



BERKSHIRE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

BIAG News No 60 November 2022

Editor: John Holden
<http://www.biag.org.uk>

EDITORIAL

This edition of the newsletter is just managing to get to you before the end of November, a little later than usual but I hope you find the content interesting. The most difficult bit to create are some of the web sites given for you to enjoy to explore because they just need that little exploring and time soon passes when being curious within such resources. I think the ring pull tab one should soon be supplemented by another that illustrates how packaging evolves. We have lived through that period in history when we packaged everything in plastic containers and modern advertising is now claiming that cardboard boxes are becoming the new innovation. I have noted that bottles of fabric conditioner to soft drinks are no longer crystal clear but have a grey tinge as recycled plastics reduce the costs. If you do find something interesting then why not share your discoveries in an article for BIAG news?

The Newbury trip was enjoyed by all and for those of you who missed it then Bob's excellent notes are reproduced at the end.

I WENT TO SEE A SEE MONSTER NEAR THE SEA.

A SEE MONSTER I DID SEE BY THE SEA

John Holden

Giving my son a lift from Southampton to Cardiff I planned a break in Weston super mare. But passing through Shepton Mallet this building made us stop for a closer look. It was much bigger than the surrounding buildings and we discovered that it is a building at risk being a former lager brewery.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Bavarian_Brewery



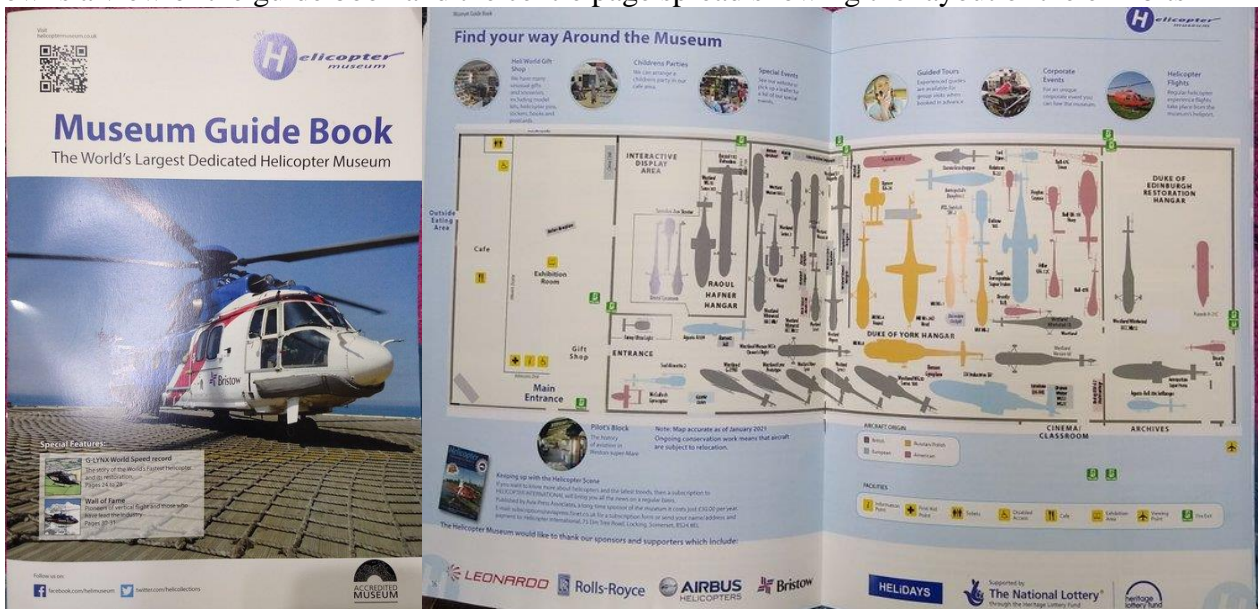
Continuing our journey just outside the town of Weston Super Mare we spotted a sign that read "Helicopter museum" We looked at each other and agreed that it was worth a visit. A roundabout only a few hundred yards beyond the turning made for an easy u turn

A set of linked hangers and over 50 helicopters on display within made for an enjoyable break to the journey



A close up view of a Russian helicopter gunship provoked a few thoughts for those caught within its sights. The gunner in the front pod had a small cabin and the cargo area was small but would have held several assault troops.

Below is a view of the guide book and the centre page spread showing the layout of the exhibits



Not shown on this plan is an impressive exhibition of the technologies. From composite rotor blades to mechanical pitch controls and several powerful engines the size of fridges.

Well worth a visit.

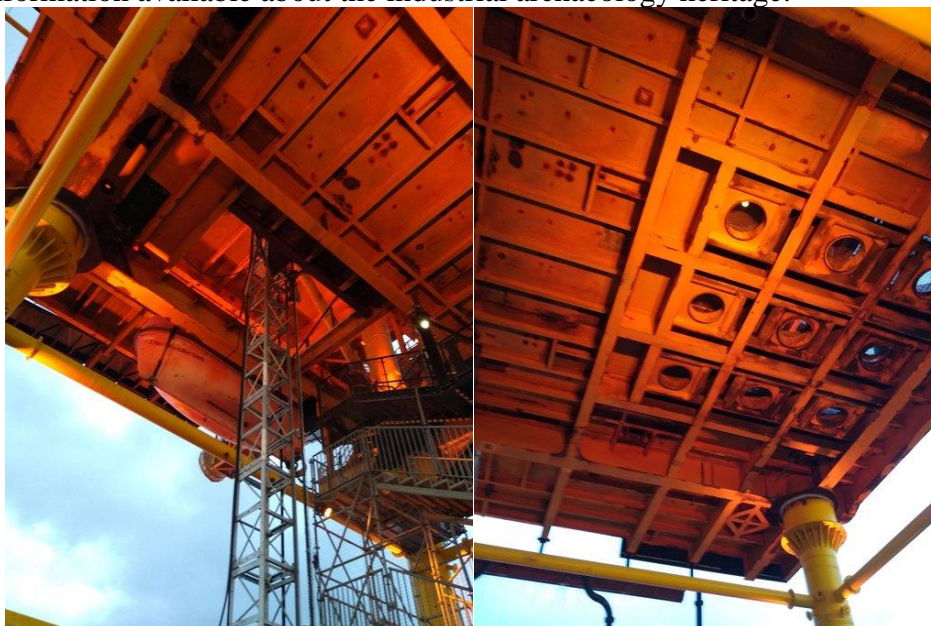
<http://www.helicoptermuseum.co.uk/>

Many readers might have heard about the unboxed 2022 creative event that put on several very expensive creative projects around the country. The BBC countryfile program showed the making of a video where volunteers held GPS located colour changing lights as they walked down Cumbrian hills. One such project is the SEEMONSTER which is a redundant gas production platform moved to Weston Super Mare. It had been stripped of all the equipment and access lifts added along with a big builders steel staircase. They had hung a swath of polished aluminium hexagons on the side and put mature trees in planters on the decks.

Orange coloured lighting, a waterfall, and a mist spray on the first floor along with some sculptures completed the set up. A helter-skelter slide from the top most deck provided safe activities for the children and adults who were young at heart.



It was free admission but an hour in the queue. It was an excellent viewing platform as the helipad on the top level had great views. There was just enough of the original structure left to prompt curiosity but absolutely no information available about the industrial archaeology heritage.



The yellow legs are new and the lifeboat now redundant as it is in a shallow pool in the old lido. It was planned to open at the start of the summer but delays in the opening meant that it extended the opening until the autumn. It is expensive to run with a good half dozen staff watching every level to make sure adventurous children do not see the fences as a challenge. It would be good if it became a Weston super mare Eiffel tower but I think costs would be too high when visitor numbers have a lull in bad winter weather. I believe they have already sold the trees. All the projects are described here with links to the individual sites

<https://unboxed2022.uk/about-unboxed>

<https://unboxed2022.uk/see-monster>

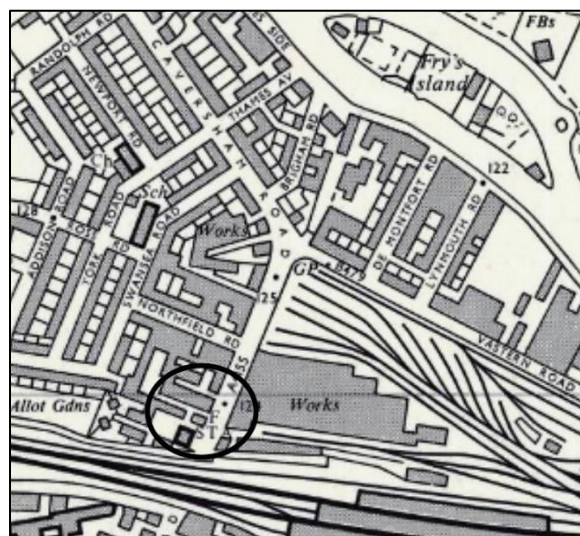
<https://seemonster.co.uk/>

Buckler Cars – Caversham Road, Reading

On 25th June 2022 BIAG was pleased to be asked to send a representative to the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the location where Buckler cars operated, organised by the Reading Civic Society. The site located at 67 Caversham Road, Reading was latterly Dawsons Music shop and is now vacant awaiting re-use. Until the late 1980s, it was one of two semi-detached properties, with an access road opening into a large yard surrounded by warehousing and small buildings.



