

North East Derbyshire Industrial Archaeology Society

NEDIAS Newsletter No. 19 – Aug 2005
Price: 50p (Free to Members)



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IMPORTANT: NOTE THE NEW MEETING VENUE – See page 2

Chairman's Comments:

Writing these notes in mid-August, with summer still in prospect and England playing Australia for the Ashes once more, it is difficult to realise that the first of our talk evenings is but three weeks away. The return visit to Cromford with Darrell Clark will have taken place by the time this Newsletter is distributed. Our visit to Peak Rail at Rowsley and the mini-bus excursion to the New Mills area are now in the annals of NEDIAS. Sadly, the proposed visit to windmills in Lincolnshire did not attract enough interest to become viable, at least for this year. Meanwhile, NEDIAS' role in the care of Summerley Colliery Coke Ovens is still being considered by English Heritage, in conjunction with the site's owners.

Elsewhere, we have been involved in discussions about the recognition of the Cannon and Walton 'Bump' mill buildings in the redevelopment plans for the 'Brampton corridor'. Here there is an urgent need for business plans to be drawn up to ensure that the developers recognise the strength of the industrial heritage of the two sites in their own plans and for a case to be made for creation of facilities which will allow public access to the buildings. I hope NEDIAS members, near and far, will find a little time available to help with the preparation of the business plan for the two mills, contact details for which will be found within these pages. Who knows, in just a few years' time we might have a custom designed, industrial heritage venue for our meetings! But first, we need your help!!

David Wilmot

WHAT'S ON?

NEDIAS Lecture Programme, 2005

IMPORTANT: NOTE THE NEW MEETING VENUE Directly opposite the swimming pool at Queen's Park, Chesterfield BT's Rowland Hill House

When: Meetings are usually held the second Monday of each month, starting at 7.30 pm.
Where: Rowland Hill House, Boythorpe Road, Chesterfield (opposite the swimming pool).

- 12 September 2005** *Cliff Lea: "Derbyshire's Oil: a story of national significance"*. The extractive industries have played a large part in the county's fortunes, but the part played by the oil industry before it moved on is absolutely fascinating and almost forgotten.
- 10 October 2005** *Philip Heath: "The Industries of Swadlincote"*. South Derbyshire's clay and coal gave rise to some remarkable industries, with pottery, brick and tile trades well to the fore during much of the last two centuries
- 14 November 2005** *Philip Cousins: "John Knowles – a forgotten 19th Century North Derbyshire Railway Contractor"*. Railway tunnelling, an iron smelters at Brimington, Matlock building activities, firebricks and stoneware pipe manufacturing at Woodville. The now largely forgotten life of this 19th century railway contractor will be explored
- 12 December 2005** *Philip Riden: "Industry before the Industrial Revolution: Chesterfield and Scarsdale, 1600-1750"*

What else is on?

Sat 10 September 2005: Lead Mining at Lathkill Dale. Guided walking tour by English Nature. Starts 10 a.m., 3 hour duration. Booking essential via 01629 816640.

Mon 19 September, SYIHS, Kelham Island Museum, Alma Street, Sheffield, at 7.30pm - Joseph Locke, Engineer: his life and work; a talk by Graham Hague. Admission £1, free to SYIHS members

Tues 11 October, 2005: Talk by Clive Hart "Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Chesterfield" at 7.30, Eyre Chapel, Newbold. Chesterfield Civic Society.

Tuesday 18 October 2005: Talk by David Wilmot: "Emmerson Muschamp Bainbridge – Founder of Bolsover Colliery and Chairman of the Lancashire, Derbyshire and East Coast Railway". Chesterfield & District Local History Society meeting, 7.30 at Rose Hill United Reformed Church, Chesterfield.

