



BERKSHIRE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

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Editor: John Coulson

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Torrington and Marland Light Railway

Dennis Johnson

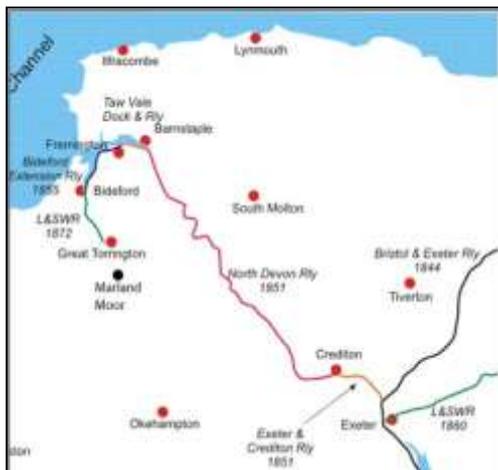
Over the last 30 to 40 years my wife, Janet, and I have holidayed from time to time in North Devon, frequently around the Bideford and Barnstaple area. Amongst other things we have cycled the Tarka Trail, which is on the bed of an old railway line, and had a drink in the "Puffing Billy" at the old Torrington Station. When, about 20 years ago, we explored the trail beyond Torrington we cycled to the area of some old clay pits near the village of Peters Marland.

During another visit about 10 years ago we discovered the cafe at Fremington Quay; this had an interesting display of photographs from the beginning of the 20th century, of the railway and quay in use for exporting clay. About this time we also witnessed the loading of a big ship on Bideford Quay with what turned out to be clay. These scenes triggered the connection between the quay at Fremington and the line which became the Tarka Trail.

At the South Wales and South West IA conference in 2013 I bought a book entitled "North Devon Clay" by Michael Messenger; with this I started to pull together the various experiences we had in North Devon. During a recent trip to stay in Instow, in an apartment adjacent to the old Instow station platform, I started to add up all these experience and to put together a talk for the benefit of BIAG members. This article is a short account of what I plan to illustrate in my talk.

In the 19th century the Marland Brick & Clay Works had brickworks at Marland Moor but wanted to export the more valuable fine white clay which was there. Pack horses had been used in the 18th century to take limited amounts of fine clay to Bideford, mainly for pipe manufacture. However, there was a more lucrative market further away where fine pottery was being made by Josiah Wedgwood. The situation was improved by the construction in 1827 of Lord John Rolle's Canal from Torrington. This short canal was built from Torrington to the navigable part of the Torridge River a few miles upstream from Bideford. The Rolle canal from Torrington to Landcross ensured that the clay works did not cease entirely; the clay was taken downstream by barge to the potteries at Annery (near Weare Giffard).

In the late 19th century the manager of the Marland Clay Works, Frederick Holwill, saw the need for efficient transport, rail being the best form of transport to the Midland potteries. A survey of the route for a rail line from the clay works to Torrington was made in 1879. This was planned so that clay could be exported via Bideford along the L&SW Railway, which terminated at Torrington, 6 miles from the Marland clay pit.



As can be seen by the diagram, Torrington was the terminal of the London & South West Railway North Devon Line from Barnstaple. It had connections to the sea at Bideford and Fremington.

In 1881 the eminent railway engineer, J. B. Fell, commissioned by Marland Brick & Clay Works Ltd., completed a 3-foot gauge light railway from Marland Moor to Torrington - including a wooden viaduct over the River Torridge. The system used by Fell ignored the usual, expensive, method of embankments and cuttings to achieve a level trackbed, and instead relied on viaducts to carry the line. Prefabricated wooden frames were adapted to the varying ground levels.

The Marland railway crossed at least five viaducts, as opposed to bridges, but the most eye-catching and by far the longest was the first, taking the little railway across the river Torridge and its wide valley. Its overall length was more than 300 yards and at one point travellers found themselves perched 40 feet above the ground. The main section consisted of five spans crossing the river, the largest three being 45 feet each, and the flanking spans 18 feet. These piers were supported on

brick bases and brick cutwaters in the river. Four more spans connected the viaduct to the solid ground and the loop line immediately before the tunnel under the road leading to the station. There were 42 spans in all, and amazingly most of the simple timber piers had no proper foundations.



The timber viaduct that carried the tramway over the river to Torrington Station (on right)

The line continued from 1881 until 1925 when the L&SWR built The North Devon and Cornwall Junction Light Railway (ND&CJLR) to link Torrington to Okehampton via Halwill junction on the North Cornwall line.



