

SOUTH WEST WALES INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Editorial Committee: F.G. Cowley, P.R. Reynolds

INTRODUCTORY

After a brief period of inactivity during the summer the Society is again functioning. The meeting at which Mr. Robert Craig lectured on 'Ships and Shipbuilding in the Port of Swansea' was very successful. Further meetings, arranged by the Extra-Mural Department of the University College, are to be held at approximately monthly intervals until next spring. On November 16th Dr. Graham Humphrys will speak on 'The Fuel and Power Industry in West Wales', and on December 14th Mr. W.H. Morris will give an account of 'The Kidwelly Tinsplate Works'. Both meetings will be held in the Royal Institution and will start at 7.0 p.m.

Since the last issue the Society has been unfortunate in losing both the Secretary and Treasurer. Chris Coggins has been appointed Lecturer in Geography at Luton College of Technology, while Jeff Griffiths is now Deputy Schools Officer to the London Diocesan Board of Education. We owe a great deal to the part their knowledge and enthusiasm played in setting up the Society, and wish them both every success in their new posts. It is good to know that they intend to keep up their links with the Society. The vacant posts have not yet been filled, but it is anticipated that it will not be long before they are.

NEWS ITEMS

Trostre Tinsplate Museum. When the huge modern strip mills at Trostre, Velindre and Ebbw Vale were built by the then Steel Company of Wales shortly after the last War, all the old works producing tinsplate by the hotpack process were closed, the last one surviving until 1955. A number of relics from the old works have been preserved and are now housed in a small museum on the edge of the works at Trostre in what was formerly a farmhouse, in use until the construction of the works in 1947. Part of the building is now furnished in traditional Welsh farmhouse style, and serves as a reception suite for important visitors to Trostre, while the remainder, two rooms, houses the museum. One of the rooms is furnished as an office might have appeared in about 1900, and contains many documents of historic interest to the trade. In the other room the centre piece is a working model of a hotpack rolling mill. Also on display are a number of small exhibits, such as tools, equipment and photographs. All the items have been catalogued by the National Museum of Wales. Besides the indoor collection there are a number of pieces of hand mill machinery in the grounds, all taken from the old tinsplate works which Trostre has

replaced. The museum does not pursue a policy of actively seeking further material, but is always happy to receive items which people may wish to present to them.

The museum is not open to the public, but if sufficient members of the Society are interested it should be possible to arrange a visit. By itself the museum is not big enough for a visit to it to occupy an entire afternoon, but taken with other sites in the Llanelli district - such as the Kidwelly Tinsplate Works - it would make an interesting excursion.

The Editor would like to thank Mr. W. Francis, Head of the Quality Control Department at Trostre, for the information on which this account of the museum is based.

Narrow boat rescue. No further developments have occurred in the scheme to rescue a narrow boat from the Neath Canal at Tonna, reported in our last issue. The organiser of the scheme, Mr. R.G. Keen of the National Museum, says that they are still waiting for suitable accommodation to be made available on the site of the new Industrial and Maritime Museum at Cardiff. He has inspected the boat again recently and can find no traces of any further deterioration.

For the benefit of anyone who wants to see the boat in situ before its removal, the way to reach it is as follows: follow the A465 road out of Neath as far as Aberdulais; turn right onto the B4434 to Tonna. The road passes under the railway, makes a sharp left turn, and shortly after that crosses the Neath Canal. The boat lies a little way down the canal from here. As well as the boat on the Neath Canal there are also remains of other boats on the Tennant Canal not far away, although these are now in poor condition. The B4434 crosses the Tennant Canal just before coming to the railway bridge mentioned above, and the boats are a little way up the canal from here.

Kidwelly Tinsplate Works. The last few months have seen quite a lot happening as regards the derelict tinsplate works just outside Kidwelly which have been closed since 1941. It had at one time been hoped that Carmarthenshire County Council would acquire the works and use them for an industrial museum, but in June it was announced that the County Planning Committee had decided against this: the buildings and equipment, they said, were not unique in themselves, nor were they the scene of any significant episode in metallurgical history. In any case the price (£120,000) was more than they felt they could afford, and it would be too expensive to refurbish the works after purchase. Following this, the owners, J. & P. Zamitt Ltd., revealed in August that they had had an offer by an American industrialist to buy the rolling mills and transport them to Pittsburgh: and since it was costing Zamitts £10,000 p.a. to maintain the site, they were naturally highly interested in the offer. This brought a speedy response from the Vice-Chairman of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society, Mr. W.H. Morris, and from our Chairman, Mr. R.O. Roberts, who both suggested the formation of a local consortium to preserve the works.