Saturday 5 November 2005: "Rocket" at Barrow Hill – see details later in this Newsletter, IA News & Notes

New Mills & Bugsworth Basin – Visited on 23 July**David Wilmot**

For our first organised bus excursion on 23 July, we are grateful to Brian Dick, who not only organised the day but also drove a Chesterfield Community Transport minibus for our day trip to the New Mills area. First stop was at Whaley Bridge for a look at the 1820s transshipment warehouse, where loads from wagons from the Cromford & High Peak Railway were transferred to narrow boats on the Peak Forest Canal. With two doorways for rail wagons and a central dock for boats, plus the inlet of the water supply to the head of the canal, the warehouse is a solid reminder of the C&HP's contribution to the Peak District's economy, despite the absence of all but a short length of track on a nearby bridge.

New Mills also proved to be something of a revelation to many of those present. The starting point of the Heritage Centre contained a superb model of the town and its industries as of more than a hundred years ago, with graphic commentary on the town's history. This helped our interpretation of the surprising amount of industrial archaeology, with remains of cotton mills, their water courses and a variety of impressive bridges for transport needs, during our walking tour of the deep valleys formed by the rivers Sett and Goyt.

Highlight for many was the walk along the 150-metre Torrs Millennium Walkway, poised some six metres above the river Goyt and offering views of the river as well as the shell of a former cotton mill gutted by fire in the last few years. We were saddened to learn that Stan Brewster from Swanwick, the man responsible for construction of the walkway, had died a few days earlier, having fallen victim to the 7th July terrorist explosion in Edgware Road, London.

The afternoon visit to Bugsworth Basin, the 1790s inland port at the end of the Peak Forest Canal, started outside the Navigation Inn with a walk around the site led by the historian of the Inland Waterways Protection Society whose thirty year efforts had at last borne fruit with the restoration of the basin to a navigable waterway. Having first seen the site, with its canal arms and wharves heavily silted, overgrown and vandalised in the late 1970s, it was a real joy to see more than a dozen narrow boats berthed around the basin.

Of course, the narrow boats of today are no longer there for movement of limestone and burnt lime, but hopefully the stonework now revealed and the information panels now erected will help visitors appreciate the heritage of the site. Perhaps they might also reflect upon the working conditions endured by their forebears in laying the foundations of the prosperity we enjoy today, as well as the determination of the volunteers who have succeeded to get the waterway open once more?

Developments at Walton Bump Mill and Cannon Mill**Richard Robinson**

Ed: At first under the banner of 'Cannon Mill Friends', groups of individuals have, in recent months, visited both these listed status sites in the Brampton area to look at their potential use in some form of community based activity as well as conservation in a form which both recognises their specific contribution to the strong industrial heritage of Chesterfield and its environs. It soon emerged that Walton 'Bump' Mill ought not to be ignored, having as its core the 1820s 'fire retardant' cotton mill and an engine house which once contained a

very substantial beam engine. Richard Robinson has passed to me the following update, and call for our assistance and support.

Over the last few weeks, Westbury Homes have come forward as the potential developer for the Walton site; they are working with P J Liversey from Manchester for the conversion of the Bump Mill buildings into apartments. They are also working with Pegasus Planning from Sutton Coldfield, who are to produce an overall plan for the development along the River Hipper corridor, including the Cannon Mill at Wheatbridge going up to Walton Works, and possibly including the land to the north of Walton Dam.

A public consultation exercise, initiated by the Borough Planning Department via a series of Community Forum meetings has also been taking place since 19 July. The object of these meetings is to produce a "Concept Statement" of what local people would like to see included in the Masterplan for the Hipper Corridor. The final two meetings are to take place on Monday 12 and Monday 19 September at Catherine Court at 6.45pm. There has been strong support for the idea of a Community Centre as outlined as the preferred option for the future use of the Cannon Mill. The Head of Planning, Mike Hayden, is supportive of the idea of an Industrial Museum for the Bump Mill, provided a business plan shows that it is viable.

The outcome of the above developments is that the formation of a Trust to oversee the future use of both the Cannon Mill and at least a section of the Walton Bump Mill has become more urgent. We therefore need a Chairman, in which capacity I would be willing to act initially, and a Secretary and Treasurer. If anyone feels they could offer some time and effort in these early stages, please let me know as soon as possible.