This shows the route of the 1925 upgrade to standard gauge rail by the L&SWR. The new line ran from Torrington to Halwill Junction.

This was built to serve numerous china clay pits that lay between the London and South Western Railway's Torrington branch and Halwill.

The clay works continued to use both narrow gauge and standard gauge about the site.



Dunsbear Halt, 2013



Last stop before the clay pits, 2013



Diesel locomotive "Progress" in 1984 and restored, 2013

There are plans to relay part of the track at Torrington and run trains along a short stretch of line using the restored diesel engine "Progress" and an SR coach.



Torrington Station, 2013



Clay wagon at Torrington Station, 2013

References:

1. Messenger, Michael, "North Devon Clay", Twelveheads Press, 2007
2. Whetmath, C.F.D. and Stuckey, Douglas, "The North Devon and Cornwall Junction Light Railway", The Oakwood Press, 1963

GETTING DOWN TO BRASS TACKS.....

Peter Trout

.....or in any other direction, it can be said that BIAG had a very enjoyable, stimulating, rather exhausting and somewhat shambolic day`s visit to Bath on September 7th.

The meeting place was the Bath at Work Museum which has at its core the Bowler Brass Foundry. To be more precise (to be contradictory) the factory covered far more than brass and included other alloys but expanded to iron and a vast range of iron working and engineering. The business grew like Topsy and included mineral water production. The collection is a truly amazing one both in content and how it comes to be displayed (of distinct IA interest).

The firm was established in the mid Victorian period and lasted through three generations until it closed in 1969. On hearing of its impending closure the saviours of the collection took literally thousands of photographs before the building was flattened. All the contents were obtained – lock, stock and barrel, viz machinery of all kinds,

tools, office fittings, unsold stock, bottles, gas making plant etc. The photographs were used to exactly recreate the works in an 18th Century, real tennis court. There is such a fantastic cramped jumble of machines and equipment one wonders how so much work was done (it would not under present H & S rules!).

But it certainly was. Presented with a customer demand, these most ingenious engineers would crack it “in-house”. They would devise and make anything in brass or soft alloys as well as working on iron that was brought in. One is staggered and humbled at the sheer wide-ranging skill of the workers, especially in these days of specialisation. (I think of Robin Wallace-Sims and how he could turn his hand to all sorts).

As a good Yorkshireman I not only think of the “brass” but of the sense of economy. It was claimed that the firm only bought one new piece of machinery. Generally, they would buy second hand and adapt it where necessary.

Going goggle eyed through the workshops one entered the mineral water factory with its array of ingredients (kept secret) for various cordials, the bottling area (Mineral water bottles are a whole subject by themselves), the carbon dioxide making equipment, soda siphons (no time for a quick one!) and on to the rest of the Museum.

Suffice it to say there was much more to see and it varied from a superb motor car to plasticine - all part of Bath`s industrial and craft history. It is no wonder that it was at this time that the BIAG group started to lose contact – it is self-defeating to try to keep a group tight-knit when interests are wide.

Before going into the Museum, we were sheltered in the next door church which was a bonus. It was particularly interesting that it was built for the poor and “unwashed”, ie those who could not afford the pew rents in other fashionable churches. Bath had a large population of poor and lowly paid who supported the rich in places such as the Royal Crescent. Servants, labourers and craftsmen were sorely needed.

The next port of call for some was the Postal Museum. Packed into the cellars of the GPO this contains a wonderful collection of postal memorabilia brilliantly displayed, and much of it interactive. I liked the touch buttons which brought alive the framed portraits of the famous to tell us of their achievements. Palmer (mail coaches), Allen (cross posts), Musgrave (sent the first Penny Black). Fascinating was the Pigeonpost letter sent by the Queen Mother which was in a case of famous FIRSTS. The story of airmail was well portrayed – Alcock and Brown carried letters on their famous trans-Atlantic flight. Letter boxes, perforating machines and the story of writing were among other attractions.

