NORTHAMPTONSHIRE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 168 – October 2023

Northamptonshire Industrial Archaeology Group

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Next issue: JANUARY 2024 for which all copy must be received by **8 December 2023** please.

Articles: around 1200 words please and accompanied by good quality photographs/drawings, etc. where possible. Shorter items always welcome – from one photo with caption upwards – if in doubt please contact the editor who will do his level best to talk you into becoming a contributor!

Front cover illustration: *Thomas E. Gray Ltd.'s Barton Seagrave quarry and 2' gauge tramway in Jan.1981 (see article p. 26 this issue) © Roy Sheffield*

News, reviews, information.....

Hercules retired

A once reasonably common sight in UK skies flew in RAF service for the last time in mid-June 2023. The Lockheed-built, C130 military transport fleet of the RAF was withdrawn having been replaced by a European jointly designed and built alternative, the A400M Atlas. Lockheed built over 2,300 of its Hercules marque, the first of which went into service in 1956, and they have been employed subsequently by most of the western world's military operators. The plane is renowned for its reliability and flying capabilities, often able to get into difficult landing strips with ease and as such is appreciated by flight crews and maintenance engineers in equal measure.

One correspondent, at least, has a much lower estimation of the Atlas, opining it to be decades late in its arrival, very unreliable, vastly over-priced and, whilst able to carry a greater payload, will be no substitute for the Hercules. It seems that joint-European ventures often bear this burden – the bloc seems to always believe that 'it might work this time'!

Major fire at Underfall Yard in Bristol

Members will be dismayed to learn of a conflagration at the above site in May 2023 which severely damaged the main shed, destroyed several boats and caused serious disruption to the businesses based there. Arson is suspected and an arrest has been made. The workshops at Underfall Yard were built in the 1880s to house all the various tradespeople who maintained Bristol's docks, including plumbers, electricians, blacksmiths, divers, engineers, fitters and shipwrights. It was restored with the aid of Lottery funding and re-opened in 2016 to provide a home for several modern marine businesses, as well as a visitor centre and café. The Underfall Yard Trust has launched an appeal for funds to help with rebuilding work and the café and visitor centre have now re-opened.

Andrew Blayney, the very enthusiastic Heritage Manager there, gave NIAG a Zoom talk in April 2021 **(Information courtesy of AIA Bulletin for July 2023)**

More titles from Cafe Royal Books

The excellent Cafe Royal Books catalogue has again been swelled by a couple of volumes of possible interest to IAers, namely:-

Miners 1974 and

London Liverpool Hull Docks 1970s

The Miners 1974 title I can personally vouch for with the proviso that, like most of this publisher's titles, it could have been improved by the provision of captions to the photos. That said, the photographs speak for themselves to a large extent and I would be fairly confident that the same applies to the **London Liverpool Hull Docks 1970s** volume. Both volumes mentioned contain solely monochrome photographs – photography at its best, in my humble opinion!

https://www.caferoyalbooks.com/ for more details and ordering

Arts and crafts at Sudbury Gas Works

A goodly number of NIAG members travelled to Sudbury Hall gasworks for the June 2023 EMIAC and were treated to a very well organised day of speakers and

ensuing guided walk. Much of the content centred on the work of George Devey, a very successful architect in the second half of the nineteenth century, specialising to a large extent in work on and in country houses and their estates. One speaker at EMIAC spoke at some, interesting, length on Devey including on his connection with the arts and crafts doyen, C.F.A. Voysey. The latter worked in Devey's architectural practice for two years, 1880-1881, after which he set up his own practice and later diversified into other aspects of design work. However, Devey recognised Voysey's innate talent and, having purchased a plot of land adjacent to one of his clients' estates in Northamptonshire tasked Voysey with building a pair of cottages there. Voysey had to carry out all the design work, source the materials, organise the labour and the 1,001 other jobs involved in such a project and complete the whole job on a budget of £500. This he did, living on site during the building process BUT, to date, no record has come to light as to where this plot was and whether the cottages still stand. Peter Perkins and myself have been trying to track down these elusive buildings, so far without result but, by one of those utterly fortuitous coincidences, the 1881 census occurred in the middle of Voysey's stay in the county and he was turned up, lodging with a bricklayer, in Sandy Lane, Harpole on the night in question! Imagination runs riot in such circumstance, of course, and attention turned to Althorp House or possibly, Holdenby House, even Castle Ashby House none more than a brisk trot away from Harpole. So, if any member has any suggestions as to likely candidates for these cottages Peter and/or myself would be very interested to hear of them.....please!

