Many members knew Lawrence as a founding father of BIAG, his involvement in many recording and restoration projects around the county and from his involvement in the University of Reading WEA IA courses that he ran jointly with Ken Major. As an early member of BIAG we asked Bent Weber to pen a few words. I ask, that as you read this, you remember the spirit of Lawrence and his many contributions to BIAG.

-0Oo-

I first met Lawrence shortly after my wife and I moved to Bracknell in the mid-1960s. I enrolled for a short WEA course there on the history of canals with Lawrence as the tutor. My memory of that course was the outing at its end – a visit to the Oxford Canal at Thrupp, an eye opener for me. This was to be my introduction to industrial archaeology which was to become a lifelong interest, and the first of many courses where Lawrence was to be one of the tutors.
From that first contact with Lawrence, I was drawn to his approach to IA, which chimed with me as a social history approach rather than a mechanistic approach of engineering in its many guises. His view on the discipline was that it was a construct of many aspects: building and operating canals should look also at the lives of the builders, the navigators (navvies) and the boatmen and women. How they and the society around them were affected by the changes being wrought and following on.

I came to the subject as a social scientist, with limited engineering experience – very much a contrast with the early days of Industrial archaeology as a discipline so I was more than pleased to find a like-minded teacher, as Lawrence was to become.

After the Bracknell course, Lawrence suggested that course members might care to come for a taster session or two of the joint course that he and Ken Major were providing for the Reading WEA /Reading University School of Continuing Education. This was not to be for me for some years until we moved to Reading and settled there in the 1970s. Meetings were held in Mansbridge House in College Road or were supposed to be – my initial taster I recall was held by candle light in the lounge in Ken Major’s Regency period house in Eldon Road: it was the period of strikes and power cuts which daunted us at the time.

The joint course went on for many years, moving from Mansbridge House to the London Road campus of the University, but eventually in the early 1980s first Ken then Lawrence decided to retire. For a year or so, I organised a continuation of the course, with outside speakers, but with the absence of both Ken and Lawrence, it did not hold together and died. Another WEA course in 1987, for the then Woodley & Earley WEA, which Lawrence, his wife Muriel and I put together on Railways and Society looking particularly at the place of the Station did not take off despite reflecting on a very successful exhibition a year earlier at the Science Museum.

Before the official formation of the Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group (BIAG) as a separate distinct organisation from the joint course, Lawrence and Ken organised outings/field trips to many locations. On these I think a comfortable old sedan car, nicknamed The Armchair was used as a conveyance: this I believe was Lawrence’s. Among the many other attributes, Lawrence’s short stature was invaluable on several of these field trips, but with the onset of bone disease so relatively early in life, which dogged him increasingly over so many years, he had to drop out from direct involvement with so many things.

Throughout our long friendship, he was always willing to give considered advice and informed information. His extensive library of books on IA was an immense help too, but above all his wife, Muriel, played so great a considerable part in this. One is grateful to them both.

Bent C Weber
Earley, Reading
November 2017

FAREWELL TO THE TRANSPORT RESEARCH LABORATORY

Brian Boulter

I see from the latest Newsletter from Berkshire Archaeology that the T.R.L. at Crowthorne has closed and the site is to be redeveloped. Its claim to fame was the invention of the mini roundabout in 1975. Fortunately, a survey is being made of all the curious structures built there including the enormous skid pan and the Dynamic Impact Test Facility. Many structures were temporary, such as full-scale models of the various “Magic Roundabouts” at Swindon and elsewhere.

Many years ago, when I would drive into London along the Bath Road, I would pass their first home at Harmondsworth. They used the Colnbrook Bypass as a test bed for street lighting, and there were explanatory signs. They also set up the “Slough Experiment”. The many traffic lights on the Bath Road to the west of the town were phased so that a vehicle travelling at 25 mph should in theory have a clear run of green lights. It rarely achieved this, especially when traffic volumes increased. Again, there were signs to inform motorists. Did anyone take photos of them?

Also featured in the Newsletter is a 1930’s bus shelter on the Henley Road and a milepost on the Bath Road one mile from Reading. I thought all mileposts and stones were listed, is the Historic Environment Record separate?
THE DEMISE OF NEWBURY’S GAS WORKS

Graham Smith

The remaining buildings of Newbury’s former gas works were finally reduced to a pile of rubble in May this year. They had been at or near the top of the league of local eyesores for some time. The vertical retort house is reported to have been the last one of its kind still standing in England.

Newbury’s first gas works was built privately in the 1820’s on a site on Kings Road West (then known as Gas House Lane). It was purchased by the corporation in 1878 which then developed the current site further east alongside the railway and started gas production there in 1880. The first vertical retort plant was inaugurated in 1925 and a larger one was built in 1947. 1949 saw the nationalisation of the gas industry, much to the displeasure of the town council.

In 1959 the town was connected to the evolving gas grid; the works was closed and the site auctioned off. The site became home to many businesses, the best known of which was probably the Aldermaston-based Sterling Cable Company – the retort house was adapted for cable manufacture and became its Tower Works. Cable manufacture ceased at Aldermaston in the early 1990’s and in Newbury some time before that but the site retained the ‘Sterling’ name as the Sterling Industrial Estate until the end.

