



# NORTHAMPTONSHIRE'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

## NEWSLETTER



BALH Newsletter of the Year Award 2017

### ISSUE 155 - SUMMER 2020

Northamptonshire Industrial Archaeology Group

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## From the Editor

So here we are midway through the year and what a year it has been so far. Winds, storms, rain, flooding and now the Virus which has really impacted on all our lives. Frustrations abound as we wait to hear whether or not we can all get on with our lives instead of living in perpetual fear of the unknown and whether we should, or not, be actually leaving our homes to meet up with family and old friends for that lovely cup of aromatic coffee or just a good old chat.

For the first time since its beginning NIAG has been put on hold from the last meeting and excellent talk about Bassett-Loake; but not quite, as Peter is quietly getting on with various projects, Terry has been working on the web-site and I have been sorting out this and the next editions. You will find that *Dates for the Diary* has been shifted, for this edition anyway to page 3. This is to alert you to the Winter programme which, as I write in May, will hopefully be able to go ahead. You will find the membership renewal notices enclosed, please ensure that these are returned to Terry by the time of the proposed AGM in November. Reminders will be sent, as usual with the October newsletter and there is a fervent hope that all of you will renew your subscription.

If all goes well we will be taking part in the Heritage Day that is to be held in September at Abington Park unless something happens and we are still not able to 'socialise' in groups, let alone large gatherings such as exhibitions. This is planned for the 12th of September. So it is fingers crossed.

I trust that you have, in spite of all the doom and gloom, managed to have a reasonable summer and caught up with all those jobs which are always being left for another day! We are still looking for a couple of small items which seem to have vanished completely in spite of a massive turn out and clear out in the garage and utility room.

Sadly I have to report the loss of two long standing members – not Coronavirus related I am glad to say, and due to all the various restrictions currently in place we were unable to attend the funerals.

On a brighter note it was spotted in the Daily Telegraph recently by member Vicki Sheffield that Elisabeth Jordan, former member and wife of the late Arthur Jordan, had recently celebrated her 85th birthday by baking cakes, emailing friends and asking them to knock on her door during their daily exercise. 35 friends came and 'visited' between 8.15am and 5pm to gossip over the fence. Thanks to Vicki and Roy for this little piece of brightness.

Finally the next couple of issues of the Newsletter will be bereft of summer reports so I am putting out a plea to members for snippets, articles, news from around the county (and beyond) to make a contribution to our newsletters. I don't hold out for anything, but it would be nice if we could have memories of past visits/walks/trips from you, or indeed if there has been anything in the past couple of months which has caught your eye and could be shared with our



membership. I wait with baited breath for the deluge...

With all good wishes. Take care and above all keep smiling.

*JaneW - Editor*

Left: Sent from a friend of ours whose daughter purchased the table as a bit of fun!

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## Obituaries:

### Robert Ayers

Members will be saddened to learn that Robert Ayers passed away in March. Records show that he was a member from 2004 and had many interests including the Wolverton & Stony Stratford tramway. He was also very active with the Wolverton & District Local History Society. Unfortunately due to the Coronavirus situation only members of his family were able to attend the funeral. However, it is understood that a memorial service will be held sometime in the future when it is hoped that we will be able to attend to learn about Bob's life. A more detailed obituary will then be published at a later date.

*Jane W.*

### Dave Goodwin

Sadly, Dave Goodwin, a former member of NIAG – *Mr Foxton* – passed away on the 3rd April at the age of 83. Those who were members in the 1980s and early 90s will remember Dave speaking at the Members' meetings on various projects he was working on at Foxton and canals generally. He also contributed to the NIAG newsletter.

I first met Dave around 1980 on an IA course run by Geoffrey in Kettering. He was working in a furniture factory at the time which he said was totally boring work and needing some stimulation, he had got interested in the abandoned Inclined Plane at Foxton. The Foxton site and canals in general then took over his life and he became a leading authority on the subject. He was able to retire early from work and spend all of his time on his chosen interest. He purchased a narrow boat and spent most of each summer touring the UK canal system but at all other times concentrated on the development of the Foxton site. He became Chairman of the Foxton Inclined Plain Trust and was chief contributor to their journal *Informer*. He belonged to several other IA and canal groups including the Old Union Canals Society, of which he was also Chairman for some time and editor of their magazine *Union* for 20 years.

With a number of colleagues, Dave did much physical work on the Foxton site in order to lay the foundations of the excellent visitor attraction it is today. In

particular he led the re-building of the Engine House in order to provide the current Museum facility and had much to do with its initial operation.

One of his greatest contributions to canal history was the transcribing of the Millner papers. Thomas Millner was the Controller of the Northern District of the Grand Junction Canal (GJC) from 1895 to 1930 and lived at Canal House at Blisworth at the junction of the GJC with the Northampton Arm. Amazingly, the late George Freeston (Blisworth historian and former NIAG member) had managed to retrieve thousands of letters and other items covering all of Millner's 35 years as Controller when they were at risk of being destroyed at the end of the War. Dave worked solidly over one winter trying to piece the various documents together and produced an excellent book on the subject. Millner worked closely with Gordon Thomas who developed and installed the Foxton Inclined Plane and a number of previously unseen photos of the lift installation were uncovered. At the time, Dave described the papers as the "*best buried treasure which he could ever wish to stumble across*".

Sadly Dave suffered with illness in recent years and was confined to living at home but still managed to research canals. His latter period was spent in a Care Home where he sadly passed away.

Mary Matts of Foxton Bottom Lock (who gave a talk to NIAG members on Foxton in 2016) said "*Dave was a 'character' who despite a rather unprepossessing exterior had a huge knowledge and enthusiasm for the subjects which interested him, primarily waterways, railways and IA. His physical work on the Foxton site and the volume of research and articles he produced over a long period of time remain as his legacy.*"

Ron Whittaker

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## Dates for the Diary

The first three Winter lectures:

9th October     *VC10s and Threepenny bits* – a talk by Joel Kosminsky

13th November AGM followed by *Bedfordshire Onion Barns* a talk by Mark Phillips

4th December *Hidden London* a talk by Chris Nix

We can only hope that the October talk and December talk will go ahead as both speakers will be travelling from London.

As always these will be held in the Garden Room, St Matthews Church, off Kettering Road, Northampton and commence at 7.30 pm. We expect that some 'distancing' measures might still be in place 'though quite how they will work is uncertain. Also the situation about refreshments after the meeting might also be on hold. We are working with the team that run the facility and will advise members nearer to the October meeting, either by e-mail or by post. Please also check with the web-site if you are able to access this media.

## **24th October : EMIAC Conference – hosted by NIAG**

NIAG hosts the 99th EMIAC Conference. At the time of this newsletter, we are still unclear as to what the state of play will be in October. In these somewhat straitened times we wait on the circumstances that are outside of our control. The booking form will, in any case, get posted to you as a separate mailshot when we have a clear idea of what can or cannot go ahead. In the meantime please bear with us.

### **Other:**

11-19th July CBA Festival of Archaeology – digital events

10th Sept British Napoleonic Bicentary Trust – Launch of *Napoleon 200* events.

11-20th Sept Heritage Open Days

Thank you to Graham Cadman for sending this information which came from *Heritage Update* issue 419. [www.theheritagealliance.org.uk](http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk).

