

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

111
WINTER
1999

THE BULLETIN OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS 111 Winter 1999

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AIA Conference 1999

This year's conference was held at Greenwich University's Chatham campus, on a chunk of the old naval base, to enjoy a wide range of visits in the county of Kent.

Roger Ford

The Friday seminar day, arranged by Tim Smith, garnered a very good attendance, with the morning session devoted to the Thames estuary, and a choice for the afternoon slots between a London theme and brewing. Careful co-ordination of the afternoon's timing enabled delegates to switch between each.

Following the conference welcome, there was a thorough introductory talk by Bob Ratcliffe of Rochester Historical Society, and indeed to many of us the 1999 conference will be remembered as Bob's conference. Every day he led a trip, whilst on the Tuesday evening in an introduction to Wednesday's Medway valley excursions, he showed us a total of 151 superb colour slides!

Saturday dawned sunny and hot and, following a talk by Peter Dawson on the history and development of the dockyard, Rob Kinchen-Smith of Oxford Archaeological Unit talked about site evaluation - very much the theme of this year's conference lectures, again being taken up later when David Eve (author of the conference gazetteer) spoke on current work of the Kent Sites and Monuments Record.

A session of members' contributions included John Selby on the 1777 canal tunnel at Fenny Compton, followed by Neil Wright on an altogether more exotic location - a lime kiln for coral conversion on the Caribbean island of Nevis. Tony Yoward was in his usual ebullient form on cast-iron churchyard monuments at Stourport and the Crux Easton 1894 wind engine; then that perennial troglodyte Paul Sowan spoke on some little-regarded tunnels in Kent.

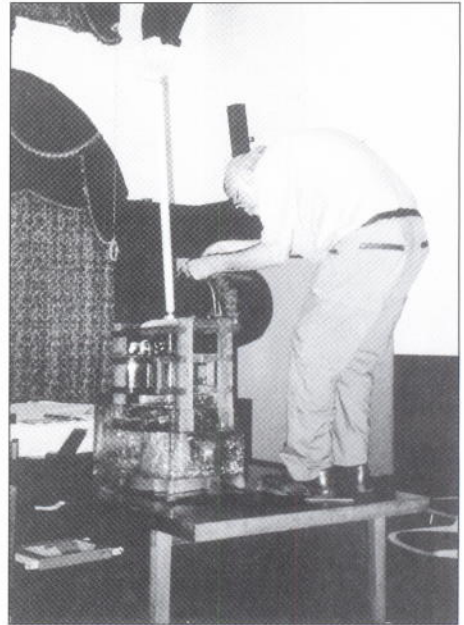
The afternoon's visits offered three choices. Bob Ratcliffe took group A to tour a rather derelict Dolphin sailing barge museum, then on to the Sittingbourne Light Railway. This latter, 2ft 6in gauge, was built to serve the paper mills in the area and is still worked by the original 0-4-2 tanks.

Visit B went to Crockenhill Foundry garage, ostensibly a village petrol station near Swanley. However, at the rear lurks a veritable Aladdin's cave of covered and open-air artefacts, including a 'Burrell' which was in steam, ancient trailers and caravans, and an assortment of decaying lorries and cars, and in sharp contrast one of these latest 'Smart' city cars. En route the restored (by an AIA member) Meopham smock-mill was briefly visited.

