



# BERKSHIRE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

BIAG News No 26, Spring 2012

Editor: John Coulson

<http://www.biag.org.uk>

## BIAG AND THE HORSESHOE BRIDGE

Peter Trout

This sounds like a fairy story and in some ways it was. As was often the case, a Newtown couple were crossing the Horseshoe Bridge. He was pushing while she was in the wheelchair when suddenly some planks gave way; the bridge was rotten.

The Horseshoe Bridge, attached to the railway bridge, so named for its shape, crosses the mouth of the Kennet. It was so designed to enable hauliers or barge horses on the Thames towpath to cross Kennet mouth without having to unhitch and suffer other inconveniences. It is a distinct and a listed feature of the Thames Path.



### Horseshoe Bridge and Listed Building Plaque

Why the neglect? Reading Council had ideas of a guided tramway across Broken Brow on to Kennet Mouth and into town as part of traffic relief. If work was to be done in this area Network Rail (as it then was), the responsible body, might have wondered at the wisdom of considerable expense at the site. Who knows?

However, elements of Option D, a community group opposed to the tramway, were concerned over the safety of the bridge and the potential loss of amenity. Various groups were contacted and the following responded - BIAG, History of Reading Society, The Civic Society, Kennet & Avon Trust, Transport 2000, and Pedestrian Society. They had to decide a strategy and subsequent tactics. A large scale campaign was not practical for various reasons. Very often such movements cannot be maintained and 'big business' often exploits that. The Horseshoe Bridge Committee opted for a lowish key approach but one that was persistent - and would not go away.

The tactics varied but by far the most important action was to count the number of people who used the bridge. It seemed an obvious ploy but it had not been done. The team, including members of BIAG, took station one Saturday and counted just under 1000 people who crossed the bridge in 10 hours. This statistic was telling, especially with Reading Council officers. It was difficult to judge Network Rail's reaction as they proved extremely elusive.

The 100 people/hour was a statistic used at Reading Waterfest. People were asked to sign prepared letters to Network Rail at the rate of 100/hour while the Waterfest was on. The number was exceeded and included both Reading MPs (although the campaign did not want to be involved in politics).

Eventually the case was won and the bridge repaired (but not as it was originally because of modern legislation). It was a victory for the community working through its voluntary groups.

No acknowledgement or letters were received from Network Rail or the Council. A plaque can be seen on one of the railway bridges referring to restoration. A recent Thames Path guide praises the work of local people (no names) in helping to get the bridge restored. Virtue is its own reward. The bridge stands proudly and is well used. BIAG can be proud of its contribution to maintaining this little bit of local industrial archaeology.

---

## CAVERSHAM - 100 YEARS ON: A BIAG CONTRIBUTION

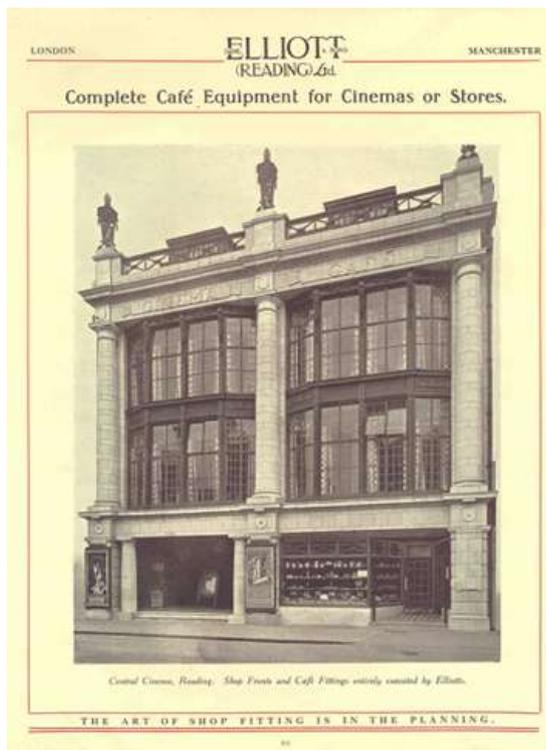
**Peter Trout**

On November 9th 1911 the Oxfordshire 'village' of Caversham was absorbed into the Borough of Reading. Throughout 2011 the occasion was noted (not necessarily celebrated!) by a number of displays, exhibitions, talks and activities. As part of all this flurry of events, BIAG was involved in two.