Richard Robinson (01246 566639)

Old Millclose - The Mine that Drowned

Patricia Pick

There is evidence that lead mining has been active on this site, north of the villages of Wensley and Darley Bridge, from the seventeenth century. Water and the miners' efforts to conquer it dominate Millclose's history. Old Millclose mine was owned by the London Lead Co. from 1720 until 1764 when the workings were filled with water and remained so until Edward Miller Wass, a lead smelter from Lea, decided to re-open the mine in 1859. Thus began an era of wealth for this 'New' Millclose mine.

Wass believed there was still ore to be found; he re-opened Watts Shaft situated in the north and deepest part of the old workings. A 50 inch diameter cylinder Cornish steam engine 80 hp was brought from Thornewill & Warham, Burton-on-Trent and installed in 1860. A rich deposit of ore was found near the boundary of Winster and Stanton more than 10 yards wide. In 1872 it was so wide 20-30 men could work alongside each other, making Millclose Derbyshire's major producer of lead ore. As the mine grew it brought with it the usual problems with water and in 1874 it was forced to close for almost 2 years. Fortunately Wass had anticipated the problem and a new shaft at Warren Carr, 300 feet deep had been sunk in readiness. Warren Carr was to become the main focus of activity although Watts Shaft remained in use until about 1889.

At Warren Carr a new engine 'Jumbo' was installed which had an 80 inch diameter cylinder made by Harvey & Co, Hayle, Cornwall. It was a 250 to 300 hp engine with four large Galloway boilers and pumps of 24 inch diameter. These raised nearly 180 gallons per stroke. The mine water was raised 36 fathoms into Yatestooop Sough some 64 ft below the surface. By June 1877 the 2 engines were coping easily with the water.

At Stanton Lees, the furthest extent of the workings, a new ventilation shaft was made. In November, 1887 a fan was installed making it the first major mechanical mine ventilation system in a Derbyshire lead mine. To save ore and waste being transported to Watts Shaft 800 yards away a new and the largest shaft at the mine, Lees Shaft, was sunk at 50 fathoms. In 1886 a permanent winder with 2 cages from Watts Shaft was installed, all ore now being brought up this shaft. Wass introduced the first properly mechanised dressing floor in Derbyshire and his operations on the surface were fully mechanised by 1878. Output by this time had risen to 4,000 tons; this was 85% of all ore raised in Derbyshire and 8% of the total in Britain. After Wass's death in 1886 the mine was put up for sale, but did not attract any buyers, and the Wass Trustees continued to run the mine until 1919.

In 1887 Warren Carr Shaft was deepened to 73 fathoms and new plunger pumps were installed. The engines coped with about 1,000 galls a minute. This was about 6,500 tons of water per day, every day. In 1889 a new shaft was sunk a short distance from Warren Carr and a unique engine house was built. This housed 2 engines 'Baby' and 'Alice'. These pumped water from 50 fathoms. Watts Shaft was no longer used, except as a ventilation shaft. Away from the steam engines and all the surface modernised processing, under ground working was still done by hand. In many cases because of the richness of the ore a pick and shovel was all that was needed. In 1901 Lees Shaft was sunk to 73 fathoms, working first south of the shaft then in 1914 on the north side, but it was worked out by 1917. In the 10 years to the end of 1913 the mine averaged 4,500 tons of ore, yielding a profit of about £28,200 per year.

By 1918 the mine was looking tired. It had suffered from disputes, strikes, and lockouts for 2 years. In February, 1919 the mine was put up for sale. Bradford Vale Mining Company bought Millclose in late 1919 for around £120,00, and after financial restructuring Millclose Mines



Ltd was formed. Modern drilling methods were introduced along with dynamite. The rest of the operations went largely unchanged, with the pumping arrangements still dependent on the 3 steam engines, Jumbo, Baby and Alice, by then working close to capacity. Between 1920 and 1929 work concentrated on veins to the west under and beyond Stanton Lees. By the end of 1929 the area was worked out and a loss of £24,269 was made that year.