In the late 1800’s the local inventor and polymath Rev. John M Bacon made many hot air balloon flights from the works. The site is to be redeveloped for housing to be built in eight blocks between three and eight storeys high – its former use means that it requires major remediation.

Further reading:

Newbury Weekly News issues of 11th & 18th May 2017. Much of the content of the articles is also available online at http://www.newburytoday.co.uk/news/nostalgia/21367/sterling-cables-site-used-to-be-newbury-gasworks.html

The building recording report by Thames Valley Archaeological Services is available online at http://tvas.co.uk/reports/pdf/SIE16-41bldreport.pdf


LAMBOURN GAS WORKS

David Cliffe

The previous edition of the newsletter carried an appeal for information about the works, which was said to have been founded, owned and run by women. While it hasn’t so far been possible to answer the “run by women” question, a bit of online searching has come up with several useful pointers for our enquirer, who thought that the works started in 1867, and closed about 1945.

It now seems that if that was the case, two companies must have been involved. The National Archives at Kew have a file of papers from the Lambourn Gas, Coke and Lime Company Limited, BT 31/1327/3474. It was incorporated in 1867, but went into voluntary liquidation in 1912.

A series of reports and advertisements in The Reading Mercury illustrate the start of the works, and the extension of its mains. In October 1867, the police station was to be lighted with gas. In the following months, the company was advertising for the supply of cast iron lamp standards – eight or ten in November, and fourteen in December. Then in 1870, the system was being extended, with 422 yards of mains and 173 yards of service pipe.

For the rest of the nineteenth century, many of the annual shareholders’ meetings, held in the Red Lion Hotel, were reported. At the meeting in February 1894, the vicar was “in the chair.”

The London Gazette shows that the company was wound up in 1912. On 30 August, it reported that “At an Extraordinary General Meeting of the said Company, duly convened, held at the Red Lion Hotel, at Lambourn, in the County of Berks., on the 25th day of January, 1912, the following Special Resolution was duly passed; and at a subsequent Extraordinary General Meeting of the said Company, also duly convened and held at the same place, on the 20th day of August 1912, the following Special Resolution was duly confirmed: that the Company be wound up voluntarily, under the Companies (Consolidation) Act, 1908, and that Alfred Howard Charcot, of Lambourn aforesaid, Jeweller, be hereby appointed Liquidator for the purposes of such winding up. J. Stokes Griffin, Chairman.”

The appointment of a jeweller as liquidator seems unusual – liquidators were usually either solicitors or accountants. The papers concerning the winding up should also be at The National Archives, and may reveal who took the concern over. Kelly’s directory for 1915 says that Lambourn was lighted by gas “supplied by a company,” which suggests that the works continued.

Another possible source of information is the National Gas Archive in Warrington. It keeps documents from before and after nationalisation. Unfortunately, its website is temporarily unavailable at the time of writing – www.gasarchive.org.

Please note that I have standardised the spelling of “Lambourn” to accord with that used by the Ordnance Survey – in the old documents it’s often spelled Lambourne.

Incidentally, this information is all available on line. It would not have been half so available a few years ago! Thanks are due to Peter Delaney, a member of the Berkshire Local History Association who was intrigued by the original article, and took the trouble to do some research and to reply.

GLOUCESTER DOCKS - A PERSONAL REPORT OF THE BIAG VISIT
(23 September 2017)

Edwin Trout

It was an unexpected pleasant and interesting day. Elizabeth and I hadn’t anticipated being free to join the BIAG trip to Gloucester Docks, carefully planned and prepared by Bob Haskins, but a last-minute change of schedule enabled us to make the journey westward. That said, it didn’t work out perfectly – we were running late and couldn’t find the rendezvous at the park-and-ride, so we drove into the city centre and parked in the pay-and-display overlooking the docks. The view was fantastic, with the historic warehouses laid out before us in a panorama. We are bound to see them, we thought, as we searched for the right change. But after an hour or so visiting the seafarers’ chapel and the 1840s’ warehouses grouped around the Victoria Dock – each with their name emblazoned in painted letters high on the brickwork walls – we still hadn’t found the rest of the party.
The architecture of the dockside buildings had a wonderful coherence: brick buildings with numerous small windows for ventilation, and strong wooden floors with cast iron columns, originally to support the storage of grain. Traditionally grain was the principal cargo, but timber, iron, sugar and other commodities passed through the port and both chocolate and petrol had their turn in later years. At least one of the warehouses – Reynold’s, I believe – was used as a mill. As we walked among the warehouses, we were struck by how sympathetic the renovations were and how new uses had been found to keep them viable. Besides residential accommodation, the NHS and city council had also taken office space.

