

# North East Derbyshire Industrial Archaeology Society



## NEDIAS Newsletter No. 62 – May 2016

Price: £2.00 (Free to Members)



### The George Stephenson Centenary and “a generous offer” Darrell Clark

Further to Philip Cousin's insight into the 1948 George Stephenson Centenary events in NEDIAS Newsletters 55/56/57/59 in 2015, I would like to add what I believe to be of interest to members on the same subject.

In 2008 on the 60th Anniversary of the celebrations, Chesterfield Railway Modellers created a 00 scale model of Chesterfield's Market Place Station which was of course where the main commemoration event took place.

The building of the station itself and the buildings opposite on West Bars looking very accurate representations, with the Crooked Spire Church at the top of St Marys Gate very prominent.

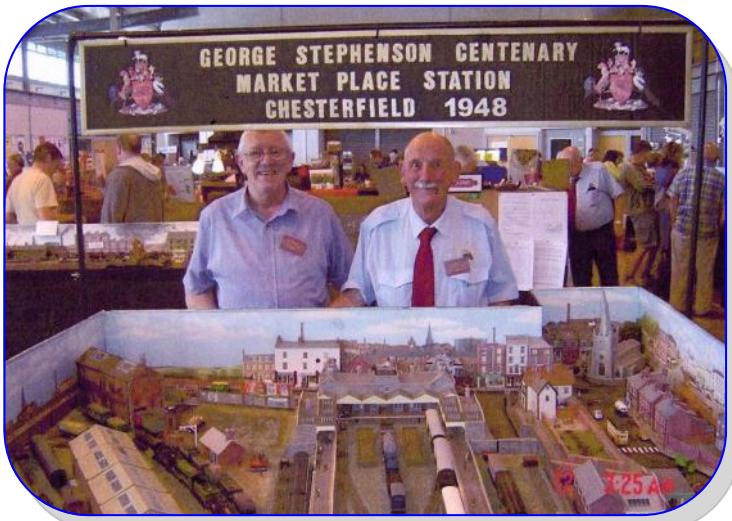


Fig 1: Maurice Poulson and Darrell Clark, two of the club's members, looking over the re-created scene

Having attended the event, Maurice as a 15-year old and Darrell as a 12-year old, our recollections were not good enough to add the detail needed, so we worked from images such as in Fig. 2.

From the collections of locomotives and rolling stock held by club members we were able to recreate with reasonable accuracy the line-up including the re-built Patriot Class 4-6-0 45529, which was given the name “Stephenson” during the celebration time.

One of the lesser known exhibits was a 1/5 scale model of Stephenson's locomotive “Rocket”; it was made in the handicraft workshop of Hasland Hall School.



Fig 2: Chesterfield Market Place Station Line-up

**In this issue:** ■ The George Stephenson Centenary and “a generous offer” ■ What's On? ■ Visit to Chesterfield Museum ■ Kenning's Manor Offices and the Plowright connection ■ More on Sir George Kenning ■ IA News & Notes ■ Chairman's Chat ■ Letters to the Editor ■ The View from Below: looking at the Industrial Revolution from a different angle ■ And Finally ... “Like” us on Facebook ■



Fig 3 (Left): The unveiling on 31 October 2005 of Stephen Hicklin's statue of George Stephenson at Chesterfield Railway Station. Present were the then Chesterfield MP Paul Holmes, leader of the council Walter Burrows, and the Mayor of Chesterfield Keith Falconer.

My memory as a pupil of that school at the time was the handicraft teacher Brian Coombes insisting it had moving motion gear, and the wheels all driven by a hidden electric motor. It was a huge undertaking for him and some of the more able (woodworking) pupils – it was completed on time, and it looked the part!

The full size working replica of *Rocket* was on show at the event, prior to spending two days on display as part of the second Chesterfield Market Festival. The replica, had been on loan from the National Railway Museum in York, and it was also to spend a day working at Barrow Hill Roundhouse, giving rides to visitors.



Finally, turning again to the 00 gauge model of Chesterfield Market Place Station – a very generous offer! Maurice, now in his mid-eighties is most anxious the model be kept intact, and would appeal to any member of NEDIAS who would like to have it (free of charge of course) to contact the Chairman Cliff to arrange the transfer of ownership.

Fig 4 (Right): The full-size replica of "Rocket" arrives at Chesterfield Station

## WHAT'S ON?

### NEDIAS Lecture Programme

**M**eetings are held at: St Thomas' Centre, Chatsworth Road, Brampton (opposite Vauxhall/Bristol St Motors) S40 3AW. There's plenty of parking in their own car park, including disabled spaces, as well as on-road parking in front of the Church. All meetings commence at 7:30pm.