An IA site re-purposed

Just over the county border into Buckinghamshire, east of Olney, the route of the former Northampton to Bedford railway crosses the valley of the River Great Ouse, naturally enough on an embankment. In this embankment stands a four-arch viaduct with no watercourse beneath. This is still marked on the Ordnance Survey Explorer map as 'Flood bridge' and still performs the role it was built for, to carry the Ouse's flood water past the obstruction to its course caused by the self-same railway embankment.

The embankment and associated flood bridge stand on land currently, and for some time, owned by David Pibworth. In the early 2010s he and his wife took it on themselves to clear away the brambles and assorted detritus hiding the mini-viaduct and realised almost immediately that the site would make a superb outdoor performance space! In August 2018 they organised one performance (of the Bard's 'As You Like It') which sold out. 2019 saw two productions and, pandemic notwithstanding, the enterprise has progressed from there, completely self-funded. The Arches Theatre company was under way and now puts on an eclectic programme of music and theatre under the arches, so to speak, between July and September – the arches have prior commitments at other times, namely the release of flood water! For the same reason there are no permanent structures on the site and audiences need to take their own seats with them. Good-ish

Olney flood bridge on a damp-ish day pre-1962

access roads and plentiful parking adjacent to the performance space are provided. The builders of the line would surely never have imagined their labours bearing such fruit whilst they were beavering away in the 1870s!

thearchestheatrcompany.co.uk for more info.

The Shore Porters Society

Whilst being driven around Aberdeen recently I noticed an unobtrusive sign on a city centre building, worded as above. My driver knew that it was an unusual and very old organisation but left me to dig out the detail. It turns out that the Society can trace its history back to the 1100s but only has records from 1498 ! It has a number of other unusual, possibly unique features. It was formed by minute of the local council, as constituted at the time, in 1498 and remained under their overall if loose control until the mid-19th century. When the city decided it needed a proper fire brigade it was the Shore Porters who provided the wagons to cart the barrels of water to the various conflagrations, and the men (at that time, of course) to put out the flames.

The Society started as a co-operative of porters working in Aberdeen harbour and also acted as a benevolent society for its members. Profits were accumulated through each year and divided between those members at the year-end with provision for retired and sick members as well. By the early 1800s the Society was recognised as a trade union focusing on fair wages and good working conditions for members, aims it maintains into the current century. In more recent times the Society has metamorphosed into a haulage and warehousing business with 30 or so lorries and vans, a dozen warehouses in Aberdeen and, from 1992, a branch in Richmond, Surrey giving them two more warehouses and a foothold in the capital. The business has been constituted as a private partnership since 1850 when links with the Town Council were finally severed. Setting great store by their accumulated history, the business is run not by a chief executive but by one of the partners, styled the deacon. Where other businesses have finance directors the Society has a boxmaster because in olden times their funds were kept in a box! Other charmingly named job titles, practices and sub-sections also subsist but nothing can take away the fact that this is a successful, modern business which, if the people of Aberdeen have anything to do with it, will still be operating in another 500 years or so!

George Gordon: 'Prying with the Pynours 1498-1978 : An Intimate Look at the Aberdeen Shore Porters Society and their Times' (pub. 1978 – reasonably priced copies available on the second hand market) for more information

Inland RNLI lifeboat stations

HM Coastguard has for long assumed responsibility for co-ordinating the provision of search and rescue services around the coasts of Great Britain. 999 calls to request assistance on or near the water are fielded by them and it is they who call up the lifeboat, helicopter crews , etc. who they deem best fitted to deal with each emergency. In recent times, however, principally from the early years of this century, they have been rationalising the means by which they provide assistance to those in trouble on some of the major inland waterways, all, of course by prior consultation with those now being asked to provide such services. So it is that Loch Ness, the largest body of inland water in the UK, was the subject of a £1M appeal

by the RNLI to enable it to build a new station – this is now operational with a high speed, highly manoeuverable boat, ideally suited to that environment..
A similar review of provision of services on the River Thames led to that waterway gaining four new RNLI stations at Gravesend (this purely for river, not estuary incidents which are handled by a nearby station), Tower (now the busiest of all RNLI stations in the country), Chiswick and Teddington. The first three are manned 24 hours per day, Teddington only between 9a.m. and 5p.m. though they are 'on-call' 24 hours. We all hope we may never need the help of any lifeboat, anywhere, but whatever happens it is good to know that, although the organising of their resources is constantly evolving, they are still there to provide for any mishap we may encounter.