Passing some elaborate gates we walked around to the main dock where the earliest warehouse was located on the north side, built for the opening of the new canal and docks in 1827. We posed for pictures by the steam crane and crossed the lock gates. Stopping to admire industrial pump known locally as ‘the Snail’ – we bumped into the rest of the group, approaching from the opposite direction. Bob gave us a copy of the tour notes and we hurried to see the stretch of canal and dockside we had missed. Prominent among the sights were the dry docks, a swing bridge, crumbling warehouses awaiting renovation and the Spurn Head lightship – on sale with an asking price of half a million!
Despite our eagerness to catch up, we noticed the Gloucester Docks Brewery in the former maltings was bearing an inviting ‘open’ sign. We made a detour and found ourselves on an impromptu (and free) brewery tour – normal fee: £20. Stocking up with a selection we promised to sample their draught ales in ‘The Tank’ public house opposite. So when we finally caught up it was lunch time, and time to try the hostelrys that lined the dockside. Some went to Wetherspoon’s; Elizabeth and I tried The Tank and found it very satisfactory.

After lunch a number of BIAG members reconvened at the Canals & Inland Waterways Museum and spent an hour or so looking at narrow boats, traditional vessels such as the ‘trow’, locally made Lister Petter engines and a fascinating audio-visual presentation of reminiscences by the last generation of boatmen to work the waterways from Gloucester. There were many items of interest, though for a museum purporting to be a national one, its scope was very locally circumscribed.

Leaving the museum we followed some imbedded railway tracks and found on display two replica railway waggon marking the route of the Gloucester & Cheltenham Tramway amid the many tracks installed around the docks by the Midland and Great Western Railways.

It was a good day – thanks, Bob.

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**THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MILITARY INFRASTRUCTURE IN BERKSHIRE**

*(A talk to BIAG by Don Summers – 18 September 2017)*

Edwin Trout

Don Summers introduced the work of the Ridgeway Military & Aviation Research Group (RMARG) in exploring the wartime archaeology of the Vale of the White Horse – the area between Banbury and Newbury, Swindon to Oxford – admitting the group was less active than it had been 20 years ago. He would review the range of sites in which traces of defence infrastructure can still be seen.

His first slides were of the former aircraft catapult at RAF Harwell in which 20-ton Wellington bombers were launched into the air under compressed air generated by six Rolls Royce Kestrel engines. The pilots were understandably wary of a device that could accelerate from 0-120 mph over 100 ft! However, the savings in space were obviated by the remaining need for a runway on which to land. A filled-in circular plot and launch track are still visible in the grass. Don went on to show pictures of improvised road block and to describe the Royal Observer Corps posts established at Wantage, Uffington, Great Shefford, East Ilsley, and Boarshill, Oxford.

Turning to industry he described the introduction of equipment to manufacture Bofors guns which was transferred from Birmingham to the upper Thames, to a then secret site now occupied by Oxford Instruments, just north of the Frilford golf course. Morris Motors likewise sought war work and were awarded a contract to make the Tiger Moth. During the Battle of Britain the refurbishment of crashed aeroplanes became essential; in fact 40% of planes were replacements. They would arrive at Cowley and reappear as if new after only eight days. Much of the bodywork could be patched up, but the real problem was the procurement of the more sophisticated instruments. Those that could be reused were rescued and taken to the ‘Purgatory Store’ - “make do and mend” was the norm. These stores were hidden in traditional tiled barns with central doorways, located around Wantage and were available 24/7. Lorries would arrive at night, and unload into the central area, with the side bays screened off. Even the driver
wouldn’t be aware of the nature of his load, and once he was gone, the guards would transfer items to the screened-off side bays. There were at least four of these storage barns, including at Charlton, Ardington and Hendred vineyard.

Decoy airfields, otherwise known as ‘Q’ or ‘starfish’ sites were designed to looked like airfields under attack at night, attracting attention from the Luftwaffe to locations less sensitive than genuine RAF stations. Locally these sites included Peasemore, Kingston Warren, Tadpole Bridge.

Country houses were requisitioned for a number of purposes: Buckland House for a Home Guard HQ; Egerstone Hall for rest and relaxation by aircrew. After the bombing of Portsmouth, the Royal Navy transferred its pay office to Woolley Park House near Wantage, while Nuneham House near Abingdon was used as the School of Photographic Interpretation for both the RAF and USAF. Letcombe Regis was used successively as a hospital, a training base and a planning office for the American forces in the run up to D-Day.

In order to prepare the British airborne troops for the seizure of Pegasus and Horsa bridges on D-Day, the Thames bridges at Radcot near Farringdon were used for training (as was a location near Exeter). Also in 1944, the RAF set up a GEE station at Sparsholt Firs on the Ridgeway, between Wantage and Lambourne. It is now a relay station for British Telecom.

Harwell was used for ammunition storage, as was Grove Park. However, Grove had no railway connection, so when in 1943 the Americans set up their ammunition store it was in the form of 1.5 miles of ditches lining the road, covered with ‘pig pen’ iron roofs. Besides ammunition, fuel was required in large quantities for US motor transport and a depot was established on Snelsmore Common. In 1943 the Royal Navy set up an aircraft storage base at Pusey House.

Don ended the first half of his talk with a discussion of anti-aircraft defence. Cowley and the local airfields were considered to be Luftwaffe targets, and thus warranted defence, including the use of searchlights and anti-aircraft guns. Searchlight sites required a supply of electricity and so were semi-permanent, whereas anti-aircraft guns were relocated every four months at sites such as Abingdon and Kennington.