The most significant was the programmed 'Industrial Caversham' on Friday 28th October at Church House in Caversham. BIAG's presentation was given by Peter Trout and Dennis Johnson with invited speakers Gillian Clark and Mildred Cookson. Gillian is the author of "Down by the River" (Two Rivers Press) which is an excellent read for those interested in the Thames and Reading. Her father was in the boat building and hire business and the family records were her starting point. Her talk, in limited time, was an insight into an almost vanished river scene. Barge building and traffic has now gone, and although there is still a boatyard and river trips; Reading does not seem over keen to exploit its river heritage.

Mildred Cookson talked about mills, particularly Mapledurham. She would have needed much more time to do justice to the old established Caversham Mill. Latterly the mill was a cork factory and produced powdered metals before being flattened in about 1970.

The main industry in Caversham was Samuel Elliott's. It should be noted that, on the pre-war German target map in Reading Central library - Elliotts features in red. The best story of the firm is told in Alan Beardmore's book "Samuel Elliott & Co Ltd" and supplement (sold out but available in the Library) and he also attended the meeting. The firm was a giant supplier of high quality carpentry and woodwork and much more. They fitted out many prestigious buildings and beyond to include work on liners including the Queens. During the war their effort was prodigious ranging from aircraft to landing craft. After the war mobile health units and the Healey Elliott car (later Austin Healey) were developed. Alas a great name was obliterated in part by asset strippers and insensitive management.



**Shopfitting - Gaumont Cinema, Friar Street Reading**

[Pictures reproduced with the permission of Alan Beardmore]



**Healey Elliott Car advertisement - 1929**

Other industries covered included Thorneycroft Marine where (ex) member Roy Green worked and designed the RG2 diesel engine. Roy's story needs to be recorded. During the war Thorneycroft's were part of the technical war devising engines to resist devices such as acoustic and magnetic mines – never mind demands for a range of engines for typical applications such as landing craft and high speed launches. There was also a link with Herbert Engineering in Wolsey Road who started pre-WWI making engines (Thorneycrofts under licence?) but during the war concentrated on aero engines. Post WW1 Herberts developed quality cars and were successfully competing at Brooklands and other events. However, like many small car firms of the 1920s it collapsed and the premises were taken over by Thorneycroft.

Gascoignes in various combinations were involved in the dairy industry with particular concern for cleansing dairy equipment. The laboratories in Ardler Rd. worked on several products, the most famous being Napisan (for cleaning Terry towelling nappies) and Milton for sterilising babies' bottles without leaving unpleasant tastes or harmful chemicals.

There are still some buildings with an IA interest including one in Wolsey Road and the Laundry in George St. Caversham. The latter was established in the late 19th C and was a significant business as early photographs bear witness. Land nearby was used for drying etc.

Mention must also be made of extractive industries such as the chalk mines at Emmer Green, gravel pits and the Brick & Tile Works. Among many small businesses in Caversham were wickerwork (from osier beds), coach making, small scale manufacture (e.g. confectionery) and, strikingly, bicycle making. (The outstanding bicycle firm was Warricks on Caversham Rd. (but not in Caversham!).



**Warrick Tricycle**

Also not in Caversham but linked were the Thameside foundries such as Allen & Simmonds, Cope & Cope, Girdlers and Goodman. Old photographs show a mass of tall chimneys beside Caversham Bridge.

This first Industrial Caversham meeting attracted a capacity audience of about 65. Many of those attending had links with local companies such as Elliotts (including a Great Grandson) as well as those with a more general interest.

The second meeting was on November 12th when BIAG took part in a WEA Day School on Caversham organised by Margaret Simons. BIAG had a 40 minute slot and presented a talk similar to that given at the first meeting. In the general forum contacts were made and ideas exchanged. One participating gentleman was in a veteran car club and advised that two of the members had Healey Elliott cars. The two events were very enjoyable to prepare, deliver and to 'spread the word' about IA and BIAG in particular. Much stress was placed on trying to move on from being a sedentary audience by providing material (ephemera, photographs etc.) for Pin Reading's History (an Exhibition at the Museum) and the Local Studies Collection of the Library. It is considered important to be active in local groups and to attempt research ranging from simple recording to writing books (It was noted that both Gillian Clark and Alan Beardmore achieved publication, being motivated by their own involvement either in the family firm or by father & son working for each other).

## EDITOR`S NOTE:

Thanks to Peter Trout for two articles in this issue and my apologies to him that they were not published earlier - something, somewhere failed in the means of transmission and I only received them after the last newsletter issue had been "put to bed". Thanks also to Dennis Johnson for providing some suitable illustrations for the article on Caversham Industries.

I would make my traditional (and continuing) plea to please keep sending me letters, articles, trip reports etc., that can be included in future editions!

