



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

NEWSLETTER



ISSUE 139 - SUMMER 2016

Northamptonshire Industrial Archaeology Group

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Photograph front cover: William Green's first factory, built 1874 in High Street South, Rushden
© Ron Whittaker 2014

From the Editor

We made an excellent start to the summer programme when we visited NPS Shoes in Wollaston and for those of us who have not had the privilege of ever seeing shoes made this was a worthy visit. The following week we went to DS Smith Plastics in Northampton. Completely different styles of manufacturing but both using machinery of one kind or another. There are only a few of these visits left so please ensure that if you need to book, do so, otherwise any of those visits which have a restricted number may get booked up sooner rather than later. Reports of these summer visits and walks will appear in later issues.

Our member John Smith passed away in February. Members may recall that we had an excellent walk around Flore some years ago led by John, who was a mine of information. His obituary can be found on page 22.

As this newsletter reaches you we will know whether we are 'in' or 'out' and whichever way has been chosen our fate, as a country, will be sealed. We can only hope that the right decision has been made and that everyone will 'get on with it' – but don't hold your breath.

Work on the Flore bypass has begun with the felling of many trees and the uprooting of hedges along the A5 near the Weedon crossroads and at Junction 16 of the M1 near to the hamlet of Upper Heyford. I have also learned that a small farmer who has rented some of the fields on which this bypass will be built has decided to 'call it a day' because of the upheaval and subsequent loss of livestock due to carelessness on the part of the contractors in either leaving the wrong gates open or shutting the gates that should have been left open (access to water), leading to the animals becoming stressed out. So much for progress or is it? The plan to build on the Long Buckby Road corridor from Daventry has been given the green light – this is coming on the back of the Flore Bypass. My prognosis fifteen years ago when I said to the Leader of Daventry DC that one day Daventry would be part of Northampton, and which was rubbish at the time, looks like it could happen in the next twenty to thirty years since the latest news is that at junction 16 (M1) another (yes, another) warehouse complex is in the planning stage. The sites at DIRFT still have to be finished and filled! I leave you to draw your own conclusions.....

Enclosed is the next EMIAC booking form titled '*Ploughshares into Swords*'. Note this is in November and will be an all day event in one location. Also enclosed is the Winter Programme of talks which commence on the 14th October.

It is to be hoped that by the time you get this newsletter, summer will have arrived and we can all enjoy being outside without the need of thick sweaters. Whatever does happen do enjoy the next few months.

Ed



WINTER TALKS 2015/16

Members Evening - 8th January

There was a good turn-out of members for the annual evening of member's presentations. The annual 'run-through' of the past year's walks and visits, a wonderful selection of visits in Laos, a presentation on the Boot & Shoe industry at the current time and a look at the former V2 installations in Northern France were the topics for the evening.

I took to the floor for the annual trip down memory lane, there were a few more slides than in previous years when last year I rattled through the presentation in something like eight minutes! This was slightly longer and hopefully memories were brought back with sights of those days and evenings.

Ron Hanson gave a snapshot of a few things that he and Kate had encountered on a visit to Northern Laos – a few miles from the Chinese border. He started with a visit they had made to a village that made a whisky-like liquor from corn and sometimes rice. Photos took us through the rather crude process which was basically boiling up the corn/rice in a dustbin over a wood fire. The end product was alleged to be up to 60% proof, but Ron had refrained from putting that to the test.

He then went on to give a description of a one-man aluminium foundry producing propellers for the local boats on the Mekong river. Very basic but something that could well have happened in a back yard in Birmingham in the 18th century. It consisted of an open wood fire with an air pump, a small iron or steel pot and various moulds made in three pieces from a form of cast concrete.

His third item was from a remote area which in former times was famed for its opium growing. In recent years in an effort to eradicate this, the government has promoted the planting of rubber trees. These trees are free on application by the farmers and they mature to sap bearing size in seven years. They are grown on small pockets of land on the hillsides, and after the sap has been tapped and dripped into its individual container, the farmer collects the contents in a basin on his motorbike to take back to his village, where, because it smells so strong, it is stored in ponds of water. The area is so remote there are no roads to or in the village, and the rubber would be taken to the nearest road for Chinese trucks to pick it up.

Lastly we saw the production of rice noodles, which again is the speciality of a particular village in that district. In this case it was a lady and her husband team. She would make dozens of crepe like pancakes from a ground rice/water mix which she cooked over a steamer. He then dried them in the sun, after which he put them through hand roller/cutters to produce a vermicelli-like product.

All of these snapshots could have illustrated (allowing for geographic and climatic adjustments) the green shoots of our own industrial past of 200 years

ago.

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Northants Footwear Manufacturers and the 21st Century

Ron Whittaker brought a Northants theme to the Members' Evening by speaking about how some of the old footwear manufacturing companies had successfully developed and transformed themselves into modern 21st century businesses. He felt that this slightly different look at the Industry complemented the excellent work that NIAG, led by the Chairman, had done in the last few years to catalogue and bring together all the information on the history and location of the Northants footwear companies.

It is estimated that about five million pairs of shoes are manufactured in the UK at the current time and over 50% of this production is still carried out in Northants factories. However, the largest footwear manufacturer in the country is the ladies comfort shoe producer "Hotters" which make around 1.7 million pairs in their factories in Skelmersdale in Lancashire. New Balance – which is based in Millom in Cumbria – is in second place and Church's Shoes in Northampton is the third largest producer in the country.

The success of Church & Co. since the company was taken over by the Italian fashion group "Prada" in 1999, has been very interesting. Through investment in production but more particularly in design and marketing, Prada has enabled Church's to gradually increase production to the point where the factory and office space in St. James is to be more than doubled by the acquisition and redevelopment of the old Northampton Corporation Bus depot. Ron considered that the expansion of footwear manufacturing facilities on this scale is quite unique in Western countries. Church & Co. also has a number of retail outlets in the UK, US, Canada and the Far East and export over 70% of their footwear production.

