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TICCIH 1997

John Crompton

The 1997 Conference of The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage was hosted by Greece, in Athens and Thessaloniki. Your representative reports on the events.

Mid-afternoon, and the heat hits hard as soon as you reach the 'plane door; very different from a rainstorm in the half-light of an Edinburgh early morning. Athens at the end of June, a half-hour bus scrum away, is even hotter.

The Conference timetable begins with registration on a Sunday morning in the Centre for Neohellenic Research where there's an exhibition of historic scientific instruments, a very full satchel of programmes and leaflets to read, and lots of people to meet if your language skills are up to it. Eventually, 100 delegates gather in the lecture theatre for a brief welcome from the Presidents of TICCIH, Louis Bergeron, and of the Greek Section based at the Centre, Vassilis Panayotopoulos.

The Athens part of the 1997 Conference concentrated on visits, first to metal mining sites at Agia Triada in the province of Lavriotiki. Industrial archaeology goes back a long time in this part of Greece, to opencasts, mines and ore-processing sites whence the ancient city states collected their wealth of silver. As in later times, ore processing depended on water, a very scarce commodity in this baking limestone landscape, and the arrangements for storing water in rock-hewn cisterns are impressive. In the afternoon, after an address of welcome and a sumptuous buffet lunch provided by the Municipality of Lavrion, we visited the extensive site of the French Mining Company founded in 1875 and closed in 1989. Many of the buildings and their machinery survive, together with the complex of flues running to a hilltop chimney. Now the central buildings are being converted to a 'technological-cultural park' annexed to the National Technical University of Athens, an enormous project which demonstrates Greek determination to do something with their industrial heritage for present and future generations. The day ended with 'real' Greek archaeology, at the Temple of Poseidon overlooking a shimmering Aegean Sea as it has done since the 5th century BC, after which the whole party was entertained to another sumptuous buffet meal by the Greek Section of TICCIH.

Monday found delegates heading for Piraeus, Athens' port for many centuries and now an extensive industrial zone which was viewed from the afterdeck of a landing-craft type ferry. This day's welcome and lunch was provided by the Port Authorities, after which we toured the older industrial areas (cameras not welcome) and visited the battleship *G Averoff* built at Livorno in 1911 and armed at Elswick on the Tyne. Not only are all the guns and loading equipment still in place, so are the four compound engines and the 23 coal-fired boilers.

Tuesday required an early start for the northwards journey, a long and hot 400 miles to Thessaloniki. On the way, we visited the port of Volos, which has a tobacco warehouse, earthquake-damaged but now

cleverly restored and converted to an education and training centre; and an extensive and still equipped tile works which is to be restored as a 'cultural centre', demonstrating again a commitment to adaptive re-use for community benefit. Volos is served by railways of standard and metre gauge.

Thessaloniki, Greece's second city, is a fascinating place, the geometrical streets of the modern town laid out after a huge fire in 1917 in the old town below the hilltop citadel. Layers of historic cultures, Roman, Byzantine and Jewish (Salonica was one of the few cities in Europe where Jews were encouraged), appear between the modern buildings, springing from the lower levels which mark the ground surfaces of earlier centuries. 'European City of Culture' in 1997, the TICCIH Conference had been built into the summer's cultural programme - Millennium committees please note!

The rest of TICCIH 97 was based in the Conference Centre at Thessaloniki's International Expo site, a fact proclaimed by a 3-metre high poster at the entrance. The list of 160 delegates showed 24 countries from Canada to Uruguay, with Japan and Russia well represented. Britain fielded a strong delegation reflecting the diverse groups and interests which make up IA in Britain - from the Royal Commissions, English Heritage, Historic Scotland, Ironbridge Institute, Science Museum, Trevithick Trust and of course the AIA. It's interesting to note the parts of the world which weren't represented: Africa, India, Australia and, perhaps predictably, China; is distance the only factor?

The 'conferring' part of the conference began on the Wednesday morning after more welcomes, including one from the Minister for the Aegean. The major theme, Maritime Technologies, springs from the timeless Greek relationship with the sea, and the foundations of that relationship was expertly brought home in John Robinson's keynote address. During the three days there were nearly 80 papers from 85 delegates, with Britain contributing strongly to the sometimes parallel sessions.

In the first session on Maritime Heritage Recording Projects, Keith Falconer (RCHME) spoke on 'Recording English ports and docklands' and Terry James of the Welsh Royal Commission on 'The sea and industry - approaches to an integrated computerised database'. Stuart Smith contributed a paper on 'Global Communications - a Cornish view' to a session on Maritime Heritage Research and Documentation, and Mark Watson (Historic Scotland) joined Dimitra Babalis to explain 'Leith's dockside transformation through warehouse conversion'. John Crompton (National Museums of Scotland) contributed 'Coal exporting ports of Fife' to a session on Seaports and their Identity, and a session on Maritime Constructions Technology heard Michael Stratton (University of York) speak on 'Construction technology and 20th century maritime installations'.

