperous, as the years passed it declined in importance to become just another branch line, closing to passengers in 1959 and to freight in 1964. As we walked along we spotted what looked like an old bench against the hedge but closer inspection showed an interesting relic. It was a simple wooden seat, for 2 or 3 people, with a back rest that was pivoted at each side so that it could be set in two positions, as used in old passenger trams which went backwards and forwards. The cast iron end frames were identified with HARDY & PADMORE WORCESTER FOUNDRY.

Back at Dymock we went along to a bridge over the line of the railway and could see the site of the station, now levelled but with a prominent line of bricks marking the platform edge. Before Nigel departed we thanked him for his talk on the canal and then went by car to the fruit farm about a mile away to see the windmill.

We were met by Michael Bentley who runs the Castle Fruit Farm and he gave us a brief talk about the windmill which had been built around 1924 to supply the farm buildings with electricity at 24 volts DC. The wooden tower, of hexagonal section and tapering from the ground level up to the cap structure, was built by English Brothers of Wisbech who specialised in temporary wooden buildings in a forerunner of the marquee business. The wind powered mechanism and the dynamo and battery system was to a patent of E. Lancaster Burne, and the windmill is thought to be the only one of its kind still standing. The sails and the dynamo have gone but much of the power mechanism, including the main wind shaft, fantail and a vertical drive shaft are in place. We were able to climb up the steep internal ladders to the reefing platform to see the cap and to admire the views over the orchards of the fruit farm. Mr Bentley told us of his hopes to do further maintenance and restoration work to keep the windmill in good order as a unique feature of the farm and as a reminder of an earlier (but still relevant) form of local electricity supply. We were refreshed with some excellent

apple juice before thanking Mr Bentley for allowing us to see the windmill and for a most interesting visit.

Tuesday 26 June 2007

Evening visit to Winchcombe Railway Museum, plus a town walk)

This two-part visit was enjoyed by 17 members on a cool but dry evening. Tim Petchey of the Railway Museum had opened up specially for us and we were able to wander around at our leisure to see the many items in his amazing collection. The signal box was not available owing to recent fire damage, but there was plenty to see among the many levers, signal posts, buildings and equipment that took up much of the site. There were hundreds of cast iron line-side notices warning of the hazards and penalties of not shutting gates, trespassing on the railway or interfering with signals. These came from a huge number of railway companies and it was quite a game to try to identify some of the abbreviations. Fire fighting equipment, an ambulance coach, old posters and maps, railway company crockery, uniform buttons, station name boards, and a host of items, large and small, were on display. Our time was soon up and, before assembling outside for our guided walk, we thanked Tim for a fascinating visit.

We met John Gerrard who was to take us around and went first to St Peters Church where he gave us a brief history of the development of the town from its Anglo Saxon origins. We heard about the 9th century abbey and the wealth it controlled, mainly from sheep, wool and weaving. Nothing remains of the large abbey but a door marked RK (abbot Richard Kidderminster) and a set of tiles are on show in the 15th century church. The town grew as a trade centre with fulling mills powered by the River Isbourne, and we saw the lane along which salt had been carried on the long route from Droitwich to Lechlade and beyond. Tobacco had been grown in the 1620s but this was forcibly suppressed to protect the emerging Virginia plantations. In 1837 the Dent family, glove manufacturers, purchased Sudeley Castle and Emma Dent was a great benefactor to the town, providing piped water, schools and almshouses, which we saw on our walk. Along Gloucester Street many of the houses had been weaver's cottages and we turned down Mill Lane to see the site of a 12th century corn mill. Among the many fine buildings were the Jacobean House, The George coaching inn of the 1540s, with a galleried yard, and the picturesque cottages of Dents Terrace. John had also been able to gain access to a private garden to see the back of the Abbots House of 1581. We had been treated to a most interesting and comprehensive guided tour and we thanked John for showing us the town. Most of the party then took some welcome refreshment at The Corner Cupboard to round off a very pleasant visit.

