

North East Derbyshire Industrial Archaeology Society

NEDIAS Newsletter No. 25 – February 2007

Price: £1.00 (Free to Members)



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Chairman's Comments:

Welcome to our first Newsletter for 2007, a year which already looks to be one of the busiest to date for NEDIAS. The change of venue back to the Friends' Meeting House coincided with the talk by Peter Kennett, although based on the development of the Vulcan bomber, ranged over a wide spectrum of aviation's development. The talk was notable for bringing in a large number of new faces and saw the highest attendance level for many months. It was a much needed rejuvenation after the December debacle when the day had to be saved by Peter Hawkins' talk on Markham & Company when our scheduled speaker missed his moment. I can but offer profound apologies to those who came to hear the due speaker but am sure the situation was rescued and, dare I say enhanced, by Peter's talk generously offered at very short notice.

We are developing a couple of summer visits (see pp2-3), and NEDIAS will also be taking part in the Walking Festival being organised by the County Council Ranger Service for the Spring Bank Holiday weekend. NEDIAS has offered three guided walks (see p11) and details will shortly be available in the DCC brochure for the event. On top of that, we have an invitation (see p11) from Chesterfield Borough Council to take part in a project to identify those unlisted buildings of the borough which are significant to our heritage so fresh air aplenty can be had this coming summer.

For those who prefer more leisurely pursuits, there is always the need for well researched papers or articles for NEDIAS Journal No. 2. Following on from the success of No. 1 in 2006, we have decided that our next Journal will be published in 2008. This not only limits the amount of fair wear and tear imposed by NEDIAS on our editor, Cliff Lea, but gives our members a chance to complete their research and the written outcomes.

Before that, we have the AGM in March for which Malcolm Calow has kindly agreed to give us a film show. Based on the visits and explorations by NEDIAS, it will be a tangible reminder of some of the highlights of our past activities. This will be followed by a forward looking display in the foyer of Chesterfield Library in April. The aim of the display is to promote interest in our activities and, hopefully, increase our membership and enhance our ability to record north east

Derbyshire's industrial heritage for the benefit of our future generations. Here's hoping for an interesting and successful year.

David Wilmot

WHAT'S ON?

When: Meetings are usually held the second Monday of each month, starting at 7.30 pm.

Where: **Friends' Meeting House, Ashgate Road, Chesterfield.**

NEDIAS Lecture Programme, 2007

12 th March 2007	Annual General Meeting Followed by: <i>Malcolm Calow's Video footage of NEDIAS events.</i>
16 th April 2007	Colin Briggs: <i>"Mill Lane Dronfield"</i>
14 th May 2007	Tony Marsh: <i>"The Plimsoll Line"</i>

Other Diary Dates:

20 th March 2007	Jonathan Ayles: <i>"A technology that changed the world: wartime drama, the Cold War, conflict and economic miracle – how the wide strip mill came to Europe."</i> SYIHS, Kelham Island, 7:30pm.
20 th March 2007	Cliff Lea: <i>"Derbyshire's oil Industry: an impressive past and an intriguing future"</i> . C&DLHS, Rose Hill United Reformed Church, Chesterfield, 7:30pm.
26 th March 2007	Mike Hayden, Chesterfield Planning Officer: <i>Redevelopment of the A61 corridor including of the sites of the previous (and future?) canal basins.</i> 7:30pm Library Lecture Theatre, Chesterfield Canal Trust AGM.
14-15 th April 2007	AIA Ironbridge Weekend at Coalbrookdale, on the subject of <i>"Roads: Characteristics and Forms of Transport"</i> . Bookings via AIA Liaison Office on 0116 252 5005. Open to members of affiliated societies such as NEDIAS.
16 th April 2007	David Rance, David Wilmot, Derek Bayliss: <i>"Damstead Works, Dronfield, and spindle making in the Sheffield area."</i> SYIHS, Kelham Island, 7:30pm

Forthcoming NEDIAS Visits

Monday 21 May 2007: Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust Museum, Wilmoor Road, Sinfin, Derby

It is surprising that RR has not yet featured in NEDIAS schedules, but we're delighted that not only will we be given a tour of the RR Heritage Trust Museum at Sinfin, Derby, but that **Mike Evans, founder member of the RR Trust, and a globally renowned speaker on RR history, has agreed to give an initial presentation to us.**

There will be no entry charge, but members **must** pre-book on the booking form which will at our regular meetings. Names are essential: RR need details of all names before the event, for security purposes.