**John Coulson**

---

## VISIT NOTES

**John Coulson**

### **17<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Farnborough Air Sciences Trust (FAST) Museum**

A group of BIAG members met at the Museum in Farnborough at 10.00 in the morning. After coffee & biscuits we were given a detailed talk on the history of the site and the background to creating the Museum by David Wilson, (the Manager of the Cody Flyer project). His talk laid particular emphasis on Cody and the Cody replica.

Around 1992, changes in government policy resulted in much of what was previously the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE) being privatised and becoming part of Qinetiq Ltd which still has a site in the Farnborough area. However, much of the original RAE site and the airfield was sold off. The RAE site has become an industrial estate and the airfield is now being operated as a commercial business aviation venture. It was recognised that some of the buildings on the site had considerable historical significance and a number have been listed including three wind tunnels, the famous "black sheds" dating from 1913, the balloon shed and a centrifuge in the Institute of Aviation Medicine which was also based at RAE.

In 1870, the Army recognised the potential advantages of balloons (mainly for reconnaissance purposes) and commissioned development work on them. The officer in charge was Templar and he moved from Woolwich to Aldershot in 1890. Samuel Cody was involved in developing kites for the army and test flying them. This, and the balloon work, was moved to Farnborough in 1906 as room was needed for airship sheds. The first airship flight was from Farnborough to London in 1907 but the wind was too strong for it to return so it had to set down at Crystal Palace.

In parallel, Cody had been developing British Army Aeroplane No 1 and, on 16 October 1908, BAA No. 1A made the first powered heavier than air and sustained flight lasting 27 seconds. A non-flying replica of this aircraft has been made by FAST and is shown in the photograph below, This shows its size and it was interesting that FAST had problems finding wood long enough for the wing spars until it was suggested they contact a ladder manufacturer who was able to provide them with suitable "seconds".



Obviously, this was later than Wilbur & Orville Wright's first flight in 1903. However, after BAA1 & 1A, the Army's interest in fixed wing aircraft ceased and Cody carried out all his subsequent work at his own expense. He went on to build No. 2, the Flyer (that could carry 4 passengers) and Nos. 3 and 4 – the latter participated in military trials in 1912. Sadly, on 7 August 1913 during a flight with a passenger, the aircraft crashed and they were both killed.

By that time the operational benefits of fixed wing aircraft had become clear and the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) was formed in April 1912 (apparently a big celebration is planned at Middle Wallop this year). Subsequently the RFC was merged with the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) in April 1918 to form the RAF. Trenchard was originally in command and the FAST Museum is based in the building which was his office. He then had a "difference of opinion" and resigned. However, he returned later and remained in command until 1930.

Following the talk, the group visited the hangar housing the replica and were then treated to a substantial & delicious cold buffet lunch. Afterwards we were given a museum tour and then let loose to explore further at our own speed. This was helped by the presence of several FAST volunteers all of who were very knowledgeable and only too keen to try and answer any questions we might have. Our thanks to them all for a fascinating visit.

#### **Further information:**

The FAST Museum is located at Trenchard House, 85 Farnborough Road, Farnborough, Hants GU 14 6TF. It is open on Saturdays, Sundays & Bank Holiday Mondays and admission is free. Phone enquiries 01252 375050, website [www.airsciences.org.uk](http://www.airsciences.org.uk)

#### **9 July 2011. Visit to Stroudwater Mills**

It may be of interest to members who participated in the visit to Stroud in July (reported in BIAG News No 25) that the Stroudwater Textile Trust have now produced a DVD titled "Rivers of Cloth". Using archive files and the recorded voices of those who worked in the industry, it tells the story of the woollen mills of Stroud and the surrounding area. It is available in bookshops and Tourist Information Centres in Stroud and Nailsworth or can be ordered direct by sending a cheque for £10.00, made payable to "Stroudwater Textile Trust" to: Antony Burton, 31 Lansdown, Stroud, GL5 1BG.