Buckler Cars site at 67 Caversham Road in 1962 (Courtesy of Buckler Car Register)



1962 – Location of Reading Site (OS Map – reproduced with permission of the [National Library of Scotland](https://www.nls.uk/))

The Buckler Car Company was founded by Derek Buckler (Chadwick Derek Frank Buckler 1910 – 1964). It was known for its high-quality cars that were supplied either fully built to order with a works body or optionally, and more frequently, in component form for home completion. The cars were designed to accept a range of mechanical components which enabled buyers to create a lightweight sports car suitable for road use and also for rallying and racing.

Derek Buckler started work at fourteen years old in his father's motor engineering company, Frank Buckler Ltd, before going on to train as a solicitor. However, by 1932 he has returned to the engineering business becoming the transport and sales director of another of the family firms, Watford Dairies. In 1938 he became the sales organiser for the company, and it is in this year that his father dies and, along with his brother Murray, he inherits Johnson Roberts Ltd, engineers to the motor trade along with other family businesses.

THE MOTOR TRADER & ESSENTIAL TRANSPORT

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Whilst our business is naturally restricted to repairing and re-conditioning Essential Transport Vehicle components for the duration, we believe that Rapid Service for these vehicles is now more important than ever before, and we are continuously organising and reorganising our services to this end. We welcome all Motor Traders within reach of Reading to phone us when in need of urgent repairs to Essential Vehicle Components. We endeavour not to use the word 'no' and we are at your service even though you may not have dealt with us before.

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WITH SHAFT REGRINDING and ALL BEARINGS-14-15 days.
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SPRING LEAVES-24 hours, or FROM STOCK.
RADIATOR REPAIRS-24 hours. NEW CENTRES-2-10 days.
DYNAMO AND STARTER REPAIRS-2-36 hours.
CONRODS REGRIND TRUCK, FORD AA, 8, 8F, 8 & 10, one MORRIS 8, 10 and 12, from stock, others 7 days.
BRAKE DRUMS REGRIND AND GRIND OUT TO STANDARD SIZE-7 days.
WIRE WHEELS REGRIND PRESSER STEEL TRUCKS-24 hours.
BEDFORD AND COMMER 85 Axle Spats Supplied and Fitted-20 minutes.
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ROVERDOD- STARTER BING STOCKISTS AND FITTING STATION.

EXCHANGE RECONDITIONED ENGINE SERVICE.
Order in advance. 2-14 Days Delivery.
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FORD & FORDSON MODELS 'AA', 'B', 'BB', 'BF', 'AF', 'TS' and 10 h.p.
This Service enables the Motor Trader to offer his Transport Customers a 24 hour Reconditioned Engine Service, almost unobtainable elsewhere.

ALL WORK IS EXECUTED TO FINE LIMITS & GUARANTEED.
The **BARKUS AIRCRAFT & MOTOR Eng. Co.**
PROPRIETORS:
BUCKLERS
GUARANTEED REPAIRS
67, CAVERSHAM ROAD, READING.
Phone 3227. Trade Only.

The next few years saw the company's work devoted to supporting the war effort, and it was during this time that the brothers purchased another service company called Barkus Aircraft and Motor Manufacturing Company located in Reading. After the war, the brothers go their separate ways with Murray managing Johnson Roberts Ltd, while Derek takes over Barkus and another company that they owned called Welco Farm Implements in Hill Heath Road South, Crowthorne. Welco were makers of agricultural implements and hammer mills.

Advert for Barkus Aircraft & Motor Eng. Co from Reading Standard of 24 Dec 1941

According to Les Brown in his book 'Special Obsessions: A History of British Specials 1947-62', Derek Buckler began to take an interest in car chassis design in 1946, when he saw an unfinished racing car that a friend had recently bought. From 1947, Buckler was designing chassis to take the engines of production cars, and fitting light-weight aluminium and fibreglass bodies to make them go faster.

The company name changed from Barkus Aircraft & Motor Eng. Co. to Buckler Cars and they began specialising in sports and racing cars. They operated out of the site in Caversham Road, Reading and the Welco Works site in Crowthorne; the Crowthorne site stopping its agricultural machinery manufacture when the Caversham Road site ran out of space to focus on the manufacture of the spaceframe chassis.



Welco Works, Crowthorne (courtesy of Buckler Car Register)



1961 – Location of Crowthorne Site (OS Map – reproduced with permission of the [National Library of Scotland](https://www.nls.uk/))

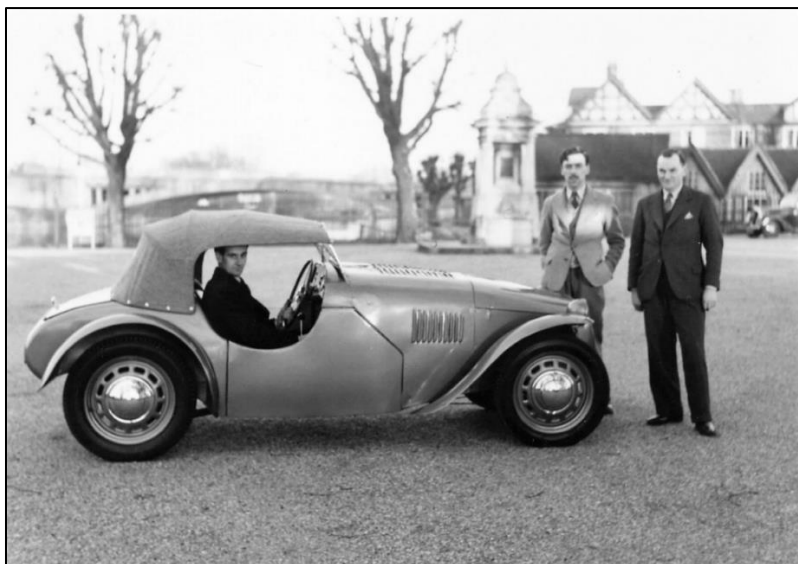
Buckler had the aim of producing cars with excellent handling characteristics, good acceleration and also with good fuel economy. The cars all had multi-tube chassis and Buckler was a pioneer of the spaceframe, an approach established in the aircraft industry. The company's designs used light narrow-gauge tubing to form a three-dimensional skeletal frame to which the engine, suspension and bodywork were attached.



1947 - DDP 201 chassis (courtesy of Buckler Car Register)

The first car they produced had the registration of DDP 201. It was designer Derek Buckler who then tested it on the roads around Berkshire where the bare chassis not only turned heads but also occasionally caught the attention of the police. At the plaque opening ceremony David Montgomery, the company's archivist, told us that the fire brigade, who were and still are in the building next to 67 Caversham Road, used to help with building the prototype machines and providing water and space for the suspension to be tested.

The picture below shows this first car in January 1950 on the Thames-side promenade near to Caversham Bridge. Standing on the right is Derek Buckler and to the left is Mark Cook, who later became the company secretary. At the wheel is Bob Drew, the works manager.



1950 - DDP 201 in Reading (courtesy of Buckler Car Register)

Following the war, the demand for private motor cars grew, but rationing and high taxation put new cars out of the reach of most people. Added to this, the supply of steel for car production was conditional on manufacturers selling most of their output overseas to provide foreign currency to boost the British economy. Buckler's solution was to use pre-existing engines and parts, attached to a lightweight frame, clad in a simple aluminium, latterly a fibreglass body, to develop a car for both leisure and sport. In doing this, he pioneered two motoring trends; firstly, the self-build 'Specials' and kit-car movement, and secondly, the spaceframe chassis. The DDP 201 used an engine one from a 1939 side-valve Ford Ten.



1949 – First production car leaves Caversham Road site (courtesy of Buckler Car Register)

Buckler supplied all the components of the car, except the body. This was because home-built cars (or 'specials' as they became known) were exempt from purchase tax, which at this time, could have added around 50% to the cost of the car. Customers had to make their own arrangements to obtain body panels and often used C F Taylor Ltd, a company conveniently located at the rear of the Buckler's Crowthorne

factory. As a result of this approach to manufacture, Buckler cars appeared in many forms and were not always immediately identifiable, particularly as owners sometimes did not receive a Buckler badge until they had sent a photograph of their finished car to the office at Caversham Road.