However, Church is not the only company in Northants to have maintained their position as a complete footwear manufacturer. Ron detailed the history of Crockett & Jones which was founded in 1879 and has continued to operate from their factory in Perry Street /Magee Street in Northampton for five generations. Similarly, Cheaney & Co. have continued to produce shoes on their site in Desborough since 1896. Started by the Cheaney family, the company was bought by Church & Co. in 1966. It was included in the Prada takeover of Church's in 1999 but interestingly, sold by Prada to Jonathan and William Church (members of the family) in 2009. Other footwear companies who it is believed continue to manufacture complete footwear in the County include Trickers (Northampton), Sanders & Sanders (Rushden), John Lobb (Northampton), Alfred Sargent (Rushden) and NPS Footwear (Wollaston).

In order to maintain competitiveness, some manufacturers such as Loakes in Kettering (family run since 1880) and Barkers in Earls Barton have successfully

continued production in the County by sourcing closed uppers (made to the company's specification) from India and the Far East and then carrying out the welted or other soling attachment process in their own factories.

The family-run firm of Groococks was established as a footwear manufacturer in Rothwell in 1914 and continued to produce shoes at their factory under the "Padders" brand until early in the current century. Today they run a very successful retail and resourcing operation from their new modern site on the Kettering Venture Park just off the A14. Most of the footwear is resourced from overseas to Groocock's specification and the retail outlet is very attractive with a wide selection of footwear and a café for customers to use. Ron considered that it was a very successful transformation of an established family company into a completely new method of operating in the 21st century.

In the second part of his talk, Ron concentrated on the history and development of the Rushden company William Green & Son or "Grensons". NIAG looked at the impressive Grade 2 listed "Cromwell Works" site in Queen Street (now empty) during the 2015 summer visits (see Newsletter no. 137). The company was started by William Green in 1866 and they opened their Green's Yard factory on High Street South in Rushden in 1874. The attractive factory, which still stands, was viewed by NIAG during the 2014 summer visits. It is claimed that it was the first factory in Northants to manufacture Goodyear welted shoes. It also has some very attractive motifs on the front of the building (which are still quite visible) depicting shoemakers' tools. Grensons moved to the Queen Street site in



1895 and continued to manufacture there until recently. Next to the Grenson site in Cromwell Road is the former HW Chapman box factory and in Allen Road is the site of the 1895 Rushden Steam Laundry which was later used as a heel factory. During the summer visit it was mentioned that the whole site was to be developed and

Ron was able to show the plans produced by Westleigh Developments and Spire Homes. The outside of the listed Grenson building is to be retained and five flats are to be built on each of the four floors. Interestingly, ENDC have also insisted that the front of the box factory and also the laundry are retained so that the new houses and bungalows have to be fitted in behind the existing frontage.

The Grenson footwear company has been purchased by new owners and they have opened a modern facility on Crown Park (near the A45) in Rushden to facilitate their resourcing, warehousing and shoe repair operation. Again, another good example of the successful transformation of an established branded manufacturer changing and adapting to the demands of the 21st century.



Ron concluded by saying that whilst footwear manufacturing had reduced in the county, it was pleasing to see how many of the branded manufacturers had changed and adapted their businesses in different ways to modern customer requirements. The tragedy is that with better management flair and a little entrepreneurship, many of the

footwear companies which the county has lost could have done the same!

Photographs © Ron Whittaker 2014 & 2015

Previous page: The former Rushden Steam Laundry in Allen Road built in 1895.

This page: Grenson's new site on Crown Oak, Rushden which opened in 2013.

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Vergeltungswaffen

Finally **Terry Waterfield** spoke about the assembly of the V2 rockets at La Capoule and Eperlecques in Northern France. He writes:

In May 1943 a photo-reconnaissance plane was sent to investigate a new construction site in northern France about 15 miles south-east of Calais. In a clearing in the woods near Eperlecques he found, amongst other structures, a large rectangular concrete structure measuring some 75m x 95m (246ft x 312ft); from the south-east corner protruded a finger of concrete.



During the war years Dr RV Jones worked for British Scientific Intelligence; it was his responsibility to anticipate the German application of science to warfare. Much of his work was involved with radio navigation, radar and the preparations for D-Day. He was also in charge of British intelligence against the V weapons.

Jones was already aware of the rocket developments at Peenemünde on the Baltic coast of Germany; after studying the photographs taken in May he realised the connection between the Eperlecques site and Peenemünde. On hearing this Churchill immediately ordered the bombing of both sites, though that had to wait until August for favourable weather conditions. The raid on Peenemünde



took place on 17th August; on 27th August 224 B17s targeted the Eperlecques site dropping 366 tons of bombs scoring 327 hits on the northern part of the site.

Needless to say work was halted on the site – but only for a few months. So what was going on?

The first successful launch of an A4 (the development codename) rocket had taken place the

previous October; Hitler wanted to build the first operational launch site for the V2 weapon and by the end of the year the site at Eperlecques had been chosen. Plans were drawn up and approved and in March 1943 the site was cleared and construction work started on Kraftwerk Nordwest (KNW – North-west Electrical Works). In reality this was the codename for a V2 launch facility; the Germans referred to it as the Watten Bunker, today we know it as *le Blockhaus* – a museum and memorial to the slave labourers who built it.

The main features of the planned facility were: rockets and warheads would arrive separately from a local depot to be assembled on site; there would be storage for 108 rockets – three days supply at a firing rate of 36 per day from two launch pads; five Heylandt compressors would each deliver 10 tons of liquid oxygen a day [some texts quote a figure of five tons] and the facility to be completed by 31st December 1943. Implicit in the design would be storage for liquid oxygen since each rocket required five tons.

By November construction work had resumed but to a modified and much less ambitious plan. Since the northern part of the site had been badly damaged, construction would continue on the southern third of the bunker as a liquid oxygen plant which would include another rail link. Work would continue using the ‘turtle’ system: a 5m thick roof was constructed over the existing walls, which when completed would be jacked-up to permit the walls to be built upwards. As the walls extended so the roof was jacked-up and the process repeated until the final height of 28m was reached. This method of construction allowed work to continue inside the building unhindered and unseen by over-flying aircraft.

The facility was completed by January 1944 but by July the facility had been abandoned and moved to Helfaut (Wizernes) some eight miles to the south. No doubt helped by the 25 bombing raids carried out between August 1943 and August 1944 during which time some 7,044 bombs containing 3,882 tons of explosive were dropped.