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Monday, 12th September 2016 | Bob Gellatly – “100 years of Immingham Docks”  |
| Monday, 10th October 2016   | Robin Fielder - “Much more than Stainless: the life of Harry Brearley, including his Chesterfield period.” |
| Monday, 14th November 2016  | Michael Parkin - “The Pentrich Revolution”   |

## Other Diary Dates

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Thursday, 12th May 2016</b>  | “ <b>Coal Mining</b> ” talk by mining surveyor Robert Bradley at Gothic Warehouse on the canal wharf at Cromford Mill. Arkwright Society event. 7:00pm includes wine & cheese. £7.50. Booking at 01629 825995.  |
| <b>Monday, 16th May 2016</b>  | “ <b>The future of historic weirs</b> ” by James Thomson. Sheffield Environment Week Lecture and SYIHS. Kelham Island Museum, 7:30pm. Info Derek Bayliss 0114 230 7693  |
| <b>Thursday, 19th May 2016 to Saturday, 21st May 2016</b>                       | <b>Barrow Hill Roundhouse – Rail Ale Festival.</b><br>Details: <a href="http://www.railalefestival.com/">http://www.railalefestival.com/</a>  |
| <b>Saturday, 28th May 2016 and Sunday 29th May 2016</b>                         | Inland Waterways Association <b>National Trailboat Festival</b> and <b>Chesterfield Canal Festival 2016</b> at Staveley Town Basin from 10am to 5:00pm.   |
| <b>Tuesday, 20th September 2016</b>   | “ <b>The History of Whittington</b> ” by Barry Bingham. Chesterfield & District Local History Society meeting at United Reformed Church, next to Chesterfield Town Hall. 7:00pm.  |
| <b>Thursday, 13th October 2016</b>  | “ <b>Taking the Waters – the history of spas and hydros</b> ” talk by Mike Higginbottom. Gothic Warehouse on the canal wharf at Cromford Mill. Arkwright Society event. 7pm includes wine & cheese. £7.50 Booking at 01629 825995   |
| <b>STOP PRESS:</b><br><b>Saturday, 4th June 2016</b><br><b>10:00am – 1:00pm</b> | 3-mile level walk led by Martyn Taylor-Cockayne at Jacksdale/Codnor on Cromford Canal to view relicts of Butterley Ironworks. More info on NEDIAS web site Events Page at <a href="http://nedias.co.uk/?page_id=316">http://nedias.co.uk/?page_id=316</a> .<br>No charge. Book via Brian Dick – 01246 205 720 |

## Visit to Chesterfield Museum

**O**n Saturday 13 February a group from NEDIAS were taken “behind the scenes” to see some of the archived collection at Chesterfield Museum. We were led by Maria Barnes, Collections Manager and after a short presentation we were able to browse amongst the stacks and shelves to see the really fascinating collection.



Maria Barnes, Collections Manager, greets the NEDIAS group



Part of the extensive collection

Mention of Kennings Ltd in Darrell Clarke's and David Bevis's articles (NEDIAS Newsletter number 61, February 2016), brought back a few memories to me. In the late 1970s, fresh from school, I worked at a number of their premises when employed by Parsons. I particularly remember their Manor Offices on Old Road. There we were installing, I think, a new mains feeder cable for the computer room. I was particularly impressed with this facility – the first time I had seen anything like this apart from on television. Unbeknown to me at the time was that the building had a quite separate history under the company that had it built – Plowright Brothers Ltd. Plowrights had what was termed their design and administration offices opened in May 1958, at a cost of some £100,000, on Old Road, Brampton – later the headquarters building of Kennings.

Plowrights' business was originally formed in 1878 by Robert Plowright and his three sons Robert, Henry James and William Oliver. They took over John Sneath's iron and brass founders in Shepley Street, Brampton. In a 1960s company history it was said that two brothers (William and Robert) had been trained in the Royal Dockyard, Portsmouth, later went to Russia (where they started an engineering works), before returning to Chesterfield. Apparently their father had some position in the Russian government. There was also involvement in the Walton Pottery Works from 1892, after the Briddons went bankrupt there. A partnership involving Henry James, William Oliver and Robert Plowright was dissolved at the end of June 1895 – at this time the business comprised the pottery and the 'Brampton Works' engineering business. Henry James Plowright retired at this time owing to ill health – the business being carried on by William and Robert. In the early days of the three brother's partnership Henry undertook travelling for the company, William Oliver acted as draftsman, while Robert Plowright was the works manager.

The early years of Plowrights were apparently spent continuing the existing Sneath business which serviced the beaver hat industry (in nearby Beaver Place), potteries and other local industries. The business's skill in engineering became known to local colliery engineers, who were soon using Plowrights for urgent repairs. It has also been said that the first steam railway engine used in Russia was made and exported by Plowrights. William died in 1910, Robert having died some 12 years earlier.

1902 saw the firm become a limited liability company, with expertise being demonstrated in mechanical handling and the preparation of coal. Plowright Brothers became well-known in this area being perhaps pioneers in this respect. The 1930s saw planned extension and modernisation of the works, including new offices. The post Second World War period saw the company particularly involved in the extensive mechanisation and modernisation of the coal industry, not just in the UK but in other countries such as Canada, South Africa, China, India and West Africa.

Plowrights were acquired by the Bestwood Company in 1951. This heralded a period of expansion, including construction of new Plowrights workshops in the Shepley/Factory Streets area, along with the design and administrative building – later to become the headquarters of Kennings and opened in 1959. In 1958 three divisions were formed – industrial plant & building; coal preparation & carbonisation and the colliery division. Aerex Ltd., another subsidiary of the Bestwood Company, who designed, supplied and installed might have overstretched resources as just a few years after the opening of their new facilities – by December 1962 – only a handful of efficiency axial and radial flow fans, used the manufacturing facilities at Chesterfield along with another at Stockton. In the early 1960s the workshops occupied an area of over seven acres; complete with plate, girder, machine, fabricating, fitting and blacksmiths shops.

