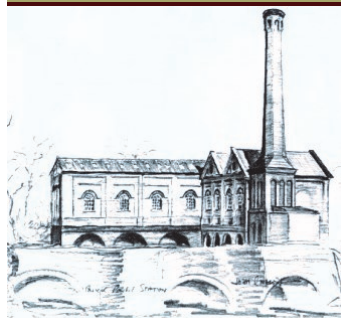


November 2013



WORCESTERSHIRE I.A. & LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

# Autumn Newsletter

## 2013 - An epic year!



Back in May 2011, we celebrated our 40th birthday with a dinner at Worcester Golf & Country Club, Boughton Park, Worcester. We had such a wonderful time that we decided to have another dinner at the same venue, which took place on Friday 3rd May 2013.

Once again, Christine Silvester had organised it extremely efficiently, and the venue and food was every bit as good as we remembered. Henry Sandon was on good form and entertained us in his unique and amusing way, as always. It was also good to see John Bennett MBE and his wife, Ruth. John had received his honour earlier in the year, and it was great to be able to celebrate this with him.

Also pictured above are Michael and Sue McCurdy. Michael stepped down as Chairman in March after his three year term. I am going to find his a hard act to follow - so much has been achieved during his tenure, to which I would like to pay tribute. Michael has a strong conviction that the Society should live up to its aims and objectives with regard to protecting and promoting the industrial heritage of Worcestershire, and not just become a social group. He has led or encouraged various initiatives over the past few years and continues to do so supported by your committee and a number of active members. We could do with more members coming forward to help with these projects, or suggest projects of their own.

Recent projects have included attempts to record the last remaining glove factory in Worcester, and the former Metal Box factory in Worcester. We have published our first book (Miriam Harvey's "Tales from Worcester Infirmary") and two issues of the "Occasional Papers" have been produced. The newsletter has been re-launched, we

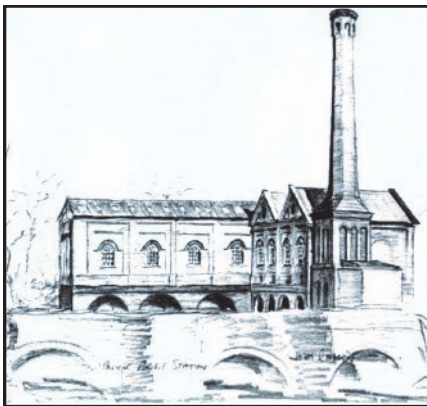
have a new, more modern website, and we have scanned in all the back issues of previous newsletters and journals to enable them to be made available as a searchable resource, and have been very active responding to planning and development issues with an IA dimension. So I would like to thank Michael for his leadership on these issues and pledge to continue his good work as far as I am able! I am pleased that Michael is staying on the committee and look forward to working with him.

Malcolm Nixon and Sue Bradley also stepped down from the committee earlier this year, and I thank them both for the hard work they have both put into it. Sue has been spreading the word about our work and events as our publicity officer, and has also been diligent at recording events for the newsletter. Malcolm has been very active on several projects, most notably the (regrettably unsuccessful) bid to the HLF for the gloving project. He is also the Editor of the Occasional Papers, and is responsible for ensuring that this new publication is of a high quality and something that the Society can be proud of. I am grateful that he has agreed to continue in this role outside of the committee.

Making a welcome return to the committee is Peter Wheatley - he has already been busy recording (the former) Metal Box factory.

We have had a really great Summer Programme, the highlight of which (for me) was the Thames boat trip. Mike Hayzelden deserves special thanks for organising these events.

*John Beale, Chairman.*

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**New Website**

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## WIA&LHS Committee 2013-4

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**Committee Members:**

**Michael McCurdy**

**Peter Wheatley**

**Non-committee role:**

**Occasional Papers Editor:**

**Malcolm Nixon (see left)**

## Welcome!

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We wish to welcome the following new members who have joined us recently: Ruth Bennett, Ernie Kay, Barry & Margaret Jones, Jan Robinson, Wendy Cook and Jean Harris.

## New Website

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Our new website is now fully operational at [www.wialhs.org.uk](http://www.wialhs.org.uk) so please use this one from now on. Whilst there is still some content to be moved, our old website is still accessible in the short term.

Please let me know what you think of the design and feel free to suggest changes or enhancements?

John Beale

## Programme Details!

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The Newsletter was not ready to print at the beginning of the Winter Season, so the programme was sent out separately in August with other urgent notices. In future, we will not try to link the two as it is proving too difficult with your Editor wearing three hats and working full time (!). Latest details can always be found at [www.wialhs.org.uk](http://www.wialhs.org.uk).

## Like a go?

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As well as being elected Chairman in March, I am still editing the Newsletter and managing the web-site. If any member with IT skills would like to help with either of these, it would be much appreciated. Please email me ([chairman@wialhs.org.uk](mailto:chairman@wialhs.org.uk))

John Beale



Despite the success of the Winter and Summer Programmes, members have not been volunteering reports on these for the newsletters in sufficient numbers. As I am extremely busy these days, and cannot attend events on weekdays, I am no longer able to fill any gaps. Your committee has decided to ask for a "volunteer" to take a few notes at the beginning of each event. It won't be onerous, a paragraph or two is sufficient, but longer articles are always welcome.

Meanwhile, no reports were received for the following events. I would be grateful for any contributions against these, which will be published in a future edition, with re-

views of the current Winter Programme:

- 28th March 2013: Worcester Guildhall
- 19th April: Honor Ridout (evening lecture)
- 10th May: Cheltenham by Train
- 29th May: Hartlebury - Museum behind the scenes
- 2nd June: Elmley/Hampton Lovett Churches
- 13th June: Abbey Cwm Hir
- 5th September: Chateau Impney

John Beale.

## Second Occasional Paper

Malcolm Nixon

It is expected that the next issue of the Occasional Papers will be distributed with this Newsletter.