As part of the plans for the Watten Bunker work started on the site for the supply depot at Shotterwerk Nordwest (SNW – Northwest Gravel Works) at Wizernes.

It was a large chalk quarry close to the main Boulogne to St Omer railway line. Initially this was to comprise a series of storage tunnels cut deep into the cliff; it was also to include a liquid oxygen plant comprising five compressors and storage for 400 tons of liquid oxygen.

With the partial destruction of the Watten Bunker it was decided to upgrade the Wizernes site, which was nicknamed Felsgestein (rock-cliff). Work started in November 1943 on the new design, code named Bauvorhaben 21, which we know today as *La Coupole*. On a hill top beyond the eastern end of the quarry a large concrete dome was constructed 275ft in diameter and 18ft thick. Once completed the launch gallery below was excavated; this work continued in parallel with the existing tunnelling work on the south side of the quarry.



Although conventional bombing raids on the site started in March 1944, it wasn't until the Tallboy 'earthquake' bombs were used in a precision raid on 17th July that work on the site ceased. Three bombs exploded around the rim of the dome causing the quarry face to collapse from beneath the dome. The site was abandoned after suffering a total of 16 raids by 811 aircraft dropping some 4,260 tons of bombs.

After the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region had been captured by the allies in September 1944, a detailed survey of the installation was made by the British secret services. Their plans show the extent of the site: some 150m inside the eastern quarry face and about 100m inside the southern quarry face over a face length of about 200m. The main entrance tunnel, which is still used today by visitors, extended under the hill to emerge in a small quarry to the east of the main quarry. Churchill was so concerned that the site could be used again he ordered the Royal Engineers to destroy both access tunnels to the small quarry.

The site lay abandoned for about 50 years until the Centre for History and Memory opened in 1997. New interpretation was added in 2010, an on-going process that the author has seen over recent years. Part of the site is closed to the public; the entrances to the hospital and office block at the western end of the quarry have been fitted with a bat-friendly access as a number of bats hibernate over winter in the tunnels.

La Coupole is now a French memorial to those who suffered during the Nazi occupation. In addition to seeing some of the tunnels and galleries and their

method of construction, a comprehensive museum has been created 40 metres up inside the dome.

Terry showed images to describe both sites, which are open to the public, as they are today.



Photographs:

Page 5: The editor stands by this massive construction of concrete at Eperlecques

Page 6: Showing some of the destruction by Tall boy bombs

Page 7: *La Capoule*, built into a quarry at Wizernes

This page: Left: One of the trains used to transport goods and

Right: showing the construction within *La Capoule*.

We look forward to the diverse range of topics in 2017.

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London Shoe Manufacturers in Northampton - 12th February

When researching the history of the shoe factories in Northampton's Boot & Shoe Quarter it was intriguing to note that a number of the manufacturers originated in London in the 19th century. It turns out that more than a dozen London-based companies set up shoe factories in Northampton between 1875 and 1900. Further research shows that London-based shoe manufacturers had been looking to Northampton to manufacture shoes since the 17th century and the reason for this was quite simple: labour rates were lower than in London. The Victoria County History of Northamptonshire Volume II quotes the following statement from 1656: "*The town of Northampton may be said to stand chiefly on other men's legs, where (if not the best) the most and cheapest boots and stockens are bought in England*". This implies that the prices were low but then perhaps so was the quality!

From medieval times, the shoe trade in London had been controlled by the Cordwainers Guild and there were strict rules which restricted anyone other than a cordwainer from selling shoes. However by the 18th century, journeymen (trained shoemakers who previously worked for the cordwainers) had begun to make shoes themselves, which they sold to the newly-established London

wholesale shoe warehouses. Due to the higher labour rates in the Capital, some wholesale companies were sending leather to Northampton (and to other provincial areas such as Stafford and Yorkshire) for making up into shoes. Adverts in the Northampton Mercury in 1780 show that a few such companies were also recruiting workers for factories which they planned to set up in the county.

By the start of the 19th century, Northampton-based shoe manufacturers were actively looking to sell their shoes in London. In 1807 William Hickson, who had learnt his shoemaking trade in London, moved to Northampton and by 1812 had persuaded the Northampton shoe manufacturers to rent a London warehouse where their shoes could be sold, and to appoint him as manager. The warehouse was set up at 20 West Smithfield but was not a great success and Hickson ended up running the business as a private enterprise under the name **William Hickson & Sons**. Fortunately, this was more successful and in about 1868, while still at West Smithfield, the company decided to exploit the cheaper labour rates in Northampton by opening up premises at 36 Woolmonger Street, Northampton. It seems to have been just a small warehouse from which cut leather components could be issued for workers to work on in their own homes. However, by 1882 the Northampton side of the business had moved to a large four-storey factory in St Giles Street (now demolished) near the corner of Hazelwood Road, where they stayed until about 1910, having been in business for almost one hundred years.

In the early 1850s, Samuel Isaac, an army contractor based in St James Street, London, formed a partnership with a London outfitter named Alexander Campbell. The resulting company, **Isaac Campbell & Co**, became notorious for supplying the Confederate side in the American Civil War with clothing, footwear and other equipment (*for more detail see David Waller's article in Northamptonshire Past & Present, Vol VIII, No 2, 1990-91, pp137-142*). Wishing to manufacture footwear in Northampton, Samuel Isaac built a factory/warehouse in Campbell Square which was completed in 1859. It was his intention that all employees should work on the premises instead of in their own homes and that machinery would be employed. However, the shoeworkers were suspicious of this and he was unable to recruit a workforce. By 1861 he abandoned the idea of manufacturing footwear in Northampton and the factory was subsequently occupied by another company with London connections: **Turner Bros, Hyde & Co**. They ended up producing boots for the American Confederate army but using the outworking system in common use at the time. Although the Turner Brothers were local lads, Henry Augustus de Bos Hyde was a London bootmaker who started to sell Northampton-made footwear and in 1861 joined the Turner Brothers in a partnership. The company appears to have undertaken all manufacturing in Northampton, with Hyde's London factory effectively operating as an agency. Turner Bros, Hyde & Co became one of the largest

manufacturers in Northampton and remained in Campbell Square until 1910.

