

CONFERRING IN DUDLEY

The AIA's annual conference for 1991, at Dudley, was the best attended ever, and one of the most successful. The main conference programme of 13-15 September followed on from a pre-conference programme of visits and lectures introducing members to the locality of the conference, as described by Marilyn Palmer and Peter Neaverson on page 2. The conference was hosted by the Black Country Society and the Black Country Museum, and organised by John Crompton and Carol Whitaker with assistance from Janet Graham, John Fletcher, and a posse of expert members of the Black Country Society. Accommodation was at the Dudley Campus of Wolverhampton Polytechnic. As we go to press this is about to become The University of Wolverhampton, but the change is not thought to be a direct result of the Association's visit.

The main conference began in time for dinner on Friday 13 September, which was followed by speeches of welcome by Ian Walden, Director of the Black Country Museum, and by Ron Moss of the Black Country Society IA Group. The weekend which followed consisted of a lively mix of talks introducing the industrial archaeology of the region, of members' contributions, of site visits, of official AIA business, and time to socialise and discuss informally. The first of the lectures about the region was given by John Crompton, and introduced the industry of the region as a whole. Further lectures were given on Saturday,

by Ron Moss on the Black Country chain-making industry, by Roger Dodsworth on glass manufacturing in the Stourbridge area, and by Mike Glasson on the Walsall leather trades. Informative and enjoyable excursions to local sites were made on the Saturday afternoon. The conference divided into three parties, to visit Mushroom Green and the Cradley chain making district, the Stuart Crystal Glass Museum, Wordsley Locks and Cobbs engine house, and the Walsall Leather Centre and the National Lock Museum at Willenhall.

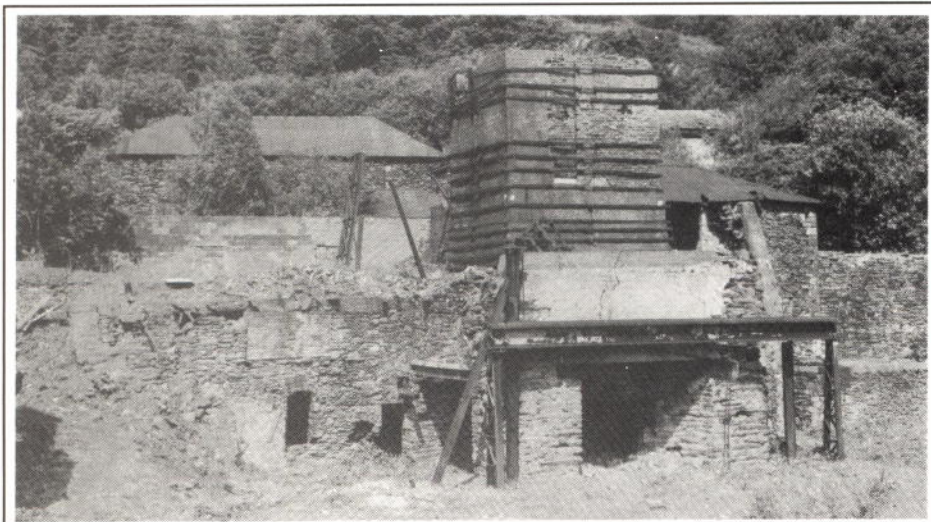
Members' contributions sessions are always an enthusiastically supported element of conference programmes, giving members a chance to learn about work others have been doing or to test their own ideas in front of an informed and interested audience. The contributions this year were rich and varied. They included short presentations on Beddingham Shaft Lime Kiln, underground archaeology, the skyscrapers of Manhattan, town rubbish disposal, industrial archaeology on the Kenyan coast, Black Country token coinage, the Wednesbury potteries, Lancashire mill architects, the repair of a gantry crane in Surrey, the work of the Lancaster University Archaeological Unit at Snailbeach lead mines and Backbarrow Furnace, the mines of Rio Tinto, and the enhancement of a regional Sites and Monuments Record with respect to industrial archaeology. The Welsh, Scottish and English Royal Commissions also gave presentations, outlining the work they were currently doing in recording buildings, sites and vanishing indus-

trial processes. Leisurely discussion continued late into the night in the Polytechnic bar.

Some of the more formal events of the conference were a reception hosted by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, followed by an excellent Conference Dinner and the annual AIA award presentations, as reported in the last issue of the *Bulletin*. The Annual General Meeting of the AIA was held on the Sunday morning, at which the officers and Council of the Association were elected. Two additions to Council were notified in the last *Bulletin*. Two new Honorary Vice-Presidents were also elected: John Hume and Angus Buchanan. In commenting on Professor Buchanan's election, the President, David Alderton, remarked that he had *introduced many people to industrial archaeology with his penguin*. Although completely true and worthy of comment, this was a remark which one anonymous member of the Council visualised more zoologically than literarily, even though he is a librarian. A profile of Professor Buchanan is given below, and one of John Hume will appear in the next edition. A discussion was held about members' feelings on many aspects of the work of the Association. In particular, the nature of the annual conferences was discussed, and it was felt by the great majority that these were always useful and enjoyable events which provided precisely the service they required.