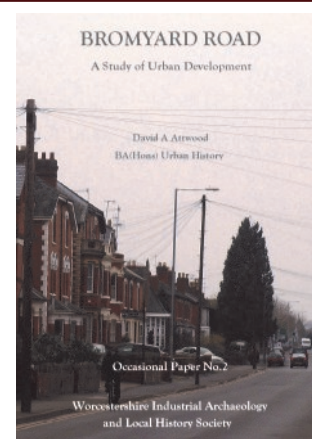
Written by our Secretary, David Attwood, the subject is the history and development of a piece of land known as Blakefield situated in Bromyard Road, St John's in Worcester, from the 15th century to the end of the 19th. It charts the ownership from the Prior, and Dean and Chapter, of Worcester Cathedral until the land was enfranchised in 1860, its sale, various tenants, and the subsequent development of housing in the last quarter of the 19th century.

This part of Worcester's development and history uses documents from the Cathedral Library and Worcestershire Archives, examining the builders, solicitors, and owners, sup-

plemented with illustrations from the Worcester City Planning Applications which have been digitally photographed and made available for research.

Every member household will receive a free copy, but a special colour upgrade has been offered for £5. We will be making this available outside the society for £10 per copy.

David Attwood



## First Person Singular

Mike Pryce

*Reproduced with kind permission of Worcester News, originally published on June 29th 2013*

Max Sinclair is the new – and only- Freeman of Droitwich; a fitting reward for years of dedication.

WHEN the spa town of Droitwich bestows the honour of Freeman it doesn't go overboard. In fact there is often only one Freeman at a time. While other cities, towns and boroughs might have a clutch of Freemen, or even Freewomen, for Droitwich it is usually a singular award. On that basis alone Max Sinclair, to borrow a phrase from the world of football and the advertising hoardings, is the Special One.

Since the death of its last Freeman, former mayor Don Lawley in November 2011, the position in Droitwich has been vacant. But no longer. Because the town council has now offered it to Mr Sinclair, the man who was the driving force behind the restoration of the iconic Droitwich Canal, an eight-mile, 35-year project that was completed only two years ago.

"I was delighted to accept," said Max. "Does this mean I can now drive my herd of goats over Chapel Bridge?" Not only that, he can probably graze his flock of sheep in Vines Park

or march down High Street with his bayonet fixed.

In truth, at 83, the last might be a bit beyond him now, because a lifetime of heavy engineering, always in a voluntary capacity, has left its mark and he finds it easier to get about with a support frame. Although Max being Max, he hasn't ruled out fitting a motor to it.



**PROUD: Max Sinclair with two of the many awards he has received.**

The Freedom of Droitwich is just the latest in a whole list of recognitions for this quite remarkable man. When he attended the Brooklands Motor Museum in Surrey recently to receive a lifetime achievement award for the work he has done for transportation, it must have been touch and go who was the more significant figure - the Duke of Kent, who was giving the award, or Max Sinclair from Lower Broadheath, near Worcester, who was receiving it.

Just to give a flavour of his life, he has also been appointed an English Heritage Angel - an unlikely vision admittedly - for the Droitwich Canal restoration, he set up the award-winning Black Country Museum at Dudley and for 15 years played the role of Max the Miller, operating and maintaining the UK's oldest working post windmill at Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings at Bromsgrove.

## First Person Singular (Contd.)

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This year his work with other volunteers restoring narrow gauge railways, such as the Ffestiniog at Gwynedd in Wales, has been featured in a BBC4 television series. There are many other recognitions, but we'd be here all day.

Max was born at Ombersley and his father was postmaster at Worcester, where he attended the Royal Grammar School. It was the era of National Service and he joined the Royal Engineers, gaining skilled knowledge in the buildings of roads, canals and railways.

Sapper Sinclair showed such promise he was commissioned as an officer, but in 1949, just when he thought he was off to Malaya, he was posted to Malvern to join the boffins at No 1 TRE.

After National Service he worked as a technical sales engineer for GKN at Smethwick - "Making nuts, bolts, screws and washers", as he put it - before joining Worcester firm Windshields as sales manager.

His first hands-on involvement with waterways came in 1961 when he bought the Grand Union canal tug Vesta as a hobby project and kept it at Halesowen.

The £200 purchase price covered two spare engines and 700 gallons of diesel. But he needed somewhere to sail it and then he realised the dire state of British waterways.

"The Government wasn't supporting them at all," said Max. "They were just letting them close down. The one at Stourbridge, for example, was being filled by lorries from a cement company tipping waste into it."

He was involved in the project to re-open that - the first collaboration between volunteers and British Waterways - and worked on the reopening of the Stratford Canal, officially performed by the Queen Mother in 1964.

Then he turned his attention to the Droitwich Canal, the eight-mile stretch of inland waterway linking the Severn at Hawford, near Worcester, with the Worcester-Birmingham Canal at Hanbury.

Much has already been written about this award-winning project, so we needn't dwell here. Suffice to say it eventually involved the removal of 300,000 tons of mud from the old canal and the restoration of long-lost locks.