Reeling from two intriguing museums and being “devils for punishment” (using the phrase benignly), the Building of Bath Museum was the next port of call. This is located in the old Countess of Huntingdon Connexion Chapel which houses another well-appointed collection. An introduction is given using a DVD made by the Department of the Built Environment at the West of England University (or something similar). This was excellently filmed and was an intelligent and apt precursor to the displays of the various crafts involved in building Georgian Bath. Quarrying, masonry, glassmaking, sash windows, plasterwork, joinery, decoration, metalwork, lighting etc etc were all there and set in the architecture of those such as the Woods (Father and Son). Little did I realise how cleverly much was based on the ideal of the “Square”. We are grateful to the Burstons for introducing this Museum into the itinerary especially as the Avon Valley Railway plan proved too ambitious.

For me at least it was a great but rather exhausting day but full of stimuli. My regret is that the party became dispersed and that we could not come together socially over a meal or drink. As members had itineraries of their own beyond the visit, it was not to be.

EDITOR`S NOTE:

Thanks to Dennis Johnson for his article on the Torrington and Marland Light Railway, (a preview for his talk at the December meeting), and to Peter Trout for his entertaining writeup on the visit to Bath in September. This was very interesting – every time I visit Bath I think that I must go back there and spend more time! I should also apologise for the shortness of this Newsletter compared to previous issues. This is because it was recognised (at very short notice) that an issue needed to be distributed before the AGM later in October. Hopefully, we will get back to the usual length for the next issue (content availability permitting– so please send me those articles you may have!)

John Coulson

BIAG Annual General Meeting

Notice is given of the 36th Annual General Meeting of the Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group to be held at Watlington House, 44 Watlington St., Reading at 7.30pm on Monday, 21st October 2013.

Members may submit motions, proposed and seconded, for inclusion on the final agenda provided due notice is given or may raise matters at the meeting from the floor, but these may be deferred for further discussion and consultation. It would be appreciated that any matters for discussion (and proposals) be submitted to the secretary in good time so that appropriate notification and preparation can be made.

Nominations for the Committee can be received beforehand or at the meeting provided the agreement of the nominee has been obtained.

AGENDA

1. OPENING REMARKS
2. APOLOGIES
3. MINUTES OF THE 35th AGM
4. MATTERS ARISING
5. SECRETARY'S REPORT
6. TREASURER'S REPORT & MEMBERSHIP
7. MATTERS ARISING
8. BIAGSCOPE & NEWSLETTER
9. ELECTION OF OFFICERS & COMMITTEE

Chairman No nominations.

Treasurer Peter Pribik has been nominated.

Secretary Peter Trout is willing to continue.

Activities Officer No nominations.

Committee Bob Haskins, Bent Weber, Graham Smith, Ron Neal and Dennis Johnson are willing to serve.

10. Appointment of Examiner
11. Consultation on Annual Subscription.

The committee is recommending that the annual subscription should be £20.00.

12. OPEN FORUM

An opportunity for all to discuss the activities, programme, future etc. of the Group and make suggestions for the new committee.

13. A.O.B.

Peter Trout, Secretary

Please Note: There is no nomination for Chairman or Programme/Activities Officer

FORTHCOMING OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2013 MEETINGS PROGRAMME

21/10/13	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by a talk about Watlington House	Michael Jones
18/11/13	THE WONDERFULLY WEIRD WORLD OF TRANSIT MAPS (How different countries approach the mapping of their railways)	Mark Ovenden
16/12/13	NORTH DEVON CLAY RAILWAY (Torrington & Marland Light Railway)	Dennis Johnson

The following dates have been identified for the Spring/Summer 2014 meetings –please reserve them in your diaries now! – 20 January, 17 February, 17 March, 14 April & 19 May. 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

VISITS – AUTUMN 2013

Sunday 20 October

Postal History: From Pillar to Post

Discover 350 years of London`s postal history from the coffee houses of the 1600s to the electronic communication of today.

All GPO walking tours start at Farringdon Station and are led by trained and accredited guides for Clerkenwell, Islington and the City of London. Walks include the story of Victorian postal reform, the growth of the GPO, the post underground and the development of post boxes and telephone kiosks.

Start: 1100 am, Walk lasts around 2 hours.

Cost & Booking: £7 per head, £6 for concessions (60+). No need to book; just turn up & meet your guide who will be wearing a City guide`s badge.

Date to be advised

St Bride`s Printing Museum, London

Peter Trout plans to lead a visit to St Bride`s Printing Museum with former BIAG member Ben Weiner hosting the tour. For further details and to book, contact: Peter Trout, 01491 682002

For general BIAG business, please contact the Secretary: PETER TROUT (Tel: 01491 682002)
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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:

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