A new visitor centre for Derwent Valley World Heritage site

Part of the Masson mills complex in Derby Rd, Matlock (DE4 3PY) which sits within the Derwent Valley World Heritage Site, was previously occupied by a retail village which was forced to close down due to the 2020 pandemic but the textile museum remained open for tour bookings. The mills were bought by the Derwent Hydro group of companies in 2022, a business owned by the Needle family which has operated a hydropower station on site since 1995, supplying energy for the whole complex with any surplus being sold to National Grid. The visitor centre is open Mon-Fri 11a.m. to 4p.m. with guided tours available at 2p.m. on opening days.

massonmills.co.uk for more details

IA on my doorstep in August 2023

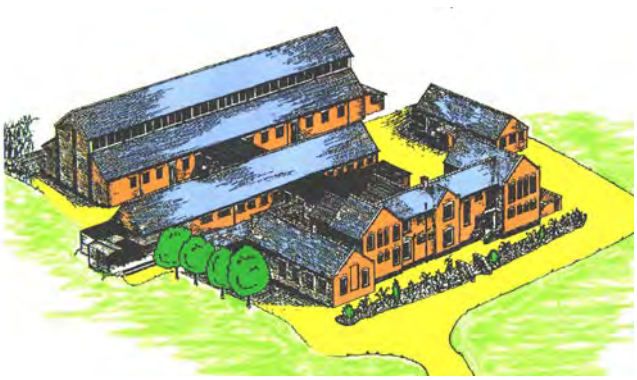
Cadent were renewing gas pipes to houses in Kingsthorpe Road and amongst their manifold depredations was the excavation of a large hole outside the cathedral near St Georges Avenue, barely a hop and a skip from Elysium Towers where resides your editor, My next door neighbour, (who is married to the daughter of an early NIAG member, David Martin) alerted me to the fact that Cadent had uncovered tram rails in Kingsthorpe Road so, off I hurried, to the hole in question, camera in hand. Sure enough, tram rails there were but, upside down! They had been pressed into use in that orientation, I suppose, to bolster the reinforcement of the concrete laid in Barrack Road, Kingsthorpe Road and St Georges Avenus, in turn installed, again I think, to allow the passage of military traffic in the 1930s. The Kingsthorpe tram route was closed in September 1933 which may tie in with such re-usage – if any member has more 'concrete' facts I would be very interested to hear them, please.

BSC, Irthlingborough: archives manager at work....

As a student at Glasgow University I obtained a degree in Russian but, when I finished my degree course I knew I didn't want to teach, which is what most people seem to do with language degrees. I did consider training as a librarian but on reading up on various courses and finding the archive qualification I thought that sounded more interesting so I applied to Aberystwyth straight away. Their requirement was an honours degree plus some knowledge of Latin, which I'd done at school. I enjoyed the course very much, I had made the right choice!

The only other universities offering such courses at that time were London and Liverpool. The principal reason I chose Aberystwyth was because of the opportunities of studying methods of managing ancient documents at the adjacent National Library of Wales.

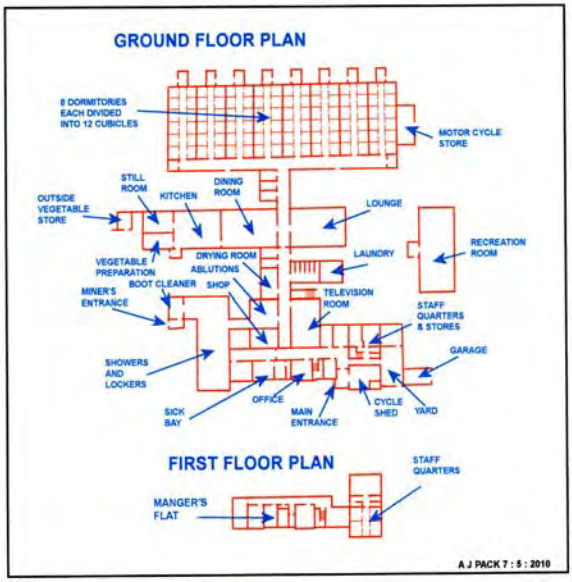
Having successfully completed the course I eventually applied for, and was appointed to, the post of manager of British Steel Corporation Record Centre located on the Irthlngborough bypass – a set of buildings constructed in 1933 as casual wards and later used as hostels for Italian and, later, Polish workers employed at Richard, Thomas and Baldwin's iron ore mine on the other side of Irthlingborough. I started my career there in 1980 with managerial responsibilities for an archivist, three record officers and domestic and grounds staff.