Tuesday 17 July 2007

Morning visit to Dorothea Restorations Ltd in Bristol

This company had its origins in 1974 when a group of engineering enthusiasts became interested in preserving mining machinery at the Dorothea slate quarry in North Wales. It has grown and changed over the years and now has premises in Bristol and Whaley Bridge. The nature of its business has also changed and much current work relates to repairs and renovations to architectural metalwork. Ten GSIA members took part in this visit and we were shown around by Peter Meehan who began by telling us about some of the practical aspects of working with cast and wrought iron. We saw some current projects including sections of railings and gates from a London church, a staircase balustrade from a private house and some ornately decorated wrought iron gates from the National Trust house at Cliveden. All of these projects required a range of metal working, welding and brazing skills,

replacing damaged components, fabricating decorative features and renewing corroded parts. Obtaining good quality wrought iron had been a problem but they now get supplies from a firm in Buxton which recycles old wrought material. For cast items they often have to use the old component as a pattern for making up new moulds, with a separately run local foundry supplying such items.

As we went around it was clear that the modern industrial unit in which the firm is located was somewhat cramped and Peter explained that some new and larger premises had been acquired and were currently being brought into use. It was a short car ride to the new site where construction of a new set of offices was underway alongside the workshop which was already operational. Here we saw some items being worked on for one of their major current projects, the large decorative spandrels from Westminster Bridge. The removal and transportation of these was being done by other contractors but Dorothea had the job of repairing the basic metal structures. These triangular shapes, in cast iron sections, have no structural significance on the bridge but are purely ornamental. There are two to each arch on each side of the bridge, so with 7 arches there are 28 spandrels. The ones we saw were the final batch of the overall project and we could see the sorts of damage and deterioration which had to be rectified, often by cutting out the damage and fabricating and fitting new sections. The overhead crane in these new premises was an obvious benefit, considering the very heavy nature of the structures. There were other things to see and hear about before we had to say thanks and farewell to Peter for a fascinating visit.

Sunday 5 August 2007

Afternoon walk to see mills and a wool drying stove in the Painswick area

We had explored the mills of the Painswick stream and its tributaries during a series of four walks between 1997 and 2000. However, at that time, it was only possible to catch a glimpse of the best surviving example of a wool drying stove in the district. The circular, stone building consisting of two stories plus attic stands in the garden of a house just off Kemps Lane in Painswick (SO 8682 0959). The new owners of the property, Mr & Mrs M G Wilson have undertaken a sympathetic renovation of the building, guided in part by a detailed written description of Gloucestershire wool drying stoves written in 1823 by William Partridge in New York. This account was reprinted by the Pasold Research Fund in the UK in 1973 and it formed the basis of an article in the GSIA Journal in 1988 (pages 2-5). The latter article included an artists impression of how such a building was constructed and how it might have operated.

The main purpose of the return visit to Painswick was to take up the kind invitation of the owners to view the building and the work that was being carried out. Again our leader was Ray Wilson and we met at the 'walkers car park' near the Rococo Gardens just outside the village. Walking down Gloucester Street we passed a milestone with its new plate fitted as part of a Millennium project in 1999 to restore a dozen or so milestones in the parish.

Having arrived at the wool drying stove we inspected it with great interest. We noted that sections of the external stonework had been repaired and repointed using an appropriate lime mortar. Inside, two new floors had been inserted at the same heights as the originals. Renovation of what has become a very rare type of building has secured its future as well as providing valuable storage space for the owners.

Moving on we were soon out in the country and passing the site of Baylis's Upper Mill. Here until only a few months ago the remains of another wool drying stove were apparent only yards from the public footpath. However, to our surprise and disappointment the walls that were about three feet high had been completely removed. No doubt this was for the very valuable Cotswold stone.

After a further half-mile upstream we arrived at Damsells Mill which was once a fulling mill and then in the 19th century a corn mill. A date stone of 1674 was visible on the front of the building alongside the lane. The mill was converted into a house in 1968. However the pair of arched openings at the rear were retained and these lead through to the very large breast-shot water wheel that survives in what is now a living room. It was particularly kind of the owners to permit our visit only days after the mill had suffered severe flooding following the deluge of heavy and persistent rain on 20 July 2007.

Continuing upstream we soon reached the scant remains of Oliver's Mill. The owners had recently repaired the dam and sluices so that water could now be held in the mill pond. Judging by the maps it is possibly more than a 100 years since the mill pond has been in water to such an extent as now. A pleasant walk to the north took us past two imposing 18th century buildings, Damsells Farm and Painswick House. We carried on to the hamlet of Paradise. Here, we were in for a real treat at the home of members Tom and Audrey Capper who had laid on a marvellous tea which we enjoyed in their delightful garden.

Then all that remained was to thank Ray for leading a very interesting afternoon and Tom and Audrey for their splendid hospitality.