C F Taylor Ltd, the company who made the body panels for Buckler cars went on to become a worldwide business itself, involved in aircraft and marine engineering, packaging and plastics. The plastics division is said to have made props for the 20th Century Fox film Cleopatra, including eight golden crocodiles, twenty-four griffins and six swans for Cleopatra's bath.

On the sporting front, between 1947 and 1956, Buckler won over two hundred awards in trials, hill-climbs, rallies and circuit races. In the summer of 1953, he took a car to the Cheltenham Motor Car Club's fuel economy rally, staged over a route of 578 miles. Averaging 30 mph, Derek Buckler won the 'Specials' section, with an overall fuel consumption figure of 91.023 mpg.



1956 – Buckler Mark X (courtesy of Buckler Car Register)

Over the next fifteen years, Buckler developed a range of lightweight sports car designs. The first was the Buckler Mk V, said to have been named to suggest that it was not the company's first car, followed by the longer Mark VI (based on the Ford Prefect), and then the Mark X, with a full-width body.

In 1954, the company split into Buckler Engineering, based in Reading, and Buckler Cars, in Crowthorne. The Reading site manufactured a wide range of products for both the specialist builder and other manufacturers and undertook individual orders for engine, suspension, and gearbox modifications. The Crowthorne site continued to manufacture the spaceframes and built cars for customers.



1970 – Buckler BB100 racing prototype (1959) in Woodcote Way, Reading (courtesy of Buckler Car Register)

After success in the early and mid-1950s, Buckler's popularity waned as other manufacturers came on the scene and the kit-car market began to lessen. In 1956, Derek Buckler withdrew from motorsport after suffering a heart attack, and in 1958, Peter Hilton was appointed to run the Crowthorne factory and in the same year Buckler produced his final design, known as the BB100, said to be the first true Backbone space frame. It had an aluminium body and retained the Ford 100E side-valve engine. Its overall weight was just 7¼ cwt (less than 370 kg).

Also, in 1958 the company built their first kart. Karting as a hobby was in its infancy, but Buckler saw the opportunity and with their expertise in lightweight machine developments were in a good position to start design and manufacture. Buckler had considerable success entering the new go kart market in the 1960s, led by Jack Barlow.



1950s – Peter Hilton driving a Buckler Kart (courtesy of Buckler Car Register)

In 1961, Derek Buckler sold the Crowthorne factory to Mike Luff and Frank Fletcher. Car and kart production continued but with Buckler's departure it lost momentum, despite him being retained as a consultant, and in 1965 the company went into liquidation.

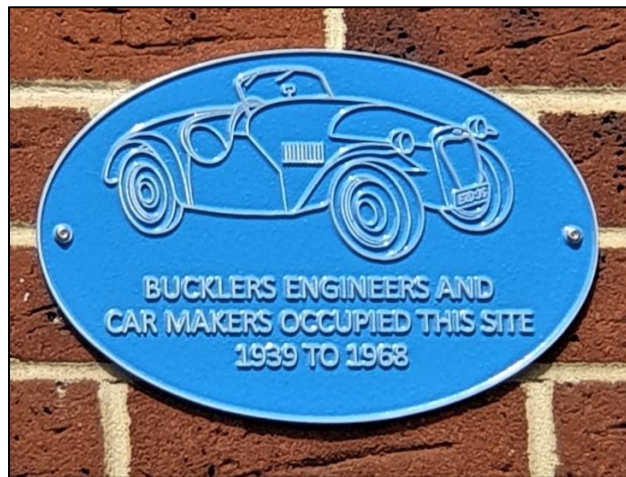
Derek Buckler died in 1964 at the age of 53. The Reading firm continued to operate for four more years, but the loss of its founder, and the decline of the 'Specials' market led to the company's closure in 1964. The site then became Dennis Hands motor dealership. In 1982, it was occupied by the Berkshire Motor Co., then Lords of Reading, and finally, Carvell Car Hire in 1987. After this, there were no more motor-related businesses on the site.

Between 1947 and 1962 Buckler produced around four hundred cars. They were also famous for their tuning accessories and manufactured close ratio gear sets that were fitted to most early Lotus cars, TVRs and many Ford Specials of the 1950s.

On 25th June 2022 a plaque to commemorate the site of Buckler Cars in Caversham Road, Reading was unveiled by Chad Buckler, Derek's eldest son, accompanied by his brother Malcolm and his son, Simon. The Buckler family kindly brought a number of their cars and lined them up outside of the building that now occupies the site of the former factory.



2022 – Plaque Unveiling (photo: Jo Alexander-Jones)



2022 – Buckler Plaque (photo: Jo Alexander-Jones)

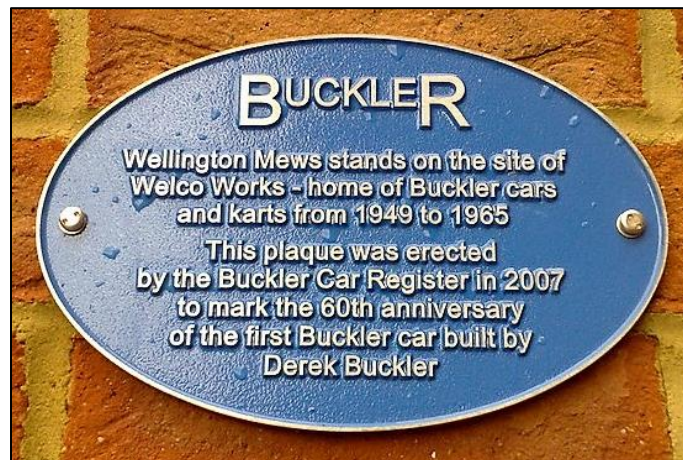


2022 – Buckler car outside former Buckler Site (photo: Jo Alexander-Jones)



2022 – Buckler cars outside former Buckler Site (photo: Jo Alexander-Jones)

In 2007 a similar plaque had been placed on the site of the Buckler factory in Hill Heath Road South, Crowthorne, to commemorate this important Berkshire company.



Bibliography and Sources:

- [Graces Guide](#) – Buckler Cars
- Motor Sport Magazine – Buckler pp 961 – 965 (Sep 1985)
- Reading Industries (Part 2) - [BIAG News No 34 \(Spring 2015\)](#)
- [Buckler Cars and Karts](#)
- [Britain By Car](#)
- Special Obsessions: A History of British Specials 1947-62 by Les Brown (2017)
- Fast Lane to success (Reading Evening Post 15 Aug 1997)

GLEANINGS John Dearing

A recent discovery of mine has been the Aston Martin Museum, which is near Wallingford but just the Oxfordshire side of the old Berks/ Oxon border at Drayton St Leonard. This was a 'new one on me' but a friend had offered to help me deliver four boxes of assorted paper to an address in Abingdon and on the way back he wanted to revisit the museum as it was soon to move to Newport Pagnell. As far as I can tell, it will be some months yet before the new facility is open but the old one, though quite small, is well worth a visit – to see some of its delights consult: <https://www.amht.org.uk/>. Unfortunately I left my camera in the car when we went in so was unable to take photos inside though I did snap the exterior afterwards – interesting in itself as a 15th century tithe barn displaying the Aston Martin logo.



Another recent discovery perhaps stretches the definition of Industrial Archaeology a little but without industry we would surely not have Labour (or Employment) Exchanges? This one in Nottingham has been converted into a church.



And taken from the train between Derby and Nottingham something that will soon be part of our industrial past – the cooling towers of the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station on which Wikipedia pontificates as follows: ‘a coal-fired power station owned and operated by Uniper at Ratcliffe-on-Soar in Nottinghamshire, England. Commissioned in 1968 by the Central Electricity Generating Board, the station has a capacity of 2,000 MW. As of March 2022, it is one of only three coal-fired power stations left in the UK, and is scheduled to close in September 2024.’



Uniper, it seems, is the German company, which as a result of the bizarre energy policies of successive UK governments, now runs five of this fair land's LNG power stations, and one gasoil power station, as well as Ratcliffe. One cannot help wondering whether - love them or loathe them (and I tend towards the former) – all those long-familiar cooling towers will disappear for ever as a result of the phasing out of coal? Could not at least one be preserved for posterity?

The Lay-by, the Hole in the Wall, and the Naked Man

By John Joyes

I can't speak for others who attended the BIAG meeting on 21st March, but I found the presentation given by Beth Asbury of West Berkshire Heritage be quite inspiring, and described many sites and subjects worthy of further research. One which drew my attention was the supposed location on the A4 near Aldermaston of the country's first petrol filling station. You might think this to be a momentous event, but the occasion has slipped into oblivion.



