

THE ORIGINS OF THE G.S.I.A.

Geoffrey Andrew

(The author was the founder-chairman of the Gloucestershire Council for Industrial Archaeology, which later became the G.S.I.A. He now lives in Liverpool.)

It was the Spring of 1963. I knew something about both Archaeology and Industry, but was intrigued to come across a notice about a one-day conference on something called Industrial Archaeology to be run by the Extra Mural Department of Bristol University. Interest became frustration when I learned that the event was cancelled because there were only half-a-dozen takers of whom all except me were academics.

I remember haranging the organiser (Mr Taylor) at his house about the importance of the subject and the fact that it would have a great appeal to non-academics and could also help to make the working man proud of his industrial heritage. Mr Taylor struck a bargain that he would set up the conference again if I produced this great audience I talked about. And that was how it all started.

Several months of chatting to people and sending out circulars produced a most encouraging response. But the great widening of interest came from a series of features in the "Gloucestershire Citizen" on local mills and other remains. These articles produced the desired response from people who wrote to correct or add facts usually from practical experience.

Eventually sufficient interest had been generated and the revived Conference was launched at Stroud Technical College. Why Stroud? I guess because my house at Woodchester overlooked such a wide range of Industrial Archaeology in the Stroud Valley that this seemed a natural centre from which activity should start.

The seating arrangements were repeatedly altered as more applicants appeared and eventually we reached a hundred or so on the "big-day" - September 21 1963.

The content of the Conference had been assembled by Kenneth Hudson and Lionel Walrond. Amongst the other contributors were Michael Rix and L.T.C. Rolt.

At the conclusion of the conference there was a popular demand for some organisation to keep the subject alive and active in the district and so the Gloucestershire Council for I.A. was conceived that day although not formally born until March 6 1964, when it was christened the G.S.I.A. A steering committee was appointed which included, from memory, Messrs Robins, Strange, Taylor, Townley, and Walrond, with myself as Chairman and Warren Marsh as the ubiquitous secretary.

Events then moved fast with some fieldwork (on Monk's Mill at Alderley) in the first few weeks after the conference and a series of lectures at Stroud Technical College for the winter. My diary shows almost weekly I.A. activities from then on, and experienced help flowed in from people like Kenneth Hudson. Notable amongst the activists I remember from that time were Warren Marsh as very active secretary and general factotum, Lionel Walrond who knew more about the subject than anyone else and Bill Robins who so ably took over as chairman when I had sadly to leave Gloucestershire within a few months of the Committee being formed.

Throughout this initial period British Nylon Spinners (now I.C.I. Fibres) at Brockworth provided the administrative base and services, and a long line of secretaries after Warren Marsh - Dr Annis, Mike Eastwood, Dr Edwards, and enabled the Newsletter to become one of the first achievements.

Before long news began to arrive of the formation of other local I.A. organisations in other parts of the country, and informal links were formed. It was at this time that Kenneth Hudson who had been a tower of strength throughout the early struggles was promoting with David and Charles Ltd. the idea of a national journal of I.A. I remember an early meeting with the publishers at which we were talking of a highly ambitious first print of 1500 copies. What is it today?

In the course of putting together these notes I have thought about how the present state of I.A. measures up to the pioneering ambitions of more than a decade ago.

Perhaps my main - and most personal feelings are:

- 1) Pleasure at the tremendous success of the G.S.I.A. not only in growth of membership but in the breadth of activity and in leading the way for other local organisations.
- 2) Some regret that I.A. has not yet been adopted as fully as it might be in schools for teaching history, economics, and applied science as an integrated whole with special benefit to the less academic student.
- 3) Some regret, too, that the subject has remained rather more refined and academic than I personally hoped - the message still needs to be carried into the factory.
- 4) The realisation, in retrospect, that I.A. nationally and in Gloucestershire "took off" as part of a wider cultural change in which the ordinary and familiar became interesting or valuable (i.e. Victoriana). Part too, perhaps of the "Pop Revolution" which in the early sixties blurred many of the boundaries between the academic and the established on one hand and the ordinary and "pop" on the other. Parallel to the Beatles as proper music or Warhol as real art? But I am getting into a very deep subject.

Finally, may I wish, from a distance, that the G.S.I.A. will have as great success in its second decade as its first.

The Editor is always pleased to receive articles, reports, and correspondence for the Journal; also suggestions for its improvement in any way - to 6/7 Montpellier Street, Cheltenham. Tel. 25086.