After the AGM, the conference was rounded off by the Rolt Memorial Lecture, given this year by the eminent historian of the iron and steel industries, Keith Gale. Delegates dispersed after lunch, with the tempting option of a special guided tour of the Black Country Museum before the journey home.

The 1992 conference is to be held at Cirencester on 11-13 September, and should prove equally stimulating and enjoyable. Details were enclosed with the last mailing.



Blackbarrow Ironworks, see page 4
Blackbarrow Furnace from the north west, with the sites of ovens and water wheel

Photo: Lancaster University Archaeological Unit

EXPLORING THE IRON DISTRICT

Before the AIA's 1991 conference at Dudley, a busy four-day programme was hosted by the Black Country Society IA Group and the Black Country Museum to explore the West Midlands Iron District. The numbers were unprecedented and the organisers had to supply two coaches and devise a complicated relay system for the visits. These included more factory visits than we have ever enjoyed before and, in an area where transport was crucial in the development of industry, the use of railways and canals as well as the more conventional coach.

On the Monday evening, delegates were introduced to 'Industry and work in Birmingham during the industrial revolution' by Dr Eric Hopkins of the Department of Economic History, University of Birmingham. He made it clear that the small workshop was characteristic of Birmingham and the Black Country before and after the industrial revolution, a phenomenon delegates were able to observe during the following week. The planned Tuesday and Wednesday visits had to be duplicated on both days as factories were understandably unwilling to accept parties of ninety people. One group concentrated on chain making and glass manufacture, while the other studied locks and leather manufacture.

The first group began their day under the able guidance of Ron Moss and Peter Glews at the Mushroom Green chainshop, where delegates were later able to see chain being forged by hand. The hamlet, although much altered, retains many features of the close-knit squatter settlements which surrounded the Black Country chainshops. The party was then divided to visit three active chain works, two concentrating on the manufacture of heavy cable chains and one on lighter machine-made chain where women operatives are still employed. Lunch was taken at the Beacon Hotel in Sedgley, which maintains its own small brewery, producing Sedgley Surprise Bitter and the better known (and stronger!) Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild. These were seen in production, sampled from the wood and supplies ordered for delivery to the Polytechnic for those unlucky enough to miss the visit. During the afternoon, several brief calls were made by a somewhat subdued group. At Harrison and Pearson's refractory brick works, they were able to see their ornate office block and to photograph the part-demolished rectangular and round kilns. A pilgrimage was made to Foster and Rastricks New Foundry in Stourbridge, from which the *Stourbridge Lion* and *Agenoria* locomotives emerged to serve in America and on the local Kingswinford Railway respectively. The latter terminated at the Ashwood Basin on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, which could accommodate 68 narrowboats at once to load coal from the Earl of Dudley's mines. Also at Kingswinford is the Broadfield House Museum, which displays the most elegant of Black Country products, various types of table glass, old and modern.

The other group were, meanwhile, visiting Walsall, Willenhall and Wolverhampton with Paul Collins and Howard Wootton as guides. Once again the coach-load had to be divided, this time into four groups to visit various curriers, saddlers and leather goods manufacturers where hand work is still pre-eminent. This was



The former Clyno Motor Works at Bushbury, Wolverhampton, built in 1925. It covered an area of four acres, with a vast single-storey expanse of north light sheds. The company failed in 1929

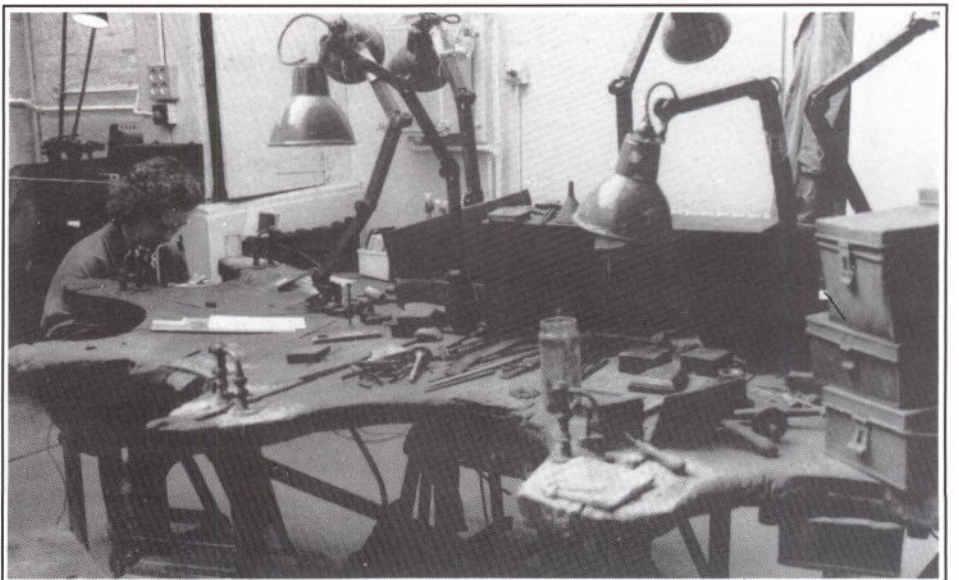
Photo: Marilyn Palmer and Peter Neaverson