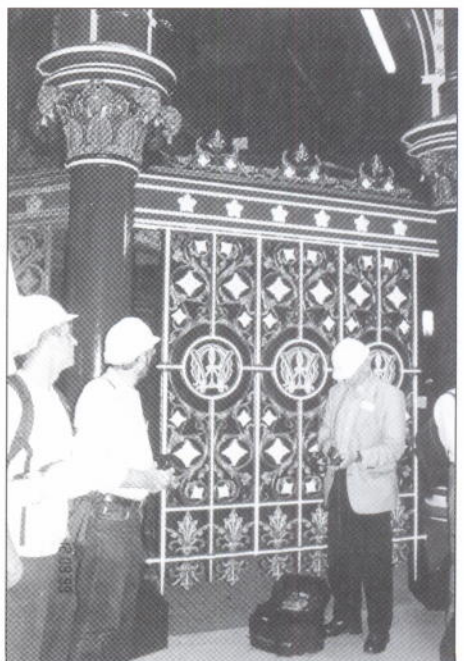
The 'local' visit comprised a walk around the dockyard, whose contents can no-way be appreciated in just one day. many historic listed buildings; an interesting museum; covered slips, one of which houses a steam centre, and another an RNLI exhibition; guided trips over the destroyer *Cavalier* (1944) and submarine *Ocelot* (the last warship built at Chatham, in 1962), both in dry docks; an amazing ropewalk, so long (1,135 ft) that from the start it is hard to make out the other

end! All returned to this site in the evening for an excellent conference dinner in the Wheelwrights' restaurant.

Sunday started with the AGM at which the President demoted himself to Chairman, and Council disbanded to be replaced by a much smaller one. Next came the awards presentations (reported elsewhere), and so to the highlight of the morning. An outstanding Rolt memorial Lecture was delivered by Professor Alan Crocker on early water turbines of the nineteenth century. The lecture finished in spectacular fashion with a home-made demonstration model set up on a flower pot in a



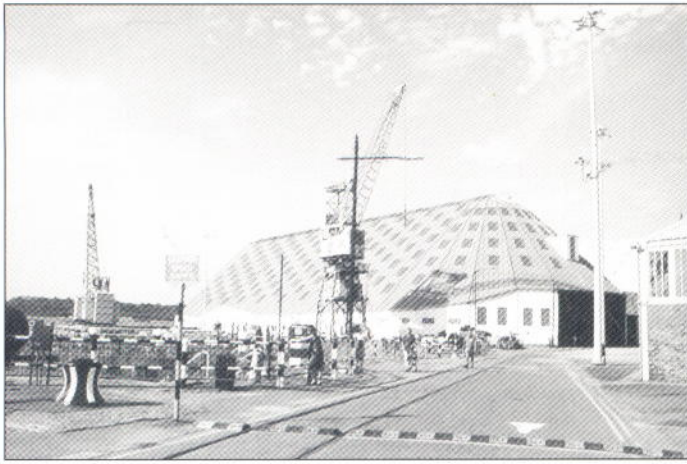
One man, his bucket and a turbine: Alan Crocker performs the highlight of his Rolt memorial lecture
Photo: Glenys Crocker



Victorian splendour in the Crossness pumping station
Photo: Ann Harrison

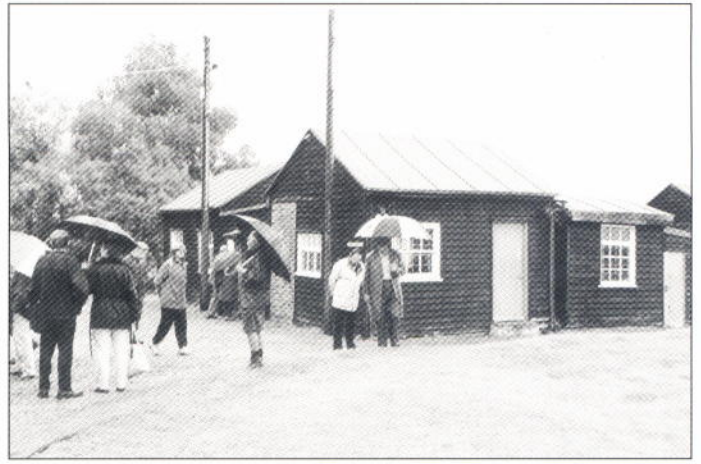
COVER PICTURE

Interior roof structure of No. 3 Covered Slip, Chatham Dockyard, visited during the 1999 AIA Conference
Photo: R. J. M. Carr



No. 3 covered slip at Chatham Dockyard

Photo: Ann Harrison



Not seaside huts in the rain, but the Abbey explosives works at Faversham

Photo: Ann Harrison

glass tank. Alan then climbed onto the table, and poured a bucket of water into it, causing rotation of the tube above and a lot of apprehension amongst those within splashing range on the front row!

