



# BERKSHIRE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

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Editor: John Coulson

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## ELLIOTTS OF NEWBURY: A TREASURED & CHERISHED MEMORY

The notion that the past is different from the present is difficult to grasp. However, it is best exemplified by a development in Newbury's history. It may well come as a great surprise to the citizens of modern Newbury to be aware that well into the twentieth century manufacturing took place behind shop frontages. One example of this was the Elliotts furniture works which was to be found behind the Methodist Church in Northbrook Street. This business was in existence for just over an hundred years and played an important role in the economy of Newbury.

Around about 1870 Samuel Elliott, a joiner, started a business and it soon was making high quality wood carving, moulding and joinery work for fitting out churches, banks, country houses (e.g. Greenham Lodge) and many other important buildings. However, ownership changed in 1895 when Samuel Elliott went bankrupt and as a consequence Elliott's Moulding and Joinery Company Ltd. was formed.

Despite this unfortunate development, by the beginning of the Twentieth Century the Company was selling its products throughout Southern England. Between 1914 — 1945, ten of these years were taken up with global conflict which greatly affected Elliotts. During the First World War (1914 — 1918) the Company produced over 200,000 ammunition cases with a workforce of 90% women. After the war was over the Company went back to serving its usual market, which consisted of manufacturing a range of furniture particularly bedroom and dining suites.

In 1939 war returned to Europe and gradually spread to other continents. Again the Company possessed a largely female workforce and produced components for aircraft including the Supermarine Spitfire, Tiger Moths, De Havilland Mosquito, the Airspeed Oxford and the Airspeed Horsa Glider. Elliotts built one third of the total Horsa production so it's not surprising to learn that the Company built a high proportion of the large troop carrying gliders that were used during the D-Day landings. Initially, the parts for aircraft that the Company manufactured were made of wood but as the war developed they extended their activities into using aluminium alloy. The Company was so successful that it was used in several official films showing how aircraft parts were made. The factory even witnessed a visit by the Minister of Aircraft Production, Stafford Cripps.



Eon AP5: ( Image reproduced by kind permission of Ken Tilley)

When the war was over they were employed in the manufacture of complete rooms for the pre-fabricated homes that were installed throughout the country.

In 1945 despite the fact that the business had hoped to resume furniture making they were not allowed to by the Board of Trade. The Company therefore, largely through the interest of the Managing Director, Horace Buckingham, began to make a series of sports gliders, including the 'Olympia'. These proved to

be very successful in competitions and many of them were made for export. Elliotts also designed and made a light aircraft, the 'Newbury Eon', but this did not go into production. However, in 1948 the manufacture of furniture resumed and because of the quality of the workmanship they were chosen to exhibit in the Festival of Britain exhibition on the South Bank, in 1951.

In the summer of 1965 Horace Buckingham died, so the Company conducted a review of its business and decided that glider production was no longer profitable. However, Slingsby Sailplanes Ltd., agreed to take over the production on EoN Sailplanes in 1966, but it seems that no Elliott designed glider was ever built by them.

The importance of the role that the Company played in the Newbury economy can be gauged from the fact that during the war years there were 600 on the payroll, twenty years later this figure had only declined to 500.

In 1970 P.M. Holdings Ltd., who also operated other furniture factories, (eg in Wallingford), acquired an interest in Elliotts. It is clear that Elliotts had been making a loss prior to this development and this continued to be so after that date.



The Newbury Weekly News of December 28<sup>th</sup> 1974 reported that in January 1973 60 staff were made redundant in an effort to make the company more viable, a further 60 in April, and another 45 in November, when it was announced that the firm was to be merged with Lupton Morton which operated in Wallingford.

By then, the paper claims only 50 were employed on the Newbury site. When the news was announced at the end of December 1974 that the Company was to close its Newbury works it came as a great shock to the workforce since it is alleged that they were not aware that such a development was pending. By Easter 1975 the closure had been accomplished and a great Newbury institution was no more. In 1981 it was announced that Bayer plc the international pharmaceutical and chemical company was to move its HQ from Surrey to the site of the Elliotts factory. In addition the Northcroft estate occupies part of the site.

So for over 100 years Elliotts of Newbury played a significant role in the story of Newbury but now it remains a treasured memory for many of its former employees and customers.