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## **Secretary's Lockdown Diary**

It seems a long time since our final talk of the winter in March, when Christine Sanderson spoke to us about Bassett-Lowke's Artwork. With the benefit of hindsight, we were lucky to be able to hold this meeting. Since that time, the diary has been remarkably empty with planned events falling away like confetti. In common with many people, I have been taking periods of exercise, enjoying some gardening in the sunshine and learning how to keep two metres apart from everyone in the supermarket as I searched for bread flour and toilet rolls. There has also been plenty of NIAG and other industrial heritage related activity to keep me occupied at home. The following gives you an idea of what this covered in March and April.

**6 March** – Email from India requesting a contribution towards a publication to commemorate the renovation of the Fitzgerald Fountain in India and its return close to its original site in Mumbai. Some of you may recall that following my research about Barwell & Co, I was able to help the engineers in Mumbai confirm some of the design details for their fountain, identical to the Isaac Fountain that stood on Northampton's Market Square from 1863 to 1962. I emailed my contribution to Mumbai on 27 March.

**10 March** – Just before the lockdown, a meeting took place between a few NIAG members and Bob Purser of the Geological Section of Northamptonshire Natural History Society. It was to discuss a joint project to identify the location of some of the former quarry sites within and around Northampton from which building stone was obtained. During the lockdown, I have spent some time poring over old maps, documents and Diana Sutherland's excellent book *Northamptonshire Stone*. If we include the pits where building stone, sand, lime and clay were extracted but exclude iron ore quarries and modern gravel quarries, I have located over 40

former quarry sites within the present Borough of Northampton. For most of these, there is nothing to see today as they have been filled, levelled or built on. However, I have noted that there are still remains of a former stone quarry at New Duston which may be a good candidate for inclusion in the 3rd Edition of NIAG's Gazetteer of countywide industrial heritage sites, due for publication in the next couple of years.

**20 March** – Phone conversation with Jeremy Rice, former owner of ironfounders Rice & Co who took over Barwell & Co in 1871 and only ceased trading in 1997. Jeremy is planning to write up the history of Rice & Co to follow on from NIAG's Barwell book and we hope to get together to discuss this when the lockdown is over.

**31 March** – Skype meeting with a consultant working on behalf of the Leathersellers Company who have been providing support to the National Leather Collection (aka the Leathercraft Museum) currently located in Northampton's Grosvenor Centre. NIAG visited there as part of our summer programme in 2018 (see NIAG Newsletter 148, p5). The Museum has had a number of different homes since it opened in London in 1951 and the Leathersellers are looking for a permanent site for this and for the Leather Conservation Centre which used to be on the University of Northampton's Park Campus. The consultant had contacted me because I did a short interview on BBC Radio Northampton last year about the empty Hawkins factory in Northampton's Boot & Shoe Quarter. I was able to provide some comments on the history of the leather and footwear industries in Northampton and in particular on the Boot & Shoe Quarter. It will be interesting to see if a permanent home can be found in the county, as the Grosvenor Centre location was clearly unsuitable for the long term.

**17 April** – Email via Jane Waterfield from John Bolton who is studying the Scottish architectural and sanitary ironwork industry. He had purchased a copy of *Edward Harrison Barwell – 19th Century Northampton Ironfounder from NIAG* (copies still available!) and noted that a part of the design for a cast-iron veranda (*Fig 1 below*) by Barwell & Co shown in the book, featured decorative



Fig 1: Barwell & Co 1865 catalogue

ironwork identical to that on a former guest house in Great Yarmouth (*Fig 2 below*) and on a shopfront in Lydney,

ironwork identical to that on a former guest house in Great Yarmouth (*Fig 2 below*) and on a shopfront in Lydney,



of the decorative ironwork on mid-19th century terraces in Great Yarmouth may be by Barwell & Co! I remain to be convinced, but watch this space!

**Ongoing** – Some of you may know that Hugh Howes who lives in Hertfordshire is writing a book on the Mills of Northamptonshire, looking particularly at how flour milling has evolved in companies such as Whitworth Bros and Heygates, such that Northamptonshire is a major centre for the UK flour milling industry today. The book will include other aspects of the county's former water mills. It is planned that NIAG will publish the book and I have been helping Hugh by reading the text and offering comments. I have also helped Hugh with a few areas of research, including building up a picture of six generations of the Hayes family who operated paper mills in the county and elsewhere during the 18th and 19th centuries. During the 1790s Francis Hayes (who became Mayor of Northampton) owned or had a stake in six different paper mills in Northamptonshire. One of these was Rush Mills on the Nene at Hardingstone where his grandson helped the Wise family manufacture the paper for the Penny Black stamps in the 1840s.

There does not seem to be any shortage of things to keep me occupied but let's hope that we can soon begin the journey back to normality, in whatever form that may be.

*Peter Perkins*

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## **WINTER TALKS OF 2019-20 – FINAL**

### **Ten and a half years on Crossrail – 14th February**

As a young graduate civil engineer Steve Brame started working for British Railways; after many years of looking after their tunnel structures he left to work on independent projects such as the Guildhall extensions and Silverstone circuit. In 2007 he returned to Galliford to work on Network Rail's Crossrail project as the Principal Building and Civil Engineer with a team of 20 people. This massive infrastructure project would provide an east-west rail link across London, strictly speaking beneath the City, with a projected capacity of 24 trains-per-hour. Each of the 205m-long trains is expected to carry 1,500 passengers. Nine new stations would be required with modifications required for many others.

The necessary Bill was introduced to Parliament in May 2005 with the Crossrail Act allowing work to start receiving its Royal Assent in July 2008. Starting from Shenfield east of London, the route was originally to terminate at Maidenhead but with the planned electrification of the GWR lines, its western terminus was changed to Reading, a distance of over 60 miles. With extensions to Heathrow and to Abbey Wood south of the Thames the line covers over 72 miles. The initial cost estimate of £15bn included £2.13bn for external work such as converting two-track sections of line to four-track, £3.1bn for asset protection

and £100m for each of the tunnel boring machines, eight of which were used. The last estimate of cost-to-completion (in 2021?) is £18¼ bn.

The first section of track to be laid was on the Stockley Bridge flyover in 2014/15. West of Hayes station is a junction where Heathrow trains leave and join the main Paddington line. Whilst the then existing layout coped with levels of traffic it would become a major bottleneck once the Crossrail trains came into service. A new viaduct was planned to carry the London bound service from Heathrow over all of the lines. The new structure was assembled on site and then, over several weekends, pushed into place over the existing tracks, which was captured on a time-lapse video. Track diagrams and images can be found on <https://www.ianvisits.co.uk/blog/2014/12/20/photos-from-crossrails-huge-stockley-flyover/>.



One of the original Broad Gauge pits © Steve Brame

Old Oak Common has been designated a depot for Crossrail thereby maintaining its position in railway history; the original shed contained four turntables. Crossrail used this site as manufacturing centre for the concrete tunnel segments. Originally the Elizabeth line wasn't going to stop here but with it

appearing in HS2's plans, a new interchange station is required. Steve showed plans for the area with its complex network of lines.

Crossrail's western portal was at Royal Oak. After assembly of two 7.1m diameter tunnel boring machines (TBM), 148m long and weighing some 1000 tonnes, at Westbourne Park, they were taken on special trailers to the large concrete portal box where it took three weeks to 'bury' the machines to start their 6.8 km journey to Farringdon where they arrived some 17 months later. Whilst the cutting heads were left in situ, the rest of the TBM was removed in sections via a shaft in Fisher Street.

Of the seven million tonnes of material excavated from all of the tunnels, some three million tonnes from below the capital was shipped down river to create a wetland nature reserve for the RSPB at Wallasea Island in Essex. All but less than one per-cent of the remaining spoil was used to upgrade other nature reserves,



Standard inspection pit at Paddington New Yard

© Steve Brame

recreational facilities and agricultural land in the South-East.