The date, 1919, was so much later than I had expected that I wondered where motorists had obtained their fuel prior to this date, and it seems it had to be purchased in 2-gallon cans from chemists, hardware stores, blacksmiths, and the like. The link Beth gave us shows a historic video of this filling station in operation (www.britishpathe.com/video/roadside-petrol-station). It is a wooden hut with awning, on a raised platform with a distinctive concrete kerb, and supposedly had fuel tanks beneath. It is difficult to

imagine that not a trace of this construction might still exist, so I felt obliged to do a physical search.. Sadly, I drew a blank, as no doubt others have done before. There was not even any evidence of the raised platform. The road has been widened, and a lay-by with a bus stop just west of the junction with Station Road may have been the exact location, as others have identified. In the video, and in the above photo, the Aldermaston station bridge can be seen in the background (recently replaced due to line electrification), and my guess of the angle of this bridge would place the location a little further west. However, the lay-by does have a few pieces of broken concrete rubble behind it (but this is an enticing

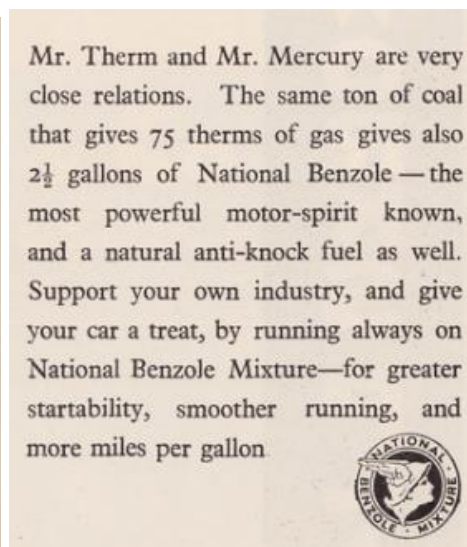
spot for fly-tippers), and a little further east, close to the junction with Station Road, is a more substantial brick construction with more rubble and obvious earthworks, but there is nothing shown in any extant OS maps covering the period, and this may just be the remains of an old culvert.

This petrol station was run by the AA, for its members only, and sold Benzole fuel supposedly at cost price. Now wouldn't that be an attractive membership inducement if it were repeated! But it only operated, along with about a dozen other similar stations around the country, until more commercial stations became established.

Motorist around Aldermaston did not have long to wait, as the blacksmith in the village took up the mantle, selling Shell petrol. His landlord would not have the fuel dispenser visible from the street, so the fuel hose was fed through a hole in the wall. The hole is still there, adjacent to the cottage still called The Forge. Apparently, the wall has been re-built, but the hole was retained !



I have to admit ignorance of the chemical origin of Benzole fuel. It was an attempt to reduce the country's dependence on Russian oil (so what changes?) and was manufactured by the distillation of coal, one ton of coal apparently yielding 2½ gallons of fuel. Although it had a very high octane rating it also had its disadvantages, in particular it required carburettor adjustments, although some people found it made an excellent paint stripper (not good for your car's bodywork) . From early 1920's it was sold by the National Benzole company as a 50:50 mix with petrol, and the AA stations closed in 1927. The proportion of benzole was progressively reduced as more lucrative uses for it became established in the chemical industry, and when in the 1950's it was recognised to be carcinogenic, was phased out altogether. The National Benzole company merged with Shell-Mex and BP, and the word Benzole disappeared from the National brand



So what about the Naked Man? The title of this article was not just to attract your attention, but refers to the advertising logo chosen by the National Benzole company, a fully naked Mr Mercury. Apparently this was none too popular and slowly it reduced to just the winged head which most of us will remember.

2022 OBSERVATION CHALLENGE

Just a little hint that there is still time to grab some photographs for the next and future issues when it will become a 2023 challenge

Theme 1 Look up

Theme 2: Look below the roof

Theme 3 The ground floor

Theme 4 Look down below

Theme 5 Look at new arrivals and changes

Theme 6: The finishes

Theme 7: Ghosts of the past

Theme 8: A grave matter

Theme 9 Only industrial

Theme 10 Street furniture

Theme 11 Transport related

Theme 12 Listed only

WEBSITES WORTH WATCHING

John Holden

The Friends of Reading Old Cemetery meet in the afternoon of the first Sunday each month. The friends undertake various voluntary tasks from just socialising on the site, sowing wildflower meadow seeds, clearing paths and uncovering graves. Members have contributed to this web site that covers the history of the site, burial, ecology and much more

<https://readingoldcemetery.uk/>

We continually create rubbish and discard it without a thought. Metal drink cans are no exception and early ones had a pull tab that came off. More recent designs have a lever action tab to break in the seal. Starting as a joke some archaeologists took up the challenge of identifying the different type to create a web site on the typology of pull tabs.

<https://pulltabarchaeology.com/>

Since man started flying aerial photography has given us a unique view from above. So explore

<https://britainfromabove.org.uk/>

Reading is famous for its brick buildings but distinctive buildings still used more expensive stone. This is a helpful source of the origins and identification of such stones

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

And finally this month there is nothing better than catching up with news in old newspapers. Not the stuff they printed yesterday but going back to the earlier dates. The local ones are:

Reading Evening Post 1965-1999

Reading Mercury 1770-1958

Reading Observer 1873-1924

Reading Standard 1891-1962

Some papers are free to access but the local ones only offer you 3 free views before a subscription is required.

This link selects the advanced search for choosing specific dates and publications

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/advanced>

Local events are often listed on this site

<https://whatsonreading.com/>

Remembering...

one of our past members, Bob McWilliam, passed away on Friday 14 October after coping with the effects of a severe stroke for nearly two years.

<https://robertmcwilliam.muchloved.com/>

Bob was the beloved husband of Claire, a wonderful dad of Katie and delightful Grandpa to Annie and Edith.

A man who shared his great interest in the world and how it worked, especially its engineering, through his years at the National Museum of Science and Industry (aka Science Museum, London) and his 30 years on the Institution of Civil Engineers Panel for Historic Engineering Works and with all his friends and family. A graduate of St Andrews University (Queens College, Dundee), Leeds University, University of Western Ontario and with a PhD from Reading University. His final masters degree was in digital design from Glasgow University.



He will be greatly missed with his encyclopaedic knowledge especially of historical engineering and commercial shipping, his magnificent map reading skills and his unfailing good humour. 'A true old school engineer'

Rising prices cause closure of Oxfordshire mill

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-62823328>

BIAG 2022-2023 PROGRAMME

DATE	Talk Topic		
Dec 12 19.30	BIAG Christmas Event – Lawrence Cameron's Pictures	David Cliffe	LINK
Jan 23 rd 19.30	A329(M) Berkshire's Own Motorway – 50 Years Old	David Hunter	LINK
Feb 19 th 19.30	Managing East Berkshire's Heritage	Teresa Hocking	LINK
Mar 20 th 19.30	Hidden Heritage of Thames Water	Thames Water	LINK
Apr 17 th 19.30	TBC		
May 22 nd 19.30	TBC		

BIAG events are held at St Mary's Church Hall, Reading. Details of how to access the venue can be found [here](#)

2022 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our 44th AGM was held on 21st November. It is pleasing to see that we are still financially viable and that we have returned to face-to-face meetings and outings following the disruption of the pandemic. The meeting agreed to keep the 2023 subscription at £20.

Two people stood down from their committee roles; Evelyn Williams and Graham Smith. We will be sad to lose their input and are pleased that, after his six years as Secretary, Graham will continue on the committee as an ordinary member. Jo Alexander-Jones will take over as Secretary.

Bob Haskins will remain as Chair and John Joyes as Treasurer, with John Holden staying on the committee and continuing to look after BIAG News. In the interim Bob and Jo will put together the early 2023 events programme, but it is hoped that there will be others joining the committee who can assist.

