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Forth and Clyde: the 2002 AIA Conference

The 2002 conference at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, was one of the most successful that the Association has held, with 147 attending the Saturday's annual dinner, and a record 81 staying on for the following week's programme of lectures and visits.

Roger Ford

Proceedings commenced with the now traditional Friday seminar, this one organised by Dr Miles Oglethorpe of the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (soon to be renamed). The seminar reached an outstanding conclusion with a presentation on 'The iconic power of the malt whisky distillery', accompanied by a tasting of three 10-year-old malts, by courtesy of Glenmorangie, and was, surprise, surprise, received with considerable enthusiasm!

In the evening delegates were invited to a reception in the Department of Civil and Offshore Engineering, at which a portrait of the eminent Scottish railway engineer John Miller (1805-83) was unveiled by Professor John Archer, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the university. In a break with tradition, this was followed by the Rolt Memorial Lecture, delivered by Professor John Hume, OBE, on 'Industry as Culture', which included a synopsis of Tom Rolt's life and career, with emphasis on his writings.

John Hume was in the chair again first thing on Saturday morning, delivering the introductory lecture on the industrial archaeology of Scotland's central belt. He emphasised that, prior to industrialisation, the agrarian life was so poverty-stricken that it wasn't possible to survive, let alone prosper in central Scotland, due to the very poor quality of the soils.

This was followed by members' contributions, the first of whom was David Perrett, talking on

Asturias in Spain, where cider at 30p a litre is produced in vast quantities, coal mining is still very active and it is a big bagpipe-playing area. Next up was David George on Carlisle's engineers, the best known being Cowan Sheldon, who supplied cranes to the world's dockyards, shipyards and railways. Third and last speaker was Dr Brenda Buchanan, discoursing on John McAdam the road surfacing man, who finally made good at the age of 60. After the break there was a panel on Scottish IA – each member giving a short presentation, followed by a general discussion. One of the points raised was that volunteer input was being deterred by the dead hand of imposed regulations.

In the afternoon we were offered a choice of three field trips. A tour of the Forth bridges and the planned village of Charlestown and its limekilns was the first of several of this year's conference trips under the expert guidance of Mark Watson of Historic Scotland. There was a trip on the newly opened Falkirk millennium wheel (which raises canal boats between the Forth & Clyde and Union canals, restoring a link severed about 40 years ago) followed by a walk through the Union Canal tunnel guided by Guthrie Hutton. The third choice was Emily Cook's tour of the fascinating oil shale landscape with its massive 'bingos' of waste processed shale. These constituted the prelude to an excellent annual conference dinner – the food at Heriot-Watt was more than satisfactory throughout the week, with a wide choice of menus at every meal.

After an amusing introduction by Ray Riley, Sunday morning saw Roger Holden give the first of a further set of members' contributions, on the subject of self-acting mules. We then admired some of John Watts' slides of buildings around Salisbury that have sadly been demolished, while Paul Sowan showed some of the delights of



Delegates crossing a replacement twin-leaf lift bridge over the canal at Spier's Wharf North, Port Dundas, Glasgow

Photo: Rodney Hall

COVER PICTURE

The Grahamston Foundry monumental iron gateway, shown at the 1886 Edinburgh Exhibition and now restored and re-erected at the entrance to the works of Carron Phoenix at Falkirk

Photo: Laurence Draper



Maclay's Thistle Brewery at Alloa, closed but intact and awaiting redevelopment

Photo: Peter Stanier



Discussing the shale oil industry amid remains of the crushing plant at Tarbrax

Photo: Rodney Hall

Subterranea Britannica's study weekends, ranging from Williamson's tunnels in Liverpool to underground war rooms at Dollis Hill. Finally, Professor Alan Crocker spoke about William McMurray, a wireworker from Glasgow who became, in turn, a papermaker, stationer and newspaper proprietor. These contributions were followed by the presentation of the AIA Awards (reported on page 7) by our President Angus Buchanan at the AGM of the Association. The official conference proceedings ended at lunchtime.

The most popular of Sunday afternoon's trips (even bribery was suspected in the swaps) was to Loch Katrine to enjoy a cruise on the steamship *Sir Walter Scott*, which now exceeds 100 years. Luckily the weather co-operated and a good time was had by all. Meanwhile, Mathew Hume and Tony Parkes took a tour to Shotts and Coatbridge (the 'iron burgh' on the Lanarkshire coalfield), including the now-derelict Cummins diesel

engine factory, the Monklands Canal and the Summerlee ironworks site, now a heritage park. The third alternative trip included a foray across the Forth to Alloa and Tillicoultry with Mark Watson. Sites visited included Maclay's Thistle Brewery which has been closed for some time and is due for redevelopment. All the plant remains in the building and our guide was Duncan Kellock, the former head brewer. It was 'Open Day' in Clackmannan and this was one of the buildings on display to the public, as was the original beam engine house of a colliery adjacent to the site of Devon Ironworks, which has survived with its massive beam. The building, complete with the beam, has been successfully converted to a country park rangers' office while retaining much of the open space of the interior. After passing textile mills in Hillfoots country, an 'extra' laid on by Mark, after he had persuaded the coach driver to negotiate a difficult bend, was a three-rib cast iron bridge of c1810. It is over the

River Devon at Cambus in the midst of a vast complex of whisky warehouses. It is open to pedestrians and was duly crossed and photographed from all angles.

We were treated to two excellent lectures in the evening. The first was another contribution from Miles Oglethorpe on recording the archives of the iron and steel and coal industries, particularly Gartcosh and Ravenscraig. RCAHMS has managed to record ten coal mines from the 300 or so that formerly existed. Michael Moss followed with a talk on Clyde shipbuilding. His first slide showed the very last boat to be launched from John Brown's yard. Amazingly, this



Five Sisters shale oil bings

Photo: Peter Stanier



R. F. & J. Alexander's cotton thread mill of 1849, Glasgow, converted to the Great Eastern Hotel by additional top storey and entrance alterations, 1907-9

Photo: Colin Bowden