Two TBMs bored the 2.7 km from the Pudding Mill Lane portal near the Olympic Park to Stepney Green. There, they were dismantled, brought to the surface and then taken by lorry to the project's site at Limmo Peninsula, where they were lowered down a shaft and reassembled. A pair of short tunnels were then bored towards a newly-constructed portal at Victoria Dock. Another pair of TBMs bored two tunnels under the Thames from the Plumstead portal to the North Woolwich portal, where they were dismantled. Meanwhile two TBMs took three years to bore their way the 8.3 km from the Limmo Peninsula to Farringdon where they were dismantled and recovered via the Stepney Green shaft. Only the shields that surrounded the cutting heads were left in situ to form part of the tunnel structure through which trains will pass.

Of particular interest to readers, might be the Connaught Tunnel. In 1846, a new railway line opened between Stratford and Canning Town. A year later, it was extended to North Woolwich on the north bank of the Thames. The North Woolwich Line, as it became known, became part of the North London Line in the 1970s and continued in use until 2006. A notable feature of the North Woolwich stretch was the Silvertown tunnel. Built in 1878, this 600m cut-and-cover tunnel allowed the railway to be diverted under the newly-built Connaught passage which connected the Victoria and Albert docks.

This tunnel is being incorporated into Crossrail's line to Abbey Wood. As their engineers discovered, the roof of the tunnel was part of the dock base so to carry out the strengthening and enlargement works, the dock had to be drained. The two single-track tunnels have been enlarged into a single two-track tunnel. See [http://www.abandonedstations.org.uk/North\\_Woolwich\\_line\\_5.html](http://www.abandonedstations.org.uk/North_Woolwich_line_5.html) for 'before' and 'after' images.

At this point Steve moved on to his speciality – buildings and asset protection. In the majority, if not all, of the surface work-sites, space was at a premium – not only in terms of physical working area but also access for materials.

A new station is being built at Abbey Wood with nine new underground stations being built at Paddington, Bond Street, Tottenham Court Road, Farringdon, Liverpool Street, Whitechapel, Canary Wharf, Custom House and Woolwich; 31 existing stations will be upgraded and refurbished to provide, for example, longer platforms, better ticketing and interchange facilities. Examples of this work was shown with a mix of 'before' and 'after' images. Not only is Paddington getting a new Crossrail station but the mainline station is getting a make-over. On the face of it the latter is simply a new glass canopy on which clouds have been painted over the mainline passenger entrance but, as shown by a short time-lapse video, it is undergoing a major transformation, the first since it was built in 1853, to increase its capacity as a major interchange station for local, regional and international travellers.

Before any construction work started the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) carried out detailed archaeological studies along the route. For example, at Westbourne Park near Paddington they uncovered Brunel's



© Steve Brame

workshops and turntables (*photo left*); in the east a large burial ground was found. The results of all this work can be found on the Crossrail website [www.crossrail.co.uk](http://www.crossrail.co.uk).

A major concern during tunnelling was the safety and integrity of the many old

buildings that stood above the route and sophisticated monitoring systems were installed to continuously monitor buildings for any movement. Such concern wasn't just limited to the underground works.

The Plumstead portal had to be positioned further east than originally intended to accommodate a deeper tunnel elsewhere on the line and to miss utility services. But such a reposition would have had an impact on industrial archaeological remains associated with the Grade II listed former electricity generating station, such as cobbles and railway tracks. In another location the tunnel was only 2 m below a transformer building that supplied 750 V power to the North Kent line and 25 kV power to suburban lines.

*Terry Waterfield*

----oooOooo----

### **Bassett-Lowke's Artwork – 13th March**

A most excellent and interesting talk, supported by an admirable collection of images, was given by Christine Sanderson who is a guide at 78 Derngate. Bassett-Lowke had lived there (1917 to 1927) and commissioned Charles Rennie Mackintosh to re-imagine the property although he never actually visited it.

Christine's talk was different in that it focused on the person and his influence on the industries around Northampton in getting his models and components produced and assembled.

The talk started with the family background and its connection with Northampton. Bassett-Lowke had trained as an architect but his interest or hobby was model engineering. Initially with a friend he got some castings machined and then realised that these could be sold on. The family was fortunate enough to visit the 1900 Paris World Fair where BL, who was about 23, saw and went on to import German models from the likes of Bing and Marklin, slightly revised for the UK market.

Bassett-Lowke was a very personable person and his genius was getting other



people to produce models which he would market. He produced a catalogue as early as 1902, formed Miniature Railways Ltd in 1904, which created 10¼ inch models for estates and even put a small track in Abington Park in 1905. Later he would build the boating pond.

Christine's talk included Loake's work for the ministry during both World Wars making water line ship models, examples of engineering installations, such as Baily Bridges and the Mulberry Harbour, so that troops could be trained before being mobilised for action.

After the Second World War they were producing larger scale ships for the offices of all the major companies and architectural models, such as Coventry, for town

planning.

Christine has done extensive research, which has taken her far afield, to meet families with connections to BL and has produced several booklets which are available from 78 Derngate.

A very good reference book is the Bassett-Lowke Story by Roland Fuller which includes a photographic record of models. An interesting fact is that BL never owned a motor car.

*Mike Ringwood*

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## ARTICLES

### **Remembering when microfilm readers were a novelty?**

*This is a tale which will no doubt bring happy memories of using these machines and comes from Alan Crosby the Editor of The Local Historian, the quarterly magazine from the British Association of Local History. Ed.*

Shortly before Christmas I was doing some research in a certain record office in the East Midlands, while the rain poured down outside and the hills of Derbyshire were shrouded in low cloud. It was serious academic research into local history, which happened to be about my own direct ancestors, so very pleasingly it combined two of my all-consuming interests and was moving as well (to me, even after well over thirty years, it's still emotional to hold a document signed by a forebear three or four hundred years ago)...

Anyway, this was an exercise in nostalgia in other ways, because I wanted to look at a series of land tax returns and they were on MICROFILM. I hadn't used a microfilm reader for several years ... the last time was at Banbury local studies library (aka The Centre for Banburyshire Studies) before the Banbury Guardian was digitised and available online. So I went into the microfilm room

(the only person there during my two-day visit) and sat in front of the infernal machine. It is of course a truth universally acknowledged that any microfilm reader is going to differ in significant ways from every other reader which you've used over the years, and this was no less the case in December.

There was the usual, oh so familiar problem of trying to get the image to be NOT upside down and NOT back to front. Usually, in my extensive experience, the film is wound from left-hand reel to right-hand reel. Here it was the other way round. Then there was the equally familiar challenge of a) making sure the film went into the correct narrow slot in front of the light, so that it would wind through correctly; and b) making sure the loose end of the film was firmly threaded through the slot on the reel. Naturally, the first couple of times it wasn't, so there was that archetypal '*record office circa 1990*' soundtrack of demented whirring and rattling as the reel revolved minus the flapping film.

Eventually, those challenges were overcome. The machine was getting warm, then quite hot, as I began winding on. Foolishly – and how many times have I done this – I pressed the 'fast forward' button and the room was filled with that characteristic eldritch screech of microfilm moving at a thousand feet per second between two glass plates. It screeched to a halt, and I slowly rewound. And of course I mean slowly, since every frame had to be checked before I found the beginning of the section I wanted ... whatever did we do without keyword searches?