In these uncertain covid times programs are subject to many changes so please follow social media or check on the website for details

[www.twitter.com/Berks IA Group](http://www.twitter.com/Berks_IA_Group)

(or search for biag to find BIAG Latest News account Forthcoming events of interest from other organisations Our website is being kept updated with news of events from other groups –

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

CONTACT THE TEAM

Email contact details are given on the web site www.biag.org.uk

Chairperson Bob Haskins who lives in West Reading: contact@biag.org.uk

Treasurer and membership secretary, John Joyes who lives in North Reading treasurer@biag.org.uk

Secretary and Webmistress: Jo Alexander-Jones who lives in Reading's Christchurch Road area: contact@biag.co.uk

Newsletter, John Holden who lives in the University area of East Reading newsletter@biag.org.uk



Day Excursion to Newbury – Saturday 20th August 2022



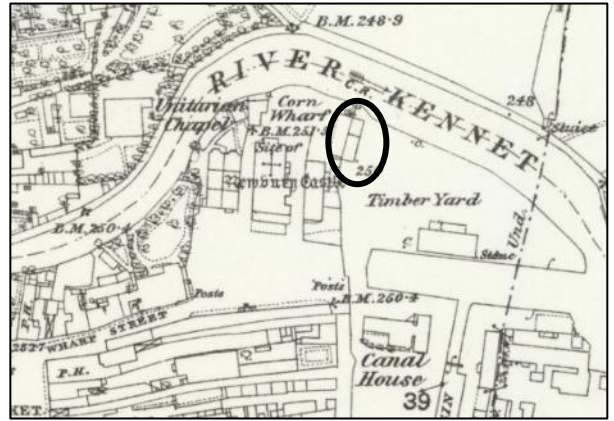
Newbury was an important stop halfway along the A4 between London and Bath and on the North/South route from the Midlands and Oxford to the port of Southampton. The Bath Road (A4) west from London was turnpiked in the 1728. The road came through the north of the town at Speenhamland and this area housed many public houses and inns to service travellers some of which still remain. The Chequers Hotel is on Broadway (now called Oxford Street) just along from the Bacon Arms which sits close to Pelican Lane where once sat the George and Pelican Inn (not the trendy wine bar so named in the centre of the town).

The waterways have always been important to the town, with the two rivers running through – the Lambourne in the north and the Kennet in the centre. The Kennet was made navigable from Newbury to Reading, where it joined the Thames in 1723. In 1791 John Rennie was secured to carry out the Western Canal Project to extend the Kennet and Avon Canal westwards. The work was completed in 1810 connecting the Thames at Reading to the Severn at Bath.

The Berks and Hants Railway opened a line from Reading to Hungerford on 21st December 1847. The northern section of the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton railway opened in 1882 and the section from Newbury to Winchester in 1885. In 1898 a branch line was opened from Newbury to serve the communities in the Lambourn Valley. Only one line remains.

Newbury was granted Borough status in 1189 and by 1204 it had a market, a corn mill and a fulling mill. While situated in a heavily agricultural community, one of Newbury's earliest and most important industries was the cloth trade, flourishing from medieval times; many of the remaining buildings reflect this heritage from the wool trade. With the coming of the canal and the railway trades grew to support transportation, a notable one being boat building. The mid-1800s saw the town housing a number of mills, not just for corn, but also for silk and paper and malting for the brewing trade. There were also heavier industries growing with a number of foundries in the town, most notably Plenty's Eagle works.

- [1] **The Stone Building** part of workshops built for the Kennet and Avon Canal Company, now used as a small museum and tearoom.



Behind the building is a relocated wharf crane facing the canal. This crane was originally inside the weighing house on the crane basin and was excavated and relocated in the 1990s. The main upright c.18ft high, supported by 2 iron stays. Radius of jib is c.14ft. 3 iron plates on main upright; uppermost (oval) says "FM 107", 2nd is below (rectangular) says "load not to exceed 2 tons", 3rd (oval) "Remove handles when not in use. Secure them to shaft by, split pins when in use" – these are now fairly obscured by mould.

Newbury wharf with its long narrow adjoining 170m basin was in place when the canal was opened in 1723. It was built for barley that was grown locally to be loaded on to barges and transported to Reading. However, the rise of the railway led to a decline in trade along the canal, and the basin was shortened and then filled in completely by the 1930s. The basin now sits underneath the library.

An archaeological evaluation in 1997 suggested that the basin had been built on a former channel of the Kennet, as marked on an 1815 deed, and it revealed eight phases of development including pre-construction alluvial deposits, initial basin construction and original timber revetments (retaining wall), replacement of timber revetments in brick, construction of a wharf side weigh house and replacement of brick revetment by a second timber revetment, shortening of wharf, extensions added to weigh house, demolition of weigh house and the infilling of the basin.

To the east, now under the dual carriageway, was Greenham Mill. Mentioned in the Domesday Survey, in 1840 it processed cloth, possibly silk and then it became a paper mill. In the early 19th century it was described as two corn mills and a blanket manufactory, and corn was ground there until 1903 when the site was sold to the Urban Electricity Supply Company when it became known as Newbury Power Station.

Across the car park towards town is the many-named Wharf House / Corner House / Canal House, a Grade II listed two-storey cream fronted 19th century house built around an 18th century timber-frame. It is unclear how or if it was associated with the wharf, and there is some confusion as there was another Canal House, later called Wharf House about 125m to the east which was demolished in the 1960s.

- [2] **The Granary** Built c. 1723 as a grain store. A huge roof coming out over on cranked posts. It is a Grade II* listed building. There is a suggestion that the western store room on the first floor was used as a lock-up and had a heavily iron-bound door and a small hatch to allow provisions to be passed through. The frontage was changed in the 1930s to add in bay windows. At this time the ground floor was occupied by the Newbury and District Bus Company who remained while the bus station was located on the wharf.



- [3] **Old Cloth Hall** John Kendrick, a wealthy clothier, left money in his will for the building of a house to provide work in the clothing trade for the poor as the industry was in decline, with consequent unemployment. Construction of the 'workhouse' was completed in 1627, and the western end of the present building formed one wing of a U-shaped courtyard complex, the remainder having been demolished. Later the building used as a charity school, possibly afterwards being a hospital and a council chamber. The school was established by Newbury Corporation in 1706 but had moved out to Northcroft Lane by 1722. It is possible that the building could have been in domestic or office use for the wharf manager, but this is not proven.

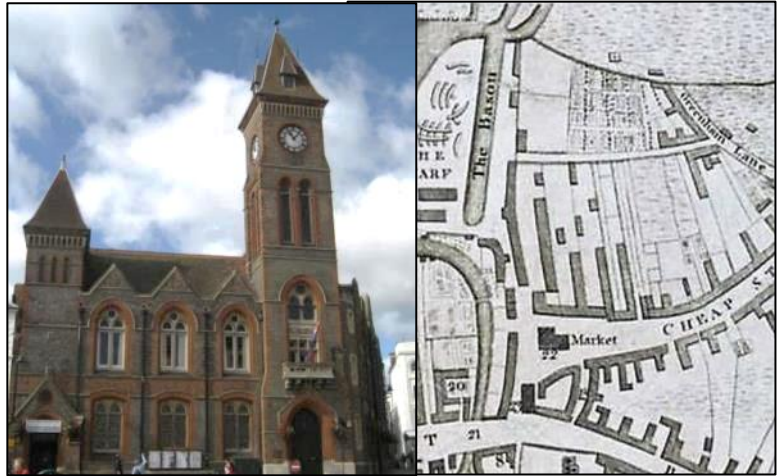


In 1829 the site of both buildings [2 and 3] was converted as stores, with granary numbers being drawn on the doors. By the 19th century it had gained the name 'Cloth Hall', although there is little evidence that the building was the home of the Weavers' Company or used as a market hall where cloth merchants conducted business, and architecturally it differs from the cloth halls in other locations. On the instigation of the mayor, the Cloth Hall was restored as a memorial to Queen Victoria in 1902, and opened as a public museum in 1904. It was a scheduled monument (de-scheduled 1997) and remains a Grade I listed building. It now houses the West Berkshire Museum.

- [4] **Town Hall with its high clock tower**, was completed in 1878 with the clock tower being raised in 1881. It was later extended west in 1909-1910; the architect throughout was James H Money. It is Grade II listed.

During the First World War the Town Hall was used for a variety of military purposes. At the beginning of the war, it was a recruitment centre and in 1915 it hosted boxing tournaments between different regiments.

From John Willis' 1768 map of the town, we can see that there was originally a building in Market Place, which he labelled the 'Old Guild Hall'. It also shows the original town hall which was built in 1742 with a walled in area around a smaller building.



- [5] **Town Hall restriction sign.** Placed on the northern wall of the Town Hall, this cast iron plaque painted in white with black lettering was obviously needed at this time, but the exact reason for its conditions are now lost. It may have been to protect the surrounding buildings from the noise and vibrations caused by any passing traction engine.