In the 1870s, as powered machinery to manufacture boots and shoes was introduced, leading to the start of in-factory working, the unlikely sounding London-based company of **Sir William Palliser & Co** opened a factory (now demolished) in Ethel Street, Northampton. After the death of Sir William in 1882, the company was taken over by **John Cooper & Son**, another London firm. In 1892 the Coopers moved their Northampton production to the factory in Campbell Square recently vacated by Manfield & Son who had themselves moved to a new single-storey factory in Wellingborough Road.

A&W Flatau is another London name that appears in Northampton in the 1870s. Jewish brothers Abraham and William Flatau, who emigrated from Prussia to London, were responsible for starting one of the more significant 19th century London-based shoe manufacturing companies from the 1840s. They occupied premises in Ropemaker Street, Finsbury from 1867 which by the late 1880s had become one of the largest shoe factories in London. They opened up a factory in Northampton in 1878, first in Market Street then moving to Victoria Road and finally to Palmerston Road. In 1900, Alexander Anderson the Northampton architect designed a large single-storey shoe factory for them in Tottenham Hale to where they moved all production, remaining until the 1950s.



In the 1880s, as more and more machinery was introduced, so a larger proportion of shoemaking operations were being carried out in the factory rather than by out-workers. By this time the quality of Northampton produced footwear had improved considerably. Despite pressure from the London Branch of the National Union of Boot & Shoe Rivetters and Finishers, other London manufacturers, no doubt faced with capital investment for machinery, opened factories in Northampton, attracted by the lower Northampton labour rates. Some were successful, others less so. Some kept their London factory going at the same time, some just maintained a sample office in London and one or two moved 'lock stock and barrel' to Northampton. These companies included **Henry Sharman** who moved to Northampton in 1885 and had a large factory built on the corner of Shakespeare Road and Cowper Street which remained in use until 1920. **Joseph Dawson & Sons** started in London in the 1820s and opened a factory on the corner of Clare Street and Overstone Road in 1886 where they stayed until about 1930. **Stubbs & Grimsdell** moved all

their production from London to a newly built three-storey factory in Talbot Road, Northampton in 1889. An article in the Northampton Mercury claims it was the first shoe factory in Northampton where all the manufacturing was undertaken on the premises and none done by outworkers. **Frederick Cook**, whose London premises were at South Place, Finsbury from 1893, opened a factory in Connaught Street, Northampton in 1895, then built a factory at Long Buckby in 1903, where the company stayed until 1933.

James Branch and **John Branch** were brothers with separate, well-known boot and shoe manufacturing companies in Northampton until the 1960s. Brought up in London, both opened factories in Bethnal Green Road in the early 1880s, only 100 yards from each other, which remained in operation until the 1930s. In 1887 James Branch, operating under the 'Bective' brand, opened his first factory in Northampton, at 20-26 St Michaels Road. By 1890, a larger factory was built on the corner of Artizan Road and Billington Street. However, by 1900 the company had outgrown this and another was built in Kingsthorpe which remained in operation until 1972. In about 1888 John Branch opened his first Northampton factory in Victoria Road and two years later moved to a large newly built three-storey factory in



Henry Street, which he called the Queen Boot Factory. We are fortunate that a few of John Branch's company records from around the time he moved to Northampton survive in the County Record Office.

It seems that throughout the last 300 years, the differential in labour rates led London manufacturers to look to Northampton to produce footwear. The growth of mass production, introduction of wholesale warehouses and changes in working practices, fuelled by increased demand for footwear, encouraged many London manufacturers to try their luck in Northampton, culminating in a rush of companies in the 1880s and 1890s. Fortunately, many of the buildings that London shoe manufacturers used in Northampton still remain; in London however, hastened by the blitz they have almost completely disappeared.

Peter Perkins

Photographs: © Peter Perkins

Page 10: Premises in Victoria Road, Northampton, used by London Shoe manufacturer A&W Flatau from 1878 to 1887

This page: James Branch's London shoe factory at 19/23 Bethnal Green Road. He manufactured shoes here from 1882 until the 1930s.

Renewable Energy - Where does our Electricity Come from? - 11th March

Emma Rafaluk is a chemist and has worked for the last eight years in renewable, initially working with wind and then moving into solar.

She briefly outlined the sources of renewable: Wind, both on- and off-shore, solar, tidal and explained the pros and cons of the various systems.

On-shore wind is the cheapest form and currently on a windy day can produce around 22% of required power. Most of the best sites have already been populated and there is little room left for major development. Planning applications typically take seven years to completion. Common land access dates back to the 1600s and can take years to unravel. A typical turbine can produce £300 worth of electricity per hour.

Off-shore wind is the most expensive way to produce electricity. Maintenance, marine interference, tidal erosion on the foundations and scouring of the power cables are not yet fully understood. However, their impact on human habitation is effectively zero.

All wind turbine towers have lifts for the maintenance men. It must be said that not only would it take a long time to climb a ladder but getting equipment to the top would be challenging.



Wind Farm at Habscheid, Germany

Solar farms can be assembled and built quickly. A farm to produce 33MW would take about eight weeks. In most location's rain is sufficient to keep the panels clean. The panels are efficient up to 25°C but require air-conditioning units so they do not over heat. This is the greatest noise consideration.

Tidal estuary turbines could produce approximately 7% of requirement at very predictable times.

All subsidies finish this year, effectively meaning that all renewable investments and research has finished in the UK. No solar panels are manufactured here and the tax relief on imported panels has been stopped.

Power can be produced in excess of demand at times but the technology for

storage, by any means, including batteries, to handle commercial quantities is years away.

The UK has power cable links to the continent and Ireland to help top up demand. Diesel and hydro-power in small amounts are available almost instantly to support peaks in consumption.

Nuclear power is with us to stay if we wish to continue to live as we do where we expect everything to be available on demand. This is what we are used to in today's consumer society. The new nuclear power stations to be built on the south coast, by EDF (the French Government) will be paid at three times the going rate for the power they are to produce, by our government, to cover the costs.

A couple of interesting web sites are: *Energy Watch* and *Grid Watch*.

Finally a couple of questions:

1. Have you all signed up to Smart Meters to help save the Nation!
2. Is off-grid spoon whittling a serious option?

Mike Ringwood



ARTICLES

Reflections in a Bus Driver's Mirror

Albert George Wilkins (1909-1989)

This is a selection of recollections of Albert (Bert) Wilkins, who in April 1980 had worked for London Transport for fifty years.