So, here was my section – the townships, arranged in alphabetical order, in a particular hundred of Derbyshire. A very familiar visual experience – jerkily moving the film on, as a thick scattering of fluff, dust and other deposits wound across the screen, backed by the text. Scratches and smears, black blobs (what on earth were they?) and feathery fragments drifted from right to left and into oblivion. Constant twiddling of the focus knob more or less succeeded, but it was often necessary to remove my glasses and peer intently at the screen from a distance of two or three inches, before being able to read a particular name or place.

Now, the relevant data having been copied down, came what was always the most exciting part of the whole ritual – pressing the 'fast reverse' button. The whirring grew louder and more manic, the screech more piercing, the tension mounted and then, yes, the film was wound back and the frantic flapping filled the air. I was transported back a quarter of a century, to a time when microfilm readers were so contemporary, and microfiche was still a novelty. I reminisced about noise-filled searchrooms with overheating machines, flickering lights, the constant rattle of reels and slamming of microfilm drawers, and the frequent curses as readers discovered that a film had been rewound the wrong way. Thanks, Derbyshire Record Office, for the memory!

*Local History News 134 Winter 2020 – Alan Crosby: Editor The Local Historian.*

## Old Towcester: Sawpit Green

One of the joys of walking from Waitrose Supermarket towards Meeting Lane in the springtime is passing two mature cherry trees in full flower on an enclosed triangular area of grass. Overlooking these trees is a pleasant row of terraced houses with a datestone above an arch inscribed *The Mews 2001 Sawpit Green*. So how did this area of grass get that name?



© Historic Towcester Survey

It is certainly an old name. When the open fields of Towcester were enclosed in 1763 it was declared that the piece of waste ground on the west side of town containing an acre, or thereabouts, and known by the name *Saw Pitts* should not be enclosed with the common fields but should continue to be used for the benefit of the inhabitants of the town. Over the following centuries the land has been encroached upon as its area is now far less than an acre! This land was owned by the Earl of Pomfret, but in the 18th century inhabitants must have had an ancient right to create saw pits on this land for it to be so protected. Such a right appears to be uncommon as the only

other mentions of *Sawpit Green* that I have come across occur in Runnymede, Addlestone, Wareham, Staunton, Willersley, Tewksbury and Barrowden, but I would suspect there are some others.

If the daffodils are in flower, you will notice that there is one bed of the flowers in a linear hollow. This is where one of the locals had in the past dug out a pit so that the trunk of a tree could be sawn to produce timbers and planks for building purposes. Oaks, and other trees, would be felled in fields and woodlands around the town and trunks and large boughs dragged and carted through the lanes by heavy horses such as Shires to get to this place. If it was an oak tree, the bark would be stripped off and sold to the tanner in the bottom end of the town. He would grind the bark in his water-driven bark mill to add tannin to the liquor in which animal hides were tanned. The resulting leather would be used by cobblers, saddlers and other town tradesmen.

Sawing timber was a two-man job. One of them had to be underneath the log to pull the large saw down whilst the other, standing on top, pulled it up. If underneath, they were in a cramped poorly lit space, with sawdust falling on top of them and collecting around their feet. Very unpleasant! The sawpit therefore had to be wide enough to manoeuvre the log over, have enough space for someone to get down underneath and be deep enough for them to operate the saw. Planks would have been needed to shore up the sides of the pit to prevent

collapse. After use the pits would be filled-in and new ones created when more timber needed to be sawn. In 1829 four 21'0" oak beams, 11" by 12"; 67 joists, 3" by 4½"; two 13'0" elm beams, 8" by 12"; 800 ft of seasoned oak boards, 24 gate posts and 2 oak butts were auctioned at the Saw Pits (*N'pton Mercury 6th June*). It is very likely that these were sawn into shape at the site.

Sawpits were being dug on the Green until at least 1887 as in that year the child of Jonah Jelley had fallen into one (*N'pton Mercury 23rd July*). How early this piece of land was used for this purpose is unknown. Pit sawing is believed to have been introduced in the 16th century so the name is unlikely to date from before then. A sawing yard is recorded in Towcester in 1280; at that time the timbers would have to be sawn by resting split timbers on trestles to saw them into shape. Unfortunately, there is insufficient information to say whether this was on the site of the present Sawpit Green.



Next time you pass by Sawpit Green look out for the hollows in the grass where the filled-in sawpits have compacted and if the season is right you may see the petals from the two cherry trees gently falling into them (*photo left*). Then think of the poor bottom sawyer who would have been there two hundred years ago, sweating as he pulled down the saw, covering himself with sawdust, woodchips

and dirt and looking forward to hours of being cooped up in that hole. Such were the good old days!

*Brian Giggins – Historic Towcester Survey*

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## **Why do we do it?**

There are many times when we sit down to compose a letter to arrange a visit to a museum, house, organisation, etc. in the strong hope that all will progress smoothly to a conclusion which will benefit those who may wish to attend.

The letter or e-mail is composed with as much information that is needed to ascertain whether or not a visit may be viable. Many times these visits incur a cost, some of which may have to be paid 'up-front' to secure the booking. This is understood and we press on and the letter is sent, usually first class which these days costs an arm and a leg, or via the 'send' button on the e-mail facility.

This sounds all too easy and soon turns to irritation when the e-mail, supposedly a 'fast' communication facility, is not answered. A week after the sending of

a letter also turns into a minor irritation when no contact is made – telephone number, address and indeed the e-mail address are all on that letter. Sometimes it has been convenient, or not as the case may be, to ‘drop off’ said communication to the recipient because you happen to be ‘passing’.

After 10 days or so of absolute silence you send a ‘chaser’ or make a phone-call if able. Still no response – but never say die. A bit of gnashing of the teeth you make a third attempt and maybe, just maybe, you finally get through to a person and have a discussion. Everything is always ‘no problem’ at the other end and the person at that other end has no idea that you are probably making faces at the computer or drumming your fingers on the desk/table.

So you get a form – another source of irritation since these forms are usually one word answer, and no-where to actually state what it is you want. However you press on in the hope that this part of the exercise will actually reap some reward. This is either sent back via the e-mail system or put back in the post, or even returned when you make another trapeze to the venue to ensure that the envelope actually ends up where you want it to. At least you know you have put it in the letter box – what happens to it after that is in the lap of the gods!

Another wait of at least a week and you start to think: did you fill the form in correctly, did you put the right date on it for the visit, had you completed all their requirements, the list goes on. Confirmation would be given, you are assured on the form. The wait continues.

When you least expect it, the phone goes and you are caught off guard because you do not have the information to hand when you realise it is the person who has been dealing with the request but who has not had the courtesy to respond to any e-mails or letters. More often than not the question raised is not the one you are expecting, i.e. confirmation of the date of visit and indeed time. So you muddle through more often than not at cross purposes until Eureka, all becomes clear.

If there is a cost involved anywhere along the line then you anxiously wait for the invoice and hope that you have costed this right and that the deposit can be sent. In many cases the deposit has to be made with the booking and if there is no contact from the other end, you don’t have a clue as to whether the cheque has been lost in the post, mislaid at the other end or stuck in a system somewhere as can happen with museums who seem to have one section for receipt of mail which then never arrives at the appropriate department because somewhere along the line it’s got lost in the internal system. This also applies to letters! One important factor with museums in particular is that nearly all the staff are part-time and you never ever know when the person you are supposed to be dealing with is actually in the office and don’t let’s think about the actual hours of work. Murphys law is that most of the staff are either ‘off, not in the office, just gone home (answerphone) or haven’t arrived’ and it’s ‘I’ll get her/

him to contact you' and once again it's name and number when you have given this out dozens of times already. By now you are slowly crawling up that wall. So why do we do it? A really difficult question to answer.