Sketch of Irthlingborough archives building in its Richard, Thomas & Baldwin's days (By kind courtesy of Alan Pack)

It was my responsibility to ensure that the archives of BSC constituent companies and sites in Scotland, Cumbria and the Midlands could be safely stored and efficiently retrieved as and when needed. This involved constant liaison with staff from many of the Corporation's manufacturing and extraction sites, some of which sites were themselves of historical and archaeological importance.

From Irthlingborough we provided a records management system for BSC to ensure all records likely to be of use to the company or of interest to future researchers could be made available when required, to the exclusion of the many records of a more trivial nature and therefore unlikely to be needed. The end result of these labours gave a full and efficient reference service to BSC staff wherever they were located and, as a by-product almost, a virtually identical service to outside bodies and researchers.



BSC archive building in its hostel period
(By kind permission of Alan Pack)

The nuts and bolts of our service took the form of a detailed control of incoming records followed by the development and implementation of retention schedules to determine how long each type of record needed to be kept, some permanently,as might be imagined. The establishing of finding aids was supremely important – just to know the Centre had a particular record is futile if nobody knows where it is!

My role at Irthlingborough also entailed assisting with financial budgeting and control along with longer term development of the Centre's services as well as overseeing day to day financial expenditure authorisation and other back-office matters.

I have found the writing of this article very enjoyable, reminding me, as it has, of happy times and their associated memories!

Maureen Brown

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My narrow boats at work –
a talk given by Peter Boyce, 10 February 2023

Peter gave an informative presentation about the history of six narrow boats he has owned, or still owns. Three of the boats began life being constructed for the Birmingham Canal Network (BCN). Their details are as follows:-

James Loader – a 40ft tug built in 1946 by Joe Worsey at Tipton and weighing 12 tons; of all wood construction with oak sides and elm bottom. Used for manoeuvring and towing up to 6 butties. Currently standing in Peter's yard awaiting hull maintenance. Present engine is a 2-cylinder water cooled Gardner (2LW).

BCN 108 – butty, built of iron in 1883. Peter restored it to its original 70ft length by adding 15 ft of new sides and six knees.

RAT – originally an LMS station boat built of steel in 1925.. Literally a barge loaded from a railway's goods yard. Now extensively modified although the front half of the hull is still in an earlier configuration as a cruising boat. Presently moored at Tess Wharf being internally refurbished.

One of Peter Boyce's narrowboats busy earning its keep. *Photo © Kay Ringwood*

Betelgeuse – A small Woolwich butty; 71ft long and built in 1935 by Harland & Wolff for the Grand Union Canal Carrying Co (GUCCCo). Designed to carry up to 25 tons with a draught of around 3ft. A large Woolwich butty could carry up to 30 tons but the increase in draught caused grounding problems at many places around the canal network. When the Grand Union Canal Company (GUCC) took over the Grand Junction Canal and several smaller companies to form the Grand Union Canal in 1929 they improved the route from London to Birmingham by widening the locks to accommodate wide beam boats of 12ft. The tunnels at Braunston and Blisworth could accommodate these wider boats but only as

one way traffic. This caused long delays and the whole idea of wide beams was soon dropped. The widened locks did mean a motor and butty could breast up and go through as a pair saving time though.
Lucy – the last wooden butty built, with oak sides and elm bottom with iron knees. Built at Braunston by Frank Nurser for John Knill in 1951. Worked for about 19 years by Knill Barlows and Blue Line; also saw service as a home for some years. Was raised by Peter about 14 years ago and is currently being totally restored. Peter has recently been able to source some Elm from Scotland to complete the bottom of the hull. The oak for the sides comes from France as it seems we are no longer able to maintain oak forests anywhere in the UK as the French do.
Renfrew – an all-steel, 70ft motor narrow boat, powered by a Lister HB2 air cooled diesel engine. Built in 1936 by Yarwood at Northwich to carry up to 30 tons. Renfrew's final role was, paired with Lucy, on the Jam Ole Run from Atherstone to West Drayton, delivering coal for Blue Line.

