

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

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THE BULLETIN OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

FREE TO MEMBERS OF AIA



**AIA goes to Catalonia • Kew Steam Museum • Crossness • Blaenavon restoration
Wolverhampton canalside • conferences • letters • famous funnel • regional news**



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Simon Thomas
AIA Office, School of Archaeological Studies,
University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH
☎ 0116 252 5337, Fax: 0116 252 5005
e-mail: AIA@le.ac.uk

Website:

www.industrial-archaeology.org.uk

AIA Catalonia Tour

The AIA's tour of Catalonia took place from Monday 19 April to Saturday 24 April 2004. I am sure all those who attended would like to thank James Douet for his excellent notes, seamless translations and great good humour; Eusebi Casanelles i Rahola for all his help, and making so many of his staff available to show us round; Francesc Tarrats, Director General of Cultural Heritage for Catalunya, for taking the time to come and speak to us, and to Paul Saulter for making the arrangements. Few of us probably realise that Paul gives much of his time free to societies like the Newcomen and the AIA. The welcome help of James Douet and Peter Neaverson are acknowledged in compiling this account.

Judith Hodgkinson

Catalunya, as we were to discover during the week, is very different from the rest of Spain, not least in its 200 years of industrialisation, notably in textiles. Having made our own way to Barcelona, 45 members gathered for the evening meal on Monday so we could meet our guide, James Douet, and Joan Munt, president of the Catalan association for industrial archaeology. We also received excellent and extensive packs of information including one or two in a wide series of A4 format booklets intended as teaching aids. Although in Catalan they are well produced and packed with excellent diagrams.

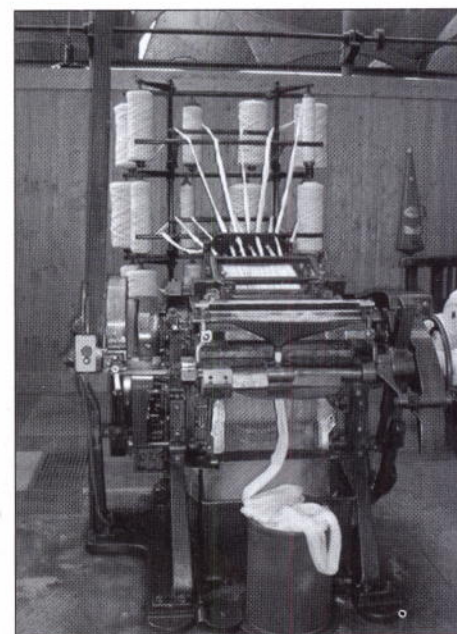
On Tuesday we travelled north east beyond Girona to the town of Banyoles to visit the dilapidated forge at El Comú. As we were to see time and again during the week, the landfall and water supply are such in Catalunya that a surprising number of take-offs is possible. In this case the water supply leat was from a lake and we gathered from our local guide Luis Privát there had been 15 take-offs in one kilometre. At El Comú there were three wheels, driving the trompe blowing system for two hearths and two trip hammers, working first iron and later copper. In rather less than ideal conditions the family operating the forge lived on the floor above. Part of the building had been used for paper-making in the nineteenth century, with a drying space at second floor level. Currently awaiting funding for restoration, most of the remaining structure and machinery is covered in a generous layer of pigeon droppings. A brief coffee-and-comfort break was rather taken advantage of and somewhat scuppered the timetable for the rest of the day. Did we think this was a holiday?

Our second visit was to the Gerunda eau-de-vie distillery at Girona in a fine Modernista building of 1911 by Domenech i Montaner. Distilling is now carried on in the firm's other premises in Galicia in NW Spain, but the fruit flavours are still produced here. The attention of the steam-buffs focused on the remarkably small vertical-boiler steam engine by Alexander Hermanos (Brothers) of Barcelona, (but of Scottish origin). We were shown round by Maria

del Mar Vich and her father and saw the bottling and packing plant. Then on to Anglès for a 1½ hour three-course lunch in a local restaurant, with the region's Penedes wine freely available which established the pattern for the week.

Then followed a walk to the Vapor Burés cotton mill, where we were met and taken round by Emile Rams. Established in 1872 exploiting the hydraulic potential of the river Ter on the fringe of the old town, it became necessary for the owners to provide facilities to attract labour. Initially a canteen was provided, and from 1889 accommodation, shops and a school, thus creating a colònia or colony, the first of several of these interesting developments which we would see during the week. In 1958 nearly 1,200 people were employed spinning and weaving cotton. Only very recently closed and cleared of its textile machinery, the main attraction at the mill now is the cross-compound horizontal steam engine built by La Maquinista Terrestre y Marítima de Barcelona which was added to supplement water power following further expansion of the mill. This has been bought by the local council at the disposal auction to ensure its preservation. We continued past the blocks of flats associated with the mill and the fine 'Torre' or owner's mansion before returning to the coach.

Our lengthy lunch meant that we had to forego the photo-stop at two hydroelectric stations (opened 1905 and 1916) as we were at least 2 hours behind schedule. Unfortunately and unforgivably this meant that we missed meeting the Mayor of Montcada for the official launch of the newly-restored steam-powered pumping station built in 1879 on the outskirts of Barcelona. The industrial settlement of Montcada has been important in the supply of water to Barcelona since Roman times, and the delightful buildings have been restored to form a slightly



Textile machinery at the Museu de la Ciència i de la Tècnica
Photo: Judith Hodgkinson

COVER PICTURE

The bunting is out to celebrate the steaming of one of the great beam engines at Crossness on 4 April 2004 (see page 8)

Photo: R J M Carr