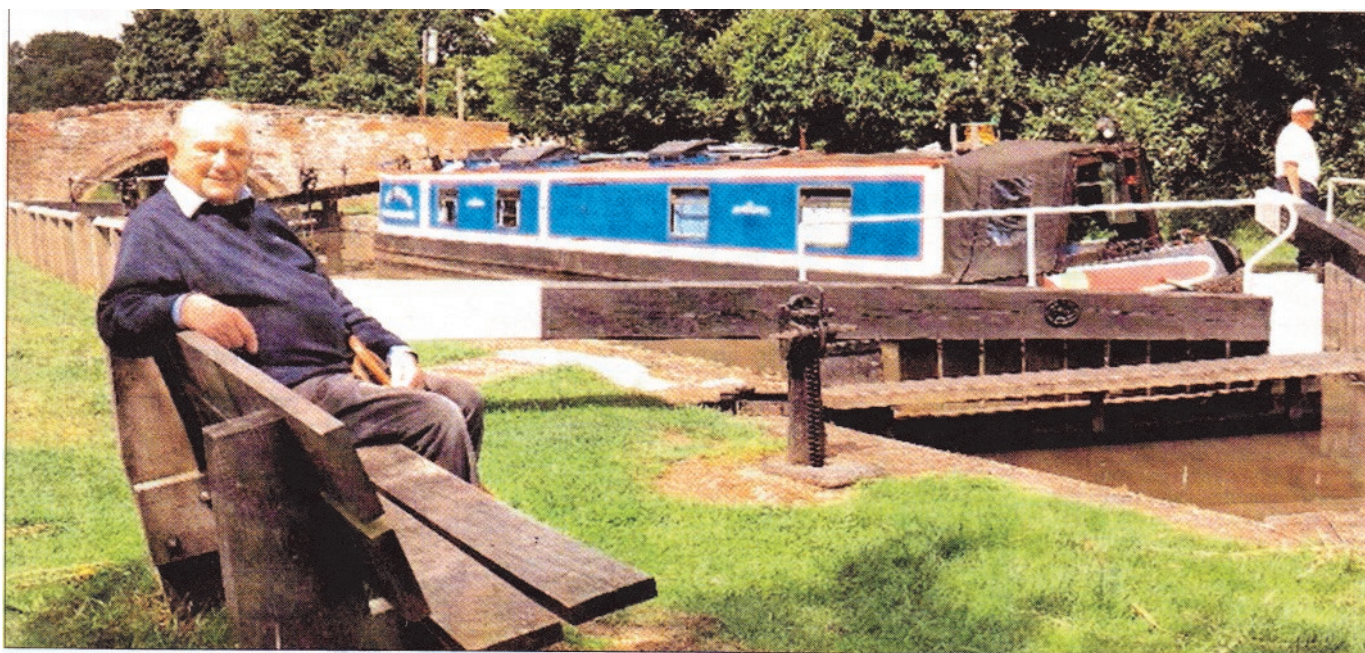
As a nod to his railway skills, Max masterminded the building of a narrow gauge track to carry the mud off to neighbouring fields. At one stage, this stretched for more than a mile.

Restoring the Droitwich Canal not only breathed new life and beauty into the heart of the spa town, it also completed a 21-mile inland cruising ring connecting the Worcester-Birmingham Canal to the Severn via Droitwich and the river Salwarpe.

British Waterways took over and the eventual cost was £12.5 million, which was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Advantage West Midlands.

However, long before all that, the volunteers of Droitwich Canals Trust, of which Max is life president, had spent many mucky days, months and years up to their knees in it, both mud and bureaucracy. He deserves the right to drive his herd of goats anywhere.

*Mike Pryce*



**LOCK AT THIS:** Max Sinclair was the driving force behind the restoration of the Droitwich Canal – a project to which he devoted 35 years of his life.



# Summer 2013/4 Programme Reports

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## TEME VALLEY CAR TOUR

Organised by Steve & Sue Southwick - 10 July 2013

The Teme valley and its environs hold many secrets, witchcraft, houses where doors open on their own, strange mists that shroud just one side of the valley and not forgetting an industrial past.

After a small hiccup as to which nearby pub we were to meet the well-attended group began their tour by looking around the church at Clifton followed by a brief tour of the now deserted section of what was once a thriving borough during the Middle Ages of Clifton upon Teme or Clifton above the Teme. Clifton occupied a high dry strategic route for the transport of salt into the hinterland of the Marches and for the transport by the military during the wars with Wales.

From Clifton the group descended the steep winding hill to our next stop at Homme Castle, now a farm house. Once this was with three others, a fortification guarding the approaches to the Teme Valley and an important crossing river crossing, constructed before 1066 by Richard de Scrob. The next port of call was a rare glimpse at The New mill formally owned by the famous Foley family and in use until the end of WW2. The Mill is now under private ownership and we were kindly given permission to view this former working mill. The leat and a few artefacts remain scattered throughout the well-manicured garden but little to show above ground to the mills past.

Undoubtedly the highlight came with the next part of our tour; the visit to Shelsley Walsh Watermill and the charming nearby church of St Andrews constructed of Tufa, a form of travertine quarried locally and used as original 'light weight building blocks'. The mill at Shelsley has been repaired and is now in full working order. All of this has been down to a valiant effort by the Shelsley Mill restoration society.

After tea and cake a few hardy souls decided to complete the tour by visiting Southtons rock, the largest piece of Tufa in England, as site known into antiquity, with a Holy Well along with a long gone Anchorite Cell. The weather was perfect and all went well until close to the rock where several trees were found blocking our way. Not to be deterred the enthusi-

astic intrepid explorers pushed on and achieved their goal. Everyone enjoyed themselves despite having to return over the obstacle course on the way down.

*Steve & Sue Southwick*

*(Photos: Mike Hayzelden)*





## Summer Programme Reports (contd.)

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### RIVER THAMES CRUISE: MAIDENHEAD TO STAINES

Roger Tapping - October 5th, 2012

When I started to plan this trip I was surprised to find that 4 years had passed since the last one. This time we were to cruise from Maidenhead to Staines, a distance of about 26 miles with 5 locks. A journey time by boat of between 5 and 6 hours whereas it is 26 minutes by road!!

Once again demand for spaces was brisk and within a very short time we had reached our maximum of 59 passengers, that being the largest number of seats available on the coach. Also due to a restriction on parking at the New Inn the pick up point was switched to a wide portion of Northwick Road where cars could be parked safely.

The day had dawned very bright and sunny, following a very wet night and was exactly what we wanted for a trip down the river. We made excellent time down to Maidenhead where we boarded our privately chartered boat "Hampton Court." This pick up point was just a few yards below Boulter's Lock, last time we were dropped off just a few yards above Boulter's Lock, so we would not pass through probably the most famous lock on the river.

Mobile phone numbers were exchanged between myself and our driver, Chris, and he drove off with the coach to park up and await our arrival at Staines.

We were now on board, all seated, some under cover but most

out in the glorious sunshine and so we set off on our journey. This is another stretch of the river famous for the magnificent buildings and residences that line its banks.

We passed through Bray Lock, the first of our 5 for the day, the skipper and his mate giving us a commentary of the houses that were owned, or had been in the past by the rich and famous.