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## **Elliotts of Reading – A Short Resume**

**Dennis Johnson**

As reported above, Samuel Elliott started his business in Newbury in 1860 and although he was a good woodworker he was a poor businessman. In 1895 he was made bankrupt and the company which took over the business in Newbury, where Sam Elliott continued to work, decided that Samuel Elliott should leave in July 1902. Elliott moved to Reading and leased land and buildings off Gosbrook Road in Caversham from Mr J C Fidler. Here he set up a new carpentry and joiners business with his two sons, Albert and Cecil. The business quickly

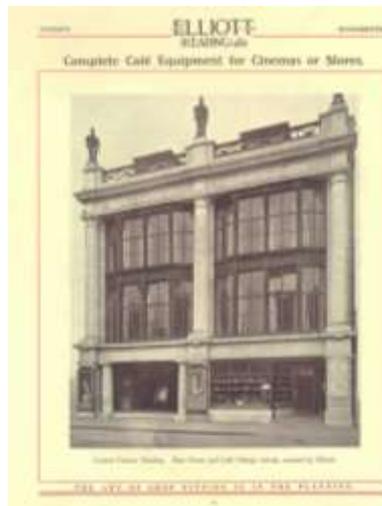
got a reputation for first class work and many contracts came in for shop fitting and for high class commercial premises.

During WW1 Elliott's undertook work for the wooden frames of Bristol and De Havilland aircraft. They also did work for the Admiralty making equipment for minesweepers. After the war they continued to get contracts, including supplying doors for the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley.



Elliott's also patented the design of a revolving door. Many of these were supplied to banks; one was used in Bush House in The Strand.

The firm was a giant of high quality carpentry and woodworking. They fitted out many prestigious buildings which included work on liners such as the Queen Mary. The factory supplied high quality fittings to great houses in England and in Europe. They fulfilled many contracts for shop fitting, including the front of the Gaumont Cinema in Friar Street, Reading.



When WWII came they moved on to use their woodworking skills for the war effort. This included making landing craft and Horsa gliders (See photos below).



Landing craft at Caversham



After the war Elliott's returned to their old business of producing high quality wood work and continued until 1969. A threatened takeover resulted in Elliott's being supported by Robert McAlpine and Sons. This arrangement continued until the late 1980s when Trafalgar House took over. By the late 1990s Trafalgar House Estates decided to sell the Caversham site for redevelopment for £2 million.

By late 2002 the lights were turned off for the last time. The site is now housing with the road called Elliott Way.

*Thanks to Alan Beardmore who gave permission for the use of some of the illustrations from Reference 1. Reference 2 contains many illustrations of work undertaken by Elliott's, together with a plan of the site in 1951.*

*References:*

1. Alan Beardmore, "Samuel Elliott and Sons", 2006
2. Alan Beardmore, "Samuel Elliott and Sons", Supplement, 2008

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## **EDITOR'S NOTE:**

Thanks to Graham Smith for suggesting reproducing the article on Elliotts of Newbury in this issue and also to Dennis Johnson for his article on Elliotts of Reading. Thanks also to Peter Trout for his note on the Reading Heritage Days; Peter also did some of the research for the Elliotts of Reading article.

You may remember that, with reference to Peter Trout's article on Industrial Ephemera in the last BIAG News (No 27), it was suggested that members to look out for old trade murals and photograph them. Sadly, I must report that I have not yet received any photographs – but there is still space to include them in future issues! So, please bear this in mind when you are out and about. (Obviously, it would be easiest if you could send me digital photos in .jpg format but I can also scan in traditional photos if necessary - originals can be returned on request. Please also advise the date a photograph was taken and its exact location).

I would also 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**

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## **HERITAGE DAYS**

**Peter Trout**

Once again BIAG made its contribution to the September Heritage Days by mounting two Reading Industrial Walks. These perambulations around central Reading, particularly the Kennet and Avon waterfronts, were devised by Dennis Johnson and previously led by him. That mantle was cast on myself this year as Dennis was 'hors de combat' due to his knee operation. The two walks were fully booked (at 25 maximum), and indeed over-subscribed. Armed with Dennis' notes and my own meagre knowledge I met my parties, with some trepidation, alongside Queen Victoria's statue outside the Old Town Hall. I need not have worried as each group was most interested and had many questions and comments.