Bert started working for the London United Tramways (LUT) in April 1930. Having passed the Entrance Examination and after four weeks was instructed to report to the Acton Depot. Training completed he was sent to the depot at Fulwell, Teddington. The weekly wage was £3 17s 6d (£3.87). For a period he was a spare conductor and therefore never knew from day to day what route he might be working. When put on the payroll he had the same driver for the five years he was a conductor.

Operating from Fulwell in those days were five tram routes, although none of them actually started or finished at the depot. The crew schedule posted in the garage told them which route they would operate day by day, not always the same route every day.

Discipline was much stricter then and full uniform had to be worn whilst on duty. A system of merit and demerit marks keeping the crews on their toes. Demerit marks earned small fines.

Conductors had a float of 3 shillings (15p) to act as change money, although many using the Workmen's tickets paid the exact fair. Something that conductors had to be careful of was reloading their ticket holders, to make sure the ticket numbers ran consecutively. A batch being used out of sequence caused problems when cashing up at the end of the shift. Once the Tim and Gibson type machines came into use that particular problem disappeared, as the machine worked on a roll of paper. Cash shortages had to be made up by the conductor and a surplus handed in, needless to say any surplus was kept to cover any shortages.

During this time Conductor and Drivers licences were issued by the Metropolitan police and were valid for one year. It was the responsibility of the holder to renew his licence. On a route through Kingston one day a LUT inspector boarded Bert's tram followed by a policeman. On seeing that his licence had expired, the inspector told him to leave the tram and make his way to Scotland Yard. His licence was not renewed for seven days which meant that a week's wages were lost, because he could not conduct without a licence.

After five years as a conductor the opportunity to become a driver came along. London United at this time ran trams as well as trolleybuses, so the training course covered driving both types of vehicle. On completion of the course Bert was able to drive both sorts. Once back at Fulwell for a period of three months he was a spare driver. This entailed being at the depot at 4am not knowing if he would be driving or conducting.

The older trams operated by LUT had open top decks and open ends. The driver was exposed to the elements and in wet weather could be seen wearing leggings,

oilskin and sou'wester. On completion of the three months as a spare driver, Bert became fully fledged, from that point on it was driving only. Signing on in the morning the driver found the tram or trolleybus allocated to him and the route, fifteen minutes were allowed to check the vehicle over before leaving the depot.

Driving a tram one day through a narrow street in Twickenham, a horse and cart belonging to an oil sundry man swerved over the tramlines catching one wheel in a rail. The tram Bert was driving hit the cart turning it over, the horse bolted and legend has it that it was caught in Hampton Court. The cart owner tried to claim damages, but because of witnesses who saw the accident and because of the condition of the cart, he



Diddler Trolleybus - the last one
© Peter Acres collection

was unsuccessful. The spring mountings on the cart were rusty.

The (London) West Metropolitan Tramway company was placed in the hands of the Receiver in June 1894 and a new company called London United Tramway company acquired the assets, backed by both the Imperial and Bristol Tramways. Clifton Robinson took charge of the new company. Electrification of the company began in 1899, using the overhead line system for power. The official opening of the new tramway was in 1901. The LUT was the first company in London to introduce the trolleybus onto the streets of West London, Twickenham, Teddington, Kingston and Hampton Court.

In 1935 Bert changed over to driving trolleybuses only, although the company still operated trams, and continued on trolleybuses until just before their final demise from London Transport. The new vehicles were quickly accepted by crews and public because of their comfort and quietness compared to the tram. Locally it acquired the nickname 'Diddler' perhaps because unlike the tram it could diddle all over the road, although no one seems quite sure of the origin.

One day driving through Twickenham a woman walked out in front of the trolleybus, Bert was able to stop without hitting her, however his clippie was not quite so lucky. She was pitched forward by the sharp breaking, putting her head and an arm through a window. Although she and Bert were friends, she tried to sue him for damages through the Union, this was unsuccessful because a policeman had witnessed the incident.

A not uncommon occurrence was a trolley pole derailment, this was when a pole or poles came down from the overhead wire. Each vehicle carried a long bamboo pole beneath the trolley in a container. This enabled crews to put the trolley poles back on the wires without calling out a breakdown crew. Must have been worth watching in a high wind. Trams and trolleybuses having to follow either rails in the road or overhead wires needed a points system where routes merged or diverged. One of these in Kingston was very busy, so a Points man was employed. His job was to alter the points in the correct direction for the oncoming vehicle. At less busy junctions this would be done by the conductor. One such set of overhead points was in Surbiton, this was where two routes diverged. The 602 going to Winters Bridge and the 603 to Tolworth. The conductor would alight and pull a handle fixed to one of the trolley poles, this altered the points in the overhead, once the trolley had passed the points switched back. There were occasions when the driver thought the conductor was back on board, but wasn't. The conductor then having to chase after his bus or wait for the next trolley to come along.

London Transport decided to phase out trolleybuses in 1954, there was in the region of 1800 vehicles used on 253 route miles. The first stage of replacement with the new Routemaster bus was in 1959, but complete phasing out was not achieved until 1962. Bert, along with trolley drivers was given the opportunity to

convert to driving oil-engine buses. This was done at Chiswick Bus Works and included a spell on the famous skid pan. Training completed Bert was sent to Kingston Garage which operated a selection of single deck routes that radiated out from the town. These were as follows: 201 Kingston to Hampton Court via Surbiton; 213 Kingston to Sutton; 215 Kingston to Ripley; 218 Kingston to Walton-on-Thames and 219 Kingston to Weybridge. The 215 and 218 both running along the old Portsmouth Road before separating at Esher.

Before moving on to one-man operated buses it is worth looking at the duties of the conductor. The conductor was in charge of the bus, starting and stopping at the correct places, the altering of route indicator blinds and something now completely disappeared from the London scene, Route Time Clocks. The conductor had a time card which was inserted into the clock, this printed the time the bus had arrived at that point.

One-man operated buses were not allowed in London for several years because of objections by the Police. When eventually it was allowed many conductors converted to driving. One of the problems faced by London Transport was the rate of pay for drivers who now had extra duties. This was eventually settled when drivers accepted one third of what conductors had been paid.