The river was absolutely heaving with boats of all shapes and sizes and the banks packed with walkers, riders, bathers and every other sort of activity. What a joy to see a river being so well used compared to our own River Severn. I wonder if the traffic on our own riverside at Worcester would improve if the punitive £4 charge for the moorings by Croft Road were removed.

On our way to Staines we passed Eton College and Eton Dorney, the site for the Olympic rowing competitions, in the distance just before we arrived at Windsor. As we had a few pounds surplus in the kitty we arranged with the crew to issue us all with a fruit juice drink and as we passed the castle we offered a toast to the new- born Prince George and wished him and his family all the best for the future.

Our journey was briefly halted at Windsor where we moored at the office of Salter's Steamers to take on fresh supplies of milk. The mate had to nip off to Tesco Express to pick up another 4 litres.





## Summer Programme Reports (contd.)



The next part of the journey was surprisingly rural, the grand houses and hotels giving way to farmland. We passed Runnymede and before long had only a few minutes to go before the rendezvous with our coach. At this point the weather decided to remind us that we were in the middle of an English summer as a couple of sharp showers made us scurry for the lower decks where shelter was to be found.



With just 10 minutes of the journey left I called up the driver, he was 10 minutes away from our landing stage and, as if by magic, as we turned to moor, the coach arrived to collect us.

We arrived back in Worcester just a little late having completed the circle by returning along the M4 and over the Cotswolds. The weather had been glorious and the scenery fantastic. Thank you all for your support, perhaps we will do another section of this lovely river some other time.

*Roger Tapping*

*(Photos: David Attwood)*

### MILDENHAM MILL

Mike Hayzelden - 13th July 2013

I was fortunate to be on the first proposed visit to Mildenhall Mill, unfortunately the second visit had to be cancelled as the

owners were away on holiday, better luck next year.

The Mill is reached by a single track road off the A449 at the end over a canal bridge. The owner unfortunately was not interested in its history, or the copies of the Dean and Chapter leases of the property I gave him.

There has been a mill on, or near the site since Roman times, in the 11th century St Wulstan, Bishop of Worcester gave a mill at this location to the Prior and monks of Worcester Cathedral. In 1609, Thomas Nash constructed a half-timbered building called Mildenhall to the east of the present mill, which was constructed in the 18th century by Dr Treadwell Nash of Bevere.

The miller's house is separate from the mill building which has a water wheel at each end, and is set in landscaped gardens with a network of riverlets with bridges over. The two water wheels drove four pairs of stones, but unfortunately the wheels and machinery are in a bad state of repair with parts missing, unlike Shelsley Mill which the Society had visited a week before which has been restored to full working order.



Denis Watts was the last working owner and writes 'I ceased commercial operations in 1947 and eventually shut down the mill completely in 1950. It was the end of milling, carried on at the same spot for more than 1,000 years without a break – no mean achievement.' as Michael Hayzelden relates in his handout. 'Then in 1970, came a temporary revival for the mill, sparked by the interest of Bill Gwilliam. "The water



## Summer Programme Reports (contd.)

had long remained in silence, and the tools of the trade lay inside, rusting, just as I had laid them down 20 years earlier. We rebuilt one of the water wheels with 64 new arms of elm, and visitors from the industrial classes came regularly. Rebuilding that wheel and doing other jobs in the mill passed many a pleasant hour in retirement," recalled Denis Watts fondly. He sold the mill in 1972'.

The result of this partial restoration can be seen in the restored wheel mentioned above in the wheel pit at the end of the building nearest the miller's house, and most of the working gear still in place inside.

The mill has had a long history with many generations of millers and it is sad to see it in its present state of inactivity. If at least the wheels were restored back into working order, they could run turbines to provide electricity, which would be better and more reliable and not a blot on the landscape like a wind turbine.

If you get a chance to go next year it is well worth a visit, to see a building in desperate need of restoration and in need of some TLC.

The owners wife had kindly put out kettles and cups for tea or coffee, whilst indefatigable Christine organised soft drinks and cake which we all enjoyed at the end of an excellent and enjoyable if nostalgic visit.

Thanks to Michael Hayzelden for organising the visit and his excellent handout from which most if not all of the above has been extracted.

*David Attwood (Text and Photos)*

*(An extended article on the mill appears later)*



1970S  
RE-  
STORED  
WHEEL



UN-  
RE-  
STORED  
WHEEL



### MACCLESFIELD (COACH TRIP)

Mike Hayzelden - 26th April 2013

This was a coach trip involving a short walk around the town with local author, Dorothy Bentley-Smith, to understand the origins of the Georgian silk and cotton industries in Macclesfield. This reacquainted us with the entrepreneur we heard of some years ago through his involvement with the Parys Mountain Copper Mine; Charles Roe. He had built his first water-powered mill in Macclesfield as early as 1743 and, within a decade, the town had become the nation's main cen-





## Summer Programme Reports (contd.)

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tre for silk production. The Macclesfield canal opened in 1831, passing just above the town centre, and linking it to other industrial centres such as Manchester. The railway arrived in 1873.

On arrival Dorothy and a friend took the party in two groups to Christ Church (a redundant church under the care of the Churches Conservation Trust) where she gave us an orientation talk and an opportunity to view exhibition materials and purchase copies of her book. She then guided us back towards the Paradise Mill where the group divided and dispersed to visit the Mill, Museum and Heritage Centre at different times.

Lunch was taken around the town, which was pleasant and seemingly prosperous, with a good mix of local shops. Some of us visited St Michael & All Angels Church which impressed us with its modern facilities inserted within the historic building in a very sympathetic way. It has made the church warmer, and given it facilities for disabled access, music teaching, choir practice, concerts and refreshments using a multilevel structure inserted in the nave.

Paradise Mill opened in 1862, (though silk weaving had been in Macclesfield since the 1750s) and originally housed both hand and powered looms. From 1912 the factory was owned by Messrs Cartwright & Sheldon, and concentrated solely on hand-weaving, despite the advance of power looms all around them. Fascinating demonstrations and commentary

by our two knowledgeable guides illustrated the traditional expertise of the silk-weaving process on the 26 magnificently-restored Jacquard Looms on the top floor of the mill (which was quite a climb!). This for me was the highlight of the day.