Unfortunately after all this expansion not many employees were left at the company, the receivers having been called in earlier. A Mr Braman, of Braman Investments Ltd., (described as 'formerly Plowright Brothers Ltd' in the *London Gazette*) told the *Derbyshire Times* that there were only a few men left at the works, tidying up. By the end of January 1963 it was expected that they would all be gone. No buyer had then been found for the impressive and nearly new office block, but PM Pathé (Engineering) Ltd. had taken over a section of the factory and were reported as being very busy. The last year or so had been a bad one for local industry with Hardwick Coke Ovens, the Midland Fruit Preserving Company, Sheepbridge's blast furnaces and Plowrights all closing.

A much fuller history of Plowright Brothers will form part of a planned Victoria County History volume in due course.

Sources:

*Brampton Trail* (Chesterfield Civic Society, no date).

R Brown 'Potteries of Derbyshire'. *Journal of the Northern Ceramic Society*, volume 11, 1994.

*Derbyshire Courier*, 26 February 1910.

'Derbyshire Industries, No. 38 – Messrs Plowright Brothers Ltd., Brampton Iron Works', *Derbyshire Times*, 8 October 1932.

*Derbyshire Times*, 7 December 1962.

*The Plowright Story* (Plowright Brothers, no date but c. 1960).

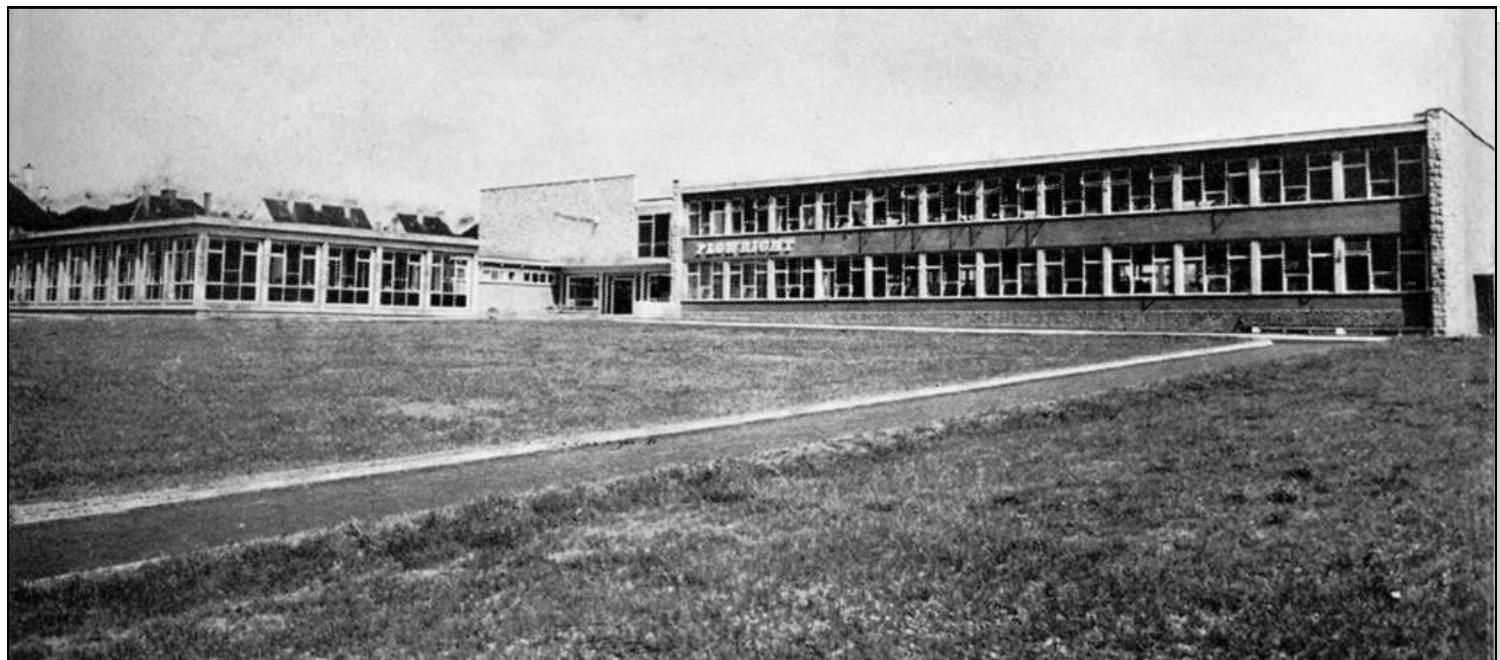
G R Micklewright, *The Chesterfield and District Story*, (Chesterfield and District Story Exhibition Executive Committee, 1950).

*Local History in Brampton* (Brampton Parochial Church Council, 1981).