Very interestingly, Peter gave examples of loads and journey details from preserved lock record books. All details were recorded – direction, time, date and load. Additionally, the barges would be gauged at certain points. Every commercial boat, when new, was required to be progressively loaded, in controlled conditions, and the freeboard measured. This was then copied, multiple times, and distributed around the canal network to all gauging points. This enabled the correct toll to be paid for the load carried. Typical loads included, spelter, wood, coal, ash and tar from gasworks, aluminium ingots and dry goods.

A hard life for the crews in confined, cramped conditions in all weathers. The only time a boat was stationary was when trapped in ice or breakdowns and stoppages.

Report by Mike Ringwood

2023 Summer visit reports:-

St Luke’s, Duston: Church visit – 5 May 2023

Each year between 1990 and 2008, NIAG’s first visit of the summer programme was to a local church tower to see and hear the bells. These visits were arranged by bell ringer and long-term NIAG member Cecil Swann. Cecil had been Bell Captain at St Luke’s Duston until his passing in 2022 and his daughter Liz, who has now taken over that responsibility, invited NIAG members to start off NIAG’s 2023 summer programme with a visit to St Luke’s.

In the past we were able to access church towers to see the bells and often access the roof of the tower to gain a view over the countryside. Liz had indicated beforehand that this would not be possible at St Luke's – no doubt due to modern health and safety strictures, I thought. While this may have been true, the reason was obvious when we arrived. Access to the tower is via a long vertical ladder with nothing to stop you falling off.

While Cecil used to go up when needed, Liz certainly does not and only one member of the congregation will so do if absolutely necessary. Fortunately the bell ringers 'ply their trade' at ground level. Architecturally, St Luke's is unusual in that the tower is centrally positioned between the nave and the chancel so the bell ringers are always the 'centre of attention'. There are six bells in the tower, the smallest (treble) weighing 3cwt and the largest (tenor) weighing 8cwt. Originally, there were only three bells, all dating from the 17th century. In 1901, three new bells were added and two of the older ones were recast; so today only one bell dates from 1656, cast by Henry Bagley of Chacombe. We were given the opportunity of tolling one of the bells, as opposed to ringing them properly from the 'up' position, and some gallant members took up the challenge!

It was also a good opportunity for everyone to look around the church. We were able to spot some items of wooden furniture produced for the church using Cecil Swann's carpentry skills and identifiable by his personal 'swan' mark. A walk around the churchyard, now a nature reserve, revealed seven Commonwealth war graves; those commemorated include soldiers who died at nearby St Crispin's Hospital.

Also of interest was the tomb of William Henry Butlin who died in 1897. In 1852 he was the first person to successfully smelt iron ore following its rediscovery in the county and his family went on to construct the East End Ironworks in Wellingborough in 1853. The tomb is unusual in that it is surmounted by a ship's anchor, cast at Butlin's ironworks and marking William Butlin's years with the Royal Yacht Squadron.

Many thanks to Liz Leaman and her colleagues for the opportunity to try our hand at bell ringing and for the refreshments! Our evening had been an apt reminder of Cecil and his many contributions to NIAG over the years.

Peter Perkins

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Chester House Estate visit – 17 May 2023

NIAG had visited what we used to call Chester Farm a number of times over the years to view the historical and industrial features of the site. This was our first visit since the house and other buildings have been restored and Chester House Estate is now promoted as a nationally significant heritage site for visitors. It contains the remains of a Roman town as well as a medieval settlement and is a scheduled monument, now under the ownership of North Northamptonshire Council.

Our visit was in two parts. We began with an excellent guided tour of the newly opened Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC) by its Curator, Ben Donnelly-Symes. Built on the site of one of the former farm barns, the ARC is a purpose-built repository to store all the collections of finds from county-wide archaeological digs since Victorian times. Northamptonshire is one of a very few counties to have such a repository. The collections had previously been stored in different locations, sometimes outside the county.