The Auxiliary Units at Coleshill

After the break Don turned to the evidence of saboteur training that RMARG had uncovered at Coleshill House. This property is located between Highworth and Farringdon, and is now in the care of the National Trust. What had once been a splendid country house burnt down in the 1950s, so now a box hedge marks the plot on which the house once stood.

Back in the 1990s, one of RMARG’s members had a role with the National Trust and one day invited the Group to visit Coleshill to see the evidence he had found of a collapsed tunnel – possibly a wartime installation. He arranged for RMARG to excavate and explore what seemed to be part of the wartime training facilities for ‘stay behind’ resistance fighters to be deployed in the event of an invasion.

Tripping up over a tree stump in woods on the estate, they discovered that not only was it in-filled with concrete, but it contained a pipe: in fact it formed the disguise for the flue of a subterranean stove! A loose stone in the wall of a ha-ha turned out to be a ‘kick-out’, or the emergency exit of an escape tunnel. Then they found a slab covered with soil that masked the entrance to a brick-lined shaft equipped with a ladder. This led to an Operating Base (OB) – a sort of buried Nissen hut that had since been refilled with soil. RMARG agreed to dig it out.

Some while later, and after a lot of manual labour, RMARG was able to reveal the OB, along with evidence of the equipment used to fit it out: hooks for wall-mounted bunks, the stove and kettle, a toilet seat, ammunition. The Nissen hut itself was double skinned, separated with 2x4 timber battens, and the concrete treated with saw dust to absorb moisture.

Nearby they found was turned out to be an Observation Post (OP) equipped with a telephone linked to the OB. It consisted of a 5’ 6” square of corrugated iron leading down to a grenade-proof false floor that slid across on a counter weight to conceal the occupant in the event of the post’s discovery by the enemy. Digging down along an L-shaped shaft RMARG breached the wall and lost a shovel though the newly opened hole. It led to a 25 ft. deep shaft beyond, and a brick-lined tunnel leading toward the house, for which they engaged an experienced caver from Yorkshire – a friend of one of the members – to explore. They also retrieved the shovel with a magnet suspended on a rope!

Eventually the National Trust called a halt to the proceedings, concerned about health and safety, and invited the participation of the archaeology department at the University of Bristol. But not before they had held an open day in which 800 visitors paid £5 to see it; RMARG received nothing for its pains! The National Trust has since built a replica that can be seen on designated dates.
A follow-up visit to the Coleshill open day held on 8 October 2017

Bill King (a founder member of RMARG) took us on a tour of the reconstructed OP and OB installations, explaining as he went, something of the history and operation of the so-called Auxiliary Units, a name left appropriately and deliberately vague for a clandestine warfare establishment.

Coleshill was the headquarters and training centre for the Auxiliary Units. These constituted a secret network of disassociated cells of saboteurs designed to cause disruption to the enemy in the event of an invasion. (They were the forerunner and prototype of all the resistance movements on the continent that Britain was to nurture later in the war. “Set Europe ablaze” Churchill ordered and for a long time, apart from strategic bombing by RAF Bomber Command, resistance was Britain’s only means of carrying the fight to the Continent.)

Units consisted of up to 12 men who would disappear underground when ordered, and reappear to blow up bridges and infrastructure, thus hindering enemy logistics while the British Army regrouped further to the North. The men were irregulars, not given army numbers, and though organised into three notional battalions – 201 (Scotland), 202 (North) and 203 (South) – operated in secret, isolated cells, coordinated by an external intelligence officer. There were at least 500 OBs, perhaps up to 1,000, with as many as 6,000 men volunteering to ‘do or die’. In fact, volunteers were told their average life expectancy in the field was likely to be a fortnight before they would be discovered and killed. Units could be found all over the country, but concentrated particularly in southern England, the East Coast (including a cluster around Hull and the Humber estuary), and the Bristol Channel and Severn valley (to secure the South Wales beaches and protect the industrial areas of the West Midlands).

Recruits were drawn from all walks of life, but particularly favoured were farmers, gamekeepers and other countrymen in reserved occupations who knew the land, along with fit, trained youngsters from the Boy Scouts who were too young for regular service. Natural leaders were sought, those who could inspire and undertake their own recruiting. Even a clergyman volunteered, though as a wireless operator rather than a saboteur.

At Coleshill the men were given training in explosives, communications and unarmed combat. They were armed, though principally for defence, as for clandestine warfare killing silently with bare hands was usually preferred. In the early days Churchill had insisted they be issued with revolvers and supplies were duly obtained from the Chicago Police Department!

Bill told us he had met quite a few former Auxiliers over the many years he had been researching the Auxiliary Units (since 1975), though most have now passed away. Some years ago he organised a reunion, placing discreet adverts in the national papers inviting Auxiliers to return to their old training base. A hundred turned up the day! Geoff Deveraux, now of Star Cross was one such, joining one of the Worcester cells as an 18-year-old Ranger Scout. He later joined the regular army and, operating behind enemy lines, finally took the surrender of three SS generals at Kiel in 1945.

The Auxiliary Units were stood down in November 1944 as the threat receded, Operation Sea Lion having been cancelled in March 1942 and the tide of war reversed in Normandy.