These difficulties had again been anticipated and in 1925 the decision was taken to sink a shaft near the northern end of the workings. This was where the ore had been particularly rich and just as importantly where a strong flow of water emerged. At Millclose it was always considered wise to follow the water which often led to the next ore-rich cavity. A shaft was sunk 103 fathoms and the pumping system was

changed. Jumbo was scrapped, Baby and Alice put on standby. Electric pumps were installed. By Oct 1933 production rose to 500 tons per week. The final and most profitable body of ore was now found at the 129 fathom level. The ore filled a cavern system, miners describing it as over 1,000 ft long. The main cavern was about 400 ft long, 40 ft high and 60 - 100 ft wide, after which it divided into two or three small caverns.

In February 1936 the old enemy re-appeared. Huge quantities of water entered the mine. Whereas in 1932 an average of 2,350 galls had to be raised per minute, in 1937 this had increased to 4,300. Engineers struggled to cope and miners had to be laid off whilst the problem was solved. An even greater flood took place on the 25 February, 1938. It flooded the mine up to the 103 fathom level before it could be checked. Again 400 miners had to be laid off. New pumps were installed and after 10 weeks the mine was again dry, 5,500 galls per minute had now to be raised nearly 8 million gallons per day, a weight of some 36,00 tons. Despite these problems the results for 1937-38 were good. Despite optimism about future reserves, rumours circulated in June 1939 that the mine would close. The cost of pumping was so high as to make further work unprofitable. The mine eventually closed in 1940 after salvage operations. The smelter however remained in use until February 1941 when the plant was sold to the present owners H. J. Enthoven & Sons, who today are Europe's largest reclaimers of lead from car batteries.

Millclose Mine workings had followed a main joint northward with numerous branches. The workings were entirely beneath the shale cover and the miners cut through several toadstones interleaved with the limestones. The mine finally reached a depth of 1,000 and the distant workings approached Pickory Corner near Haddon Hall. Most of the mine was beneath the River Derwent or its floodplain. After closure Millclose Mine soon flooded up to the sough level and the most extensive and interesting mine in Derbyshire is now totally submerged.

Letters



*SNG on the North York Moors
Photo: Trevor Hammond, courtesy SNG Trust*

Ed: A few members were struck by Gresley nostalgia (see the last Newsletter).

My nostalgia was also fuelled by a visit to NRM, York, last week, but others are urged to open up the web site mentioned by Jo Wright below.

Dear Cliff,

Sir Nigel Gresley

Thank you for the NEDIAS newsletter. I have a single copy of 'Chime' Christmas 2002 (The Voice of the Sir Nigel Gresley Locomotive Preservation Trust Ltd) with several photos of this loco in steam, mostly identified in location.

Nostalgia, yes, of a sort. I remember a great trip from York to Scarborough via Pickering Gap behind Sir Nigel in early August 1981 - me, two children and my mum. She got engrossed in shopping, and had to run for the return journey.

Sorry no photos of any of this. Current steam hauled 'fellow travellers' are two young grandsons, very willingly loaned by their parents for the day.

Do look at the Gresley web site for a variety of images: <http://www.gresley.org.uk>

Yours, Jo Wright

Letters (cont)

Ed: The letter re Damstead in the last Newsletter from Colin Briggs has raised not unexpected interest

Dear Cliff,

Colin Briggs raises a question about the source material for the Damstead Works gunpowder attack in the May newsletter. This source was a very useful but not widely known Internet site that will doubtless interest members.

Trying www.uk.olivesoftware.com/ will find what appears to be a demonstration site for a British Library project to digitise at least part of its extensive newspaper archive. The home page you will reach, headed "Welcome to the British Library Online Newspaper Archive", is linked to search engine containing digitised copies of national newspapers including the Daily News, News of the World, Penny Illustrated, Manchester Guardian and Penny Dispatch. Various, but not all months, in 1851, 1856, 1886, 1900 and 1918 are covered. The site is then searchable. The Damstead works is found by simply typing in Dronfield. This brings up "Attempt to blow up a manufactory" from the Manchester Guardian of the 9 February 1856. It is then possible to click onto the article and read it, printing it off if required.

This site has been developed by Olive Software (www.olivesoftware.com) who appear to specialise in this type of activity (they have fairly recently provided The Scotsman's digital newspaper resource). Although clearly limited and of demonstration quality only, with many features not enabled, the site does give an glimpse of what is possible and indeed just what is being achieved with this sort of technology.