The Silk Industry Museum alongside Paradise Mill houses exhibitions exploring the properties of silk, design, manufacture and social history. Although built c. 1860, the mill was operated by Cartwright and Sheldon from 1912 until 1981, and it is within this time period (1930) that the exhibitions and room settings have been set to illustrate life in Paradise Mill. This museum was much larger than we expected and we could have benefited from having more time to explore it at leisure.

The Silk Heritage Museum displays the history of the silk industry with an excellent film lasting 15 minutes and a beautiful display of costume from regency to present day. The museum is housed in a former Sunday School. There was a large Silk Gift Shop but the café was closed! So it was back to the coach eagerly anticipating our coffee stop on the M6!

*John Beale*

*(Adapted from Mike Hayzelden's briefing notes)*

*(Photos David Attwood/Mike Hayzelden)*



## A Victorian Ice Works - Request for Information

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"I am beginning to learn about the fascinating legacy of agricultural and industrial archaeology in Colwall, Worcestershire where my grandfather Stephen Ballard was a fruit farmer and his father before him ran a vinegar brewery, model piggery (dilapidated but sheds still used) ice cream, and ice businesses in addition to canning fruit. Sadly many of the buildings have been demolished, however, the Ice Works building is still standing. It has very puzzling features and I am looking to understand its workings better and also looking into ways to renovate it. I would be grateful for any links to further information that you can supply, since the standard internet searches have not led to any understanding about ice

manufacture with a paraffin oil engine (the method used here)."

Rachel McQueen  
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39 Pound Bank Road  
Malvern  
Worcestershire  
WR14 2DE  
*AIA News, Letters, page 15*

# Volunteering in Worcester Porcelain

*From the PostBag*

I have recently joined the team at the Museum of Royal Worcester, located near to Worcester Cathedral, in a post funded by a Heritage Lottery project.

Part of that role is to look at volunteering opportunities and develop the volunteer team for the project. In particular, we are looking for help working in our archives, to create an inventory of the items there and carry out research by transcribing books and oral history recordings.

I am writing to enquire if (...) any members of Worcestershire Industrial Archaeology and Local History Society would be

interested in volunteering with us? I could send you some information about volunteering opportunities if it would be of any interest to your group or even come down to a meeting and talk about what we are hoping to do. I must add here that the museum cannot pay expenses to volunteers.

If you are at all interested, please do get in touch. I would be happy to come and attend one of your meetings, although I am no expert in porcelain!

Carrie-Anne Parkes

Email: [carrie-anne@museumofroyalworcester.org](mailto:carrie-anne@museumofroyalworcester.org)

## Membership Secretary - Change of Email Address

As many of you are aware, following my accident while on holiday in France, my email account was hacked. I lost my contacts list and have not been successful in retrieving it. I have also lost all my saved emails. I now have a dedicated WIA email address which will be passed on to future incumbents of the post.

As I send out a large number of emails at a time, please add

[membership@wialhs.org.uk](mailto:membership@wialhs.org.uk) to your contacts list to avoid messages from me going into your spam box.

Also please delete my yahoo address - suemccurdy@yahoo.com - as it is no longer active. Michael is still using - mmccurdy56@yahoo.com - if you have that address.

*Sue McCurdy*

## Obituary - Ian Hayes

*Roger Tapping*

It is with great sadness that I have to report the death of Ian Hayes on Friday 23rd August 2013.

Ian and his wife Rachel have been members of our Society for many years and have been almost lone voices from the Red-ditch area of Worcestershire.

Ian had a great passion for all things industrial and was personally responsible for producing a number of books and leaflets about his interests. Perhaps his greatest love was for the Forest of Dean mining area and he had established several good friendships with the few remaining miners in that area.

He was also fascinated by his own area of north Worcester-shire and along with Rachel had explored the River Arrow and the mills along its route, the needle industries of the area and abandoned railways both locally and all over the world.

He was a prolific contributor to our Newsletter/Journal. I looked back over the years and discovered to my amazement that he had written no less than 50 articles and by using a search tool I saw that his name appeared some 104 times. Ian served for a short time as Committee member and organised the Winter Programme.

Both Ian and Rachel enjoyed our meetings and outings; I believe a personal favourite of his was the trip we made to Flat Holm in the Bristol Channel. This complemented his earlier visit to the sister island Steep Holm, which he also found very fascinating.

Our condolences go to Rachel and the family, and we can count our selves very lucky that Ian gave so much of his time to us.

*Roger Tapping (President)*

Example contributions include:

1991 winter programme sec.  
News 3 Tardebigge narrow gauge railways  
News 4 Bordesley Stream.  
News 5 Bittell Waterways System  
News 7 Pensax coal mines  
News 8 Alvechurch watercourses  
News 9 Alvechurch Old Rectory  
News 10 Redditch Railway  
News 12 Stream system between Alvechurch & Redditch  
News 13 Forest of Dean Free Mines  
News 15 Old farm buildings north of Redditch  
News 17 Needle pointers in the Redditch area  
News 18 Update of the Forest of Dean free mines  
News 19 The Egyptian Foundry at Redditch  
News 20 The Cellars of Cofton Hall  
News 22 Historical Eateries in Alvechurch  
News 24 Early years on the Wr – Bm canal  
News 26 Railway bridges at Redditch  
News 28 Hopwood – an inland port  
News 33 Further update of Forest of Dean free mines.  
Hunt's house colliery  
News 36 Dowery Dell Viaduct  
News 38 High Duty Alloys, Redditch  
Spring 2013 Beeching in Worcestershire

Books Free mines in the Forest  
The Bittell Waterways System.





The Conference this year was hosted by the group based at Bristol (BIAS). The meeting was held at the Social Club of Fry's/Cadbury's former chocolate factory at Keynsham and once again our Society, through the good services of Len Holder, mounted a display of our Society activities and publications

The format was to be the same as usual with 3 talks being given before lunch and a further 3 in the afternoon. Following the closure of the meeting, visits had been arranged to see the Brandy Bottom Colliery, a walking tour of Keynsham, the Avon Valley Railway at Bitton or Warmley Museums, Gardens & Grotto.