When a bus was finished for the day it was driven through the wash, parked and swept out by the cleaners, the bus was then refuelled and then parked in the garage ready for the next day. Bert remembered one morning having signed on and finding his bus, went through the various checks. Lights, indicators, water, air, he then started the engine. The vehicle went back into the garage wall, not creating much damage to bus or wall. The mechanic who had parked the bus had left it in reverse. The one morning when Bert did not check to see if it was in neutral. Both Bert and the mechanic were reprimanded but no further action was taken.

Ill health forced Bert to cease driving and he was transferred to Chiswick

Works where he was employed as a Messenger. In all he spent twenty nine years driving trams, trolleybuses and RF type single deckers. In April of 1980, although already passed the official retirement age, Bert retired after a special presentation by London Transport to mark his fifty years of service to the capital's transport system past and present.

Peter Acres (Revised 2015)



Trolleybus in Kingston © Peter Acres collection

UPDATES

Britannia Works, Deanshanger

A fantastic opportunity to purchase the former Britannia Iron Works site in Deanshanger with the benefit of a detail planning permission for 14 units.

The site is 0.7 acres in size and is predominately triangular in shape with a gentle slope down from the back of the site to the main road. Currently on site is the beautiful former iron works company building. The site has the benefit of a detailed planning permission for 14 units comprising mainly of family homes. The site does not contain any tree preservation order nor is there any requirement for section 106/CIL or affordable housing. The land has also been de-contaminated.



The above information is part of the details that Ashtons, estate agents, put out about the Works which NIAG looked at in July 2010. As those members who went on the walk may remember the site was large and it is to be hoped that any developer who purchases the site, asking price in excess of £1,200,000, will somehow retain the factory building which lies alongside the main road.

Thank you to Matthew Nayler who first brought my attention to this information. Ed

St Edmund's Hospital, Northampton

The last remaining issues over planning permission should be resolved in the next two weeks but after the Chronicle & Echo publicised the concerns over public safety and the long-term future of the site, work to make it safe started this week.

In a statement issued on Monday night (18th April) the Borough Council welcomed the development. A spokesman said: *"Following the applications for planning permission and listed building consent being approved in principle in June last year, officers have been working closely with the applicant to resolve the outstanding issues relating to drainage and the demolition of the buildings at the back of the site. The information about these issues needed to grant permission has now been submitted by Kayalef Ltd, and is currently being assessed by officers. Permission is likely to be issued within two weeks."* However, work has started on securing and clearing the site before commencing its re-development because of the concerns over safety.

A Kayalef spokesman says: *"St Edmund's is a complex project with complex issues regarding listings, feasibility and demands on converting 19th century buildings to meet the needs of the 21st century."* Thanks have been given to everyone for their patience

over recent months who have shared the frustrations of inactivity on this site.

Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 21st April 2016

Rail Depot – Milton Malsor/Blisworth?

Developers behind the eight million square foot rail depot in rural Northamptonshire have said the scheme could ‘create new open space’. The claim is made in documents released today (28th April) by Ashfield Land as part of a public consultation into the proposed Rail Central site between Milton Malsor and Blisworth. It reveals a new annotated map of the huge warehouses that would be constructed to handle freight from across the world. It also suggests ways to mitigate the impact on the villages and suggests that loss of public rights of way could be off-set.

Ashfield Land says: “*You may be concerned that there will be impacts on existing public rights of way or other community facilities, and feel that this should be mitigated by the creation of new footpaths or a new area of open space or a country park, or new community facilities*”. Villagers labelled the suggestions “comical”. A spokesman for the ‘Stop Rail Central’ campaign group said: “*Are they really saying they will insert a vast depot on open countryside and then offer to create some open space. It’s ridiculous.*”

Details on site’s freight movements:

Ashfield Land has for the first time given examples of how freight would move on and off the Rail Central site. It says a train of containers may arrive from mainland Europe or even China, with goods for the UK. Others may come from rail-connected factories elsewhere in the UK or Europe. Goods bound for destinations outside the Midlands are then moved out by road or rail, with those to places further afield eg to Scotland or the South East moving by rail.

Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 28th April 2016

Snibston Discovery Park

We have to report that the Discovery Park of what was once Snibston Colliery (reported in issue 130, 2014) has now been demolished with all the exhibits being placed elsewhere. This site was to be redeveloped with many houses, etc. being built. We understand from our colleagues in Leicester IA that the ground is heavily contaminated and cannot be built on and there is now a huge derelict empty space. What a complete waste of what was a good heritage venue. But then it could be argued that many Councils don’t wish to keep our heritage alive and see the easy option of selling these sites for housing development. The joke here being that the land is contaminated and not fit for purpose other than what was once there.

Ed.



MISCELLANY ITEMS OF INTEREST

Birmingham's New Street Station

We have often travelled through Birmingham New Street on our excursions into far flung places on the Rail Tours and I thought you would like a few facts and figures which I spotted in the *Rail magazine of December 2015*.

4 Train companies serve the station

37 seconds – a train arrives or departs New Street every 37 seconds

1,200 workers on site (on average) during the rebuild project

3,500 – the highest number of workers on site during the rebuild project

1854 – The year New Street opened

1967 – The year the then-redeveloped station opened

170,000 passengers a day use Birmingham New Street, nearly triple the 60,000 a day for which the old station was designed when it was rebuilt in the 1960s

15 public lifts – before the rebuild there were two

----oooOooo----

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTY

Shoe firm opens Stateside store

A Rushden shoe firm has gone Stateside with the opening of its first store outside of the UK. Grenson has been based in Rushden since 1866, starting out at the Corn Merchants in the town before moving to Green Yard. When bigger premises were required in 1895, a factory was built on the corner of Queen Street and Cromwell Road, where the firm remained until 2013 when it relocated to its current site in Crown Way, Rushden. And as the company celebrates its 150th year in business, it has opened a new store in New York. The shop is its first standalone store outside of the UK and will serve the American market, which is its second biggest worldwide.

Bosses say they are hoping to offer more than just ready-to-wear shoes for men and women, with other services including bespoke, repairs and the Grenson Lab service where staff will make a shoe to a customer's own specification.