Try searching for Chesterfield and such gems as a fatal railway smash near Clay Cross in May 1851, efforts towards municipal housing in the town in 1918 and a report from the same year of boring for oil in the area, will be revealed. Unfortunately you will also get numerous advertisements for Chesterfield suites!

On another less positive matter, the sad saga of the Dema Glass archives is somewhat confirmed by a colleague and former Dema employee. He reports that a fair amount of photographs and other documents were simply skipped when the works closed. Some were retrieved and fell to a local collector. It seems inconceivable that archival material should still be dumped as rubbish, but it does.

Regards
Philip Cousins

.. and now read on....

A 'Rattening' at Damstead Works, Dronfield, 1856

David Wilmot

"Attempt to blow up a Manufactory with Gunpowder", so read the headline of the Manchester Guardian article of 9 February 1856, found by Philip Cousins on the internet (see above). The Guardian devoted two columns to an account of the appearance at Eckington Petty Sessions of Thomas Needham of Sheffield, charged with *"having wilfully and maliciously attempted to blow up with gunpowder the premises of Messrs. Ward and Camm, of Dronfield, spindle manufacturers"*. The case arose from an explosion at Damstead Works on 3 January 1856 which had damaged a gable wall; an example of "rattening" which was an all too frequent experience at the workshops and factories of the Sheffield trades during the middle years of the 19th century.

The incident had been reported in the Derbyshire Courier of 12 January, nine days after the event, as a “*determined attempt to destroy a manufactory building at Dronfield, by a gunpowder explosion*”. The article gave both useful information on the workings at Damstead and background to the possible causes of the explosion, saying that:-

“Mr. Geo. Ward carries on at that place the manufacture of spindles and a portion of his grinding wheel is let off to persons engaged in other branches of the trade of the district; one of these is an edge tool grinder named Spooner, who does not belong to the trade union. Probably feelings of resentment have been excited against Mr. Ward for harbouring Spooner. During the dead of the night a tremendous explosion occurred which awoke the sleeping inhabitants of the vicinity. An examination of the manufactory showed that a large quantity of gunpowder had been put down a chimney of the grinding wheel, and exploded, the violence of the shock having entirely blown down one end of the building. Had the explosion acted in the opposite direction, it must have done great damage to the machinery and property in the building.”

Further light was shed at the Eckington hearings on the business activities of Messrs. Ward & Camm at Dronfield, saying that they “*let off a portion of their premises with steam power to workmen employed in the grinding of razors, sickles and edge tools for manufacturers in Sheffield*”. The case was said to have “*excited great interest, from the disclosure by the prisoner [Needham] that he had been incited to commit the offence by parties supposed to be connected with one of the Sheffield trades’ unions*”.

Despite the Derbyshire Courier’s account of inhabitants sleeping nearby having been woken by the explosion, it seems that the workmen were the first to find the damage, when on arrival on the morning of 4 January, they found the roof of the building partly off and the gable wall blown down; “*This mischief had been accomplished by lowering down the chimney a garden water can, filled with gunpowder, and plugged at the apertures with wood, so as to form an explosive shell*”.

Subsequently, a threatening letter had been received through the Post by Mr. Ward which the Guardian quoted verbatim:

“Mr. ward *Sebastopool*
Get shut of Etchels and Spunner or youl rue the day if they stop you weel weant stop I shall bring it down & I know whear you liven in the day time I can find it in the night and I shall doo If you dont aquit Etchels and Spooner I shall storm sebastopool you can watch until your eyes come out you will niver catch us we are enviserable Beings god us signed *Old Nicholass*”

By 30 January Mr Raynor, Chief Constable at Sheffield, was near to solving the case. Thomas Needham, it seems, had quarrelled with his brother-in-law, Henry Bradley, as Needham had “*formed an improper intimacy with a married woman named Hannah Chapman*”. Prompted by the quarrel and assisted by Mrs. Chapman, Needham had written to the Chief Constable confessing to the outrage at Dronfield while also implicating Henry Bradley. The letter read:

“ *Crookes Jenary 20 1856*
I Thomas Needham and Henry Bradley did on the 4 of Jeneray did attempt to blow up the works of Mr Camm at Dronfield the powder was stolen for that porpes from Messrs David Rosser and John Smith powder house at crookes by Henery Bradley Henery Bradley also did on the 15 instant did sloarter a sheep and take it away I could fill a newes paper with such like roberys but I think there is plenty this you may reli on as the truth *Thomas Needham*”

Needless to say, Chief Constable Raynor wasted no time in having Needham and Bradley apprehended and, after a night in custody, Needham was interviewed and confessed to fabricating the charges against

his brother-in-law, Bradley, adding *"I have a good wife, and have behaved very improperly to her in consequence of my connection with Mrs. Chapman"*. Given the text of the earlier letters, the Chief Constable's account of the conversation bore closer resemblance to police language than accuracy to that of the accused. The accuracy of other parts of the Chief Constable's report was questioned by Counsel for the accused regarding the possibility of a payment of £50 to Needham if he would name those who had employed him.

Raynor said he definitely had not offered to give Needham £50 but claimed to have said *"that I would give £50 out of my own pocket to find out the parties who had employed him to do the job"*, adding to the court *"I said word for word what I have told you, and left him to draw any conclusion he thought proper"*. Given that Needham had admitted to the hope of earning enough from the Damstead job to get himself and Hannah Chapman to America, the inducement from Mr. Raynor, regardless of its wording, must have been sorely tempting. Yet throughout the case, Needham gave no hint as to who was actually behind the drive to oust "Etechels & Spooner" from Damstead.

The only information divulged by Needham was that he had been approached by a man he did not know, while gathering moss in Ecclesall Woods a few days before Christmas 1895 for his winter seasonal work of curing [stuffing] birds. Asked by the man to do a well-paid job for him, Needham agreed to carry out a job but, according to his evidence, the man declined to give him his name and address. He was just told he would get further instructions from a man he would meet on Abbeydale Road, near Millhouses, on the first night of Sheffield fair. The identification was to be the highly unimaginative question, *"What time is it?"*

Needham told the court he had been working as an engine driver for the Sheffield Waterworks Company at Crookes Moor for some time, so his direct interest in the rattening must be in some doubt, but a definite but perhaps temporarily indirect interest is evidenced by the description of his occupation as a spring knife cutler in one newspaper of the time. Needham also admitted to knowledge of Damstead, having been *"there when the foundations were dug and worked there for some time"*. He said he obtained the gunpowder by breaking in to the Crookes Moor store of Messrs Rosser & Smith, contractors to the Sheffield Waterworks Company, and bought the fuse at Twibell's of Snighill.

A witness from Rosser & Smith said their store had been broken in to on the night in question and two barrels together containing some 30 to 40lbs of gunpowder had been stolen. Whether all of that could have been packed in to a garden watering can was not examined. Only 10lbs was later said to have been used, leaving the likelihood that, assuming the theft was accurately described, there would have been plenty of powder left over for use on rattennings elsewhere. Lucky indeed was the stranger who came across such a well-qualified person in Ecclesall Woods!

Perhaps Needham had a thread of social conscience as, when meeting the second contact, he claimed to have declined to do the job until after Christmas, as he had no wish *"to distress the men"*. That contact had given him £3 as a bond but at no time was the full amount paid mentioned. Before the hearing ended, Needham offered the court an apology; *"I'm very sorry I have done it, but I wish the magistrates and the gentlemen to know all about it. If I get over this, I will never do the like again; and I should never have done this but for the unfortunate connection I had with Mrs. Chapman"*. Notwithstanding, the magistrates committed Needham to Derby Assizes.

On 19 March 1856, Thomas Needham aged 29, came before Derbyshire Lent Assizes at Derby, charged that he *"on 3rd January last, placed 10lbs of gunpowder in a certain building, with intent to destroy and damage the said building and machinery, working tools, fixtures, goods and chattels contained therein, the property of George Ward of Dronfield"*. Mr Ward told the court he had gone to the premises on the morning after the explosion, finding the remains of the watering can in the chimney, access having been

gained from the adjacent embankment. Here we should note that the works is situated in a steep sided valley bounded on one side by the river Drone and the other by the considerably higher Chesterfield road. It is still possible to see how easy access would have been to anyone with any knowledge of the area.