R. Wilson

Thursday 30 August 2007

Morning visit to Smiths (Gloucester) Ltd recycling centre

Eight members joined this working hours visit to the Smiths waste management plant at Moreton Valence. We had an introductory talk from Peter Martin, the technical manager, before being shown around in two groups by Peter and by Ian Watson, the operations manager. The waste management division is just one of the sections of the company which is concerned with plant hire, demolition, construction and various other services. The waste transfer plant takes in a variety of demolition and industrial waste (from lorries and skips) which is separated into a number of usable products using a mix of mechanical and manual sorting. The main products are aggregate, stone, brick and concrete crushed into a size suitable for the building and construction industry; wood chips sold on to chipboard manufacturers; and ferrous and non ferrous metals sold to scrap metal companies for recycling. They also handle cardboard which is baled ready for transfer to specialist cardboard producers. Compost is made from municipal grass cuttings, and topsoil and sand are also separated for resale. Some materials, notably asbestos and tarmac, need special methods to handle safely. Certain plastic materials are extracted but the limitations on the exact separation of different types of plastic makes this part of the activity somewhat uneconomic with existing technologies. The whole operation of the business is dependent on the need to be able to cover all of the processing costs by generating sufficient income from the saleable products. Even with all the sorting and separation, fair amounts of material remain as waste which has to go on to landfill, but the company obviously tries to extract as much as possible of economic value in order to minimise this.

Going around the site we saw a variety of mechanical shovels, mobile grabbing cranes, stone crushers, wood chipping machines and portable conveyors, all busy transferring and processing large mounds of material. The company has recently installed an extensive processing system, built up from conveyors, large rotating sieves, magnetic, vacuum and air blown separators, all electrically driven and computer controlled and monitored. This allows much basic separation of the incoming waste, but partly relies on operators alongside slow moving conveyor belts visually checking the material and manually picking off items and placing them down the relevant chute. This part of the system is inevitably labour intensive and its worth is dependent on the prevailing market for recycled material, and hence of variable effectiveness in minimising landfill.

We had all learnt more about the efficient and economic handling of waste and the problems of achieving real gains in recycling materials. It had been a most interesting visit and we thanked our guides for showing us around and telling us about the business.

Sunday 23 September 2007

Coach trip to South Wales (Risca, Ebbw Valley and Big Pit)

As on previous such visits, we were grateful to Robin Williams of the Oxford House Industrial History Society for helping to guide us around and tell us about the many sites in the area.. We had a full coach and our first stop was at the OHIHS museum at Risca, where we met Robin and his colleagues, Tony Jukes and Lionel Milsom. All three contributed to the commentary as we travelled around and at the various stops. We had a little time to explore the museum before setting off, but also fitted in another look at the fascinating array of exhibits when we returned to Risca at the end of the afternoon.

The first stop was to the burial ground of Trinity Chapel to see a memorial to the Cwmcarn dam disaster and a number of graves of victims of colliery explosions in the area. A short walk took us to a nearby housing area laid out as a garden suburb, with some attractive houses, built around 1920 for senior staff of the Ebbw Vale Iron Steel and Coal Co. The houses and colourful gardens formed a picture of pleasant living in the “Metroland” style. It was then on to the road bridge at Cwmcarn which, along with an adjacent canal aqueduct, several houses and a mill, had been devastated by severe flooding following the collapse of the dam higher up the valley. We heard the grim story of this 1875 disaster when 12 lives were lost and then went up to the remains of the earth dam to the point where it had breached. The reservoir (for the Monmouthshire Canal) was never reinstated but the canal itself was rebuilt and we saw the empty and disused trough of it alongside the road.

A short drive took us to Crumlin for a view of the remains of the abutments of a high railway viaduct, and then Navigation Colliery, built in 1911 and closed in 1967. An impressive range of mine buildings, in red and yellow brick, remain. We saw the two winding houses (for up-draught and down-draught shafts), a fan house, chimney and workshops. Time and vandalism have dented the appearance but the structures are impressive for their bold design and, as ever with preserved buildings, await ideas and funding for a viable alternative use.

We crossed into the Afon Llwyd valley heading for Blaenavon, passing a large round concrete structure just off the road. It was, we heard, a slime thickener used as part of the coal washing plant in a 1950s scheme at Hafodyrynys Colliery which closed in 1966.