Members should make their own way to the RR Heritage Trust Museum, **meeting well in time**

for a prompt 7:00pm lecture start. The venue is at RR's gate 5A, Wilmore Road. See details below

Follow the A5111 (Raynesway) to the roundabout at the junction of the A6. Turn left and then immediately right at the next roundabout, continuing on the A5111. Go straight ahead at the next roundabout (with the footbridge over it). At the next traffic lights, turn left into Moor Lane. At the end of Moor Lane, turn Left into Victory Road. After a short distance turn right at a mini-roundabout into Wilmore Road; the Training Centre/Heritage Trust is immediately on the right. (Gate 5a).

Monday 25 June 2007: The Shardlow Mid-Summer Saunter & Supper

Something of a tradition has developed within NEDIAS for a summer evening visit by members and friends to a place of interest for a guided tour followed by some supper. There is to be slight change this year as we are forsaking the world of steel rails for a canal experience. On the evening of **Monday 25th June 2007**, there will be a guided walk with a member of the Shardlow Heritage Trust to look at the canal-based township created by the late-18thC arrival of the Trent & Mersey Canal. This will be followed by a buffet supper in the Clock Warehouse, a former canal building which straddles an arm of the canal and has in more recent times served as a public house.

The cost, including the guided tour and buffet supper, will be £12.50 per head. **Numbers are limited and Advance Booking is Essential.** Booking forms will be available at our March AGM 2007. For further details, contact David Wilmot (01246 854180 'most' evenings or email david.wilmot@lycos.co.uk)

Mill Lane, Dronfield *Colin Briggs*

Ed – Colin gave a fascinating insight into the social contexts of Mill Lane at a very well researched presentation to the Old Dronfield Society last year, and we were pleased to be able to book him for a talk to NEDIAS on 16 April. He will particularly be looking at the part played by industrial activities along the lane, and his research very much complements the survey work of Damstead Works conducted by Paul Smith and other NEDIAS members some years ago. Colin has kindly sent to me the following pre-talk taster...and intriguing teaser! See you at his talk?

My Mill Lane focus has been mainly social, because some old people remember how the lane once was, so it's use it or lose it, but I'm very aware there was industry in the lane too. The problem with drawing this into my work is the same as that forcing the present emphasis: there was no effort to create even a superficial record before demolition circa 1960. This is understandable, the lane was just one of innumerable old streets subjected to hasty post-war clearance and like them its earlier outline can be seen in maps and the odd photo.



Earthwork at Mill Lane, Dronfield.

But unlike the many, Mill Lane's vulnerability to flooding prevented redevelopment, meaning there's still evidence of how things were.

One archaeological aspect has nagged me relentlessly since the summer of 2003, when Paul Smith of NEDIAS commented on it while surveying the Damstead Works. It's an earthwork spanning the lane. Presently I suspect it might date to, say, the sixteenth century. Another growing nag results from an April 2006 tour of what's now called the Bridge Works. Some of its structure looks to correlate with buildings drawn on Victorian plans and maps, so I've formed an impression that the fabric might hold elements of those earlier features. Suspicions and impressions are one thing, but assessing whether they might be fact is beyond me, so that's one reason I'd like to plead for competent attention to Mill Lane.

Another reason is that the flooding problem has been solved and given today's demand for building land, well... Do I object to development? Not as such, because we can't preserve everything for future generations, but shouldn't we try to make amends for past failings by leaving a record? The thing is, over the last four years I've come to think that Mill Lane should be seen for what it is, i.e., an accidentally frozen, fragmentary relic of Dronfield's social and industrial history. The trouble is, as with the social side, I can't escape the feeling that the clock's ticking.