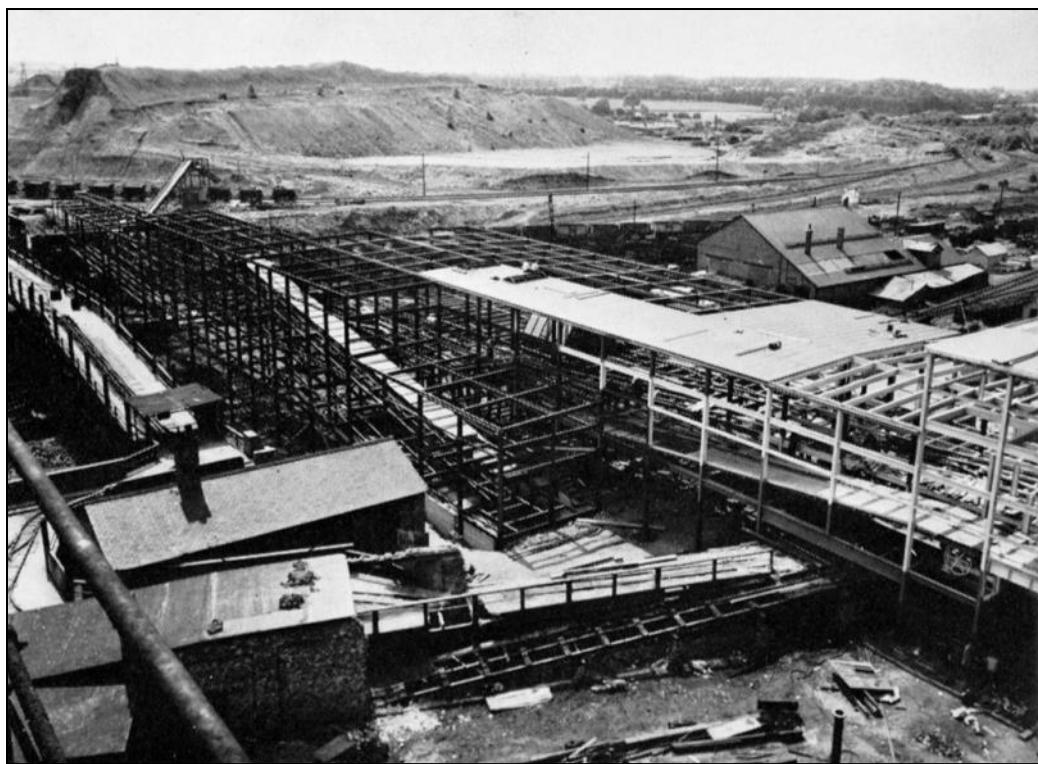
*London Gazette*, 2 July 1895, Issue 26639, p. 3765.

*London Gazette*, 26 March 1963, Issue 42953, p. 2769.

For some further information on the Plowright brothers see also a thread on the 'Chesterfield Forum' at URL: <http://www.chesterfieldforum.net/threads/walton-pottery-updated.4867/#post-49754>



Taken from an early 1960s book *The Plowright Story* is this photograph of the company's 'new design and administrative offices opened May 1959'. This later became Kenning's headquarters on Old Road, Brampton.



LEFT: Also featured in the same publication was this 'aerial view of Plowright surface re-organisation at Brodsworth Colliery'. Other photographs included a fabricated pressure vessel, surface handling plant at a South African drift mine, 'squeezer type rail brakes for retarding railway wagons', a fabricated lattice girder, a 10 and a 100 ton storage bunker and a 'complete colliery headgear installation'

**F**ollowing the article on Sir George Kenning in the last edition, Darrell Clark adds that the motor group's offices/ HQ for the whole group were originally built for Plowright Bros., a heavy engineering company producing castings for mining head gear and all the bits and pieces which go with it.

### PLOWRIGHT BROS. LTD.

Brampton Iron Works,  
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#### Manufacturers of COAL SCREENING PLANTS

To date—over 300 Plants installed in  
Great Britain and the Colonies.

TIPPLERS,  
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CONVEYORS (Steel, Rubber or Cotton),  
TUB CREEPERS,  
HEAD GEARS,  
CAGES and KEPS,  
PICKING BELTS (Plate or Bar type, etc.),  
TAR-MAC, and GRAVEL PLANTS,  
etc., etc.

Telegrams: "Plowright, Phone, Chesterfield."

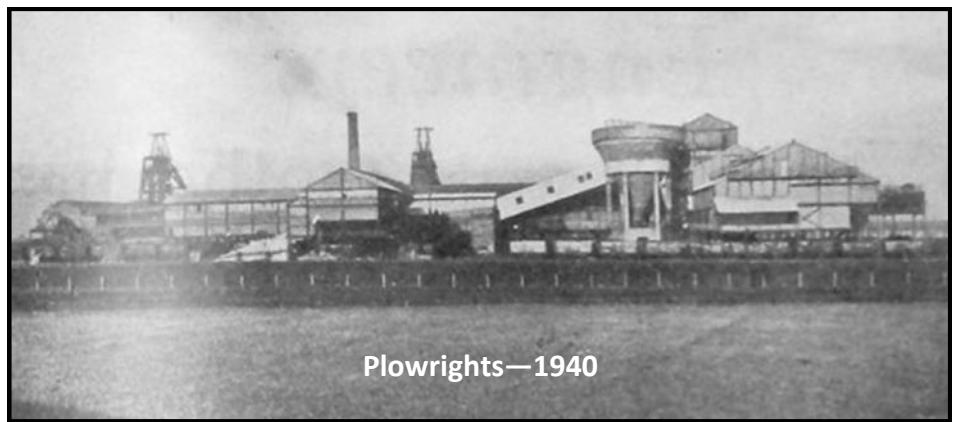
Nat. Telephone: No. 2156, Chesterfield.