There was also a women’s section known as SD (‘Special Duties’) units. They were used as wireless operators. Later the SD units transferred to SOE, and several women were parachuted into France and other occupied territories on active operations.

Asked about sources, Bill referred to the Nation Archives’ WO 119/ - class: correspondence between the Prime Minister and Duncan Sandys, Churchill’s personal intermediary with Col. John Gubbins of Military Intelligence, the OC at Coleshill (until he joined SOE in 1942).

The tour ended with a visit the replica wireless and messages station concealed in a chicken shed at the edge of an orchard, and the surviving guardhouse that overlooked the entrance to Coleshill House. Trainees were only admitted once the village post mistress to whom they reported had sent authorisation ahead by ‘phone.

READING CIVIC SOCIETY
(A talk to BIAG by Richard Bennett [Chairman] – 5 October 2017)

Edwin Trout

In introducing the work of the Reading Civic Society, Richard explained it had been established in 1961 in response to proposals to demolish the Town Hall and Market Place, and drive a road through Forbury Gardens. The initial campaign of opposition was supported by John Betjeman and the Bishop of Reading, who memorably asked “Reading produced John Soane -will Reading produce another?”

Like other civic societies associated with Civil Voice, the national body, Reading aims to preserve what is historic and distinctive, and to instil a sense of civic pride. It “sets out to save what is worth saving”. Its fundamental role is
conservation, especially in relation to Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings, and its main activity is scrutinising planning applications. In this the Society has to be proactive; the plans aren’t presented but have to be sought. Sometimes the Society advises on the history and architecture of Reading, and on listing and de-listing, but is hampered by lack of professional expertise and dependence on volunteers.

There are 10,000 Conservation Areas nationally; Reading has fifteen, two of which are in the town centre. Local authorities have a statutory duty to enhance their character and appearance, and to control advertising and demolition of buildings, but they do need to be actively managed. Richard hinted that might not always be the case with Reading Council. The Civic Society meets developers, as over the Weldale St development, and can share experience of their relationships with the council and other developers.

Reading Council’s website offers no guidance on planning at all. It is, Richard argued, “worst in class”. The Civic Society had developed its own guidance, drawn from best practice in Basingstoke and Bath. The Council’s site now links to the Civic Society!

Another recent initiative has been the establishment in 2016 of the Conservation Area Guidance Committee, involving a number of like-minded bodies. BSANA, CDRA and the NAGs for Katesgrove, Redlands and Bell Tower (off the Caversham Road). Cllr. Tony Page is involved and Historic England has provided training. The CAGC has defined 24 historic views of Reading, using Oxford View Cones. Eight or nine views are being incorporated into the RBC plan. “Together we’re stronger”, Richard observed.

Other Civic Society activities include the promotion of Civic Day (June) and Heritage Days (September), with lots of walks and talks. Indeed the Society is updating guides to three walks originally published in the 1970s. It encourages educational endeavour, with a student prize presented annually at the University Reading, and while it doesn’t offer talks, it does organise visits.

**Some Recent Developments 2017**

- The BMW garage site near the ‘yellow’ railway bridge is to have three residential buildings erected on it, all for rent.
- Weldale St (the ‘Foundry Quarter’) is to have four new blocks with 429 units for sale, though the design is not permitted to challenge the prominence of Chatham St.
- Kenavon Drive and the Huntley & Palmer site – is to have 750 homes in three blocks and a 19-storey residential tower.
- Bristol & West Arcade is to have flats, the new building following the curve of the street. The developers will work to improve the adjacent historic buildings such as the former Coopers Arms.
- The Ship has been totally empty for 30 years, but recent enquiries have established that it is still owned by the Samuel Smith brewery which has aspirations to refurbish - “it’s just a question of priorities”
- The future of Caversham Park once sold by the BBC remains unclear

**Successes and Failures**

Richard pointed to some successful listings and, in some cases, restorations – Oxford Rd School and ‘Hillside’ in Allcroft Road listed 2005, Wantage Hall 2008 – as well as failures – the Boar’s Head and ABC in Friar St, Battle Hospital and Katesgrove School. Oakland Hall on the Bath Rd has been demolished

He referred to the Local Heritage List. In 2017 there were nine buildings on it, two of which have been demolished. Southern Electricity (Vastern Rd), St Patrick’s Hall and Arthur Hill swimming baths have now been added. However, local listing offers no statutory protection, though it does encourage developers and planners to “stop and think”. One such project in limbo is the Chazey Heath Barn. Standing on an isolated site at the end of the Warren, this is a Grade 1 listed barn dating from the 1600s. It is owned and maintained by the Mapledurham Estate (which has a total of 39 listed buildings). It was to be converted as a care home, and though the developer withdraw, planning permission remains in place.

**Projects**

Richard reviewed a number of recent projects including the Trooper Potts memorial, the Watlington House renovation and the Phoebe Cusden plaque on Talbot House, Castle St. Looking back a little further he identified the ‘A Circle and a Century’ exhibition: a 360 degree panorama first taken in 1895 from the top of a gasholder and repeated recently from a modern tall building. In 2009 the Society had the Laurentius Braag memorial on the Minster cleaned (a reminder of the presence of Danish prisoners of war in Napoleonic Reading – he was one of the prisoners who died) and the unveiling of the Simonds Brewery information board in the Oracle. This was a celebratory occasion, involving members of the Simonds family and the former head brewer from the war years.