followed by visits to two lock works, where the intricacies of levers, wards and mortices were explained amidst the racket of mass production. Lunch was taken at the entertainingly named pub, the *Brewer's Droop*. The lock theme was continued in the afternoon with a visit to the imposing former Chubb Lock Factory of 1899 in the centre of Wolverhampton (photo: page 8). This was in the process of conversion to the Lighthouse Arts and Media Centre, retaining most of the original structure with a new theatre building added. Nearby, the former carriage drive entrance to the original High Level station stands isolated. The former Great Western Low Level station of 1855 is in a sorry state but the railway enthusiasts viewed some remaining dual broad/standard gauge track. The emphasis then changed to road transport, where Paul Collins' expert knowledge of twentieth-century car factories came into its own. Visits were made to the former works of Henry Meadows, Clyno Engineering, Villiers, and the Star and Sunbeam Motor Car Companies.

On the Wednesday evening, both groups converged on the Black Country Museum which was kept open specially and were grateful to the staff who remained at their posts. With the Newcomen engine in steam

and wrought iron being rolled under the supervision of our Rolt Memorial lecturer, Keith Gale, delegates had plenty to amuse them until the evening's activities began. Two canal boats, operated by the Dudley Canal Trust, went through the new tunnels constructed in 1984 and 1989 into the Singing Cavern, a disused limestone mine. Here, Black Country food and entertainment were provided, but the large numbers precluded any clog dancing. However, footwork was in evidence on the return trip when the boats were legged through the tunnel by various AIA volunteers. The organisers are to be congratulated on providing such an enjoyable and unusual entertainment.

On Thursday, the Black Country was deserted for the more rural parts of Worcestershire. Delegates first visited the Churchill Forge, where a private trust are restoring a blade mill which was in operation until 1970. The next stop was Kidderminster, where Brinton's large carpet making complex was visited, although the numbers made a factory tour impossible. The most impressive building in the complex is the four-storey Slingfield Mill of 1864 in polychrome brickwork. Lunch was taken on the banks of the Severn at Stourport, where a tour was made of the basins at the terminus of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. Our



The Smith & Pepper workshop in the Jewellery Quarter Discovery Centre, Birmingham

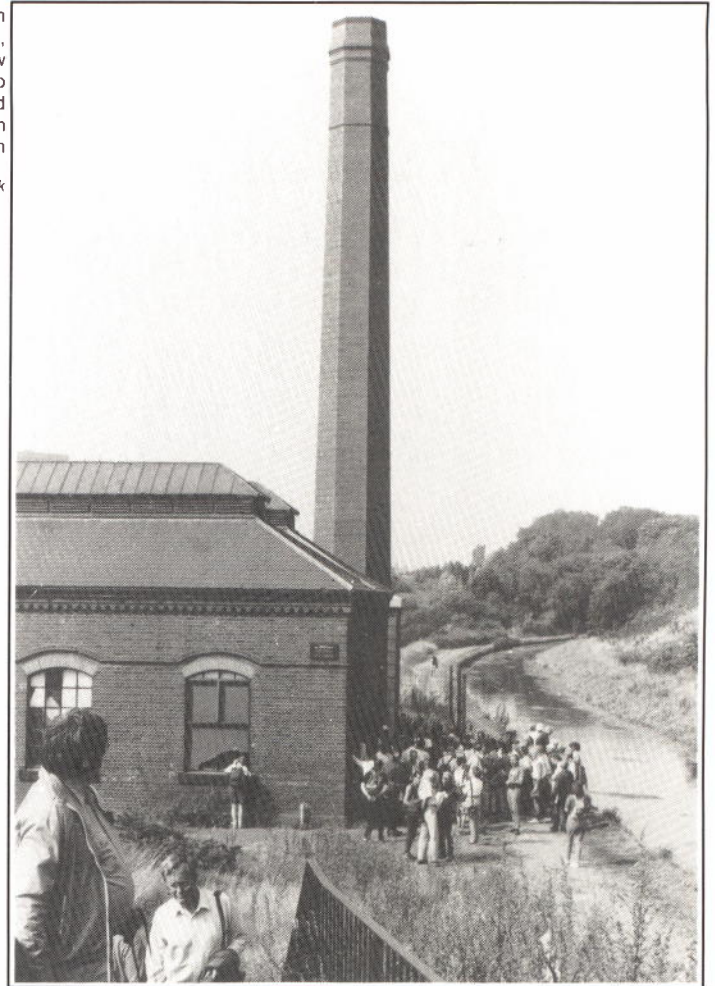
Photo: Marilyn Palmer and Peter Neaverson