I am not going to record the details of the walk, partly because some BIAG members were disappointed at missing out so it might be offered to the Group in the Spring. Suffice to say the walk scotched the silly idea of Reading's 3 Bs as it showed there was more to Reading's industrial heritage. This was underlined by the distribution of our leaflet, "Industrial Reading". It was very encouraging to tap the interest and there is always the hope of recruiting new members. Even more encouraging was the feedback, which was somewhat flattering. The greatest spin-off from this was contact with Caversham Round Table who requested a walk for members as the Chairman (James) had so enjoyed his walk. This was arranged for a Friday evening starting at 6.30 pm, meaning half the walk was in the dark (I did not hear a splash so I assume no one fell into the Kennet!). They apparently enjoyed the experience as it stimulated much discussion over their restorative 'pints'.

Apart from any immediate enjoyment and interest these walks give BIAG and the IA cause a boost. On the other side it helps others, particularly newcomers to the town, to relate to the area. These walks are Reading based but there must be potential for other Berkshire areas for something similar in the future. Let's not forget SERIAC in Newbury. Any volunteers?

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**CROFTON STEAM-PAST**  
**John Coulson**



The railway finally took the opportunity to join the participants at the end-of-season Steam Gala at Crofton Pumping Station on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> September. On the morning of Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> the West Somerset Steam Express from Paddington to Minehead passed through (hauled by SR Battle of Britain Class no 34067 "Tangmere"). On the Sunday, the Cathedrals Express from Maidenhead to Kingswear passed by, hauled by the modern replica A1 Pacific no 60163 "Tornado". A Crofton volunteer caught the Sunday steam past and I couldn't resist including his photo- hope you like it! (*Photo courtesy of Frank Cheevers.*)

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**VISIT NOTES**

**Sunday 12 August – Fawley Railway & Museum**  
**John Coulson**

BIAG members visited Sir Robert McAlpine's private railway & museum at Fawley on Sunday 12 August. For once during this appalling summer, the weather was superb and we wandered round the exhibits & museum at our own pace, only occasionally meeting up with each other. The railway collections in his museum are very extensive and we were also treated to a grand line-up of vintage (and more recent!) cars – all in perfect condition. Unfortunately, I had to leave early but it was a very enjoyable day. Thanks very much to Ron Neal for organising the visit - I would certainly like have the opportunity to revisit some time since there was much to see.



## South East Regional IA Conference (SERIAC 2013) at Dartford, Kent

The next SERIAC conference will take place at Dartford Grammar School West Hill, Dartford, Kent, DA1 2HW. on Saturday April 27<sup>th</sup> and will be hosted by Kent Archaeological Society. The outline programme has now been announced and is as follows:

9.00 to 9.45am **Arrival and Registration.**

9.45-9.55am **Opening proceedings.** President K.A.S. Ian Coulson.

10.00 -10.45am **Gunpowder industry of Kent.** Professor Alan Crocker .

11.00 to 11.45am **Ship Building in Kent.** Richard Holdsworth, Preservation & Education Director, The Historic Dockyard, Chatham.

11.50-12.35pm **Historic Aircraft restoration.** Chairman of Medway Aircraft Preservation Society Limited,

2.00-2.45pm **Early years of J & E Hall of Dartford.** Terry Young. Director/General Manager J & E Hall Technology Centre.

2.50-3.35pm **Cement Industry in Kent.** Jim Preston.

3.55- 4.40pm **Kentish motor cycle manufacturers.** Nick Kelly. An outline of the rise and demise of the Motorcycle Industry in Kent.

4.40pm **Closing remarks** by the Chairman.

Cost for pre-booked delegates will be £12. However the cost on the day will be £15. A buffet lunch may be prebooked at a cost of £7.50p

Further information and Booking Form is available from Mike Clinch 01322526425, e-mail [mike@mikeclinch.co.uk](mailto:mike@mikeclinch.co.uk) (or see Dennis Johnson or Graham Smith at BIAG).

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## FORTHCOMING NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2012 MEETINGS PROGRAMME

19/11/12 AGM AND MEMBERS` EVENING. This will include reports on various IA visits during the last year.

17/12/12 THE HISTORY OF THE SEWING MACHINE

Martin Gregory

Meetings will now be held upstairs 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. The programme for 2013 is not yet available

**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)

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For general BIAG business, please contact the Secretary:

PETER TROUT (Tel: 01491 682002)

7 WEST CHILTERN, WOODCOTE, READING, RG8 0SG

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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)