Most recent is the campaign to save the iron lamp posts in the Caversham Road area. This action was brought about by the Bell Tower Community Association, as the traditional lamp standards are not only characterful, but made by local firms Goodman & Griffiths and the Caversham Bridge Foundry. The Government has made funds
available for two years to replace such lamps with LED technology, the traditional standards being structurally weak and can’t be isolated at the base. Objections have achieved a stay of execution, but the prospects of saving the lamps long term are poor.

To have a say in the future of Reading’s townscape, consider joining the Civic Society.

BEYOND OUR BORDERS

No 2 – OLIVER’S MILL, BURSLEM

Bob Haskins

Beyond Our Borders: Number 2 – Oliver’s Mill, Burslem

If you take a two and quarter mile stroll south from the Harecastle Tunnel south portals along the canal towpath you’ll arrive at Newport Lane Bridge (no. 123), only noteworthy because adjacent to this bridge on the east bank of the canal are the remains of Oliver’s Mill flint calcinating and grinding mill. The site has recently been listed Grade II and is well worth crossing the bridge to take a closer inspection.

Photograph 2.1 View showing Oliver’s Mill adjacent to the canal allowing easy movement of raw and finished products. Newport Lane Bridge is just out of view to the right of this photograph.

The ovens were built by Oliver & Sons (Burslem) Limited in 1909. The site contains three calcinating bottle ovens, ‘Jumbo’, ‘Middle’ & ‘Office’, used for firing flint stones to make them friable for subsequent milling or grinding. The finely ground flints could then be added by the pottery manufacturers to their clays to give whiteness and a greater strength to the finished products.
Photograph 2.2 View of Oliver’s Mill calcinating kilns from Newport Lane, Burslem.

The ovens were loaded at the upper level with a mix of coke and flint stones, fired for up to three days and then unloaded at the lower level and the contents sieved to remove coal ash residue prior to conveying the calcinated flints to the grinding pans. It is thought the ovens were last fired in 1964.

The ‘hovel’ the (outer skin) of the round calcinating kiln acts as a chimney; taking away smoke, creating air flow and protecting the oven inside from the weather and uneven droughts. The steel straps (bonts) that you see around the upper level of the kilns provide strength to the structure as it expands and contracts during firing.

WBB Minerals (Watts, Blake, Bearne & Co.) who own the site still produce milled ceramic materials for the pottery industry.

Just beyond Newport Lane Bridge is the site where the Burslem Branch canal of approx. 650 yards ran towards the town centre. The branch opened in 1802 but fell into disrepair following a breach in 1961. From the canal branch terminus at Anderson Wharf a tramway was built that ran along Navigation Road to the town centre. Burslem was where the pottery industry began and this link by the tramway, along the branch canal and onto the Trent & Mersey Canal to Middleport allowed the pioneering pottery manufacturers to transport their products to market and receive raw materials. Burslem boomed following these developments and became known as ‘The Mother Town’.

http://www.burslemport.org.uk/

It is well worth a walk along the route of the branch canal to the site of Anderson Wharf, up Navigation Road and into the town center. It lacks the bustle of former days but this is most welcome as it allows you to view some magnificent architecture around St Johns Square with minimum disturbance. Outstanding are; the old Town Hall of 1852-7 by G T Robinson (now occupied by Haywood Sixth Form Academy), the Wedgewood Memorial Institute of 1863-9 and the School of Art 1905-7, and the statue of Sir Henry Dalton who watches your perambulations. Burslem is the only town of the six that has a defined centre, however, the administrative centre of the city has now moved to Hanley; a great shame. There is much to interest the architectural and industrial historian in Burslem – don’t miss the opportunity to visit a real working industrial district before it’s too late!

No 3 – ST ALBANS SOUTH SIGNAL BOX

Bob Haskins

A five-minute walk south from St Albans City railway station down Ridgmont Road leads you to a small wicket gate; the entrance to St Albans South Signal Box. This is the largest preserved Midland Railway signal box and one of the few signal boxes open to the public and, it’s beside a mainline railway. If you take a train from St Pancras station you’ll spot the box on your left-hand side just before arriving at St Albans City.

The signal box was built in 1892 replacing an earlier box. Just prior to closure by British Rail in 1972 it was granted Grade II listing, it was then neglected for 31 years, in 2003 rescued by a group of enthusiasts, and since 2013 it has been regularly opened to the public.
What we see today is a faithfully restored original wooden box classified as a type 2A by the Signalling Record Society typical of many made from pre-fabricated parts in Derby. The Midland Railway 44 lever Tumbler Interlocked frame in the control room (top floor) dates from 1904 and controlled trains between Harpenden (to the North) and Napsbury (to the south). The switch room (ground floor) has been converted to a small museum showing videos and slide shows.