third form of transport came with the journey from Bewdley to Bridgnorth on the Severn Valley Railway, where we found, to the delight of the rail buffs, *Flying Scotsman*, *City of Truro*, *Leander* and other locomotives. The final visit of the day was to Bratch Locks with Brindley's polygonal lock house of 1772. A fleeting glimpse was possible of the two triple-expansion engines still resting in the Byzantine-style former Bilston UDC Waterworks nearby. These engines, begun by James Watt and Company, were completed by Thornewill and Wareham of Burton on Trent, after the former went bankrupt in 1895. The evening's lecture subject remained with the Severn, when Peter Wakelin analysed the trade patterns on the river through the medium of the Port Books. This was followed by a selection of video recordings of the Black Country at work shown by Kelvin Lake and Peter Eggleston of IA Recordings.

Birmingham was the venue for the final day of the pre-conference programme, beginning with a guided tour of the new Jewellery Discovery Centre with its fascinating time capsule workshops adjacent. The results of the face-lift of the buildings and the introduction of new retail and wholesale trade in the Jewellery Quarter were then inspected under the leadership of a City Guide. Many of the old workshops still remain in use behind the more elegant facades. Delegates then boarded Brummagem Boats for a trip to Smethwick via the Icknield Port loop and Telford's New Cut. Disembarking at the New Pump House of 1892, some members walked up to the splendid 1829 Galton Bridge by Telford. Restoration of the pump house by Sandwell Borough has included the building of a complete new chimney stack. By contrast, delegates next walked to the excavated site of the original 1779 Smethwick Engine, now covered by a roof. This was the original site of the engine subsequently seen in the Birmingham Science Museum, the oldest working Watt engine in the world. Working, but for how long? The Keeper, Jim Andrew, started the engine for delegates but explained the Health and Safety problems concerning possible incidence of Legionnaire's disease due to the temperature reached by the water pumped for demonstration. How did our engine men survive in the past? The Watt connection was maintained with a brief final

The 1892 pumping station at Brasshouse Bridge, complete with new chimney, returning water to the 473 feet Smeaton Old Line of the Birmingham Canal Navigation

Photo: Amber Patrick



visit, this time to the Soho Foundry which is now in the possession of an equally well-known Birmingham firm, Avery's. Inside the elaborate portico are several cottages built for Murdoch and other foundry workers in about 1800.

Delegates returned to the Dudley campus, ready for the Conference proper, with an enthusiasm for the Black Country whetted by an excellent series of visits. Their thanks are due to John Crompton, Ron Moss, Peter Glews, and other members of the Black Country Society for coping valiantly with such a large number of people. The factory visits gave an insight into the continuing pre-eminence of

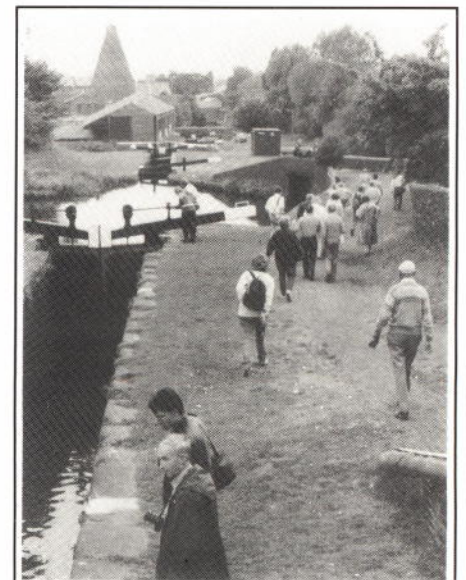
the Black Country in metal wares and leather manufacture. Although vast changes have taken place in the landscape and few pre-1900 buildings survive, the craft skills are still in evidence. Members will also value the Conference Guide on the West Midlands Iron District which has achieved the almost impossible in covering a complex area. Readers will appreciate the clear maps drawn by Brian Malaws, and the editor and authors are to be congratulated.

Marilyn Palmer and Peter Neaverson



Conferring on the *Euphrates Packet*, on Telford's new line of the Birmingham Navigation

Photo: Amber Patrick



Wordsley Locks and glass cone, visited during the main Black Country Conference

Photo: Peter Wakelin 3