The Conference was held in the Social Club of this very impressive former factory, the site of which came under scrutiny when Kraft Foods Ltd made the acrimonious take-over of Cadbury's. It is so sad to see this once proud factory standing idle and the site destined yet again for more housing. The site retains all that was best about factories of this era when welfare of the staff was very important. The area immediately surrounding the conference centre was filled with sports pitches of all sorts.

The venue in my view left quite a bit to be desired. The conference room was not tiered and consequently the people sitting in front obstructed vision. The IT equipment was not the best and inadequate blackout curtains did not help this.

There was insufficient room for Len to display his books etc and neither was it comfortable to walk around the room given over to all the Society stands. Buffet lunch was included along with tea/coffee but the big bonuses were that there was a secret supply of hot bacon rolls (if you knew where to find them), and a full size bar at lunchtime.

Professor Angus Buchanan OBE gave the welcome and opening address and a brief resume of each lecture is given below.

## Landscape and the Somerset Coal Canal

Mike Chapman from the host Society, BIAS gave the first talk about the canal and the battles that were had to route the canal through difficult terrain. The canal was authorised in 1794 and was promoted by the mine owners of the North Somerset coalfields as a cheaper means of getting their coal to the markets of Bath and Wiltshire. The surveyor was John Rennie. The canal had two branches; the northern one ran

from Paulton to Midford and was connected to the mines via a tramway. The southern route ran from Radstock through to Monkton Combe where it joined the Kennet and Avon canal at the Dundas Aqueduct.

To overcome the 135 ft drop in level between Paulton and Dundas the locks were concentrated at Combe Hay. The original proposal being to build Caisson

Locks in which a large watertight box (Caisson) was submerged in a water-filled masonry chamber. The boat would then be floated into the box, which was then sealed and moved to the new level before letting the boat out. This was a great idea in theory but failed on practical and engineering reasons. The Caisson locks were replaced initially with an inclined plane and later by flight of 22 conventional locks. As usual the coming of the railway marked the demise of the canal and it closed in 1898. The Somerset Coal Canal Society was formed in 1992 with the aim of preservation and some reopening.

## Brandy Bottom Colliery

Hamish Orr-Ewing from the South Gloucestershire Mines. Hamish gave a brief overview of the mine site, which is remarkably well preserved with many interesting above ground buildings. It was development of an earlier mine known as Lord Radnor's Pit and became known as Brandy Bottom when it was connected to Parkfield pit by underground connections. The Parkfield pit was closed in 1936 but the site was acquired by the adjacent Shortwood brickworks.

The whole site is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument and has two main clusters of buildings. The northern group includes the 1835 Cornish Engine House, and the 1836 Vertical Engine House. The most iconic building is the 40 metre high chimney. The southern group has the 1871 Horizontal Engine House and a steam-powered fan house.

## Adaptive re-use of brewery Buildings in Burton-on-Trent - Malcolm James.

I found this talk quite fascinating as I used to work at Burton in the early 1960s. Malcolm had some excellent photos of the many brewery buildings and the way they had been adapted for modern use. We are hoping he will visit us in the future for a winter meeting talk.

## The Crewkerne Textile Industry - Richard Simms from the Somerset Industrial Archaeology Society (SIAS)

The textile industry started to develop in Crewkerne in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and was based on locally produced wool and flax. At first it was a cottage industry but factories began in the late eighteenth century. Samuel Sparks at Viney Bridge built the pioneering factory, which later became known as Hart and Son's webbing factory and continued to manufacture parachute harness webbing. The

## AIA Regional Conference 2013 - Bristol (Contd.)

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factory initially used waterpower from the River Parrett. Many of the early factories have now been converted to residential use.

The Development of Weymouth's Water Supply - John Willows from the Dorset Industrial Archaeology Society (DIAS).

John has been employed by Wessex Water for many years and is now curator at the museum at Sutton Poyntz. He has charted the development of the water supply that the town required following its rapid development as a resort following the arrival of the railway. The main water supply was via boreholes at Sutton Poyntz but additional supplies from Ferrybridge and Wyke Regis supplemented this. Sutton Poyntz is now a water supply museum and well worth a visit as much of the original machinery remains in situ. The prize exhibit for many years was a very large map measuring some 4.5 metres square. It is made up of 30 separate sections of 1880s Ordnance Survey maps, mounted on linen and shows details of the water supply of the area using different coloured inks, water colours and printed media. The map is now being conserved and digitalised and will be kept at the Dorset History Centre. A copy of the map will return to the water

museum at Sutton Poyntz.

A Future for Industrial Museums - Stuart Burroughs, Director of the Museum of Bath at Work.

The final speaker, Stuart Burroughs, spoke about the way he perceived the future of Industrial Museums would go. Sadly his proposals, which were based on a scheme the French advocate was lost on me. Perhaps I was getting tired but I did not choose to agree with much of what he said.

After the official closure a few of us went on the town walk round Keynsham. This in itself was a good walk with many interesting buildings but our guide had got his timings seriously wrong, as we did not return to our cars until close to 7.00 pm, the walk taking over 2 hours to complete.

My thanks go to those members from our society, 8 in total, who represented us.

Next year our Society will host the conference on Saturday April 12th - see below. Book the date now we will need your help and your support.

*Roger Tapping*

## AIA Regional Conference 2014 - WIALHS Hosting!

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*Roger Tapping*

Our Society is an affiliated member of the Association for Industrial Archaeology (AIA) and as such we participate in an annual Regional Conference, which is held by like-minded Societies in the South West and South Wales area.

It is our turn to host the event again next year and in the past we have held two very successful conferences at the Charles Hastings Medical Centre, Worcester. However for this event we have decided to change both the venue and the format. Previous conferences have comprised a number of talks given by members of the Societies during the day, followed by a choice of up to 3 visits in late afternoon to sites of local interest.