The new store is the fifth Grenson store – it has four in London already. The US one is in Elizabeth Street, New York and four people have been hired to run it. The shop's interior design echoes some of the elements of the London stores such as the warm cherry wood walls and the mid-century lounge atmosphere.

The 150th anniversary of Grenson is due to be marked by a series of events and an archive collection of shoes which will be reproduced from the originals. They will cover many decades of shoemaking by Grenson.

Northants Telegraph – 3rd March 2016

Former Gas holder site, Northampton

Artists' impressions of a cut-price supermarket planned near a busy roundabout in Northampton have been released as part of a bid to approve the finer details

of the scheme. German brand Lidl bought the four acre site once occupied by the town's gas holder back in 2014 and shortly after had outline planning approval to build a store there. In September 2015, the company lodged a bid to extend that application by adding an option for a café or hot food takeaway to the site. The application was launched to approve the final design and layout of the store and 152-space car park, though a café does not feature in the plans.

Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 20th March 2016

Delapre Abbey, Northampton [1]

In the March newsletter which NIAG received, I note that the restoration work is continuing to take shape on site – both outside and in, and with some interesting finds along the way. Work on the south range rooms has begun and the specialist contractors from Hirst Conservation are getting stuck into their mammoth task to bring these rooms back to their former glory. Work on a new conservatory is now underway and with it a new commercial kitchen. Being built on the site of the medieval nunnery building found in the summer of 2015, the kitchen design had to be altered in order to preserve the archaeological remains. The new kitchen extends from the back of the South Range ‘gap site’ to the end of Abbey Cottage. This area will also house the new café and restaurant. The ‘gap’ site where the new conservatory will be was the location of the magnificent Victorian conservatory. Due to finds when work began on the area it is now known that it once housed a central pond and brick planting beds. This ‘winter garden’ will be remembered in the design of the new tiled floor – a welcome link to Delapre’s past.

For more information please look at the web-site: www.delapreabbey.org

Delapre Abbey, Northampton [2]

A major restoration project at Delapre Abbey could cost Northampton Borough Council £920,000 more than expected after it decided to upgrade the current plans. Work began in the grounds of the ancient abbey just over a year ago as part of a bid to make the site into a “*first-class heritage attraction*”.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) pledged £3.65 million to the project, which was rounded up to £6.3 million by the Borough Council and other sources. However the council now says the original proposals for the ‘south range’ of the ruins – which would have cost £50,000 – will not make the most of its ‘*architectural features.*’ The borough’s cabinet were due to decide last night (13th April) whether to now spend £624,000 on the south range, which will eventually become meeting rooms. The refurbishment of the 18th century stable block and coach house, recently home to the tea rooms, will also cost £113,000 more than expected. All-in-all the cabinet is being asked to approve £934,000 of additional monies to the project, which it could claw back in part from the HLF at a later date.

The cabinet member for regeneration said: “*We hope to increase the specification of*

the south range restoration in order to make the most of its architectural and decorative features. This will help make Delapre a sustainable, long-term asset.....” He further said: “The original specification would have been sufficient to bring the building back into use, but would not have enabled us to showcase everything it has to offer. This includes a fully-refurbished billiard room interior – which will become a café – a beautiful library, a drawing room with a stunning painted ceiling and gilded covings, and the dining room with its ornate wall frames and ceiling.”

Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 14th April 2016

Transport charity’s bid to extend track

Plans to reinstate a section of railway track between Rushden and Higham Ferrers have been submitted. Rushden Historical Transport society wants to reinstate the track from a point 200m north of Shirley Road bridge to Queensferry in Higham Ferrers. If approved by East Northants Council, it would be the last element required to put a line along the old existing route of the old railway and mean trains would run up to the Higham Ferrers end of the track.

The society has the requisite funding and lease arrangements in place, but needs planning permission from the council. Documents submitted as part of the application say: *“The proposed reinstatement of the old line from Rushden to Higham Ferrers must be seen in principle as a positive on the basis that the applicant, a charity, has worked over the years to retain the main station building, from which it was under serious threat of demolition in the 1980s, and then rely on contributions and goodwill to grow the current operation into what it is today. The proposed development is the final element of the grand plan to have a track which runs to two destinations rather than turn round and go back to the main station.”*

However, *[there’s always a however!]* a number of people have objected. One objection published online states: *“I feel this extension will greatly impact on my privacy as it will run alongside my back garden fence, therefore infringing on my privacy and this quiet area will become very noisy and the air will fill with diesel smoke. I feel it will also cause a lot more traffic and more cars to be parked in an already busy area where parking can be a great problem during school times and when there are other activities happening at the school.”* Whilst another objector also states the noise and odour factor they also complain about the fact that the Greenway is a link to walk along between villages and towns thereby reducing the number of cars on the roads.

Trains only run on weekends and the applicant says it can plan to allow for extra demand.

Northants Telegraph – 24th March 2016.

Plans for more railway tracks

Rail users travelling from Kettering, Wellingborough, Corby and Market Harborough could see an increased service if a new plan by Network Rail is given the go-ahead. They announced last week (w/c 22nd) that it was looking at a number of options which would see the firm reach its growth target by 2043.

One option is to increase the number of tracks between Kettering and Kilby Bridge Junction, just to the south of Leicester, from two to four.

The Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Rail Action Committee Chairman welcomed the news. He said “*Having only two tracks between Kettering and Leicester restricts the capacity available for people travelling. It’s difficult to mix fast and slow trains but four tracks would make that easier. I think this is good news as when business and the population goes through a huge rise as it is, there is an increase in congestion.*”

The plans outline the rail company’s ideas as part of its vision to cut journey times and increase travel opportunities. It is expected that the midland mainline between London and Kettering and Corby will be fully electrified by 2019.

Northants Telegraph – 31st March 2016

Petition against change to design of new rail bridge

More than 200 people have signed a petition against changes to the design of a bridge for the new Stanton Cross development. This petition was begun because of probable changes to the design of the River Ise bridge. It comes after Bovis Homes, the company behind the 3,200 home development to the east of Wellingborough station, applied to change the design and appearance of the proposed River Ise bridge which is to be constructed as part of the scheme.