Joseph Wright's "The Air Pump", and a connexion with Joseph Priestley. *John Rowland*

Ed – My comments about a newly exhibited painting of James Watt in the November 2006 edition of NEDIAS Newsletter has brought an intriguing observation from John Rowland about another Lunar Society member, the famous chemist Joseph Priestley. Read on...

Have a really good look at the attached picture. It is 'An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump' by the Derby painter Joseph Wright. (A great artist, but not very good at titles.) It has been much admired from when it was first exhibited in 1768 right down to the present day, but the understanding of its subject matter has deteriorated over the past 230 years thanks to the efforts of technically-unaware critics who have obscured both artistic excellence and scientific truth with cheap symbolism.

So, what's happening? It's generally accepted that the painting shows a gathering of The Lunar Society of Birmingham, a group which met every lunar month to discuss 'philosophical' subjects and watch experiments after the fashion of the more formal Royal Society of London. Meetings were held at the time of the full moon, (there is a very obvious clue in the painting) not for any deep mysterious purpose, but simply so that all those who had a job to do next day could see their way home! The members were by no means just the idle rich.

The eye is drawn to the grey-haired central figure, who is about to revive a white parakeet in the glass vacuum vessel by opening a valve. He is usually described as 'a travelling scientific lecturer', but I regard this as mistake number one. What professional lecturer would appear before his audience in a ragged shirt and a dressing gown? He is clearly in his own home. In the eighteenth century it was perfectly normal for the master, (and even the lady) of the house to entertain friends in 'undress' as it was then known. On the other hand, any professional visitor such as a solicitor, doctor or paid lecturer would be formally clothed.

My personal theory is that the house belongs to Dr. Joseph Priestley, the chemist and non-conformist preacher. Priestley lived in Birmingham; he was a Lunar Society member, and an expert on the chemistry of gases. At that time (1768) he would have been 35, so this is not an accurate portrait, but the face shows many of the features seen in contemporary portraits of the



distinguished chemist, such as the hooded eyes, large nose, fleshy eyebrows and 'wearing his own hair', i.e. no wig. Perhaps Wright, invoking artistic license, wanted an 'eminence grise'. Priestley was supported to the extent of £100 per year (15 to £20,000 today) by the richer members of the Society including the industrialist Matthew Boulton, the potter Wedgwood, and the polymath Dr. Erasmus Darwin, all of whom followed his researches with great interest.

Art historians are comfortable with the air pump and the effect of a partial vacuum on the bird, and correctly identify the pair of 'drawing-room size' Magdeburg hemispheres on the table, but that is as far as the rational approach goes. In the most recent book on Wright's life and work, (Tate Gallery 1990) author Judy Egerton writes: 'Other objects on the table include.....a tall phial of liquid, a cork, and a pair of Magdeburg hemispheres....' In fact, the liquid in the 'phial' is not relevant; the important thing is the gas in the space above it! Priestley used glass bottles of this design to collect gas in his experiments. A bottle full of water would be inverted with the neck submerged in a large vessel of water (a 'pneumatic trough' as he called it) and any gas from a heated retort collected by piping it into the bottle so that it displaced some of the water. Tightly corked, the gas sample could be stored for later investigation. In the picture the cork has been removed, and a lighted taper placed inside leaving sooty marks on the glass, obvious on close inspection of the original, now in the National Gallery. The result of this test could be that the flame is extinguished, or it flares up, or even causes an explosion. Priestley did not discover oxygen (which would have given the latter result) until 1774, and although 'flammable air' (hydrogen) was known at that time, in the 1760s Priestley was investigating 'fixed air' or carbon dioxide, and its importance in the respiration of both plants and animals. The characteristics of 'fixed air' had been first studied by the Scottish professor Joseph Black (1754), and the 'fire extinguishing' test for it was well known, so there is no doubt in my mind that the bottle, cork and taper were used to demonstrate one of the properties of carbon dioxide. (Such is the accuracy of Wright's draughtsmanship that the taper can be seen to be a tightly-rolled strip

of paper, or 'spill'.)