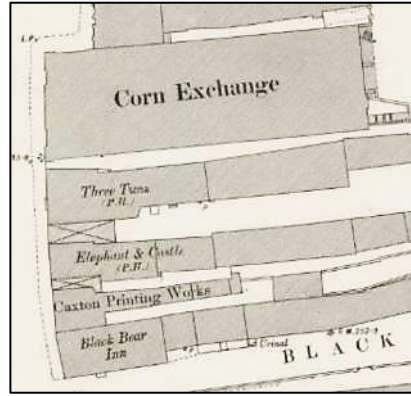


- [6] **Corn Exchange** built by J S Dodd with a distinctive Corinthian façade, opened for trade in 1861 to handle the grain-growing industry in the area under the 1581 Charter granted to the town to charge a toll on all corn sold in the market. Corn dealing in the Exchange gradually declined until it ceased in 1983, but not before dealing in oil, insurance and farm machinery had been included. There was also an annual wool market held in the building for many years. As well as its trading role, the building fulfilled a social role for the town, holding celebrations, public meetings and dances. 1993 saw it refurbished to become a theatre and it is now Grade II listed.



- [7] **The Elephant at the Market**

The building at 8 Market Place is Grade II listed. Its name has changed several times, in 2016 from the Queen's Hotel to The Elephant at the Market. The listed building description notes it as a mid-19th century re-fronting of an older inn, with a stucco front and a carriage entrance to the south. It has been suggested that both "The Three Tuns" and "The Elephant and Castle" occupied the site simultaneously; however, on the OS Town Plan of 1880 shown below, the Queen's Hotel site is marked "Three Tuns" and the "Elephant and Castle" occupies the site next door, later rebuilt as Barclays Bank. Historical pub research indicates that a public house with the name "Three Tuns" was in operation from 1830 (from Pigot's directory).



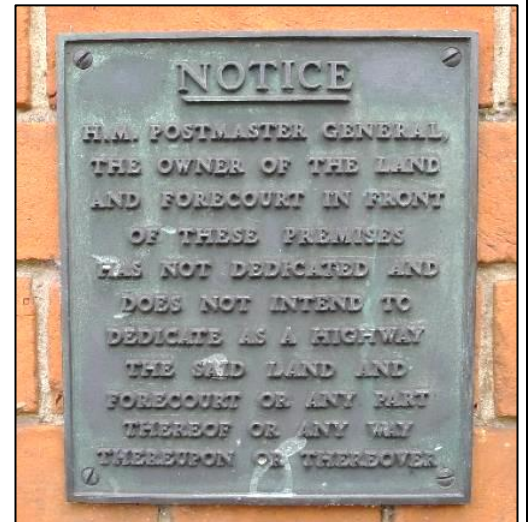
The Queen's Hotel is listed in local directories from 1883. One of the earliest mentions of the Queen's Hotel is in the Newbury Weekly News of 19th June 1879 when John Hamlen announces that the premises is now open for business, including commodious stables. Sadly, the building that housed the Caxton Printing longer exists. The works

works that we can see on the map no was owned by G J Cosburn who produced an annual illustrated directory of the town and neighbourhood which lasted for 44 years. Cosburn started in Reading as an apprentice under Messrs Cowlsade and moved to Newbury as a representative of the Reading Mercury before he set as an independent printer and publisher.

[8] **Post Office** - A Neo-Tudor building designed by the Board of Works under the supervision of J Askew with the builder W Goodchild of Reading. Grade II listed building. A stone plaque above the main window identifies the building as the 'Post Office' and above the two side windows are carved V and R identifying the date of the building as in the Victorian era. This building is the first purpose-built Post Office in the town, previously the postal services were provided by a number of private shops in Cheap Street. The gabled house that occupied this site previously was demolished and at the time of building it was set back from the street line to allow space outside for customers to post letters without becoming an obstruction. The interior was handsomely appointed with mahogany counters and pneumatic tubes to allow telegrams and other messages to be conveyed upstairs. The description in the Newbury Weekly News of 26th November 1896 describing the buildings at opening features the number of facilities for the staff and to allow the efficient processing of mail, these extend to sleeping and cooking facilities for night time staff. The building was lit and heated by gas which was installed by Messrs Edwards and Godding of Newbury. Mail carts and hand trucks could bring in and take away post through the using a gateway on to Wharf Road.



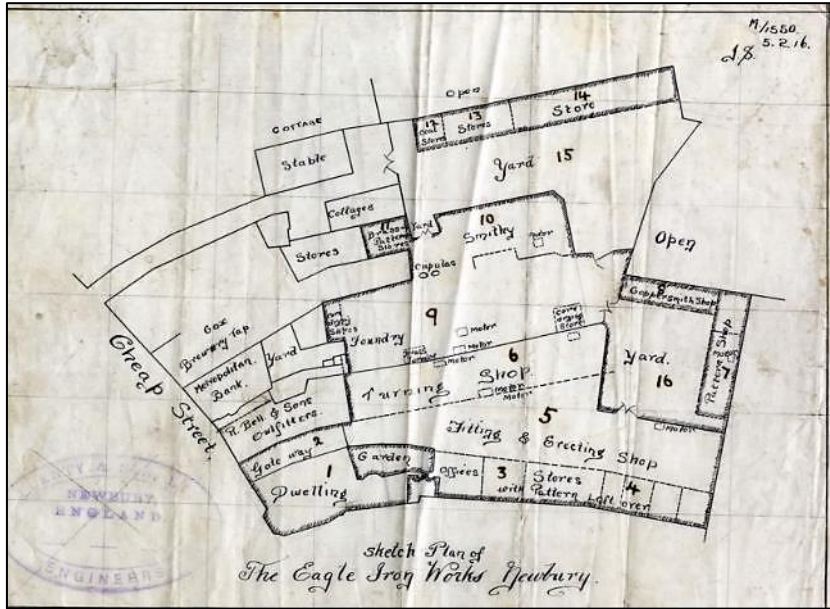
Just prior to reaching the Post Office on the other side of the road is the Grade II listed Catherine Wheel and early 19th century public house with unusual crenelations on the roofline. The earliest reference to the site as a public house is in 1867 when the landlord was Edwin Fox.



[9] **Site of Plenty's Eagle Iron Works.** This foundry sat on the west side of Cheap Street, where the Kennet Shopping Centre is now located. William Plenty, a wheelwright, moved to Newbury from Southampton and opened the Eagle Works in 1790.

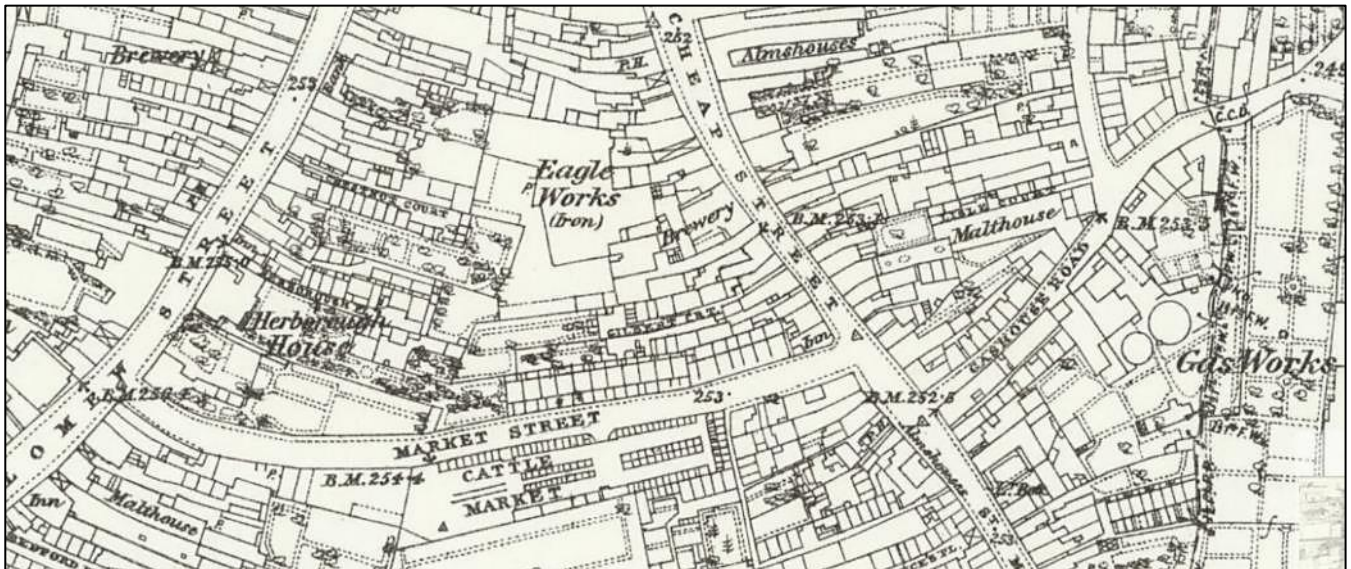
In its early years it concentrated on agricultural machinery, it also made sluices for the Kennet and Avon Canal. At the time it started operating there were five iron works in the town, with Plentys being the largest employing 90 men by 1881. In 1876 Plenty bought Stacey and Lace's foundry in Bartholomew Street to expand the business. They moved out to Hambridge Road in 1965, with the Eagle Works site being demolished in the early 1970s to make way for a shopping centre.