Representatives:

W. OATES,  
18, Parkhead Crescent, Ecclesall. SHEFFIELD.  
SAUNDERS, TODD & CO. LTD.,  
17, Oxford Street, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

Darrell goes on to add, that as far as he can remember, Plowrights never occupied those brand new offices on Old Road, because just at the time their main customer, the NCB, was in massive decline so Plowrights went into liquidation.. The office block and factory building was bought by Kennings around 1961/1962.

Sir George's early beginnings included the distribution of oils particularly paraffin which he sold from a travelling horse and cart – hence Kennings eventual large involvement in fuel and oil distribution.



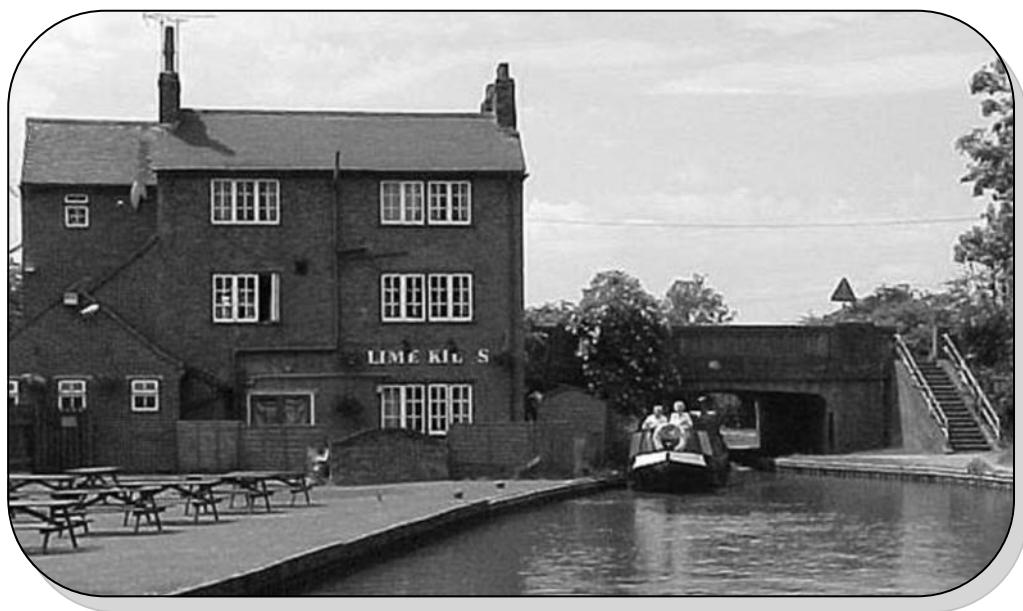
Plowrights—1940

## IA News and Notes

### Industrial Heritage Day EMIAC 90

The Railway and Canal Historical Society are organising the next Industrial Heritage Day/ EMIAC 90 which will be held on Saturday 14 May 2016 at The National Forest Waterside Visitors' Centre Bath Lane, Moira, DE12 6BA.

The subject is to be the Ashby Canal which was built between 1794 and 1804 to serve the eastern basin of the Leicestershire and Derbyshire coalfield. Originally 31 miles long, running from Ashby Wolds to the Coventry Canal at Marston Junction, it continued to serve this purpose until the 1960s, despite being taken over by the Midland Railway Company in 1845. The canal suffered decline and gradual partial closure in the 20th century but the section from



Snarestone down to the Coventry Canal remained open and is still navigable today. In recent years much progress has been made in getting the canal restored north of its present terminus by the Quarry Lane Pumping station, near Snarestone.

The day includes talks on The Ashby Canal and Tramroads, by Dr. Wendy Freer and The Ashby Canal, decline and restoration, by Geoff Pursglove, and during the afternoon the hosts offer choice of two guided walks to view sites of interest:

1. Walk along the restored canal from The Waterside to Moira Furnace and early 19th century Blast Furnace, now a museum. Visit does not include entry to the museum which costs £2. An easy return walk of two miles along the towpath.
2. Visit to Snarestone Wharf, (off Quarry Lane, by the old pumphouse) to see the length of canal recently restored, part of the abandoned length and what is planned for the future. This will be about a 1.5 mile easy return walk.

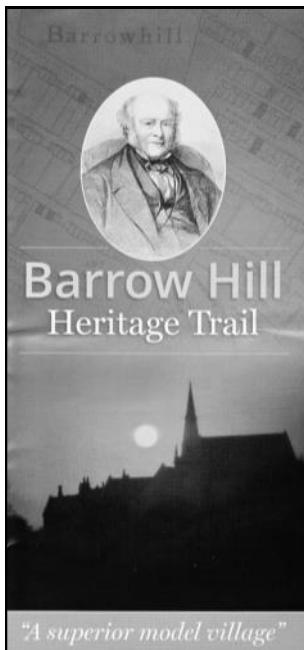
This looks like it will be a popular day, and the Registration Form is now available on our NEDIAS website, at our meetings, as well as from Railway and Canal Historical Society. Queries e-mail [wild141@talktalk.net](mailto:wild141@talktalk.net)

## Great Central Railway

Philip Cousins reminds me that there is a short film on the Great Central Railway's later years available on the BFI web site - when threatened with closure. There are some brief glimpses of Heath and Chesterfield Central on it. It can be found on the BFI website at Watch Great Central Railway 1962 – <http://player.bfi.org.uk/film/watch-great-central-railway-1962/>

2016 will, of course, be the 50th anniversary of the closure of the GCR main line.