Wright's use of concealed lamps in his paintings was much admired, and in 'The Air Pump' the light is obscured and diffused by a large goblet full of cloudy liquid. This has been the source of some misguided speculation, in particular from the pen of one William Schupbach, writing in 1989. His tedious and obscure speculations are quoted at length by Ms. Egerton:

'By far the most interesting recent observation on 'The Air Pump' is William Schupbach's. He observes that there appears to be 'a carious human skull' in the large glass jar which stands on the table,its cloudy liquid masking the candle's flame. The skull is not part of the lecturer's normal equipment (it is; he keeps his brain in it, Mr. S.JR) but as Schupbach suggests, must be a motif introduced by Wright as a symbol of death. The theme of mortality is echoed in the painting by the unexpected reflection of the candle snaking up the left side of the glass containing the skull. Skull and candle are traditional companions in iconography, the candle demonstrating the consuming passage of time, and the skull its effect. The philosopher seems to point with his right index finger down to this combined reminder of mortality. The function of the rod which stands in the flask is, at a formal level, to guide the viewer's eye from the philosopher's finger to the skull". As Schupbach adds, this interpretation makes "'The Air Pump' in part a vanitas picture", reminding us that "death is inevitable and its moment unpredictable", and so implying that the bird in the experiment will die.'

The 18th Century is now regarded as the Age of Enlightenment. So, how would an enlightened member of the Lunar Society of Birmingham have explained the goblet of cloudy liquid?

'Dr. Priestley's lecture concerns the bonds between living creatures and air. He is demonstrating that a bird cannot survive without air; he has shown that 'fixed air' is different from common air because it extinguishes a flame. It is therefore entirely logical that he would prove that the common air we breathe, or some part of it, is changed to fixed air when we exhale. An excellent test for fixed air, even if mixed with other gases, already exists. Although brought to our attention by Professor Joseph Black of Edinburgh, it was discovered in the last (i.e., 17th....JR) Century by Van Helmont, and consists of a clear solution of slaked lime. When fixed air is blown through this liquid, it turns cloudy due to the generation of fine chalk particles. (The decreasing number of educated persons in the 21st century would explain that carbon dioxide forms carbonate ions in water, which react with calcium hydroxide to form a suspension of calcium carbonate.....JR) Some hours or days before his guests were due, the Doctor would have prepared the reagent solution by adding lime to water, giving it a good stir, and leaving it to stand in a large glass vessel, such as the one seen in Mr. Wright's recent masterpiece.'

In the 18th Century 'lime burning' was a small-scale activity akin to charcoal-burning. Limestone was burned with wood or charcoal in small kilns, often by farmers who used the lime as a soil conditioner. In such earlier times lime was a rough impure product, only crushed to a fine powder if required to make builder's mortar. Dr. Priestley would have obtained a few pieces of impure lime from a local farmer. The curious object in the goblet which has puzzled so many is simply a lump of farmer's lime.

Prior to the lecture, the lump of slaked lime would have been seen immersed in a still, clear liquid. After an appropriate explanation, the Doctor would have invited a guest to blow into this liquid. This would have been easy enough, because the 'rod' resting in the goblet is clearly a tube, if one is allowed to take a close look at the original work. Once again, Wright's accuracy makes its purpose clear. As for a suitable guest, who better than the boy on the left? He has obviously done his best, because the liquid has not only gone cloudy, it has also been recently agitated: there are bubbles around the meniscus, and droplets adhering to both the inside and outside of the glass. Without doubt, the living creature has exhaled fixed air.

Although I have concentrated on the picture's technical content, much of its merit depends upon the sensitively observed reactions of the ten subjects. When the novelist Gustave Flaubert visited England in 1865-6, he appreciated this point immediately, making no attempt to wring a flood from the damp clout of symbolism:

'Wright; Experience de la machine pneumatique. Effect de nuit. Deux amoureux dans un coin, charmants. Le vieux (a longs cheveux) qui montre l'oiseau sous le verre. Petit fille qui pleure. Charmant de naivete et de profondeur.'