Events that have taken place since then are described as follows by Mr. Morris: "The Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society has taken up the cause and we convened a meeting at the works on September 7th, inviting the organisations listed below to send representatives. Some 30 people turned up and made an inspection. The various items of machinery and the processes were explained by former workmen, Douglas Hague, and myself. Afterwards we held an informal meeting at the Gwenllian Court adjoining. I set out to explain the purpose of the meeting and to initiate discussion. There was general agreement that the price asked, £120,000, and the subsequent maintenance, would be prohibitive but that the fixed plant and machinery ought to be rescued and transported to another site. The outstanding items are the two Foden vertical engines, the standards for the rolls and the rolls themselves. It was considered that they could be used to re-create the working of a mill. We put forward the suggestion that it might be incorporated in a new industrial museum sited in South-East Carmarthenshire. The area was important and significant enough to deserve such a museum. This was well received and it was considered that the new local authority, the Llanelli District, when it came into existence in 1974, might undertake such a service. No further word seems to have come from America, nor has there been any offer from potential buyers."

Organisations at the meeting of September 7

The Carmarthenshire County Council
Llanelli Borough Council
Burry Port Urban District Council
The Carnegie Trust
The Leverhulme Trust
The National Museum of Wales
J. and P. Zamitt Ltd.
The County Museum, Carmarthen
The British Steel Corporation
The Council for British Archaeology
The Department of the Environment, Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments
Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire
The Pembrokeshire Industrial Archaeology Group
University College, Swansea
The South-West Wales Industrial Archaeology Society
The Civic Trust
Transport and General Workers' Union
Kidwelly Borough Council

N.B. Mr. Morris will be speaking to the Society on Kidwelly Tinplate Works on December 14.

Welsh Miners' Museum: Amgueddfa Glowyr Cymru. At a press conference on August 23 plans were announced for transforming the abandoned colliery at Glyncoerrwg into a mining museum. BBC Wales broadcast an item on the scheme in 'Good Morning Wales' the following day and the Western Mail had a long illustrated article on it. Most of our readers will probably have seen the article, though if not the editor of the Newsletter can supply a copy. Since then further progress has been made.

Mr. David Walters, Secretary of the Welsh Miners' Museum Committee, writes as follows: "After our press conference we received a Safety Report on the site. As a result we revised our plans and on the face of things our revised plan seems to be more feasible than the original one, inasmuch as that in the old plan we would have used the building which surrounded the pit-head to house galleries, and workings which would have complicated design work and heating and ventilating problems. But our new approach would house the galleries and workings in a custom made building situated just below the surface of the ground. We have submitted these plans to the N.C.B. and are awaiting a decision on the availability of the site.

We have sought support for our project from various quarters such as the County Planning Department, The Welsh Museum, the Wales Tourist Board, the Prince of Wales Committee, the Minister of the Environment, and the Welsh Office, and are awaiting replies.

We held a public meeting on Thursday, 28th September at the local Workmen's Hall, when members of the press were present. We organised a small exhibition which was manned by a working party from University College, Swansea, the Welsh Museum and the local Historical Society. On the same day we met the Management Committee of the Community Development Project and convinced them of our intentions. As a result the Projects Management Committee have undertaken to organise and finance a feasibility study of the museum project."

Loughor Zinc Works. The chairman, Mr. R.O. Roberts, has assembled sparse information about the Loughor Zinc Works which was operated for brief periods in the early nineteenth century. The ruins (SS 571989) appear to be a rare survival of the English Method of producing the metal by Downward distillation. Any knowledge of relevant early documents would be welcomed.

IA IN THE SWANSEA AREA

The initiative for action in studying the industrial archaeology of Swansea came from a few interested persons within the University College of Swansea, which led to a public lecture by Mr. Rex Wailes in June 1963. Following this lecture an Industrial Archaeology Group was set up to cover the Swansea area, the rest of South West Wales coming within the province of the Port Talbot Historical Society, the Neath Antiquarian Society and the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society.

The main aims of the group were to compile a detailed directory of IA sites in the Swansea area and to compile record cards for the National Record of Industrial Monuments. Mr. K.J. Hilton was Secretary of the Group. Between September 1963 and May 1965 seven group meetings were held and over 60 cards completed, along with a directory of sites. Special mention should be made of the considerable work done by Mr. Bernard Morris in the preparation of these cards, an account of which appears elsewhere in this newsletter.

Field excursions were held in the summers of 1964 and 1965, and various speakers gave public lectures. In October 1964 the Group contributed to a conference on IA in Wales, held in

Cardiff. At this conference the South East Wales Industrial Archaeology Society was formed. Excursions and lectures were regarded as subsidiary to the main purpose of the Group, i.e. the directory of sites and the record cards, and when these were completed in May 1965 the Group ceased to operate, although excursions were held in the following summer.