Afternoon trips in the sunshine again offered a choice of visits. Group A forayed out to the massive sludge pumping station at Crossness, Thamesmead, which houses four mighty beam engines, one of which is currently under restoration. Group B went to Brook pumping station, whose pumps and diesels of the 1900s are still working, then back to Fort Amhurst, 1756, which offers fascinating insights into the lives of its defenders during all wars since, also the story of the development of the River Medway was inspected at the heritage centre. Group C went out on the river in the paddle steamer *Kingswear Castle* of 1924 (though the engines came from an earlier vessel of 1904), with Bob Ratcliffe again on good form pointing out all the salient riverside features.

Wayne Cocroft of English Heritage gave the evening lecture on explosive manufacture in the Faversham area, to prepare us for Monday's programme which comprised a walk around this

fascinating and attractive town; a visit to Abbey works where compressed CO2 cartridges used as explosives are produced in sheds set up in the mid-1920s and little changed since; lunch at Brogdale fruit farm, which has a complete collection of all known variety of fruit tree; and a tour of the Shepherd Neame brewery, complete with a tasting session. A memorable day. David Burrigge gave the evening dissertation on Dover's nineteenth-century defences.

Tuesday saw a return of the sort of conference weather regular attenders have endured in recent years. This turned out to be an incident-packed day, with half the party stranded in pouring rain at a disused tunnel (unfortunately closed with gates) of 1830 on the Canterbury-Whitstable railway whilst their coach was being switched with another. On to Dover for an abbreviated visit to the wartime HQ tunnels, followed by a stop at Western Heights to admire the overview of Dover harbour, ferries and maritime station, now used as a car park. Lunch was taken at Crabble water-powered corn mill, and after a very quick tour around, the coaches proceeded to Hythe station, for a trip on the famous narrow gauge Romney,

Hythe & Dymchurch Railway, hauled across Romney Marsh by a miniature Pacific. Bob Ratcliffe was of course in charge all day.

Wednesday morning's outings consisted of a choice of works visits to either a cement works or a paper mill (a couple of our members who turned out in shorts were unceremoniously ejected from the former, as apparently knobby knees and cement are considered to be incompatible); or a chance to see some of the construction of the Channel tunnel high-speed rail link, where it will cross the Medway beside the M2 motorway bridge. The railway bridge is being fabricated a short distance away, to be rolled into place. This is the first new English main line for 100 years, but the site is so muddy all vehicles bog down and have to be dragged out by tractor! The Rural Life Museum at Cobtree served us lunch, and in the afternoon we returned to Chatham to see the quite splendid museum of the Royal Engineers. A lot more time would be required to appreciate this fully - it embraces the entire history of the Empire as seen by sappers through the ages.

Continuing the military theme, Paul Calvocoressi of English Heritage gave the conference's last evening talk about the remaining buildings of Woolwich Arsenal, which we visited on our last formal day. Mary Mills gave a very comprehensive and erudite commentary on the trip there and back, which included diversions to see massive chalk pits, also riverside sites of interest. Paul took us into the original cartridge works (later a bomb factory) from which can be seen some of the outstanding Grade I listed buildings. This was necessary because all the roads have been dug up and carted away in yet another fatuously expensive 'contaminated land' clearance by outside contractors. Lunch at the picturesque Avery Hill campus of Greenwich University allowed a visit to the impressive Edwardian conservatories. Afterwards delegates enjoyed a conducted tour of the David Evans silk print works and museum at Crayford.

Thus ended a most fascinating and varied conference, which was a real tribute to all who had a hand in organising it. My thanks to other delegates for their contributions to this report.



Big men or a little train? The Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway

Photo: Ann Harrison