COVER PICTURE

The restored flax scutching windmill at Heule near Kortrijk in Belgium (see Preetjes Mill, page 10)

Photo: Marilyn Palmer

ADVERTISE IN IA NEWS

See page 15 for details

A secondary theme, Industrial Landscapes in Mining Areas, was continued from the Montreal Conference in 1994. Again, Britain made a strong contribution. Stephen Hughes (Welsh Royal Commission) spoke on 'Components of the mining landscape in Wales', Anthony Streeten (English Heritage) discussed 'Managing change in the mining landscapes of England', and Richard Williams talked on 'The treatment and preservation of Cornwall's historic mining landscape'.

Presenting and listening were both subject to risk, the former from sophisticated projectors which wouldn't respond, the latter from simultaneous translation which frequently lagged well behind, especially when French was being translated to English through a middle stage of Greek. Timing went haywire, and any chance of discussion quickly went overboard, and the tasks of Neil Cossons chairing a plenary session and session chairpersons summarising the contributions of their participants was near impossible.

Whilst the days were rather losing their way, the evenings took delegates to wider activities. One evening was devoted to a boat tour round the harbour, disembarking to view an exhibition, 'Risks at Sea'; then a short walking tour of the port buildings leading to another sumptuous feast complete with pig-roast, music and lessons in Greek dancing. Another evening took us to the city flour mill, now a thriving night-club with exhibition space amongst the surviving roller equipment. Less successful was a visit to the Industrial Museum of Thessaloniki housed in a modern industrial unit, not through any fault of the museum or of the special exhibition opening planned to honour our visit, but because of the mosquitoes which devoured us!

Saturday was devoted to two all-day excursions, both relaxed affairs with long periods of forced inactivity. The inclusion of the tombs of the Macedonian kings on an IA day (for those who had not been beguiled by the promise of a steam railway ride) was unexpected. The core of the non-railway excursion was provided by visits to Naoussa and

Edessa, towns which stand on the edge of cliffs over which water tumbles in spectacular display, and both are restoring and adapting their mills for community cultural use. Inevitably there was the municipal hospitality - local fruit served as we explored Naoussa's former woollen mill, once driven by a horizontal wooden turbine; lunch on a shady open-air terrace on the cliff edge; and an evening buffet with the workers on the Edessa Water Park project and their families. Edessa had a complex of small mills at the head of Greece's biggest waterfall, drawing power from the water several times to grind grain, crush sesame seeds, saw wood etc., and these are being stabilised and restored to form a leisure and cultural park. A two-stage glass lift, hurriedly completed for our visit and behaving temperamentally (it worked by oil hydraulics, not water!) leads down the cliff to a turbine-driven rope works, disused but with all its machinery.

Amongst all this activity came TICCIH's organising meetings, of national representatives, of the Board, and the general assembly. Your representative was kept quite busy, presenting and discussing Britain's invitation for TICCIH 2000 and being co-opted to the Board for a three-year term. Between now and the millennium there will be 'interim' conferences in Cuba (1998) and Hungary (1999), and meetings in Belgium and Germany were also proposed. A Russian invitation to the Central Urals was accepted for 2003, and thoughts extended as far as a possible Japan venue for 2006. More immediate is a proposal, widely welcomed, to transform TICCIH into a subscribing membership organisation, beginning with the 1997 conference delegates who were deemed to have paid their first year's subscription; this will depend on a membership secretariat based at Le Creusot and the production of an upgraded newsletter (come back, *World Industrial Archaeology*).

All this enjoyment is tempered by the realisation that it's Britain's turn to host the next in the main, triennial, series in the Millennium year - which is a

good reason why TICCIH 2000 should be the best ever. Another reason is Britain's claim to have 'invented' IA in the first place, though an international perspective does bring the claim into dispute; but the best reason is that we should have the best resources, of achievement in recording, in monuments preserved, and in humans who enthuse and practice IA. It will depend on us all, of course, from all our diverse institutions, societies and interests, to pool resources and pull together. The AIA, the Science Museum and English Heritage have joined forces as joint lead sponsors, and many other groups have expressed their support. Dates are in place, beginning August 30 in London, providing a choice of regional tours to Cornwall, Wales and Scotland from September 3 to 7, and a final evening together in Manchester so that delegates may join the AIA's own conference from August 8.

Memories of TICCIH 1997 are rich and varied: of a widening of perceptions, of new friends and interests made, of days far too hot and far too much food; of the tremendous welcome from Greece in general and the Greek Section of TICCIH in particular; of the depth of organisation and the high quality of publications. Some aspects are rather different from our experience at home - the frequent and unstinting hospitality at municipal expense, for example. The key is, of course, that an international conference was being seen as important, significant, useful to those who were visited. Delegates were being used, to enhance the standing of industrial archaeology and heritage perhaps; to encourage and enthuse the municipalities who are at the threshold of great cultural re-use projects. One felt that the Conference was a valued event!

Will TICCIH 2000 be a valued event in Britain? Will it enhance the standing of industrial archaeology? Will it enthuse government perhaps, or commercial companies, or developers, to put more thought into using Britain's industrial heritage for present and future generations? Will it provide such a welcome and such hospitality as we found in Greece - a hard act to follow! The answers lie within us all.

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