Much the same evidence as heard at Eckington was aired at Derby, including questions about the exact remarks made by Chief Constable Raynor over the £50 reward, but the outcome was inevitable. The jury found Needham guilty and he was sentenced to four years penal servitude [imprisonment with hard labour].

To put the case in to context, the Damstead rattening was but one of many of the “Sheffield Outrages” which mainly occurred in the 1850s and 1860s. The problem eventually prompted Mr Walpole, Home Secretary, to bring a bill before Parliament in February 1867 for a Royal Commission to be set up to enquire in to the “Sheffield Trade Outrages”, there having been more than 200 rattening in the previous ten years (see J H Stainton, *The Making of Sheffield*, 1865-1914).

Out of the evidence to the Commission described in Stainton, the example from Elisha Parker of Dore deserves mention. A former member of the Saw Grinders Union, he told them that failure to pay the subscription would result in a visit from “Mary Ann”. Parker referred to his experience in 1853 when he and an assistant were earning £4 per week from saw grinding, out of which they “paid to the Society 3/6 [17.5p] in the Pound”. He left the Union and went to work amongst non-Union workers but “Mary Ann” caught up with him and first hamstringed his horse at Dore, then tried to blow up his house. Most recently they had shot at him, inflicting wounds so severe that he had spent the next eleven weeks in Sheffield Infirmary.

Tracing the fate of Thomas Needham after Derby Assizes is made difficult by his name being relatively common amongst the Sheffield trades. If he served the full prison term he would have been released by early 1860, seven years before the Commission’s enquiry. It is understood that he did give evidence to the Royal Commission and, hopefully, more on that will soon emerge.

A search for Needham in the Sheffield directories has proved inconclusive but the 1851 and 1861 census have given better results. In 1851, Thomas Needham, Ecclesall born spring knife hafter aged 24 was the head of household at 3 School Lane, St. John’s District. His wife was Mary A Needham, also aged 24 but born in Crookes. They had a son, John, aged 5 months and another significant person in the house, namely William Bradley, as a nephew aged 14, presumably the son of Henry Bradley who featured early in the police case for Damstead.

By the time of the 1861 census, Thomas Needham and family were to be found at 70 Pearl Street, Ecclesall Bierlow. Thomas appears as a spring knife cutler aged 35, his wife is still Mary Ann [an unfortunate pair of names for circumstances prevailing at that time] aged 34. By this time they had three children; John aged 11 and now a warehouse boy, Thomas aged 10 and Mary Anne aged 7. Also in the household we find “relatives” William Bradley (as in 1851 but now aged 26) and Henry Bradley, aged 33.

All would therefore seem to be well except that a couple make their first appearance in the 1861 census; Thomas and Hannah Needham, both aged 34 and living at 99 Lord Street. Allowing for some disparity in information often given to census takers at that time, the descriptions are not too far removed from those of the entangled pair at the time of the Damstead rattening. Neither appeared in the 1851 Sheffield census yet this Thomas gave his birthplace as Sheffield and trade as a pen blade grinder while his wife’s birthplace was “Handsworth, Derbyshire”. The possibility of Thomas being the legally responsible head of the Pearl Street family while actually living at Lord Street cannot be overlooked.

Reverting to the unresolved question of who instigated the Damstead rattening, the name of the non-Union man, Spooner, does not appear in the news of that time, nor does “Etchels”. Whether George Ward took heed of the warnings and got rid of the trouble attracting pair is not known. With just the one reported attempt to stop Damstead Works, it must be assumed they probably got moved on. But Thomas Needham’s involvement must have been far from incidental. It seems highly unlikely that a perfect stranger would chance upon someone in Ecclesall woods who just happened to have detailed knowledge of Damstead Works, means of access to the necessary explosives and the ability to assemble the charge. If we accept that Needham did not know the man, the connection must have been made through someone who knew both Needham’s background and his current movements, such as Henry Bradley.