The online petition states: “*Wellingborough Council originally approved the design of the bridge when planning permission was granted for the Stanton Cross development in January 2008. The bridge currently approved by the council has brick pilasters and an arched fascia, to complement the historic curved bridges over the railway in the near vicinity. The changes seek to remove the pilasters and the fascia and will result in a bridge that no longer achieves the design principles required. The new bridge will be viewed by all users of the north-south route running adjacent to the River Ise through the proposed town park and River Ise country park.*” The organisers of this petition are requesting that Wellingborough Council refuse the application.

The Stanton Cross development was first considered in 1996. Planning permission was granted in 2008 and the ground-breaking ceremony for the first houses took place in March 2015.

Northants Telegraph – 17th March 2016

Kelmarsh Hall – restoration of decor

Four months of painstaking paint restoration is now complete at Kelmarsh Hall. The double-height Great Hall had been suffering from flaking paint for a number of years and the Kelmarsh trust was keen to conserve the current paint scheme as it is attributed to renowned decorator John Fowler and Nancy Lancaster, the doyenne of the English country house style, who lived at the Hall.

A spokesman said: “*In November 2015, paint specialists Crick-Smith of Lincoln were appointed and conservators set about injecting powerful water-based bonding agents behind the flaking paint and then carefully ironing flat the flakes. Areas of loss were filled and touched in to match the existing and 60 years of smoke and dirt was cleaned off using*



OF THIS AND THAT

Obituary: John Smith MA

Sadly John passed away during February and Peter, Terry & I attended his funeral at Flore on the 10th March. John was 92 when he quietly slipped away one evening. He had strong connections with Brockhall, Flore and Weedon, his family having come from Brockhall and had connections with the Brodie family. When still a small boy his parents moved to Flore and it was to here that he returned to live after his retirement in the 1990s. During the War because of an earlier childhood illness which made him medically unfit for service he joined the Admiralty in Naval Intelligence, here he worked alongside Ian Fleming the creator of James Bond. After the war he lived in Newcastle before moving to Derby to work in the Town & Planning department. He was a much travelled man, China and Africa to name but two of the far flung places he visited, he was also a keen tennis player. A devoted husband, John lost his wife of seven years to cancer, they did not have any children. He came back to live in Flore in 1995 after the death of his aunt, living in her bungalow until his own death. He loved history, the countryside, the garden and all things to do with heritage and during the last 20 or so years has committed much of his vast wealth of information into books about Flore and I was lucky enough to assist with one or two of these publications. He will be sorely missed amongst the History world.

Jane W.

Dates for the Diary

Last of the summer walks. See your programme for all details.

- 8th July Rushden Boot & Shoe walk
- 16th July Kings Cross & St Pancras, London
- 24th July Frogmore Paper Mill, Hemel Hempstead
- 31st July Stamford Town afternoon walk
- 1st September Leighton Buzzard Narrow Gauge railway, Bucks.
- 12th November EMIAC at Lincoln – Information enclosed.

Other:

May/October Chester Farm: Open for public use of three self guided walks every day from 8am to 6pm. Free parking. Visitor car park postcode is NN8 2DH. Website: www.chesterfarm.co.uk/pages/home.aspx

- 9/10th July Battle of Northampton weekend at Delapre Abbey. Contact 01604 760817 for more details.
- 18th August Leather Stamping at Northampton Museum & Art Gallery. 1.30-2.15 pm and 2.30-3.15 pm. Make your own unique and genuine leather key fob, bookmark or wristband. £2.50 for the session. To book 01604 837397. *This could be one for the grandchildren.*
- 26th August Leather Stamping – as above.
- 10th Sept. Heritage Fair at St. Sepulchre, Sheep Street, Northampton. 10.30 am to 4.00 pm. NIAG’s stand will be there and Shoe walks are planned. Assistance would be appreciated to give Jane, Terry & Peter a break. Contact Jane if able to assist, please.
- 9th/10 Sept Delapre Abbey open as part of the National Heritage Open Days – last chance to see the restoration works in action before it opens in 2017.
- 14th October Winter Programme of Talks commence: Programme enclosed.
- 12th November *Ploughshares into Swords*: EMIAC at Lincoln - booking form enclosed.
- November Delapre Abbey’s catering services will be open from this month, offering refreshments for park visitors, as well as afternoon tea and a full menu of lunch and dinner dishes.

2017

- 11th February Delapre Abbey opens to visitors for the first time in 900 years! Watch this space.

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And Finally:

Spotted in the Magazine ‘*Todays Railways Europe*’ issue 238, October 2015, the French section, under a wonderful heading ‘*Silly Season Special*’.

Train passes over person on track.

Trains were severely disrupted on the Paris-Rouen main line on the afternoon of 18th August when a person was seen to lie down between the rails at Rosny-sur-Seine, after which a train passed over, the person got up and walked away. The police initially thought that this act could have been a stupid “dare” by a young person, but after investigation identified the person as a 64-year-old woman with psychiatric problems, who is now in a local hospital. No further action was taken.

Barbecue on train

There is no catering on most non-TGV trains in France, so people improvise. The “*Républicain Lorrain*” newspaper report in August that a group of regular travellers on the Nancy-Bar-le-Duc route organised an aperitif on the train, followed by a barbecue. They had brought an electric barbecue, which they plugged into on-board sockets (*supposedly limited to 100 watts for laptops*), then started grilling sausages. Apparently the contrôleur allowed this to go-ahead. The group is now hoping to organise a “*raclette*” (molten cheese) this winter!



Coming up in the next issue:

The Summer reports

EMIAC at Moira report of the day

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Newsletter

Next Issue: **October 2016**

Deadline for all articles and information 1st September 2016.

Anything received after this date will be held over to the next edition.

Article guidelines: Ideally should be no more than about 1200 words, unless the article is of a special interest and accompanied by photographs or diagrams. Shorter articles are always welcome. Photographs will be inserted if submitted and the Editor is happy to discuss the author's requirements.

Please submit by e-mail, fax or mail. Where possible photographs are encouraged to illustrate all articles. When submitting photographs via e-mail, the picture should be no larger than 250,000 pixels in JPEG format and should be sent as separate attachments. Please give information about the photograph. Photographs/slides sent by post (first class) will be returned to you the same way. Please also include your name and address so that you can be credited with taking those photographs and don't forget to put a caption with them.