## Barrow Hill Heritage Trail



A new heritage trail leaflet taking visitors through Barrow Hill village, also with description of The Chesterfield Canal which winds through that area, Staveley Works and its clocktower building as well as Barrow Hill Roundhouse has just been issued. Pick up copies at local Tourist Information sites, as well as at Tapton Lock, the Roundhouse and museums in the area.

The trail covers centenary sites of WW1, with Blue Plaques on some of the residents' houses. The official opening was on 9th April 2016 with various enactments. Queen Victoria paid a royal visit to Barrow Hill. She arrived at Barrow Hill Memorial Club for the official launch of the Heritage Trail. In evidence were Richard Barrow, organ grinders, the Town Crier and other Victorian characters as locals explored the area.

See [www.barrowhillheritagetrail.wordpress.com](http://www.barrowhillheritagetrail.wordpress.com)

## Two new websites to explore!

Christine Richardson has set up a great on-line archive of information about the Chesterfield Canal. You can see details at <http://www.chesterfieldcanalarchive.co.uk/>

If that weren't enough, there is a brand new website set up by the Chesterfield & District Local History Society – <http://www.cadlhs.org.uk/> – very much recommended, and containing great information including access to their recently introduced Newsletters.

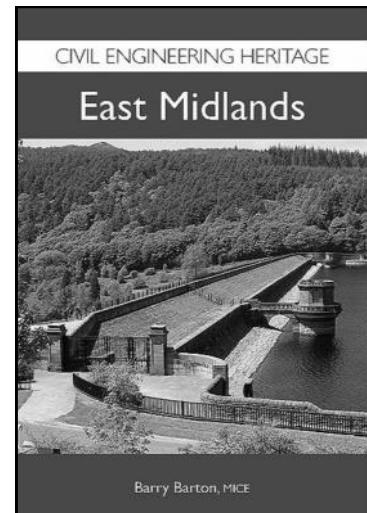
## **"Civil Engineering Heritage – East Midlands" by Barry Barton**

Just released is a new publication by Barry Barton entitled "Civil Engineering Heritage – East Midlands"

Over at least the past 300 years civil engineering has been a crucial part of the development of transport, industry, water supply and motive power in Britain, necessary for economic development and the improvement of public health. Civil Engineering Heritage (East Midlands) is the latest in a new regional series in Britain and Ireland that examines the crucial role that civil engineering has made to society.

This publication makes an important contribution to the industrial history of Britain and would interest anyone with a desire to know more about civil engineering's impact on the East Midlands. It includes a county-by-county gazetteer of significant and important monuments to civil engineering, from bridges to dams and from pumping stations to tunnels. There are 50 structures listed in just the Derbyshire section including descriptions of the dams, bridges, mills, tunnels and viaducts that might be anticipated.

Publisher: Ruddocks, Lincoln. ISBN 978 0 904327 24 3.



Barry Barton, MICE

## **Clay Cross Company haulage system, Brixworth, Northamptonshire – letter to the Editor**

*I've received a letter with news of research into the history of Clay Cross Co activities in Northamptonshire,, particularly of an interesting 4ft gauge track transporting ironstone from Brixworth Quarry, and particularly asking whether NEDIAS members can throw light on the origins of the electric haulage system. I have already passed this enquiry to Cliff Williams, but other members may have suggestions. I précis:*

Dear Mr Lea,

At Kettering Library recently we put on a small display on the local activities here of the Clay Cross Co who were at work around Brixworth, Northants., quarrying ironstone from 1928 until Oct 1947.

In 1944 the Clay Cross Co installed there an electrically powered haulage system to take 4 ft narrow gauge wagons down to the tipping dock with the main line railway (LNWR, Northampton to Market Harborough line).

Does anyone within NEDIAS have any idea where the electric haulage system came from? It's been mooted that when this electric haulage system was installed it was described as an "electric windlass".

Eric Tonks, the noted authority on the ore industry of the East Midlands had earlier suggested that it might have come from Crich limestone quarries, which apparently had a cable worked incline down from the quarries to canal and railway.

Greg Evans, 132 Station Road, Burton Latimer, Kettering, Northants NN15 5NU

## **Robert Blincoe**

### **- letter to the Editor**

*Members will recall the great talk by Chas Arnold about Robert Blincoe and Litton Mill, and his follow-up article in the last Newsletter – Ed.*

Dear Cliff,

I have just received Newsletter No 61 and couldn't believe my eyes!

There is an article about ROBERT BLINCOE – what a coincidence. I have just finished reading "*The Real*

*Oliver Twist*" by John Waller; this is the story of Robert Blincoe and all the social history of that era. I have only this week obtained the 1832 book called "*A Memoir of Robert Blincoe*" by John Brown. Members might be interested in these two books, and full details are:

"*The Real Oliver Twist*" by John Waller. ISBN 1840465425, Icon Books Ltd., 2005.

"*A Memoir of Robert Blincoe*" by John Brown, ISBN 0904573052, Republished by Caliban Books, 1977.