---

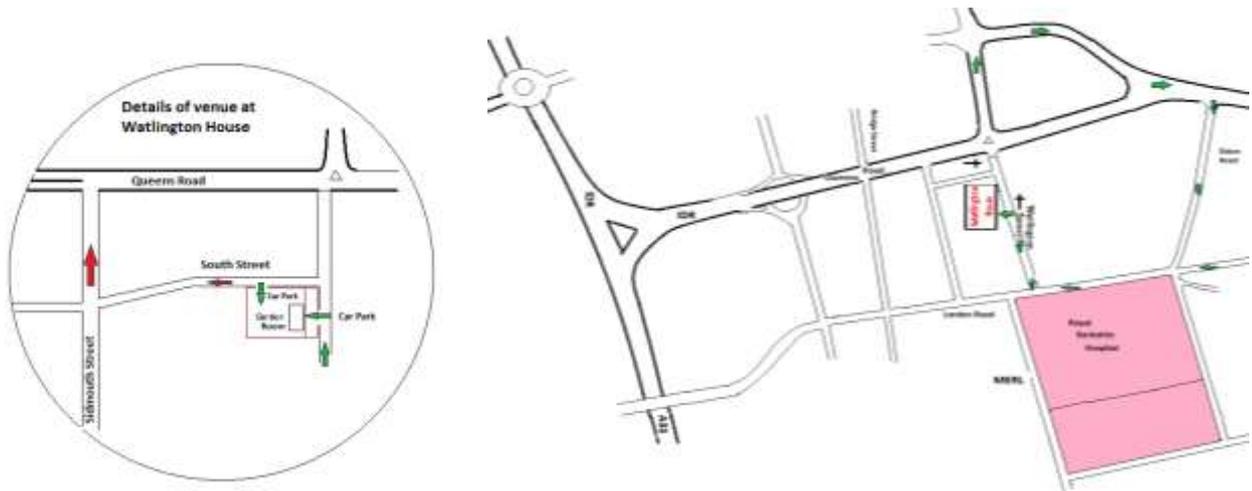
### **FORTHCOMING MEETINGS PROGRAMME: JANUARY – MAY 2012**

16/1/12	THE CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH SPEED RAILWAY 1 (HS1)	Douglas Irvine
20/2/12	STEAM & STEEL IN THE VALE OF THE WHITE HORSE	Tony Hadland
19/3/12	INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY FILMS EVENING	Peter Trout & Bent Weber
16/4/12	RAILWAYS & ART	Mark Casson
21/5/12	THE GROWTH & EXPANSION OF READING FROM 1800 TO 1911	Margaret Simons

Meetings are held in Watlington House, 44 Watlington St, Reading RG1 4RG in a meeting room on the first floor. All meetings are held on Monday evenings and will start at 7.30pm.

**Travel Guidance:** By bus, the westbound Route 17 bus services stop at the end of St John's Hill. The nearest eastbound stop for Route 17 is outside the Prudential offices to the north east of the Watlington St bridge over the Kennet. Both stops are about 5 minutes' walk away.

By car, it is easiest to approach by travelling westward along London Road from Cemetery Junction and then turning right into Watlington Street just before the petrol station. Car parking facilities are available at the rear of the site via the entrance in South Street.



Watlington House has a web site with a map: [www.watlingtonhouse.org.uk](http://www.watlingtonhouse.org.uk)

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### South East Regional Conference (SERIAC)

The South East Regional Industrial Archaeology Conference (SERIAC) will be held on Saturday 28 April 2012 at St Bartholomews School, Newbury and is being organised by BIAG. A programme is now available on the BIAG website and bookings are being taken.

**The event is being fronted by Graham Smith who will need help from others to act as stewards. Please offer Graham support; he is at most evening meetings of BIAG, or ring 01635 580356.**

We plan to visit Bristol Floating Docks to visit the Paddle Steamer Medway Queen which is in dry dock alongside the SS Great Britain, being restored. This will be followed by a trip on the Clifton Rocks Railway.

{The K&A Reading Branch has a meeting Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012 with a talk entitled: **Restoration of Paddle Steamer Medway Queen** by Mark Bathurst at The Grange Free Church hall, Circuit Lane, Southcote, READING, RG30 3HD starting at 7.45 pm.}

Sunday 12 August BIAG plans to visit the Steam Railway of Sir Robert McAlpine at Fawley. Queries for both trips to Ron Neal, (Tel: 01635 34342, email: [ronaldgneal@googlemail.com](mailto:ronaldgneal@googlemail.com)).

## CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The subscription year for BIAG now runs from January 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>. The subscription for 2012 is now due. Please send a cheque for £20.00, made payable to BIAG, to the treasurer: Peter Pribik, 6 Harefield Close, Winnersh, WOKINGHAM, RG41 5NP, or see him at one of the evening meetings.

**Dennis Johnson**

For general BIAG business, please contact the Secretary: PETER TROUT (Tel: 01491 682002)  
7 WEST CHILTERN, WOODCOTE, READING, RG8 0SG

Submissions to BIAG News are welcome in any format. Please send your contributions with an IA theme such as articles, letters, pictures, jokes, cartoons, cuttings from journals etc. to:

JOHN COULSON (Tel: 0118 9402526)  
3 THE CRESCENT, CRAZIES HILL, READING, RG10 8LW  
or e-mail [jcoulson@theiet.org](mailto:jcoulson@theiet.org)