Perhaps we do this because, in the hope that the visit may be of interest, members might like to come along and see something which the normal public visitors would not see, in other words 'behind the scenes'. It does not always work and we have had some real bums in the past – on the other hand we have also had some really smashing visits which have always gone well over the allotted visit time.

It is also worth noting that in many instances those people with whom you are attempting to make arrangements to visit actually do not necessarily understand the needs of specialist groups. In our case this leads to further frustration as it seems they cannot see past the Archaeology bit of our name and also can't seem to think that maybe, just maybe, we are interested in other aspects of our rich heritage. The general attitude seems to be 'this is what we do so like it or lump it!' Nor do they understand that we do not want the run of the mill visit, rather we are looking for that extra bit, the bit that the general visitor does not see.

Communication, or lack of it, is what makes or breaks these requests for visits. Today in spite of the so-called revolution in 'fast' computerised communication, it does not exist. Those of us who went to college to learn our chosen career despair at the total inability to acknowledge any kind of communication and those who fail to acknowledge just do not understand why the author of said communication in the first instance starts getting irritated to the point of 'calling the whole thing off'.

However, we doggedly persist in the hope that the visit will be finally arranged. Status Quo restored when it is and relief that for the time being all is well until, that is, the next time!

So think of us when you get your next summer programme that someone is attempting to arrange something for you to enjoy and the hoops that we sometimes have to go through in order to arrange that visit.

*Jane Waterfield – Editor*

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## **GT Law, Towcester**

Last September, Brian Giggins from Towcester sent me a note to say that a planning application had been submitted to South Northants Council concerning proposed changes to the roof of a workshop which was the former premises of shoe manufacturer GT Law, at 174 Watling Street Towcester. Towcester History Society were not objecting to the changes but suggested that that the building be recorded before any changes were made, which seemed to me the sensible suggestion. I understand that a building recording survey has already been

carried out but the report on it is not yet available. This prompted me to review what we know about GT Law.

It so happens that NIAG visited GT Law in Towcester in December 1970 and a record of that visit, written by Richard O'Rourke, appeared in *CBA Newsletter in Group 9*, No 15, January 1971, p8. This is available to download in pdf format from the Council for British Archaeology (South Midlands) website: <http://www.archaeologyuk.org/cbasml/Journal.htm>

About the company, Richard O' Rourke wrote: '*The founder of the company, Mr. G.T. Law was in the first decade of this century, an accomplished athlete, and being dissatisfied with the track shoes currently available he decided to make his own. Certain of his friends also asked to have shoes made, and this persuaded him to set up a workshop for their manufacture in Wimbledon, some years before the First World War. Running shoes, road walking shoes and rugby boots were produced here until 1940 when the area was bombed and he decided to move to Towcester to live. About 1946 he started manufacturing here, but his son continued at Wimbledon, keeping the retail shop and workshop there. This arrangement survives today (i.e. December 1970) except that the son, Mr. C.W. Law, took over control on his father's death.*'

Richard took a number of photos in the Towcester workshop during the visit which show the clicking (cutting of the upper leather components), closing (stitching these together) and lasting operations but strangely none of the building in which it was done, suggesting perhaps that the workshop itself was unremarkable. It was a single-storey building with a north rooflight (the above planning application refers to replacing the rooflight).

The website for auction house Christies records the sale in 2015 for £266,500 of a pair of English black kangaroo leather running shoes produced in 1954, by Charles Law of *G.T. Law and Son* of Wimbledon Park, Surrey. Each shoe had six spikes to the sole and the label attached to the tongue indicated they were made by *G.T. Law and Son*. They had been worn by Sir Roger Bannister when he broke the record for the four-minute mile in 3 min 59.4 seconds on 6th May 1954. The shoes were 10½ inches long and weighed 4½ oz. There was an accompanying letter of provenance signed by Sir Roger Bannister and a letter written by Eustace Thomas to Sir Roger prior to the race denoting 'the lightness' of the shoes made by Law and Son.

Towcester History Society suggested in their comments on the above planning application that Bannister's running shoes may have been partly manufactured in the Towcester workshop in 1954. However, as Charles Law was based in Wimbledon, it seems more likely they were entirely made in Wimbledon.

Number 174 Watling Street Towcester is listed Grade II but the reason for listing can be attributed to the house facing onto Watling Street, described as '*early 19th century probably with 16th/17th century origins*', rather than the workshop, described in the listing details as a '*1-storey rubblestone extension.*'

It is not clear when GT Law closed their small shoe factory in Towcester but it was probably not too long after NIAG's visit in 1970.

Peter Perkins

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## UPDATES

### Wellingborough Roundhouse

The Wellingborough Roundhouse, a notable railway landmark, has come a step closer to being saved from unauthorised demolition after councillors voted to list it locally. In January, Wellingborough Civic Society members highlighted the fate of the large red-brick Wellingborough Roundhouse, fearing that the building might be knocked down.



© Ron Whittaker 2020

During February Wellingborough Council development committee members voted unanimously to locally list the roundhouse, meaning planning

permission would have to be sought to demolish the building. Bob Townson, Wellingborough Civic Society committee member and campaigner, said: *"I feel a lot better now I know that the council have taken it on board. I'm happier now they can't pull it down but I think that Bovis [part of the developer Vistry Group] was a bit annoyed. I think they were going to pull it down. A couple of councillors have suggested ideas for the roundhouse to make it into a conference centre or maybe convert it into flats."* The roundhouse sits on land which is part of the Stanton Cross development.

*Evening Telegraph – 27th February 2020*

*I have been given more information on this building which will feature in the next issue.*  
Ed

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## MISCELLANY OF ITEMS OF INTEREST

### HS2 uncovers Stephenson's roundhouse

A railway roundhouse designed by Robert Stephenson, the Victorian builder of the steam locomotive *Rocket*, and said to be the oldest building of its kind has been found in Birmingham. Archaeologists working on the HS2 high-speed rail link uncovered extensive remains of the roundhouse at Curzon Street station. It was in use from November 1837, predating the oldest roundhouse still intact in Derby by two years.

The open-roofed 124ft-diameter building was next to the first rail terminus serving the centre of Birmingham. A 15ft turntable inside was used to turn railway engines, as they could not reverse, and manoeuvre them into bays in

which they could be stored or serviced.

Stephenson was only 34 at the time of its completion and chief engineer for the London-Birmingham Railway line, which would transport passengers the 112 miles between the cities in five and a half hours. Its counterpart at the southern terminus, built ten years later, is the Roundhouse venue in Chalk Farm, north London.

A new HS2 terminal could open on the Curzon Street site in 2026 – the journey to London will take 45 minutes. HS2 said that excavators would record the site and determine whether the remains could be preserved in situ.

*The Times – 12th March 2020*

### **John Shrapnel, actor. Connection to the exploding cannonball.**

An ancestor of John Shrapnel, an actor who died in March, General Henry Shrapnel (1761-1842) invented an exploding cannonball, giving his name to the shards of metal produced by an exploding shell. Apparently the connection was not lost on *The Times* readers when the TMS diary noted in May 2017 that John Shrapnel was narrating a BBC documentary about Britain's nuclear bombs.

*The Times – 12th March 2020*

### **Ancient pathways that were lost**

When the Ramblers launched its *Don't Lose Your Way* (DLYW) campaign earlier this year, there were thought to be around 10,000 miles of historic paths missing from official maps. However, the outdoor pursuits charity has now identified 30,500 miles of rights of way, and there are likely to be more. The campaign seeks to put paths that were not recorded on 'definitive' maps, drawn up between the 1950s and 70s, back on the map ahead of a government cut-off date of 2026, after which they can no longer be added.