Hope this will be of interest

Marrian Tattersall, Bacup.

## Chairman's Chat

**Cliff Lea**

This spring we heard the great news from Barrow Hill of funding which will bring much needed repairs and improvements to what is undoubtedly one of the great gems of this area. It seems like only yesterday that the site was saved by the dedicated enthusiasm and work of local volunteers, and at NEDIAS we take our hat off to them.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has come up trumps, and Britain's only surviving operational railway roundhouse is set for a major revamp with confirmed funding of £1,170,600.



*Photo courtesy Doug Spencer*

A new entrance, shop and café will be created alongside high quality new visitor facilities, a dedicated learning and meeting space and a conservation workshop.

It is hoped that work will start in June this year and be complete by mid-2019. Mike Kennedy, chair of Barrow Hill Engine Shed Society, said: "We're delighted by the news of our success. The project will enable us to safeguard the Roundhouse for future

generations, and provide the improved facilities that we need to attract a new audience, whilst retaining our existing audience of rail enthusiasts. "It will also provide us with the expertise and equipment to tell the story of the Roundhouse and its workforce to a wide range of people, particularly local people including families and schoolchildren."

Barrow Hill Roundhouse was built in 1870 for the Midland Railway and houses an operational turntable serving 24 radiating roads or tracks. It was used to repair and maintain engines and rolling stock for the Staveley Iron and Coal Company. As one of the few roundhouses to survive the transition from steam to diesel engines, it operated until the industry went into decline during the 1970's and 80's. In 1991 it was saved from demolition by local campaigners with just 48 hours to spare and has since become a popular place to visit, primarily for railway enthusiasts.

Brilliant news Barrow Hill, this surely is the most successful museum in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire area.

# The View from Below: looking at the Industrial Revolution from a different angle

**Chas Arnold**

**T**he voices of working class men and women are rarely, if ever, heard during the early Industrial Revolution. Perhaps the only voice commonly heard is that of Robert Blincoe, whose memories of his harrowing childhood in Litton Mill were collected in 1828. In February's edition of the NEDIAS newsletter I introduced you to the experiences of some of Blincoe's contemporaries.

Although their words tend to be fragmentary and brief they contribute to a bleak and humourless picture of working class conditions in the early factories.

However in recent years historians have unearthed hundreds of autobiographies written by, mainly, working class men, which give us a more detailed picture of working class life. They provide "a view from below". In her book "*Childhood and Child Labour*" Jane Humphries uses over 600 autobiographies to challenge some of our easy assumptions about working class life. Emma Griffin, in "*Liberty's Dawn*", uses over 350 autobiographies to explore some of the less researched areas of everyday life. Evidently an appeal on Women's Hour was particularly successful in yielding unknown material.

So, what about these autobiographies? There are several hundred of them, from all parts of the country. In a quick scan of the bibliography I found references to Norfolk, Aberdeen, Cornwall and Southampton and all points in between. Annoyingly there are very few identifiable as coming from Derbyshire. They cover an amazing variety of occupations, among them dozens relating to agriculture, service and seafaring, but also mining, preaching, shoemaking and teaching. Robert Roberts was a "*wandering scholar*". Some have very snappy titles like "*My Story*". Others less so.

In 1801 Robert Scott wrote "*The Life of Robert Scott, Journeyman Wright, from his Infancy to the present time, Being a space of seventy years. In verse. Written by Himself. With Observations, Moral and Religious. In London, Newcastle, Morpeth, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Falkland*". Others were worse. Some of the memoirs were published, some were self-published (!) but most are to be found, unpublished, in Record Offices. Perhaps there are more waiting to be uncovered.

The writers were mainly men, as you might expect. Presumably the women were too busy. Women appear as mothers, sisters, wives and daughters. Griffin puts the number of female writers at something like 12 out of 350. About 80% of the jobs ascribed to women in the autobiographies are in textiles, agriculture, domestic service, retailing and needlework; all relatively poorly paid. Other jobs were in education, medicine and helping their husbands, as in shop keeping and inn keeping, for example. And a special mention to Thomas Cooper's mother (unnamed) who made pasteboard boxes. And George Holyoake's mother, Catherine, made horn buttons, and employed several people. And particularly Eliza Mitchell who spent two years learning a trade, "*the little fancy shoe making for little children*".

In terms of work people in rural areas were generally desperately poor. Life on the land was not the idyllic paradise often imagined. There were many reasons. Farming was precarious in many parts of the country, work was unskilled, seasonal and poorly paid. Employment was often precarious too. Illness, injury, alcohol or a bad attitude could all damage a worker's prospects.

For example James Bowd "*sometimes work and sometimes none and that meant not much for a man with two Children to live upon*". Even skilled workers found life hard-going. Fellow villagers often could not afford to buy their skills so work was short. A shoemaker in Longnewton, a tailor in County Antrim and carpenters in Cornwall, for example, all had to work on the land to supplement their incomes. Moving to the town or city was often their only option.

This runs contrary to what is almost a folk belief that the factories were universally bad for the people who went to work in them. Presumably a regular job, a roof over your head and a constant wage (and a good wage at that) were an attraction to many others as well as our biographers. As an illustration, in Glasgow, in the 1840s, a handloom weaver, could earn 35s a week. Joseph Arch, as an agricultural labourer in Barford, was earning 9s. Ben Brierley and his father, weaving satin shawls, earned 54s a week, "*such an income was enough to turn our heads, We seemed to be rolling in wealth*".