Next year we are heading north to Kidderminster, the main reason being that we are now struggling to find any suitable sites to visit in the immediate area of Worcester. Moving to Kidderminster will give all our delegates the opportunity of exploring that area and in order to get the best of our site visits we are restricting our number of speakers to 4 who are all experts in their field.

The conference will be held at Baxter College, Kidderminster and the four speakers are to be:

**Melvyn Thompson – from the newly opened Kidderminster Carpet Museum.** Melvyn will talk about the carpet industry of Kidderminster and the struggle to create a permanent museum to the industry in the Town.

**David Postle - from the Kidderminster Railway Museum.** David will talk about the fabulous collection of artefacts in the museum adjacent to the Severn Valley Railway at Kidderminster Station.

**Christopher Taft - from the British Postal Museum & Archive.** Chris will talk briefly about the link between Kidderminster and the founder of the Post Office, Rowland Hill, who came from Kidderminster. His main subject will link the Post Office and the start of World War 1 in 1914, one hundred years earlier. The Post Office had their own battalion known as The Post Office Rifles; one of their officers, Sergeant Alfred Knight gained the Victoria Cross for his actions in battle at the Menin Road Ridge.

**Ian West - from the Association for Industrial Archaeology** Ian, who is a member of the AIA Council, will talk about 'the introduction of technology to the country house'.

Following the conference, three visits have been arranged:

- The Kidderminster Carpet Museum - £2 entry fee payable on site
- The Kidderminster Railway Museum – free admission but donation welcome
- The Drakelow Tunnels at Wolverley - £10 entry fee payable by cash on site

Final arrangements are still on-going but it is expected that the overall cost of the day would be in the order of £15 per person, to include cold buffet lunch.

To make this Conference the success that has become the standard for our Society we will need your help.

- We need you to support us by attending the Conference at Kidderminster.
- We need some of you to help on the day with a number of roles to help the day run smoothly.



# Mildenham Mill

Mike Hayzelden: source: Berrow's Journal Archive - Saturday, 18 January 2003

Waterways historian Max Sinclair of Lower Broadheath, firmly believes there has been a mill on, or near the site, since Roman times, though its name is of Saxon origin - Mill-Den-Hom (home of the miller). The earliest surviving records of the mill are from The Domesday Book period and from the time of the 11th Century Bishop of Worcester, St. Wulstan, who gave a mill at this location to the Prior and monks of Worcester Cathedral. In 1609, Thomas Nash constructed a half-timbered building called Mildenham to the east of the present mill, which was constructed in the 18th Century for Dr Treadwell Nash of Bevere.

Worcester historian, the late Bill Gwilliam, wrote glowingly of Mildenham Mill some years ago, as part of his industrial archaeology researches in the county. "It is a fine example of a large mill of the period and is built of lovely Severnside bricks. It has two water wheels of iron rims and elm paddles, driving four pairs of stones," Max Sinclair explains that in times past the River Salwarpe, flowing from the Lickey Hills and through Droitwich to the Severn, was ideal for mills as well as for navigation by barges. "The very name Salwarpe derives from the hauling of salt by the Romans."

For centuries, the Salwarpe was used to transport goods, but the opening of the Droitwich Barge Canal brought all this to a virtual end. Some of the final journeys along the Salwarpe had been made by barges carrying the millions of bricks needed for the building of locks, bridges and a short tunnel along the Droitwich Canal. Even so, the banks of the Salwarpe continued to be dotted with several water mills which for centuries had been grinding wheat and corn to produce flour for baking and meal for animals. One of the largest of them, Mildenham was to be owned by the same family for the last century of its use as a mill and had its own wharf on to the nearby Droitwich Canal, offering another means of distributing its products in past times. In the 1970s Max Sinclair persuaded the last member of that particular milling dynasty - the late Denis Watts - to commit to paper his memories of life at the mill.



Denis Watts was the final miller at Mildenham, selling the historic building in 1972, to live in retirement, first in Herefordshire and then at Haverfordwest, Wales, where he

and his wife died in the late 1980s. However, it was Denis's maternal grandfather, Henry Bill, who acquired Mildenham Mill in 1870, moving to Hawford from a mill at Belbroughton. He married Susanna Pugh, whose family ran the Rindleford Mill at Bridgnorth, and the couple were to have two sons and four daughters. One son, Sidney Bill spent his entire life of 66 years at Mildenham, being born there and living and working as a miller until his death in 1943. His brother, Ernest spent his working life as a baker at the bakery and shop set up by his father Henry Bill in High Street, Droitwich. It closed in about 1920. But it was through one of Henry and Susanna Bill's daughters, Matilda, that the milling dynasty was to span a century, eventually passing to her son Denis Watts. Matilda married George Thomas Watts who, appropriately, came from Mill Street in Leominster.



Miller's tale of family life at Mildenham: Denis Watts' memoirs of 1974 start with a virtual epitaph to the historic water-mills of England: "They have ceased to be an active and traditional industry in our countryside and are now past crafts, left only to be studied by industrial archaeologists." This was clearly an observation tinged with great sadness for Denis, who described himself as being "a country miller, descended from at least five generations of millers." He explained that his written recollections were intended "to portray the life of a country miller from the 1920s through to 1950" when he finally shut off the water from the mill wheels and "forsook a dying industry."

Mildenham was known for many years as Bill's Mill, obviously in deference to Henry Bill, though it was later to be operated by Denis's father, George Thomas Watts, his uncle Sidney Bill and Denis himself, together with other members of the family - "all human cogs in the mill down the decades".

Denis and brother Osmond started their education at Claines School, walking the mile from their home where the mill, at that time, had switched largely from its traditional role of turning grain into flour to being operated day and night, Sundays included, grinding peas to go into pea-soup for the troops at the battlefronts of the First World War. "One night," recalled Denis "my sleep was disturbed by a low droning noise. Startled, I ran to the window to see a German Zeppelin



## Mildenham Mill (Continued)

passing over. The mill was still working, blacked out by sacks hanging from nails driven into the woodwork at each corner of the windows. How history repeats itself. I used those same nails again for the same purpose during the 1939-45 war"



He also witnessed what he believed was the last use of the Droitwich Canal for navigation. "In 1916, a hayrick of about 18 tons was taken down the canal by barge on its way to Tewkesbury. In the time of my grandfather, Henry Bill, however, wheat regularly came by canal barge to Mildenham, emanating originally from Russia and Manitoba. My parents also told me of the days when cargoes of salt from Droitwich were regularly carried along the canal by barge."