Given the known difficulties between Needham and Bradley, it seems more likely that Needham chose not to identify the instigators either from loyalty to his compatriots in the Sheffield trades or uncertainties on the feasibility of migration to America based on the Chief Constable’s apparent financial inducement coupled with, perhaps, doubts about the strength of the relationship with Mrs. Chapman. Meanwhile, work at Damstead continued and this may have been Dronfield’s only experience of rattening during the period of the Sheffield Outrages, or so it seems at present...

David Wilmot

Sources:

Manchester Guardian, 9 February 1856

Derbyshire Courier, 12 January & 22 March 1856

Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 9 February & 20 March 1856

J H Stainton, *The Making of Sheffield, 1865-1914*

White’s Directory of Sheffield, 1856 – Listing of “John M Twibell, grocer, 50 Snig Hill”

1851 & 1861 Census of Sheffield – Names index and census records in Sheffield Local Studies Library

IA News and Notes

A New Book, *Chesterfield – Picture the Past*, by Ann Krawszik, has recently been published by Tempus in their *Images of England* series. Ann’s book draws upon the Chesterfield images collected for the North East Midland Photographic Record, Picture the Past project under which some 45,000 images are being digitised. Over 200 photographs are shown, with brief captions highlighting points of interest.

While some of the photographs have been published before, such is their detail that there will be plenty to hold the interest of NEDIAS members – the marked contrast between the new and gleaming electric tram under test in 1904, with the dented and stained final tram of 1927 being just one example.

Add to that an elevated view of the works of Donkins and Chesterfield in Derby Road, Wharton’s Foundry in the foreground of an 1857 print showing the Midland Railway’s line and Clayton’s first tannery; the Great Central Railway’s goods warehouse and yard, filled with drays loaded with packing cases labelled “25 Tons Confectionery, S Elliott, Steeple Works, Park Road”, and you have much to ponder. Available from Chesterfield Library and the usual local bookshops, its price is £12.99.

91 Years On and Still at Work!

Not your Chairman, but a small two-cylinder horizontal steam engine seen recently in Amberley Chalk Pits Museum in Sussex. The engine, marked “Bryan Donkin & Co. Ltd, Chesterfield”, was said to have been supplied to the Worthing Gas Light & Coke Company, circa 1914 and remained in use until 1967. It can now be seen in steam within an engine house at Amberley, working without load as befits such a mature object.

Another Chesterfield creation still in active use is the rolling footbridge for pedestrians made by Markham & Co., over the entrance to a small boatyard on the Menai Strait at Caernarfon. Perhaps anyone finding other examples of Chesterfield’s engineering products still in use and (preferably) visible to the public, could pass details, photographs etc., to the editor for inclusion in future NEDIAS Newsletters

STOP PRESS: George Stephenson unveiled – and a visit from “Rocket”!

On Friday 28 October, the long awaited statue of George Stephenson is to be unveiled at Chesterfield Station. At the same time, the Borough Council are arranging to bring the reconstructed “Rocket”, for initial display in the town centre on 29/ 30 October.

“Rocket” will then move to Barrow Hill for Saturday 5 November, and I hear there is to be a small-scale event, with train rides behind Rocket along the branch being available. Just the event for Fireworks Day!

And Finally

David Wilmot’s research on the “rattening” and the fickle nature of men when tempted by the opposite sex, reminded me of a documented dispute which allegedly emerged during the drilling for oil at Hardstoft in the 1920s. The Duke of Devonshire’s agent responsible for the operation at the time records:

“Depth this morning 2510 feet. Well at a complete standstill owing to the two drillers falling out last night and bashing each other to pieces. Fox has been dismissed, and Brack is in bed trying to recover from his injuries. Lost all his teeth and a lot of other things.

“ **Women the trouble.** ”

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Published by North East Derbyshire Industrial Archaeology Society. **Editor:** Cliff Lea, 15 Kelburn Avenue, Walton, Chesterfield, S40 3DG, phone 01246 234 212 or email cliff@nedias.org.uk. The authors retain copyright of the contents.