Looking beyond the obvious, there are one or two aspects worth commenting on. Generally speaking the writers did not go to school. Therefore they must have taught themselves to read and write, or were helped by a friend, work colleague or, in a few cases, a kindly employer. Emanuel Lovekin “*began to feel very strongly the desieries to learn to read*”. When bedridden following an accident when “*about 13teen*” his friends started him off, later he attended “*nights School*” and Sunday school and eventually wrote a 7000 word autobiography. Many others joined self-improvement groups. Theirs is a monumental collective achievement.

Secondly, because teaching yourself to be literate implies a certain amount of positive determination, a lot of the men went on to become politically, socially or religiously active. A few went on to become active nationally like William Lovett, a future Chartist leader. Scores of others were active locally, becoming involved in reading groups, the church or co-operative movements. Here they were obliged to act as treasurers, preachers, secretaries, readers. John Harris attended Troon Sunday school from the age of 5, became a teacher there and eventually librarian. Because he could control the unruly boys Joseph Wilson became Sunday school secretary.

For those of you of a nervous disposition, look away now. Sex. Yes, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries people had sex. What we have now, however, is an insight into personal life I never read about in my school textbooks. A large number of marriages took place when the bride-to-be was pregnant; according to Griffin as many as 40% of brides were pregnant. Seemingly sexual activity was allowed before marriage provided it was discreet, but if the woman became pregnant marriage was inevitable. Elsewhere we read nostalgically of “*walking out*”, “*keeping company*” and courtship.

Two stories amused me. John Cannon failed to keep his “*kissing and toying*” with Mary Rose secret because he shared his bed with a servant boy. Joseph Woolley kept up a running commentary on the private lives of his neighbours. He recounts a fight between William Barber and his wife, after she discovered him visiting the barn where “*that old Slut Lives*”. Henery Allin returned from London, “*turned away from is place for Being too free with Cooke or as people say he was Caut with hir in such a place as was no Credit to them*”.

Happily few of the male autobiographers boast about their sexual exploits. However Edmund Harrold kept a diary between 1712 and 1715 and logged each time he made love to his wife with the words “*I did wife*”. Uniquely he then added a few details! I leave it to your imagination to work out what had happened when he wrote “*newfashion*”, “*oddly*” and “*after a scolding bout*”. Incidentally, homosexuality of any sort does not get a mention.

As an aside the autobiographies reveal that the average age of marriage was 27 for men in 1700, and 25 in 1800. For women it was 25 and 24 respectively. Both men and women seem to delay marriage because they were earning good wages and were relatively free. Some were undoubtedly saving for a rainy day. Marriage brought ties that reduced income and independence. Finding this comparatively late age of marriage has forced me to reconsider what I say to visitors to Cromford Mills when talking about the way of life of the villagers. They didn’t get married and produce families from an early age. On average there were about 6 siblings produced by these marriages. Agricultural workers and miners had the most children (6 plus), soldiers the fewest (4).

Despite releasing an avalanche of new evidence there are problems with the use of these autobiographies. Can you remember with accuracy your schooldays, your first job or your first love? I can barely remember last week. And even if you could remember, would you really want to reveal secrets of your younger self? Or would your memoir follow the old adage “*The older I get, the better I was*”? Despite these obvious drawbacks the autobiographies give us interesting, informative and amusing snapshots of life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “*A rare fenestration of working class experience*” according to Jane Humphries.

They provide a qualitative and quantitative balance to the usual narrative of inventors, businessmen and politicians, the powerful. Start with Emma Griffin. I laughed out loud ... at a history book.



“But the sun itself, however beneficent, generally, was less kind to Coketown than hard frost, and rarely looked intently into any of its closer regions without engendering more death than life. So does the eye of Heaven itself become an evil eye, when incapable or sordid hands are interposed between it and the thing it looks upon to bless.”  
— Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*

**And finally ....  
.... "Like" us on Facebook**

**Les Mather**



**NEDIAS** has for some time had a website with information about the society and details of our events. But now we've entered the world of Social Media with the launch of the NEDIAS Facebook page.

It has been said that Social Media exists for people to pick arguments with strangers and publish pictures of the cat. That's not entirely untrue, but increasingly it's also the means by which people find out about societies such as ours and get to know others who share their interests.

So what will you find on our Facebook page? Well, that's up to you as anyone, NEDIAS member or not, is welcome to contribute to it. But to start us off we'll be posting details of our forthcoming meetings and providing links to relevant industrial archaeology news from elsewhere on the web. Also, every couple of weeks or so we'll be featuring an industrial site or artefact from somewhere in our area – not necessarily a well known one – to showcase what's here and perhaps encourage some discussion or reminiscence. And, by the way, should anything inappropriate appear we do have the ability to delete it!

You should be able to read the page simply by searching online for NEDIAS Facebook or similar, though experience suggests this doesn't always work. But you'll need to be signed up with Facebook (which is free) if you want to post anything. So why not take the virtual plunge? Hopefully you'll find something of interest and, better still, want to add something of interest too.

**P.S. We don't have a cat!**

## **COPY DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT EDITION: 5th August 2016**

### **NEDIAS Committee:**

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