'An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump'. A simple yet profound work, with no mysterious symbols, and no hidden message except perhaps that truth, clarity and the spirit of rational inquiry will prevail.

John, I think your rational research has shown us the light; maybe you should write to the Tate, and the curator at Derby have to say? Ed.

Iron Production by Blast Furnace at Storforth Lane

Darrell Clark

The Hunloke family of Wingerworth Hall and the exploitation of mineral wealth on their estate have been well documented by David G. Edwards in his book "The Hunlokes of Wingerworth", published 1976. One aspect of these events, the extent of the ironstone workings and the size of the blast furnace operations on Hunloke land at Storforth Lane, Hasland, is I feel worth exploring further.

It is necessary to state that the Hunloke family lands have been used for iron production since before 1545; although evidence suggests at this early date Nicholas Hunloke took over the control of the workings and of production, its exact site remains unknown as far as I am aware.

Other water powered charcoal fired iron works are recorded by Farey, operating from the 1620s until 1784.

The Storforth Lane blast furnaces were apparently established by Yates of Rotherham. The three furnaces, according to financial accounts of 1864-5 suggest the output was 2000 tons per month.

The whole works and its rail connections to the Midland Railway, either side of the still-existing Storforth Lane bridge are quite clearly shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1876/1877.

Those of us who like me lived in Hasland in the 1940s will clearly remember the slag heap (it was quite easy to climb to the top I remember). What I am not able to confirm is the method of getting the slag to the tipping point on the top. The O.S. map does seem to indicate it was by bucket and wire rope hoist, but it was long gone even in my boyhood.

Turning to the extraction of the ironstone on the estate, the earliest workings, certainly up to the beginning of the 19th century were bell pits, the main line of these corresponded with the outcrop of the blackshale coal seam. Today its line is marked by an intermittent line of trees running from Woodthorpe in the south to Walton in the North.

Referring again to the O.S. map the use of a Tramway (what was its motive power?) running from due south parallel to the Derby Road before turning westwards across the road at Birdholme House into the hill on which Wingerworth Village sits; these workings of The Wingerworth Iron Company date from the 1840s to the 1870s.

I hope this article will provoke at least some lively discussion within the membership or even a greater in-depth study by a group of us.





Letters

A voice for Non-Professional Archaeologists

I am writing to inform you of a recent initiative to create a Special Interest Group within the IFA devoted to furthering the interest of the Avocational Archaeologist. That is basically people like you and me, those who are not involved in 'professional' archaeology in the sense that we don't do it for the money we do it for the love of the subject.

In order to form the group I need the support of 15 members of any class of the IFA, I already have 8 people signed up and would like to fill the ranks with true avocationalists like myself. The IFA rule for the formation of groups is that you are allowed to be a member of WHATEVER class. Only the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer have to be corporate members. We are still looking for volunteers for the posts of Secretary and Treasurer. The formative group has strong support within both the IFA and the CBA and is seen as being an important step in reinforcing the relationship between 'professional' and 'amateur' archaeology in the 21st Century.

I would therefore encourage any current IFA members reading this to sign up for the group by emailing me, and also encourage your members to become part of the IFA at whatever grade they feel comfortable. The IFA has two grades of non-corporate membership Student and Affiliate, for further details visit the IFA website at www.archaeologists.net.

I would welcome IFA members from the academic, professional or non-commercial sectors to sign up for the new SIG. I think together not only could we continue and expand the long tradition of active fieldwork by local groups but provide a training ground for future 'professional' archaeologists.

If like me you have an active avocational interest in archaeology, then this is the way for us to have our voice heard within the IFA.

Regards,

Jeff Morris MA PIFA

jeff.morris66@ntlworld.com

Linacre Over Lead Smelting Mill

Dear Cliff

I am an archaeology student at Sheffield University. I have undertaken survey of Linacre Over Lead Smelting works for a module of survey techniques and am look for background information for my report. I have been to local studies in Matlock and Chesterfield plus the local records office and am in touch with Severn Trent. I wondered if anyone in your organisation might be able to add information or help with interpretation of the site.

