

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

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Conference 1994

Bill Firth

Conference this year was organised by the Southampton University Industrial Archaeology Group (SUIAG). It was held at Sparsholt College, Winchester, over the weekend 9 - 11 September with an overlapping supplementary programme from the previous Wednesday to the following Tuesday.

Events started on Wednesday afternoon with a nearly full coach-load visiting Fort Widley and Bursledon Windmill. Fort Widley was built, but never used in anger, in the mid nineteenth century as part of the landward defence of Portsmouth. The visit was most interesting, the views on a clear, blustery day were superb. Bursledon Mill, the only windmill in Hampshire capable of working, was built on the site of an earlier mill in 1814 and ceased working in the 1880s. Restoration started in 1979 and the sails moved again in July 1990. There was enough wind to move the sails during our visit.

As a preliminary to Thursday's visit to the Isle of Portland the evening lecture was 'The Portland Stone Industries' by Dr Peter Stanier, who also led the visit. This was a marvellous day out and, despite showery weather, it did not rain during the five hours we were outdoors on the island. Much of the visit was concerned with the quarrying of Portland stone but we also took in Fort Verne (contemporary with Fort Widley), the lighthouses, two windmill towers and other sites, including stone carvers at work. Again the views were

NEW EDITOR

From the next issue of *IA News* the Editor will be Dr Peter Stanier. All correspondence regarding the bulletin should be sent to him at 49 Breach Lane, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 8LF (0747 854707). It would be helpful if lists or address lists which include the Editor's name and address are changed immediately.

Dr Peter Wakelin, gives his thanks to those who have helped produce the bulletin over the past six years on page 6.

superb. With a long coach ride we could not return to Sparsholt for dinner which was taken at the Coventry Arms at Corfe Mullen.

Friday also took us out of Hampshire although on the way we visited the silk mill at Whitchurch built in the late eighteenth century and still operating, albeit on electric power, turning out special silks for legal and academic gowns, theatre costumes and other short runs.

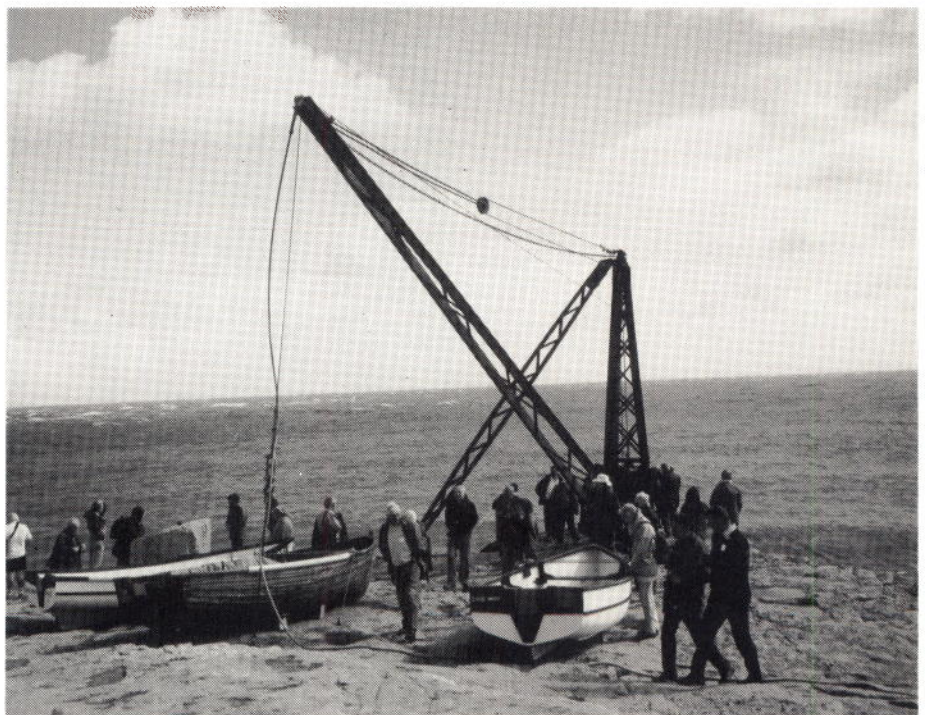
We then went on to the Science Museum store at Wroughton airfield where we were shown the new controlled atmosphere store and its contents. Unfortunately, time did not permit a look into any of the other hangars where exhibits are stored and after our packed lunch, with coffee kindly provided by the museum, we went off to Swindon.

Here the staff of the RCHME, led by Keith Falconer, took us in turn in four separate groups on tours of the remaining buildings of the GWR works, the railway village, the railway museum and the refurbished building, which was the GWR design office and is now occupied by the Commission.

The conference proper started after dinner with a welcome from Dr Edwin Course, President of SUIAG, and a talk, 'A Brief Survey of IA in Hampshire' by Professor Ray Riley. This was a wide-ranging personal selection of sites in Hampshire. Some members' contributions followed.