The schematic is from 1816 showing the layout of the ironworks.



The 1880 OS map below shows the centre of Newbury and the various industries; there are a number of breweries and malshouses, the old gasworks and a cattle market along with the ironworks. Most are now underneath the Kennet Centre and other modern developments.

The Newbury section of an excellent document entitled 'A Directory of Berkshire Brewers' by John Dearing lists the various breweries and malshouses in the town.



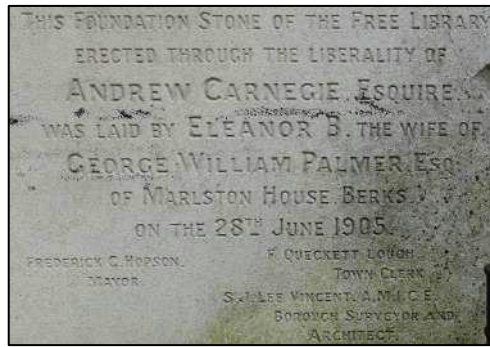
[10] **Povey & Wade Music Piano Store, Kings Road West.** Moving south along Cheap Street there are two classical houses on the junction with Kings Road West, which we can see from the map above was once called Gashouse



Road. The side of the first house has a ghost sign for Povey and Wade's music shop. In the late 1800s the site was the

home of Turk and Son, iron and brass foundry which was there until it was sold just after the World War I. It is just possible to see another ghost sign with the company's name on the Kings Road West side and at the back of the current building you can still see what would have been the foundry buildings. Alongside the south of the foundry buildings ran an area called Sackville Place which in 1893 Turks used for a new stable and store – the map shown is from 1880 prior to the site becoming the foundry.

- [11] **Carnegie Library**, built 1905. Carnegie Road. Moving further south on Cheap Street the Newbury Free



library as it was originally named. The American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie gave £2,000 towards the library on the understanding that Newbury Corporation would adopt the Free Libraries Act and not charge rates on the site. There was quite a lot of opposition to the adoption

of the Act but it was finally approved and the site, which held a dilapidated building associated with the workhouse, goal and a dancing saloon, was purchased for £500 from St Mary's church trustees. Carnegie's money provided for 10,000 books as well as daily newspapers and journals.

- [12] **Railway Station** (GWR) rebuilt 1908-10. The current station is on the site of the original Brunel station from

1847 on the Berks and Hants line of the Great Western Railway. The design is said to be a copy of the station at Westbury in Wiltshire. It was considered for national listing in 2012 but was considered to be of a common type with limited connections to Brunel. The footbridge is considered to be of interest because of its length spanning four running lines. On the corner plot, now empty, leading down to the station once stood Bridge House – a large 18th century detached house which appears to have been demolished when the station was rebuilt in 1908.



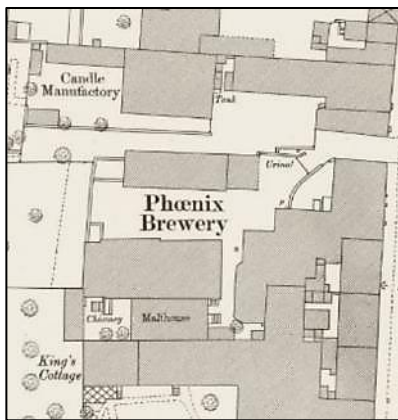
- [13] **Rockingham Road Railway Bridge**, is a skew segmental arch bridge erected between 1845-47 taking Rockingham Road over the main line to Westbury. It is Grade II listed. It is the only example of a Brunel single-span segmental arched bridge with raking abutments, it was built as part of the Berkshire and Hampshire Railway by an assistant engineer to Brunel's specification. The unusual single arch appears to have been designed for aesthetic reasons since it is not necessary on engineering grounds.

The bridge can just about be seen from an alleyway next to the railway bridge on Bartholomew Street.

- [14] **Toomers Hardware Store**, Bartholomew Street. Situated just over the railway bridge in Bartholomew Street on the corner with St Michael's Road this store has its own legend in the town. The longstanding Newbury Toomer family were said to have first occupied No 4 Northbrook Street from 1694. The 'House of Toomer' Shop stood on the site of the old Rose and Crown Inn (Willis' map 1768). The shop was burnt down in 1961 and then completely rebuilt with nothing remaining of the original building. The family then moved their shop to the current location. Joseph Toomer, the founder of the famous ironmongery, was also a musician, painter, diarist and census-taker, whose wife was related to Clive of India and the Astronomer Royal Maskelyne.



- [15] **Phoenix Brewery** built in the early-mid 18th century to the design of James Clarke, a master builder from Newbury. The building facing on to Bartholomew Street was the brewer's house which is now a Grade II listed, To the rear of the building are the beer houses and other brewery buildings now converted into the Phoenix serviced apartments. The commentary in John Dearing's directory tells us that Herbert John Finn & Co. founded the Phoenix Brewery in 1842 at 49/51 Bartholomew Street, where the voracious South



Berkshire Brewery was also based. However, it retained its independence longer than the latter, eventually being taken over by Ushers in 1925 along with 21 pubs. Previously, until 1895, it was owned by Nutley's, with William Nutley (1842-68) and Charles Nutley (1868-95) as brewers. On the map from 1880 we can see a candle manufactory, and modern maps show that the original buildings along with those of the timber yard just to the north may still be present, but getting access doesn't look easy.

- [16] **Oddfellows Hall**, dated 1886 and located on the corner of Craven Road and Oddfellows Road. The architect was James H Money of Newbury, the builder was Edward James of Newbury, with stonework by John Pound of Speenhamland. The hall and the adjacent caretaker's house were used by the Order of Oddfellows until the 1940s when it was converted to flats. The building is Grade II listed. The Oddfellows were a trade association similar to the Medieval Guilds, but they represented craftsmen who did not have a specific Guild structure into which they fitted.



[17] **St Nicholas Church** was rebuilt between 1509 and 1532 with the work mainly financed by the cloth merchant 'Jack of Newbury'. Inside there are a brass and a window dedicated to this benefactor. It is a Grade I listed building.

- [18] **Newbury Town War Memorial** This memorial designed by local architect Sir Mervyn Macartney was unveiled on Sunday 22nd October 1922. It is Grade II listed. Behind the memorial is a curved screen wall with brass plaques commemorating those who fell in World War II.



- [19] **Newbury Bridge** - The current bridge was built between 1769 and 1772 and has three arches, although the two outer arches are hidden by flanking buildings. James Clarke constructed the bridge to replace an earlier wooden one. There is no tow path so the tow line to haul a barge had to be floated under the bridge and then re-attached to the horse on the other side. It is Grade II listed.



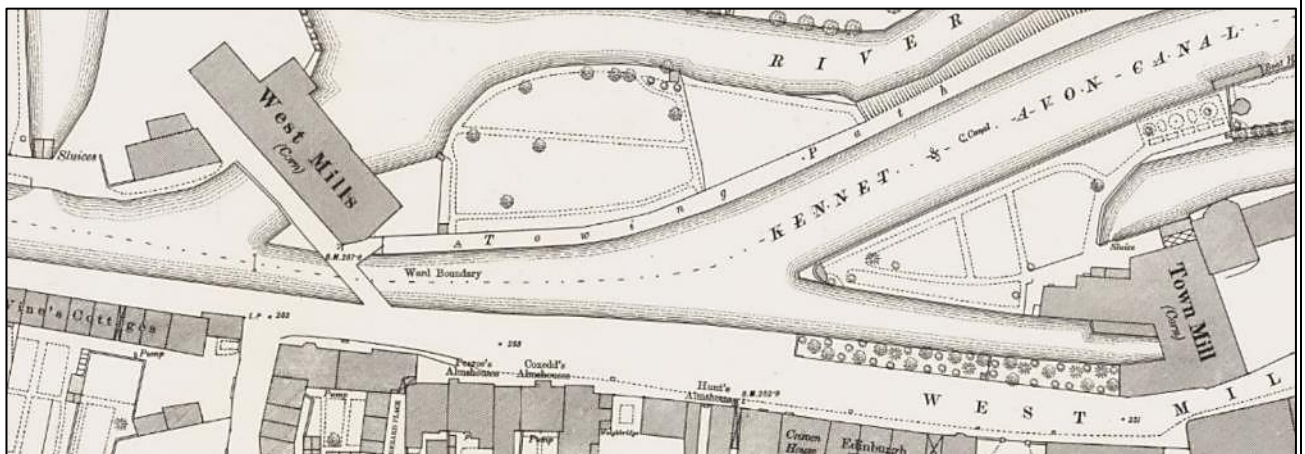
The two arches on the west side have additions to the top: SW corner has "Bishopsgate" London. This was added c. 100 years ago as the building society who owned the building at that time had their headquarters in Bishopsgate London. NW corner has "Donnington Castle". This was added by the Newbury Building Society c. 1997. The Bishopsgate tower (SW corner) is the only one to survive as a

free-standing structure. All three corner buildings are thought to have the same vaulted cellars which form part of the outer spans.