Thanks

Mary Wilde

mary@crackpot.fsnet.co.uk

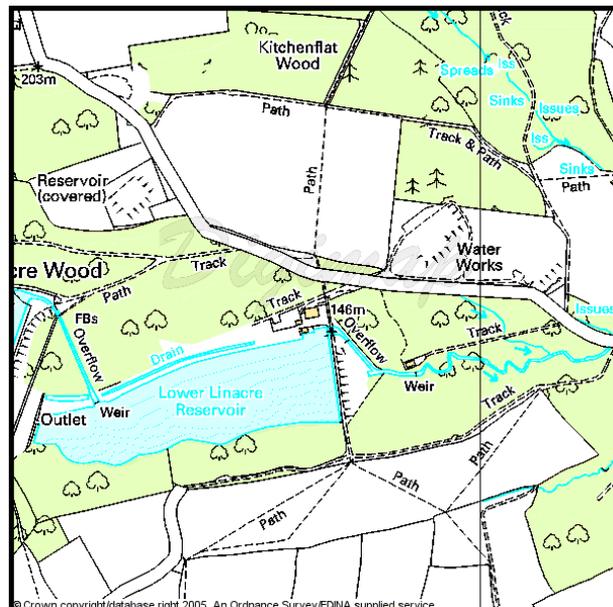
Project summary:

The aims of this project were to produce a survey and report of the Linacre Over Lead Smelting Mill using appropriate survey techniques. The site was selected as although some survey work has been undertaken in the area by the Trent and Peak Archaeological Unit, a more detailed survey would provide a good record of the site at this point in time and enable further

interpretation and risk assessment to be carried out. The site is situated below the lower Linacre reservoir as shown in the map [right] (Ordnance Survey/EDINA 2005).

A visual assessment was undertaken followed by three days surveying using an EDM to produce a hachure survey of the key features including q-pits, track, dam, wheel pit, tail race and mill pond. The plan is in the process of being drawn up.

Although these features are quite clear on the ground, questions arise such as what effect the construction of the lower reservoir had on the site, what was the extent of the millpond and how has the course of the brook changed over time.



Any information or views regarding these questions, or additional thoughts about the site would be much appreciated.

Ed – Do we have any members who have an interest and would like to help with the interpretation of this survey at Linacre? Mary was at our last meeting in February, and would welcome contact from any members who have an interest. Please contact Mary directly at mary@crackpot.fsnet.co.uk

Staveley Ironworks.

Dear Cliff.

I am interested in finding out about Staveley and Stanton Ironworks history from 1841 to 1920.

My Great-Grandfather was Job Allen jnr born in 1849 at Brimington. His father Job snr. born 1812, Brimington, was an Ironstone Miner in 1841, 1851, 1861. By 1871 he was Publican at the Angel Inn, 235 South Street, Whittington and in 1881 he is a General Shopkeeper living at 339 Wellington Street, Whittington. How he made the transition from miner to publican is not known.

By 1861 the sons of Job snr. are William 20, Seth 18, Job jnr. 12 and Cephas 10. All are classed as Iron Moulders. In 1871 Seth and Job jnr. are still Moulders but Cephas is now a miner, presumably for iron ore but could he have been into coal by this time? In 1881 Job jnr. is married and living at 272 South Street, Whittington, still a Moulder. In 1891 Job jnr. is still a Moulder living with his family (5 children) at 353 South Street. By 1901 Job jnr, with family (6 children) are living at 77 Hallam Street, Ilkeston and his occupation is Iron Founder.

My grandmother remembered taking a jug of ale into Stanton Ironworks for her father's lunch and my father always said that his Grandfathers house had a brass doorknocker, the only one in the street. There is also a gold pocket watch in the family belonging to his wife.

1. I am interested in a number of aspects:
2. I would be interested to know where the iron ore was mined locally and anything about iron ore mining in the area.
3. I am intrigued to know what the differences would have been in occupation between the brothers, all classed as Moulders with such ages, particularly a 10 year old.
4. What would have been the likely reason for moving to Stanton, was there already a link between Stanton and Staveley?
5. Was an Iron Founder a Foreman managing Moulders?