So far 3,000 people have joined the campaign, and the Ramblers are calling for as many volunteers as possible to join the search. "*Most paths were lost by mistake*" explains the DLYW's programme manager. "*Maybe a route wasn't walked at the time so didn't get recorded. Sometimes one parish recorded a path but another forgot, so it stops abrupt at a parish boundary. But if they aren't added to the map, they will disappear for good.*"

The Ramblers has a clever online mapping tool, which divides the country into 15,000 one-kilometre squares. There's a current Ordnance Survey map, plus one from 120 years ago, together with a 'slider' which enables you to peel back the years. "*If you spot an old footpath, lane or bridleway not on the present-day map, you can draw it in. The next step is to prove it used to be a public right of way and still is. We'll help people research and apply to get it approved. We've mapped the entire Isle of Wight and almost the whole of Somerset, Derbyshire and Hampshire. But there are areas with more lost paths such as in Herefordshire and North Yorkshire. People are needed to help identify these before the deadline*" the programme manager says.

Some lost rights of way are still in use, while others have vanished from view.

Hints, such as an old stone stile that leads nowhere can be a clue as well as sunken lanes – called hollow ways – dips in the landscape signifying tracks worn down by centuries of tramping feet or hooves, or lines of trees or hawthorn hedging meandering across a field, suggesting the boundary of a path or road. One does not need to be a walker or hiker to get involved, participants include map lovers, people interested in history, wildlife enthusiasts and supporters of the national landscape.

The public rights of way are a great national asset, connecting us to nature and to our rural and urban past. Putting lost paths back on the map will create a better network for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. There are paths going back millennia that reveal how our ancestors interact with the landscape over centuries. One they are gone, they're gone. It is vital for us to preserve them.

*Waitrose's Weekend Paper – 26th March 2020*

### **Slate capital of Wales – UNESCO status**

A landscape in Wales which once provided a third of all slate used for buildings across the globe has been nominated for world heritage status. The so-called Slate Landscape of Snowdonia could be ranked alongside other UNESCO sites such as Stonehenge, the Grand Canyon and the Great Wall of China. The slate mines and quarries of the area *roofed the world* in the 18th and 19th centuries. Slate has been quarried in North Wales for more than 1,800 years but it was



Mine working remains at Blaenau Festiniog

not until the Industrial Revolution that demand surged. By the 1890s around 17,000 people were employed in the industry, mining 485,000 tons of slate a year.

The landscape includes seven quarries and mines around communities such as Blaenau Ffestiniog and Bethesda. Some quarries still operate. If successful, the Slate Landscape will become the UK's 33rd UNESCO World Heritage Site, the fourth in Wales.

Welsh heritage minister Helen

Whately hailed *the incredible slate landscape* after submitting a formal nomination. The site will be reviewed by experts before being considered at a UNESCO committee meeting in 2021.

*Daily Mail – 24th January 2020*

### **Leighton Buzzard Railway extension**

Laying of the Leighton Buzzard Railway's half-mile extension began as the line celebrated its centenary. After delays caused by a struggle to appoint

an earthworks contractor, the work began in earnest prior to the October 5/6th steam gala. There was an urgent need to get the main line connected to Stonehenge Works yard, the former layout having being removed to allow



earthworks to take place. Because of the approaching gala, the contractor was to complete all his work on the first 110 yards of track bed with the exception of laying ballast. Laying in the crossover, trap points and associated plain line, plus one temporary and one permanent point level, as well as dropping around 50 tonnes of ballast and some packing work was completed by the end of 16th September. This meant the layout was available for trains to run over it. Spring should see the line ready for testing and training and the target is to have the work

completed in mid-2020, with regular passenger operation over it from 2021. The extension will also provide around 450 yards of double track, which is rare on 2ft gauge lines. Much of the work has been carried out by a team of up to seven volunteers, aided by the bigger Monday Track Gang when not needed to keep the existing line in good repair. [NIAG visited in 2017 resport issue 142 p.11]

*Heritage Railway Magazine - October 2019*

### **Darlington's prized steam engine**

For 163 years the world's first passenger steam engine has been *the jewel in the crown* of Darlington's railway heritage. Now the town has rounded on the National Railway Museum (NRM), owners of Locomotion No 1, after it revealed plans to uproot the engine and make it the centrepiece of a £4.5million revamped exhibition in Shildon, near by. Darlington has accused the Science Museums Group (SMG), of which the NRM is a part, of *cultural vandalism* amid claims that it belongs to the town – the engine features on its coat of arms and on Darlington FC's shirt badge. Locomotion No 1 has been owned by SMG since 1968 and is on loan to Darlington until March 2021.

The town has launched a campaign to keep the artefact, with rail enthusiast and cross-party politicians joining the fray. They say that with the 200th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 2025 and plans for a new rail heritage quarter in Darlington, the loss would be a *major blow*.

The leader of the council says: "*This is something people will be horrified about. She wishes to send a clear message that the council will leave no stone unturned in their quest to keep Locomotion No 1 in Darlington.*" The MP for Darlington has also waded into the affray and almost echoes what the council is saying.

Locally it has been pointed out that Joseph Pease, who paid £50 to restore the

engine when it reached the end of its working life more than a century ago, wanted it to be displayed in Darlington. His great-great-great-grandson says: *“that for the past 163 years each of these organisations has respected Joseph Pease’s intention.”*

The NRM, however, argues that Locomotion No 1 began its journey in Shildon, which is also *the birthplace of the modern passenger railway*. It plans to double the size of its Locomotion museum at Shildon before the bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. In a statement the NRM said: *“A £4.5million plan will see the construction of a new, 4,000 sq.m Building Two, close to the existing visitor centre, which will almost double the amount of covered space available to the public. The building will house up to 40 vehicles from the national collection, bringing the total number of rail vehicles at Locomotion to more than 10.”* Construction is due to start in October next year and the building to open in September 2022.

A spokesman said that loan agreements were common between museums and that the NRM group had more than 2,000 loans at any one time. Loan periods are typically for three to five years. The loan agreement for Locomotion No 1 was signed in 2016. Sir Peter Hendy, chairman of Network Rail and an SMG trustee, said: *“As we head towards once-in-a-lifetime anniversaries, the development of Building Two and the homecoming of Locomotion No 1 will give the museum even more opportunities to put the heritage of Shildon on the map.”*

Locomotion No1 *retired* from railway service in 1841 and in 1850 was sold to Pease’s West Durham colliery, where it powered a water pump. By 1856 its working life was finally over and proposals were made for it to be auctioned, but its historical importance was appreciated and it was restored to working order. It formed part of the 50th Jubilee celebrations of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1875 and, after travelling around various exhibitions at home and abroad, returned there.

*The Times – 24th January 2020*

*In 1975 the NRM was founded which makes the claim by the g.g.g.grandson ‘that for the past 163 years each of these organisations has respected Joseph Pease’s intention’ to be worthless, since the NRM had not even been founded back in 1856 when Locomotion No 1 finally stopped working! The Science Museum (SMG) operates as a charity group and was founded in 1988, it also has a wholly owned subsidiary trading company, NMSI Trading Limited. In 2017 Locomotion, The National Railway Museum at Shildon, became part of the Science Museum Group.*

*The term National Museum of Science and Industry had been in use as the Science Museum’s subtitle since the early 1920s. The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum is the corporate body of SMG and was established under the National Heritage Act (1983) for the purpose of general management of the group. Prior to 1st April 2012 the group was known as the National Museum of Science and Industry (NMSI).*

*The National Railway Museum was established as a result of the transfer of the British Transport Commission’s railway collection to the Board of Trustees of the Science*

*Museum. Information taken from Wikipedia. Ed.*

### **Waverley Paddle Steamer starts £2.3million boiler refit**

The historic paddle steamer Waverley left Glasgow in January, under tow to Greenock, for the start of her £2.3 million boiler refit. The funds were raised in around seven months, with donations from more than 8,000 members of the public and £1m from the Scottish Government. The work is expected to take around four months.