- [20] **Newbury Lock 85** This lock on the Kennet and Avon Canal was built between 1794 and 1796. It structure is a brick chamber with stone coping with two sets of double wooden gates. The top gates have mechanical gate paddle gearing assisted by lever operated ground paddle gearing with single lever on each side of the chamber. The bottom gate has hydraulic paddle gearing. It is the only example of this design in southern England. It is Grade II listed.



- [21] **West Mills Swing Bridge** – Built c. 1810. John Rennie's original design comprises a wooden underframe, consisting of 4 or 5 heavy longitudinal beams, with a wooden planked deck and wooden railings. Diagonal iron stays strengthen the structure. The bridge turns around a stubby pintle attached to a lower iron bearing with the upper bearing plate attached to the underframe. The weight of the bridge is borne on large ball bearings - about 3" in diameter - which sit in the bearing race. It is an accommodation bridge, meaning that it was built to preserve an existing right of access, road or path when the canal was put in place. The pivot point for many of the accommodation bridges on the K&A are on the 'green bank' side of the canal rather than the towpath side. This made it hard for single-handed boaters to travel along the canal, as once they moored the boat on the towpath side, walked across the bridge and opened it there was no way back to bring their boat through. Instead, they had to leave the boat unsecured and taking a rope across to pull the boat through by hand.



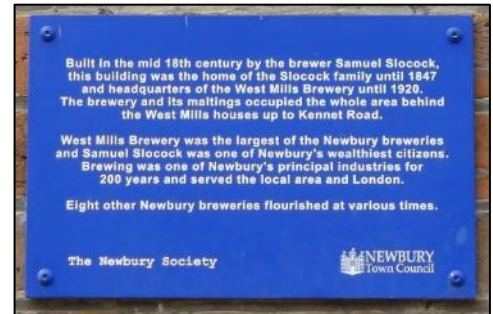
Across the bridge are the remains of West Mills (corn) granary, which is now converted to flats. It is of 18th century origin and is Grade II listed. Across the canal the remains of the Town Mill (corn) have also been converted into housing. This mill was a working operation when recorded by Kenneth Major as a 'very old mill incorporated into a modern mill'. The main mill building however had been rebuilt in 1892 following a fire. From the 1950s the mill was owned by H Dolton & Sons Ltd. It closed in 1972. On late 19th century to early 20th maps, it is marked as a corn mill. But later as a flour mill. According to Victoria County Histories paper-making and silk-throwing were also carried out most likely in the 19th century. On the north side of the swing bridge is a mill stone incorporated into the wall and labelled Dolton Mews. Henry Dolton, of the Newbury family, was mayor in 1869.

Along from West Mills are two sluice gates operated by an electric motor labelled "Limitorque Valve Controls Ltd, Newbury, England". The sluices look to manage the old mill race. Broad-gauge rail forms bridge over the stream.

- [22] **West Mills.** Number 22 displays a fire insurance mark for Sun Insurance Policy No. 332180, dated 30th October 1773 (the year of the Boston Tea Party). Along the canal side are seven 17th century cottages known collectively as The Old Weaver's House. In 1963 they were converted into two dwellings.



- [23] **Newbury Brewing Industry Blue Plaque** - Coming back down West Mills, St Nicholas House sits on the corner of Oddfellows Road. This 18th century Grade II* listed town house was the home Samuel Slocock, who was a brewer in 1796 and appears in 1823 and 1830 as Samuel Slocock & Son, with the location of West Mills. In 1840, Edmund Slocock, presumably the son, is recorded as brewing in Bartholomew St. Goodley also associates the Slococks with the West Mills Brewery and gives Edmund's era as 1830-47. He was followed by Hawkins and Canning, 1850-68; William & T E Hawkins and E B Black, 1883; and T E Hawkins & Co. from 1887.



The Newbury Society have placed a plaque on the building to commemorate the houses' heritage.

- [24] **New Monkey Bridge** – Retracing the path along West Mills beside the canal the tow path leaves the built-up centre of Newbury and reaches this bridge. The original Monkey Bridge was an arched steel lattice footbridge built in 1935 with a water main pipe underneath, commissioned by the Corporation of Newbury under a local employment scheme. However, by 2005, West Berkshire council deemed it had reached the end of its useful life and it was replaced by the New Monkey Bridge which opened in 2008, a couple of metres to the west of the site of the original bridge. Next to the bridge on the north side is a military pillbox.



- [25] **Speenhamland Obelisk** – Crossing Monkey Bridge and the Northcroft parklands Speen Lane, just off of the Old Bath Road is reached. At this point sits a Bath stone column topped with a gas light. The obelisk was originally erected in now at the junction of Speen Lane was erected in October 1828 where the Clock Tower now stands on the Old Bath Road junction with Strawberry Hill. The Speen Obelisk was provided by Frederick Page of Goldwell House (5 Old Bath Road). The Newbury gas works started was contracted in 1825 in the south-east of the town and they were taken over by Newbury Borough Council in the 1830s. The Kings Road site closed in 1959 and the remains of the buildings were demolished in 2017. This obelisk is a last reminder of the gas-lit era in the town.



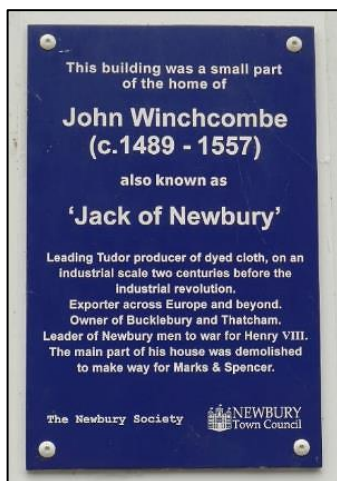
- [36] **Clock Tower** – the current structure was built in 1929, designed by the architect C R Rowland Clark, built by E B Hitcham and was a gift of James Henry Gooding. Prior to the clock tower there were other structures at this location. The first clearly documented monument at this site was the early 19th century gas lamp now in Speen Lane. This made way for an ornamental four-faced clock mounted on top of a tall cast ironwork pillar commissioned for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 built with £278 5s subscribed by the townspeople and unveiled in 1889. The clock was lit from below by four branching gas lanterns, later replaced by free-standing gas lights. It also included two drinking fountains and a water pump for dampening down the dusty roads. A Russian gun captured in the Crimean War was brought to the site, and a trough for animals was added in 1908 by the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association. Chain linked bollards and a traditional red telephone box completed the group by the early 20th century. The number of items



now on the site may have been why the Victorian structure was superseded in 1929. The gun and apparently the clock were melted down in Plenty's Eagle Ironworks during World War II.

[37] **John Winchcombe II (Jack of Newbury) House** – At 24 Northbrook Street was the home of the Winchcombe family and most notably John in the 15th century. John was born in Newbury in 1489 and worked with his father, also John, in the cloth industry. When his father died in 1519, he inherited, along with his own business, around 30-50 looms for producing woollen cloth. Records show he produced about 6,000 cloths a year which made him one of the leading clothiers in England. He exported a type of cloth called 'kerseys' via London to the fairs at Antwerp in Belgium, where the Winchcombe cloths were recognised as the best of their kind and were in great demand in places such as Italy, Germany and Hungary. Each kersey was about a yard wide and 18 yards long.

Today the site is occupied by Marks & Spencer and was previously the Jack Hotel. Only the side of the original building survives, external carvings and mouldings can still be seen on the building along Marsh Lane. The property went back towards the Marsh, now known as Victoria Park. The building included a panelled hall and parlour, numerous bed chambers, buttery, kitchen, cheese house, bake house, bolting house and a Brew house, all located around courtyards.



By 1540 his wealth allowed him to buy land in and around Newbury, the parishes of Bucklebury and Thatcham and the estates at East Lockinge and East Shefford.

John Winchcombe is known by more than one name. Most commonly it is 'Jack of Newbury' but he is also given the surname of Smallwood in some records. The Newbury Society have placed a blue plaque on the house in Northbrook Road to commemorate his industry.

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August 2022

Some photographs of BIAG members in Newbury