**Photograph 3.1** South West view of St Albans South Signal Box from Charrington Place.

**Photograph 3.2** View of St Albans South Signal Box from the bottom of the stairs that leads to the control room. The site has many signalling artefacts and signs, a small garden railway (popular with children of all ages!), hands-on displays to experience being a signalman and a small well stocked mature garden with seats to enjoy a cup of tea and watch the frequent trains. The staff are friendly, very knowledgeable and run regular signaling demonstrations.

Allow a minimum of two hours to view and enjoy! Access to the site is free, but donations are welcome.

http://www.sigbox.co.uk

For a day out in St Albans there is a frequent Thameslink service from St Pancras to St Albans City station (every 10 mins taking 30 mins on a Saturday, every 30 mins on a Sunday). Alternatively, a comfortable, albeit tedious M4/M25, one hour and 15-minute drive from Reading. For a day out, St Albans offers: The Cathedral, Verulamium Museum, Roman Theatre, The Roman Mosaic and Hypocaust, a Charter Market, a Clock Tower (offering fine views across the city and cathedral) and plenty of eating establishments. It’s a fifteen minute walk from the station to the city centre.

it’s been around since the first Elizabeth, having opened in 1570, almost certainly Britain’s oldest known manufacturing company. Times have changed, as has the demand for bells. The foundry has made many famous bells, including Liberty Bell for Philadelphia – it summoned the City’s residents to hear the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and became a rallying symbol for slavery abolitionists. The company owner, Alan Hughes hopes to find a buyer before he retires in May 2017; his grandfather bought the business in 1904.

The building in Whitechapel Road is Grade II listed, has already been sold; part of the reason for selling is the upkeep of the property. A recent roof leak cost £20,000 to repair, money the company cannot recoup from just making bells. The company has occupied this site since 1738, when it had moved across the road from smaller premises.

The Foundry has also cast bells for Westminster Abbey, St Paul’s Cathedral and many other significant churches. *(BBC News website and others, edited)*

* Reproduced from the January 2017 issue of “The Bulletin” (The Journal of the TfL Industrial & Social History Group by kind permission of the Managing Editor.

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**RECENT PUBLICATIONS**

**Brian Boulter**

This year’s *Berkshire Old & New*, published by Berks. Local History Assn. comprises two fascinating in depth articles on local industries.

Evelyn Williams has researched Philbrick’s Tannery which was on Katesgrove Road, Reading from the 1830s to the 1930s. In the absence of any business records she has used a wide range of local and national sources to investigate the tannery, its premises, the raw materials and their processing, the products (and by-products). A tannery in Wokingham was leased and used for fellmongering. The Philbrick family has also been researched through several generations. One member went to search for gold in Australia but ended up running a tannery there.

David Pedgley, with help from the local history society, has investigated Wallingford’s malting industry. At its peak in 1798, there were no less than 17 malt houses, some of which survive, at least in part. Much of the malt was shipped down the Thames to London breweries, and there are notes on some of the bargemasters. Local breweries are also covered. In 1961, Associated British Maltsters (later Paul’s) built a huge concrete maltings on the branch line to the town, which operated until 2000. I was once told that malt was sent by rail in bulk wagons from the branch to the Guinness Brewery siding at Park Royal. Was this true? This article shows how the industry and its customers have changed over two centuries.

The volume is obtainable from B.L.H.A. Price £3.

Earlier this year, Berkshire Record Society published *Newbury & Chilton Pond Turnpike Records, 1766-1791*. This offers a unique and fascinating opportunity to see how the Turnpike Trust was set up, financed and managed. Jeremy Sims, the Editor, has transcribed the minute books and accounts held at Berkshire Record Office and contributed an introduction, setting the turnpike in context, geographically and historically.

It formed part of the route from Southampton to Oxford and the Midlands, represented today by the A34. The Trust was set up during the “Turnpike Mania“ and the early period of the industrial revolution. The idea was that those who damaged the road should pay for it, so tolls were 1d for each horse, 3d if drawing a vehicle. Cattle were charged by the score. Frequent users could “compound” for an annual fee. Road maintenance appears to have been still very basic; a gravel surface with surface mud shovelled away at intervals. More important at this stage was arranging to widen the road to allow vehicles to pass and to allow horses to be harnessed in pairs.

Looking at the accounts, there appears to have been no seasonal variation in the toll receipts, indicating that this was a route for commerce rather than agriculture. However, the income increased by over 75% during the 25 year period – so as usual, better roads bring more traffic.

The minutes of the meetings held at the Globe Inn in Newbury include fascinating local detail. In 1784 somebody defaced the milestone at Ilsley, altering the distance to Newbury from 9 miles to 10 miles. A public notice offered 1 guinea reward for information. In 1789, the gatekeeper at Hursborn Hill complained of being persistently assaulted
by Captain Lord Charles Fitzroy M.P. (Let me through – Don't you know who I am??) The Clerk was instructed to send him a warning letter.

This is a subscription publication but should be available for reference (and purchase?) at Berkshire Record Office and some libraries.

Peter Trout

Following the talk by Don Summers (RMARG) the following book is relevant: “The Archaeology of the Second World War” (Gabriel Moshenska, Pen & Sword, 2012).