It was then on to Blaenavon, the whole area now a world heritage site with enormous IA interest, and the National Mining Museum of Wales at Big Pit. Most of us opted for the underground tour when we split into three groups and, after kitting out with helmets and lamps, were lowered 300 feet in the pit cage. Our guides were all former miners and they gave us a fascinating insight into the dark and hazardous world of coal mining in the early years of the industry. Back on the surface we could look at the winding house and the 1952 electric winding engine, and the buildings and ancillary plant which helped to tell the story of mining over the years. In the 1939 pithead baths building we saw the locker rooms and showers which had brought great improvement to the miners' facilities, and this building now houses a very comprehensive set of displays and exhibits which cover all aspects of coal mining, from the technical, social and political angles. Our time was soon over but Big Pit is clearly a place worth many visits to appreciate the full story of this major industry.

The coach took us on to Brynmawr where we passed the distinctive, but long disused, boiler house of the Enfield Cables rubber factory, before reaching the head of the Ebbw valley for the journey back to Risca. We saw the old iron furnaces site, started in 1790, before passing through the extensive area of the Ebbw Vale steel works, now totally inactive after 2 centuries of iron and steel production. All that remains is a 1915 office building with a prominent clocktower. We continued south back to Risca, with a longer stop at the museum, before heading to Bassaleg for a final walk to see some railway and tramroad features. The Bassaleg viaduct from 1826 is reckoned to be the oldest bridge in the world still carrying a railway with loads from the Machen quarries. A walk took us to Pye Corner where three former tramroads had met and we heard about the competing interests of the companies concerned. Many other sites and stories had been brought into the commentary as we had driven around and, before departing for home, it was fitting to thank Robin, Tony and Lionel for all their efforts in making it a splendid tour of a fascinating area.

Sunday 7 October 2007

Afternoon walk in the Wotton-under-Edge area

It was a fine afternoon as around 40 people assembled at the Renishaws premises at New Mills for the first part of the walk. We had the chance to see the exterior of this fine mill building in the company of Michael Sykes, a local historian, who works for Renishaws. He told us about the early years of the site, the 19th century developments under the Austin family (woollen cloth) and then the Tubbs Lewis company (elasticated fabric). Renishaws, a world-wide company making technically advanced measuring equipment, acquired the site in 1981 when many of the buildings were in poor repair. In the restoration work they have been careful to preserve the appearance and character of the main buildings while the more recent developments and new buildings are compatibly designed. With the neatly landscaped grounds and the mill pond looking like an ornamental lake, the whole site is very attractive. We saw a well maintained circular stone building which had been a wool drying stove and had a brief glimpse inside the main mill building. In the reception area we could see some of the original wooden beams and cast iron pillars and we could appreciate the way that the mill had been sensitively converted into a modern office building. After thanking Michael for a short but very interesting tour we went by car to Wotton and then, using as few cars as possible, on to Monks Mill near Wortley.

Ray Wilson was our guide for the rest of the afternoon and, after we had all fitted our cars into a short lane, he led us across a field and into a wooded area towards the site of Monks Mill on the Ozleworth stream. We came across the remains of a large building, roofless and ruinous but with many tall stone walls and arched openings, and even a stone staircase.

Behind and below the staircase was an arched opening, seemingly a water course with a set of stop planks alongside a short (dry) leat. The buildings formed a right angle and Ray explained that the mill was in existence in 1612 and this corner was probably part of the earliest surviving remains. Later, a short extension was made to the east wing and later still a very long extension made to the north wing, this ending up over 400 feet long. There were sections of newer stonework and brick repairs, with some doorways now blocked, and the mill had obviously been through many changes. It closed in 1867 and there have been efforts recently to conserve the structure but its future is uncertain, having recently passed into new ownership.

We then made our way back to Wotton and first looked in at the 1638 Perry and Dawes almshouses, a fine building still in residential use. It was then on to see the exterior of Waterloo Mill, from 1815, with the extension which was built as an engine house. A short walk brought us to Old Town Mill, steam powered in 1817, with an attractive frontage and now in residential use apart from the former engine house which is now a church. After the interesting and varied set of buildings we had seen, we were ready for the final attraction – tea and cakes at the old Town Hall laid on by the Wotton-under-Edge Historical Society. The Historical Society is one of several local volunteer groups who have developed a thriving amenity on Sunday afternoons for visitors to the town. Before departing for home we thanked Ray for another informative and enjoyable afternoon.



(Ray Wilson)

New Mills, Kingswood near Wotton-under-Edge, looking west (see 7 October 2007 visit)