*AIA e-newsletter April 2020*

### **Stockport Hat Works restoration underway**

The Stockport Hat Works Museum, which celebrates the town's important felt hat industry, is embarking on some exciting changes to create a more sustainable future. The redevelopment is restoring 30 hatting machines and their associated line shafting, create a vibrant space for visitors, with better interpretation, new learning facilities, and will put more of its collection on display. This work was funded in part by a grant of over £16,000 from the AIA Restoration Grants scheme. The museum is closed whilst this work takes place but is due to reopen in Spring 2021.

*AIA e-newsletter – April 2020*

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## **NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTY**

### **AIA Creative Re-use Award 2019 – Engine Shed, Northampton**

This year's award was presented by the President, Marilyn Palmer, together with Chris Barney, Editor of IA News, to the Engine Shed in the University of Northampton on 5th February 2020. Receiving the award were Simon Badcock, the Project Manager, Estates and Campus Services, and Kathryn Students'



Union Vice President Welfare. (*photo left*)

The University of Northampton has developed a splendidly spacious new Waterside Campus which opened to students in September 2018. Surviving on this site, amongst its new state-of-the-art campus buildings, was a former railway engine shed and office

which have become the headquarters for the Students' Union on the Campus. The brick-built engine shed of 1872 was situated at Hardingstone Junction, where the Midland Railway's Northampton (St Johns) to Bedford railway line met and crossed the London and North-Western Railway's Blisworth to Peterborough line. The area adjoins the River Nene and had been developed as an industrial site. The building ceased to be used as an engine shed in the early

1920s\* and then remained empty for a long time but in the 1960s became a welding school used by British Railways. This closed in 1998, and the shed was then the victim of an arson attack in 2000, which destroyed a large portion of the roof at the western end of the building. It then became very derelict and covered in vegetation, as the various excellent display boards around the building show. With the help of Heritage Lottery Funding, the engine shed has been restored



back to its original state externally, complete with lantern roof: some of the original trusses are still there. It now houses the HQ of the Students' Union on the campus, with a café, games area and meeting spaces in a two storey 'pod' at the far end. Here there are glass doors to some rooms, engraved on which are various old images of the railway, maps, etc which are an innovative reminder of the origins of the building. The small office not faraway now serves as the student post room, and a section of railway line has been installed between this and the main

shed. The original inspection pits were uncovered during the refurbishment but after recording they are once again hidden beneath the floor. The building therefore provides a number of ways of giving new generations of students an understanding of the heritage of the site. The Engine Shed is also open to the public as a café 9am-5pm Monday to Friday.

*Marilyn Palmer*

*\* I am reliably informed by a local source that his father was based there from 1937 and that the shed was still operational until the 1960s. Ed.*

### **GT Hawkins, Overstone Road, Northampton – a possible lifeline**

A derelict factory in Northampton's Boot and Shoe district has been listed for sale online as space for 48 flats. The former GT Hawkins factory in Overstone Road was once one of the UK's major suppliers of climbing and military boots. But while its rivals like Tricker's and Crocket & Jones have continued manufacturing in the town, the factory in The Mounts shut down in 2000.

Now the three-storey factory – which still has its royal warrant displayed at the corner of St Michael's Road – has been listed for sale for £2.5 million and recommended as space for 48 flats. The Victorian factory, which was originally built in about 1880, has been left unloved in the past two decades. The new listing comes with plans to redevelop the factory into some 48 flats – but does not come with planning permission. In fact, the Hawkins building has been considered for planning applications several times in the past 20 years but these have never come to fruition.

*Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 26th March 2020*

## **The Racecourse, Northampton**

An historic building on The Racecourse in Northampton could receive a new lease of life thanks to creative students from the town's university. The white-rendered building, which dates back to the early 19th century and was used as an armoury during the Second World War, currently stores equipment used for the park's upkeep. It is now being earmarked as an ideal building to be converted into a community facility, and plans for its redevelopment could be included in the Semilong and Trinity Neighbourhood Plan.

Students were tasked on the University of Northampton's interior architecture and spatial design course to come up with concepts for it. Ten undergraduates rose to the challenge, and came up with a variety of alternative uses for the building, including a submerged theatre with outdoor stage; a community kitchen and ecology centre; a drug rehabilitation centre; an educational wildlife centre and a venue for art and wood workshops.

*Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 2nd April 2020*

## **And in these crisis times:**

### **Phipps NBC**

News is that Aleric Neville (*photo left*) has fired up his cooking vats again in order to keep up with the demand for its bottled beer. Locked up since the outbreak of coronavirus became serious, the team is now working hard to brew the beer which has seen a five-fold increase in its sales of bottled beer since the crisis began back in March.

*Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 23rd April 2020*



### **Tricker's hopes for getting back on its feet**

The boss at Tricker's hopes the shoe industry will get back to business soon after closing its Northampton factory for the first time in its 191-year history. England's oldest shoemaker carried on through both World Wars but was forced to stop its shoe production and close its shops in March. The MD said that it was purely for health and

safety reasons as social distancing in a factory is difficult as it's a hot and busy place and not something that he wished to put his staff through.

The company was founded in Northampton in 1829 by Joseph Tricker and has been making shoes at its St Michael's Road factory since 1904. During both World Wars, the firm made boots for British Army soldiers but the current crisis has put a temporary stop to production. They are still taking online orders but has furloughed most of its workforce after the shops in Northampton, London and Tokyo closed on the 20th March.

*Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 30th April 2020*

### **Formula One breathing aids helping to save lives**

Breathing aids made in Mercedes' Formula One factory at Brixworth are now helping save Covid-19 patients' lives at Northampton General Hospital. Engineers from the Mercedes-AMG Grand Prix team first sat down with University College, London medics to start developing the device on March 18th. They then turned over their production facility in Brixworth to manufacture a ventilator designed to keep patients out of intensive care. About 40 machines are now pumping out 1,000 devices a day for the NHS.

*Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 30th April 2020*

### **Carlsberg donates alcohol to help make sanitiser**

The Carlsberg factory in Northampton donating alcohol to help manufacture hand sanitizer is one of the ways the brewery has been helping others during the virus crisis.

*Northampton Chronicle & Echo – 7th May 2020*

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## **OF THIS AND THAT**

### **Book Review:**

*Northampton in 50 buildings* by Lorna Talbot, published in 2020 by Amberley Publishing (ISBN 978-1445695136); price £14.99

As its name might indicate, this book lists a selection of buildings in and around Northampton town centre and tells their story to demonstrate some of the architectural heritage of Northampton. It is one of a new series of books covering a variety of towns and cities in the UK. The introduction is a potted history of the town and the reader is left to determine the order in which the buildings have been presented (they are in order of construction date). A map is provided of the area covered and each building is indicated by an identifying number which refers to a key on the following page. However, as the listing is in construction date order, this could not be said to help when touring the buildings. Each of the buildings described is accompanied by a number of photographs (many unseen before) but no photographers are credited.