Saturday morning began with two lectures. First, Professor Angus Buchanan gave us 'The Mill in History', another wide-ranging and personal selection of sites illustrating the development of the mill to the factory (often still called the mill). Michael Hughes, the Hampshire County Archivist, followed with 'IA and the SMRs' in which he showed us what Hampshire is doing on recording and documentation and where the Index Record of Industrial Sites (IRIS) and Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) fit in. The remaining members' contributions completed the morning programme.

There was a choice of three visits in the afternoon; the Hampshire Museum store, led by John Silman, Twyford Waterworks, led by Edwin Course, and Portsmouth Dockyard, led by Ray



The 1994 AIA Conference: Quarry crane and delegates at Portland Bill

Photo: John Bennett

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Riley and Brian Paterson. I can only speak for the dockyard visit. We were bedevilled by traffic problems and then security at the dockyard and had to be satisfied with a one hour dash through the historic parts not open to the public and a return to Sparsholt. It was ironic that within an hour we were on our way back to the dockyard suitably spruced up for the conference dinner on the gun deck of HMS *Warrior*.

To many this was the highlight of the conference. HMS *Warrior* was commissioned in 1861 as the largest, fastest, best protected and most formidable warship in the world. She represented the start of great advances in warship design and soon became obsolescent.

She came off the active list in 1883, went into reserve, was a torpedo school from 1904 to 1924 and a hulk at Milford Haven from 1929 to 1979 before she was taken to Hartlepool for restoration.

We had plenty of time for pre-dinner drinks and had the freedom of the ship to inspect as we pleased. An excellent dinner, four courses and coffee, was followed by the loyal toast, a welcome from our President and some very interesting observations about HMS *Warrior* from Mr Val Fontana who has been closely associated with the restoration and ably stood in for Captain T Fraser Morgan who had been unavoidably called away. It was late, late when we arrived back at Sparsholt.

Sunday morning followed a traditional pattern. Reports from the heritage bodies given by Keith Falconer, Miles Oglethorpe and Peter Wakelin were followed by the AGM and, after coffee, the Rolt Memorial Lecture.

The Rolt Memorial Lecture was given by Dr Edwin Course and was appropriately entitled 'Engineering Works in the Countryside', a subject close to the heart of Tom Rolt. The full text will be published in *Industrial Archaeology Review*.

This ended the conference proper but on Sunday afternoon there was a most interesting voyage on SS *Shieldhall* past Southampton Docks and down Southampton Water. Some SUJAG members refer to their organisation as 'sewage' and it was perhaps appropriate that the *Shieldhall* was designed as a sewage removal vessel. She is the last triple expansion steam-driven ship in the south.

The evening lecture, 'Fortifications of the Solent', was given by Ian Stevenson and enhanced the background to our visit to Fort Widley, the other forts we had seen all round Portsmouth and at Portland, and the forthcoming visit to Spitbank Fort.

Monday was a rural day. It started with a trip from Alesford to Alton on the Watercress Line. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, it was diesel hauled. There was a stop at Ropley to visit the engines and repair shops. At Alton we split into two parties, one to visit the Salisbury and Southampton Canal and Michelmersh brickworks, the other to the Bass brewery at Alton, Selbourne brickworks and Headley Mill.

The brewery was interesting but the plant is modern and represents the IA of the future, the brickworks were muddy and represent IA still in use. As the leaflet about the mill says, 'Headley Mill is not a resurrected water mill but has a known record of service for over 1,000 years'. We were privileged to see it.

Back at Sparsholt the evening lecture was a fascinating account of the history of the sewing machine by Dr Martin Gregory who has a considerable collection of early machines.

The last day took us to Gosport starting at the Froude Museum. William Froude was a pioneer in ship hydrodynamics in the early nineteenth century and was followed by his son R E Froude (See *IA News* 88). We saw a testing tank in operation and many relics of the Froudes and the subsequent development of the subject. We then went down to the pier and embarked for Spitbank Fort, one of the sea forts guarding the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour. In addition to visiting the fortifications, there were splendid views and we had an excellent lunch. This was the last visit except for a brief photostop at what was Gosport railway station.

Much more could be written but mention must be made of the weather. Throughout the conference there were very heavy showers and yet by some intervention it almost always rained when we were in the coach or indoors on a visit. There was an extremely heavy storm on our way to HMS *Warrior* but as the coach ran down to the dockyard it all cleared away and no one got wet. This was not the only instance - we are not sure by what means Tony Yoward arranged this.

Thanks must be expressed to all our guides and lecturers, too numerous to name, but John

Silman, who commented so ably during our journeyings and who we hope will soon be in full health again, must be mentioned. Last, but far from least, our thanks must go to Mary and Tony Yoward who took over at short notice and who so ably masterminded the whole programme. □



Exploring the new Science Museum store at Wroughton

Photo: John Bennett



Inside Whitchurch Silk Mill during the Conference visit

Photo: John Bennett