From the blurb “He shows how archaeology can use the ruins, relics, historic sites….ranging from buried air raid shelters and bomb sites to sunken ships, old airfields and hidden traces of the secret war…” The section headings include:

Introduction (including definitions)
The Home Guard (including guerrilla warfare)The Merchant Navy
The War Child
POWs (Eden Camp, N. Riding is well worth a visit)
The RAF
Air Raid Wardens

A fascinating book, not quite Industrial Archaeology but a close cousin. It stimulates observation, as in our visit to RAF Woodcote. You may recall my talk on Airships which, if it didn’t put you off the subject, might lead you to:

Fatal Flight – the true story of Britain`s last great airship (Bill Hammack, Articulate Noise Books, 2017)
British Airship Bases of the 20’ s (Malcolm Fife, Fonthill, 2015)

The general story of the R101 is well known but the details much less so. It is an intriguing story of engineering, personalities and politics. The wider picture of the R100 & R101 rivalries is riveting – not least for differing construction methods.

Fife`s book is one of great research combining history and archaeology. The Cardington sheds remain, other traces survive as at Howden whereas most have been erased except in the historical records – what do you know about Wormwood Scrubs?

Another sideline:


This is obviously a transport book and the authors seem to have an intimate knowledge of every cart and vehicle. But what so often gripped my attention was the background. The Wolverton Carriage & Waggon Works must have been wonderful to visit. Views of vehicles at work in sidings, transit sheds, docks and stations are all the stuff of industrial history/archaeology.

FORTHCOMING 2017-18 MEETINGS PROGRAMME

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<tr>
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<td>Joseph Bazalgette</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 December 2017</td>
<td>Film Show &amp; Social Evening</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 January 2018</td>
<td>History of Reading Cinemas</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 February 2018</td>
<td>Concrete Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 March 2018</td>
<td>London Docklands – its rise, fall and rebirth</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 April 2018</td>
<td>Lawrence Cameron memorial slide show (to be followed by briefing on the SERIAC arrangements)</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 May 2018</td>
<td>125 years of Raleigh Bicycles</td>
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<td>17 September 2018</td>
<td>Didcot Railway Centre – its Past, Present and Future</td>
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<td>15 October 2018</td>
<td>AGM + members` presentations</td>
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<td>Architectural Ceramics</td>
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<td>10 December 2018</td>
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All meetings are held on Monday evenings at the Church Hall of St Mary’s Church, Castle St, Reading RG1 7RD and start at 7.30pm. Access to the church hall is through the right-hand side passage.

**Travel Guidance:** By bus, St Mary’s Church Hall is within a two minute walk from St Mary’s Butts and a five minute walk from Oxford Road where many Reading Corporation buses stop.

By car, the Church does not have a car park but vehicles may be parked off-road on the market stall hardstanding area in Hosier Street after 18.00. Alternatively, there is a public car park in the Civic Centre adjacent to the Church. St Mary’s Church has a web site with a map: [http://www.cofec.org/stmarys.html](http://www.cofec.org/stmarys.html)

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**EDITOR’S NOTE:**

Again, this issue is rather bigger than usual – I’m pleased to say this time because there have been many contributions from members some of which I have had to hold over to the next issue. That is a trend we are very keen to encourage so, as always, please keep the articles coming!

Many thanks to Edwin Trout for his article on the BIAG visit to Gloucester and for providing the reports on two talks given to BIAG earlier in the year. There is quite an emphasis on Gas Works in this issue with Graham Smith’s article on Newbury and David Cliffe’s follow-up to his article on Lambourn Gasworks in the last issue. Bob Haskins “Beyond our Borders” continues and there are more to come! The idea is to feature visits of IA interest to sites outside our immediate area and we are keen to encourage any other members who make similar trips to write them up so they can be featured as well. Thanks also to Bent Weber for sending me copies of “The Bulletin” – more extracts from here to come as well!

Finally, we opened this issue with an obituary to Lawrence Cameron who was one of the founders of BIAG. I attended the Industrial Archaeology evening class that he and Ken Major ran at the University of Reading for many years (although it was more of a club than a formal class!). He and Ken were the perfect complementary pair- Ken the professional scholar with an eye for detail and Lawrence whose enthusiasm and enjoyment of the subject bubbled over and converted many of those attending. We are all the poorer for his passing.

**John Coulson**

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**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**SWWRIAC 2018 – Saturday 14 April 2018**
This will be hosted by Somerset IAS and will be held at the Village Hall in West Coker near Yeovil. Further details when available will be on the SIAS website [www.sias.me.uk](http://www.sias.me.uk)

**SERIAC 2018 – Saturday 21 April 2018**
A reminder that next year SERIAC will be hosted by BIAG in Windsor. Please make a note in your diaries and keep the date free!

**AIA Conference, Caithness – Friday 22 June to Thursday 28 June**

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For general BIAG business, please contact the Secretary: GRAHAM SMITH (Tel: 01635-580356) 114 SHAW ROAD, NEWBURY, BERKS, RG14 1HR or email secretary@biag.org.uk

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 newsletter@biag.org.uk (please note new e-mail address)

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November 2017

Printing and distribution: Bob Haskins