To bolster his income, Denis's father, who had served a long apprenticeship as an engineer with Alexander and Duncan at Leominster, started his own agricultural engineering business, selling and repairing binders, mowing machines, haymaking equipment, and the like. Some of the new machines arrived, dismantled, in crates at Fernhill Heath station and then had to be assembled for sale. As a boy, Denis spent many hours helping his father in his barn workshop. Another side to this business was the reaping of corn and mowing of grass for customers over a wide area. "Horses for

the mowing machines were supplied by the mill, and the charge for mowing was 4/6d per acre for man, machine and two horses." Haymaking, cider drinking, ducks, rabbits, swans and fishing all played a part in the riverside boyhood of Denis Watts, together with the netting of numerous eels in traps. These were sold to a fishmonger named Thorpe in The Tything and then to a shopkeeper in The Shambles.





## Mildenham Mill (Continued)

Denis left the grammar school in 1923 and entered the family business at Mildenham Mill, though this was a disappointment to his parents, who had wanted him to go into something with "a better future." His timing was not good either because small mills such as Mildenham were starting to be "dealt a blow by the coming of large roller mills." Recalled Denis: "We no longer delivered flour to the local bakeries nor, as we had done for many years, to the County Gaol in Castle Street. The mill's bakery shop in Droitwich High Street had also gone. Virtually all that was left to the country miller was the grinding of grain for cattle. "About this time too, my brother Osmond left home to get married and went to Porters Mill, near Fernhill Heath, as miller to the Jackson family, remaining there for a good many years. He was born at Mildenham Mill and had worked in it for seven years from leaving school. He died in 1963."

"Soon after my entering into the work of the mill, my father died suddenly in 1924, though my uncle Sidney was still with me. He had been milling all his life and was a skilled miller and millwright, like his father before him and also his grandfather who had milled at Belbroughton. There are countless skills to be mastered in operating a mill," stressed Denis, whose written memories include comprehensive instructions on the art of mill stone dressing, together with a wealth of technical detail about the water wheels and machinery at Mildenham Mill. "Back in the 1920s, grain arrived in 10-ton trucks at the local railway stations as well as coming by horse drays from local farms. Many farmers visited our mill weekly, bringing their grain to be milled."



Denis listed the Worcester corn merchants for whom Mildenham did milling for many years, including John Barnett, Bastin, Kettle & Co, Cornforth & Cale and A.B Purnall, all at Lowesmoor; Holthams at the Cornmarket and C J Phillips at South Quay.

Denis had vivid memories too of the severe spring of 1928, when there were 13 weeks of frost and ice. The mill's water wheels became "solid blocks of ice" and no milling could be done. Denis's uncle Sidney even went skating on the Salwarpe..."I measured the ice on the river, it was 15 inches thick."

Around 1933, a revolution began in haulage transport with a switch from horses and drays to motor lorries. "We had to pension off our own dray horses which, with their forebears, had been a feature of Mildenham Mill since the time of my grandfather, Henry Bill, who had owned a number of substantial covered wagons.



"In the late months of 1938, however, there was more confidence in the future because trade all round was picking up." "We bought a pair of new millstones and also fitted new arms (spokes) of English oak to one of the water wheels. New brass fixtures were also moulded for us by the Worcester foundry of Hardy & Padmore. During the early part of the war, lorry drivers coming to the mill asserted that the war would be over in a very few months. Their counterparts, the wagoners, had said the same in 1914! "

"In the wake of the war, electricity cables began spreading over the whole countryside, giving every farm electric light and power. Hammer mills were soon installed in many farms, driven by small electric motors and capable of grinding one ton a grain per hour, though such meal could never equal that from a mill stone. However, the demand then seemed to be for greater production, never mind the quality. Technology was quickly passing the water-mill by, and the death knell of Mildenham Mill was sounded. I ceased commercial



## Mildenham Mill (Continued)

operations in 1947 and eventually shut down the mill completely in 1950. It was the end of milling, carried on at the same spot for more than 1,000 years without a break - no mean achievement."



Denis, together with his brother Osmond, who had left milling at Porters Mill, went to work in Worcester, though Denis didn't record where in his written memories. However, Max Sinclair believes it was at the Cadburys' factory at Blackpole. Denis met and married during this 20-year period but continued to live at Mildenham Mill.

Restoration: Then in 1970, came a temporary revival for the mill, sparked by the interest of Bill Gwilliam. "The water

wheels had long remained in silence, and the tools of the trade lay inside, rusting, just as I had laid them down 20 years earlier. We rebuilt one of the water wheels with 64 new arms of elm, and visitors from the industrial archaeology classes came regularly. Rebuilding that wheel and doing other jobs in the mill passed many a pleasant hour in retirement," recalled Denis Watts fondly. He sold the mill in 1972.



Mildenham Mill ceased to operate commercially in 1947, but in the 1960s and early 1970s Bill Gwilliam, as a leading industrial archaeologist, took a keen interest in it and, with Denis Watts, restored one of the water wheels and a pair of stones to working order after standing silent for two decades. Wheat flour was then milled for the many visitors brought to Mildenham by Bill Gwilliam from his industrial archaeology classes, and it thus became the last working water mill in Worcestershire. Among fellow industrial archaeologists taken then to Mildenham by Bill was Max Sinclair, who later opted for early retirement from his post as the globe-trotting sales director of the Midlands industrial giant Rubery Owen. "I was fortunate to meet Denis Watts, and my change of career to that of a miller was destined," he said. Max helped in the effort to restore Mildenham Mill to working order.

**source: Berrow's Journal Archive - Saturday, 18  
January 2003**

## Summer visits (reports wanted!)



Abbey Cwm Hir



Chateau Impney