The text is written in a readable, 'matter-of-fact' style but provides little context. For example, I would have liked to know why such a flamboyant edifice as City Building (at the junction of Fish Street and The Ridings) was built in splendid isolation some distance behind the town's main shopping thoroughfare. Talking of which, your reviewer wondered why the Northampton Co-operative Society building (of 1938) failed to make the grade as it's the most prominent building in Abington Street but then I do have a greater interest in art deco architecture. The Welsh House gets a description but no further knowledge is provided about the Welsh inscription on its façade; and the building is quite difficult to identify in the associated picture of the market place.

While it can be considered a useful book to have in one's reference library, the main gripe for your reviewer is a lack of attention to detail. This reviewer formed the impression that much of the work is borrowed from computer surfing but when the author is left to her own devices, errors have crept in. For example, in the piece on Delapr  Abbey, the author is aware that the 'e' in Delapr  should have an accent but throughout the piece (and in the map key), the accent is the wrong way round; I guess we should be grateful for consistency. Also, the description for the Gibraltar Barracks of 1797 tells us it is in Barracks (sic) Road; however, further along, the Cathedral seems to be in Barrack Road. Are these the same street? The introduction bemoans the fact that in spite of having a cathedral, the county town has never been granted city status. The author seems to overlook the fact that the presence of a Roman Catholic cathedral has never been a criterion for city status.

In spite of these and other faults, the book is a collection of useful information in a handy paperback.

*Reviewed by member Trevor Haynes*

### **Facts to make you think.**

*I came across this sheet of facts and unfortunately cannot give a reference as I forgot to note from which magazine I had torn the sheet! Ed*

#### All to do with the month of October

- On October 12th 1999, the population of the world reached six billion with more than one-third living in China and India.
- The October Revolution in Russia in 1917 actually took place in November. At the time however, it was October in Russia, since they had not yet changed from the Julian calendar.
- The first manned balloon flight took place on October 15th 1783 in a Montgolfier hot-air balloon in Paris.
- Fletcher Christian, who led the Bounty mutiny in 1789, named his first son Thursday October Christian...because he was born on a Thursday in October.
- The Battle of Hastings took place on October 14th, 1066.

#### Trivia

- Records show that in 1999, over 3,000 people were hospitalised after tripping over a laundry basket.
- Welsh for jellyfish is *sglefren f r* – which translates as sea skater!
- London has more Indian restaurants than either Mumbai or Delhi.
- Some species of bamboo can grow 91cm in 24 hours – that is a rate of almost 4cm an hour, or 1mm every 90 seconds!
- The dark region on the north pole of Pluto's moon Charon, is called Mordor. (*Lord of the Rings* fans)
- Your brain generates about 12-25 watts of electricity - enough to power

a low-wattage LED light.

- Egyptians were the first to use dog collars – often with spikes on them to protect their beloved pooch from wolf attacks.
- *The sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep's sick* is said to be the toughest tongue-twister in the English language.

**Brewerypedia** is the database of the Brewery History Society; it is searchable by company names and by town and country. This is a useful tool for local history. It is easy to trawl through and lists all the known brewers in the country. [breweryhistory.com/wiki](http://breweryhistory.com/wiki) will take you to the relevant site.

### **The rules when a monarch dies**

When a monarch dies, their serving Lord Chamberlain (currently Earl Peel) is meant to snap his ceremonial wand of office in half over their grave. But our wonderful 'waste not' monarch has approved a wand that can be unscrewed into two halves and reassembled. The idea came from the cues in the billiard room at Sandringham.

*Daily Mail – 25th February 2020*

### **Anniversaries:**

April 2020 saw the 250th Anniversary of William Wordsworth's birth whose poem *I wandered lonely as a cloud* still resonates today.

### **New Book**

The Institute of Historical Research has announced the publication of a new book about British Railways and the Great War.

Title: *Civilian Specialists at War: Britain's Transport Experts and the First World War.*

Author: Christopher Phillips

Publisher: University of London Press

Cost: Not known

A PDF version can be downloaded for free and could be of interest to members. [https://humanities-digital-library.org/index.php/hdl/catalog/book/civilian\\_specialists](https://humanities-digital-library.org/index.php/hdl/catalog/book/civilian_specialists).

Thank you to David Waller for this piece of information.

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**Correction:** *The A5 slip accompanying the last issue refers. The poem quoted regarding Wuhan came from the Daily Express newspaper not the Daily Mail.*

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## And Finally:

### Keep your distance

Feedback (New Scientist) has always been fond of unusual systems of measurement. Planet weights measured in African elephants, sleeping bags twice the size of Wales, that kind of thing. Trouble is, the same units crop up time and time again. That's why they have been pleased to see the social distancing guidelines providing fodder for a new generation of bizarre units.

In Toronto, people are encouraged to stand one hockey stick apart, while in Colorado they are urged to use either a pair of skis or a refrigerator. Leon county in Florida explains that 2 metres corresponds to the length of an alligator, while residents of the Yukon were given it in caribou. The favourite, though, has to be the poster from Guatemala that apparently measures the distance out in tapirs.

*New Scientist – Feedback page – 25th April 2020*

And then there is the **Exterminate covid-19** story from the same magazine

The question is asked '*Is there anyone in the universe who hasn't heard about the coronavirus pandemic?*' If goings-on in the North Yorkshire village of Robin Hood's Bay are anything to go by, apparently not.

One resident filmed a health and safety announcement being broadcast from a motorised vehicle doing the rounds of the village. Not just any motorised vehicle though, but a Dalek. "*By order of the Daleks,*" it screeched, "*all humans must stay indoors, all humans must self-isolate.*"

If the most nefarious Dr Who villains ever are looking out for our well-being, things must be grim.

*And I don't normally read The New Scientist. Ed.*

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## Coming Up:

White Gold – Salt

Grape Britain

The rebuilding of Britain after the Second World War

Plus the usual topics

**As we go to print : please note:**

### **Heritage Day – September 2020**

With the continuing uncertainty and prevarication by various Government departments regarding when museums, cafés and all ‘non-essential’ sites may open and with no communication from the organiser about the above Heritage Day, in spite of sending e-mails (see my article on Why Do We Do It?), I personally have taken the decision not to take part in this year’s event. The Heritage Day involves close proximity to the public when talking about NIAG and for them to look at our publicity boards and indeed publications and maybe to pick up one or two bargains from the sale of books which are always a winner. This is certainly a sorry state of affairs but it is with regret that I have made this decision. Social distancing is not possible with this kind of event. The situation is not of our making and clarity and assurance needs to be given before we go ahead in the future.

### **Heritage of Industry : AIA Events:**

I have heard from the Organiser of all the Heritage Trips that he has postponed all the trips until next year. He, too, is concerned about the willingness of customers to join group tours, with all that entails, this year. All who have booked on these trips will be kept on the lists and informed when further arrangements have been made.

To put it mildly – Not a happy time.

**Jane W – Editor**

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## Newsletter

Next Issue: **October 2020**

Deadline for all articles and information 1st September 2020.

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 are encouraged to illustrate all articles and will be inserted if submitted. The Editor will be happy to discuss the author's requirements.

Please submit by e-mail or mail. Photographs/slides/diagrams sent by first class post will be returned to you the same way. Illustrations submitted via e-mail should be sent as separate attachments to text; they should be in one of the standard formats (JPEG, TIFF, SVG, etc), and images must be at least 2.2 megapixels in dimension. Please give information about the photograph, e.g. a caption and date. Please also include your name so that you can be credited with taking the photographs.