6. If so what was the relative status of a Founder with respect to other manual trades.
7. Could an Ironstone Miner save up to become a publican?
8. Were the houses at Whittington owned by Staveley Company?

Any other relevant information would be gratefully received.

As one bred (1943) and brought up in Bolsover I do know the area well, but now living in Northumberland, the chances to do local research are limited with trips to Chesterfield being generally confined to visiting relatives.

Robert Doughty
Wylam
Northumberland.
robert.doughty32@btinternet.com

Ed: David W has already passed some comments on to Mr Doughty, but interested members are asked to make contact.

I.A. News and Notes

Walks Festival

The North East Derbyshire District Council with other local bodies are organising a Walks Festival for the Spring Bank Holiday weekend, 26th, 27th, 28th May. Over 30 walks are included the programme covering a variety of topics. NEDIAS has contributed 3 walks.

On the Saturday David Wilmot is leading a tour of Clay Cross to include its Industrial past and connections with George Stephenson.

On the Sunday Patricia Pick is leading a walk from Ashover taking in the Ashover Light Railway, lead mining and quarrying.

Also on the Sunday Patricia Pick is leading a walk from Holymoorside to include the Chimney at Stanedge.

Details of all the walks will be available in a leaflet published in March and available from the Tourist Information Centre, Tapton Lock and Clay Cross visitor centre.

A “Local List of Local Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest”

Chesterfield Borough Council’s Conservation Officer has written to NEDIAS asking for our assistance with the creation of a list of buildings within its historic environment. The list is to stand alongside the existing Statutory List managed by English Heritage and Central Government, but just as a source of local information. The Council is aware that there have been a number of buildings within the Borough which “were of architectural or historic interest and contributed positively to the street scene [but] have been lost through development proposals”. We are assured that there is no intention to change the existing planning controls which apply to a building as the aim is to provide clarity to owners, the local community, developers and planning officers on the significance of the building in question to the historic environment.

This proposal is a considerable step forward, fulfilling a long-felt need given the number of industrial or transport based buildings, large and small, which have disappeared in just the last five years. We therefore propose to form a small group within NEDIAS to work with the Borough Council on this project and we ask members who may be interested in helping to give

their names and contact details to David Wilmot (01246 854180; David.Wilmot@lycos.co.uk) as soon as possible.

NEDIAS Exhibition in Chesterfield Library, April 2007

Don't miss the NEDIAS exhibition in the foyer at Chesterfield Library, to run throughout April, and showcasing some of our activities. A superb display put together by Jacqui Currell.

... and Finally ...

... an Explosive industrial future for conkers!

Cliff Lea

The government in 1917 issued a circular to schools, asking that horse chestnuts should be collected that autumn by school children, and should be sent to the Director of Propellant Supplies, Ministry of Munitions.

It seems that horse chestnuts contain a high level of starch, and were needed as raw materials in a secret process for the industrial production of the chemical Acetone, a precursor for certain explosives. That other source of starch, the potato, was sorely needed to feed the nation. A factory was specially built at King's Lynn, for conversion of starch, a major constituent of conkers, by fermentation, saving use of valuable foodstuffs.

Children throughout Britain were asked to collect conkers; vast quantities were said to have been collected, but only 3000 tons reached King's Lynn, the transport and delivery being hampered by other wartime transport priorities.

The plant apparently began production in April 1918, but due to the variability of the feedstock, ceased production in July 1918. Clearly a bad time for industrial use of the nation's conkers.

But a most curious affair; what could have been a fascinating industrial project has ended up consigned to the litter bins of IH trivia.

NEDIAS Committee: *Chairman* – David Wilmot; *Secretary* – Patricia Pick; *Treasurer* – Pamela Alton; *Membership Secretary/Assistant Treasurer* – Jean Heathcote; *Publicity/Publications* – Cliff Lea; *Lecture Meetings* – David Rance; *Visits Co-ordinator* – Brian Dick; *Archivist* – Pete Wilson; *Committee Members* – Roger Evans; Derek Grindell; David Hart.

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