During the winter of 1965-1966 the Extra-Mural Department ran a series of six lectures on IA with speakers from other parts of the country, which was attended by 53 people, and constituted the first formal course in Wales. In May and June 1969 the W.E.A. organised study tours on local history and IA led by Mr. R.O. Roberts. The subject was also covered incidentally in Extra-Mural Department courses on local history.

P.C. Coggins

C.B.A. INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY RECORD CARDS

Seventy-four C.B.A. report cards and a miscellaneous group of photographs have been received from the chairman (Mr. Bernard Morris) of the formerly constituted society. They cover a wide range of monuments which may conveniently be summarized under the following heads: bollards (2), brickworks (5), bridges (6), canals (1), coal mines (5), drinking fountains (1), forges (8), furnaces (1), grist mills (12), industrial housing (3), lime kilns (4), lighthouses (2), malt houses (2), milestones (3), pounds (1), slate quarries (1), spelter works (1), textile mills (5), tinplate works (1), tramroads (8), warehouses (2).

Most of the cards record industrial monuments in the area covered by the old lordships of Gower and Kilvey but five cards relate to monuments in Carmarthenshire and four to monuments in Pembrokeshire. There is a noticeable absence of cards for the important industrial areas of Neath and Port Talbot. Many monuments of importance in the industrial history of the area had disappeared before the original society was operating - the record cards were compiled between 1963 and 1966 - and since then a number of monuments recorded on the cards have been demolished. It will be among the tasks of the newly-constituted society to up-date existing record cards, to trace cards not represented in the present collection and to extend the coverage to monuments not covered by the 1963-66 survey. It is hoped that a list of the recorded monuments will be circulated to members as soon as possible.

F.G. Cowley

LITERATURE

Shortly after our last issue a new Pelican book on IA was published: INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY; by R.A. Buchanan. (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972. 60p.) In over 400 pages the reader is introduced to all aspects of the subject. Machinery and technical processes are described lucidly so that even the least mechanically minded can understand their basic principles. A good number of interesting photographs are included, and line illustrations in the text help to clarify various points. Not the least useful feature is the last

section of the book, which contains a short description of industrial monuments in different parts of the United Kingdom, with maps to show their locations. This is an information-packed book at a modest price that can be warmly recommended.

D. Morgan Rees has recently had a series of articles on IA in South Wales published in the Welsh-language journal 'Y Sgyddonydd' (The Scientist). The title of the series as a whole is 'Agweddau ar archaeoleg diwydiannol'. Part 1 (vol.9, pt.2, pp. 126-132) is called 'Y cam cyntaf' (The first step); and parts 2 & 3 (vol.9, pt.4, pp. 186-192; vol.10, pt.1, pp.36-42) are 'Gwaith allanol' (Fieldwork). Sites he discusses include the Lliw Forge at Penllergaer, Neath Abbey Ironworks, and Wenallt Forge in the Neath Valley.

On more specific topics in our area, the following items have appeared recently:

THE EARLIEST PASSENGER CARRYING RAILWAY VEHICLE? A NOTE; by J.R.S. Phillips. (Transport History, vol.5, pt.2, 1972, pp.32-4, 217.) In Chicago University Library the author found a sketch of a carriage on the Mumbles Railway dated 1809 - earlier than any other known illustration - and quite different from the vehicles in the well-known later illustrations.

THE ROMAN GOLD MINES AT DOLAUCOTHI; by G.D.B. Jones and P.R. Lewis. (Carmarthen County Museum, 1972. 20p.) Revised edition of a work that first appeared in 1971, describing the site at Pumsaint on the A482 between Llanwrda and Lampeter. Large-scale maps make this pamphlet a useful guide to the main surviving features of this early industrial site, and enable one to find one's way about with greater understanding.

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY: A STUDY OF SOME REMAINS OF PAST MINING ACTIVITY IN THE UPPER Tawe AND TWRCH VALLEYS; by W.G. Thomas. (Brycheiniog, vol.14, 1970, pp.67-78.) A useful description of mining around Cwmtwrch and Ystradgynlais, together with a list of sites worth visiting. Includes some interesting photographs.

The Port Talbot Historical Society have recently published the latest volume of their Transactions (vol.II, pt.2.) The quality of the production is up to the usual high standard, and among the interesting articles the one of most direct relevance to the IA of the area is H.R. John's THE TINPLATE INDUSTRY IN PORT TALBOT. In addition there is the usual selection of old photographs of Margam and Aberafan.

Finally our congratulations to one of our members, Dr. Susan Frank, whose book A HISTORY OF GLASSMAKING (Henley-on-Thames, Foulis, 1972. £4-50) written in conjunction with Professor R.W. Douglas of Sheffield, has just been published. The authors trace the history of glass from its earliest beginnings some 3500 years ago to the present day, discussing both the technological and industrial aspects of the subject.

P.R.R.

Published for the Society by P.R. Reynolds, University College Library, Swansea, SA2 8PP.