While there were relatively few objects to see from the industrial age, we were able to see a variety of earlier objects, including Roman mosaics, quern stones, various ceramic pots, a medieval pewter platter and even a bone from a prehistoric woolly rhino. The staff of two, together with an army of volunteers, still has a 'mammoth' task of sorting and cataloguing all the various collections but nevertheless, the ARC is open for anyone to book a slot to visit and examine objects from specific collections.

NIAG members during our Chester House estate visit

NIAG member Jon-Paul Carr was our guide around the estate for the second part of our visit, relaying the history of the site from his encyclopaedic memory. Although there is evidence of occupation from prehistoric times, the underground remains of the Roman town forms a key part of the estate although it is still largely

unexplored. Chester House itself was built in the 17th century and a Georgian wing added in the 18th century.

The estate became a farm in the 19th century when many of the farmyard buildings were constructed. Ironstone quarrying took place on the estate in the 1870s and again in the 1920s but all sign of this has disappeared except for the line of a former tramway used to transport the ore away from the quarry. In the 1880s the estate was acquired by John Battams Whitworth when he built Whitworth Bros' Victoria steam flour mill on the banks of the River Nene at Little Irchester but the estate land continued to be farmed until the 1960s. The site was acquired by Northants County Council in 2002 and over the last 10 years most of the estate buildings have been restored, despite the interior of the house being badly damaged by fire during the renovation work.Some of the more recent farm sheds were replaced by buildings to accommodate the museum and space for other groups and activities.

On our perambulation of the estate we viewed the site of the Roman town and the route of the ironstone tramway. We also visited the remains of the kitchen garden where the wooden framework of the greenhouse we saw back in 2000 has virtually disintegrated and is awaiting funds for restoration. A tour of the house revealed that new oak panelling in the upstairs rooms has replaced that lost in the fire. We also viewed the self-contained flat which now occupies the upper floors of the Georgian extension. This is available to rent as a holiday flat. Some of the party had lunch in the café which occupies the ground floor of the house and others walked down to the river and across the newly installed bridges over the River Nene which permit access to the footpath between Wellingborough and Ditchford. Here there are excellent views of the twin railway viaducts which take the Midland Mainline over the river.

Thanks to Ben and Jon-Paul for an excellent morning in the spring sunshine.

Peter Perkins

Shoe Industry Buildings in Central Northampton – 21 June 2023

On a fine summer afternoon we met up with local historian Roger Frisby on the top floor of St Michaels multi-storey car park off St Michaels Road where a there is a surprisingly fine view over Northampton, particularly Northampton's Boot and Shoe Quarter with the upper floors of a number of

the former shoe and leather factories visible. NIAG has visited this area in recent years, so our aim today was to look at what remains of the shoe and leather buildings in the central area of the town.

Descending to ground level, we made our way to the top of Abington Street where the premises of Radio Northampton stand at the junction with the Mounts (site 254 in NIAG's Gazetteer – the Third Edition of A Guide to the Industrial Heritage of Northamptonshire). It was built in the early 1890s for the International Goodyear Shoe Machinery Company who supplied much of the machinery to produce Goodyear welted footwear in many of Northampton's shoe factories. In about 1900 the building was taken over by the British United Shoe Machinery Co and they were there until the 1930s when it was occupied by the Northampton Town & County Building Society who later became Anglia (and ultimately Nationwide) Building Society. It has been used by Radio Northampton since 1982.

1897 warehouse for W.C. Henderson on Abington Street/Albion Place corner

On the opposite side of Abington Street, at no.104, we looked at the three-storey brick and stone façade of what was Stimpson Bros. leather warehouse dating from c.1888. The company had a tannery at Abington Mill and later changed its name to Stimpson Perkins. The building is now a hairdressing salon, with the arch to the side called Shoebridge Mews leading to other businesses. Looking along St Giles Terrace, Roger pointed out the location of A&W Arnold's shoe factory which closed in the 1960s. (see article in Newsletter no. 167, page 21). Adjacent to the factory had been the alleyway leading to the stage door of the New Theatre which fronted onto Abington Street, where comedy film stars Laurel & Hardy were photographed when they visited Northampton in the 1950s.

Further down Abington Street opposite the Library is a 3-storeys-plus-attic

building with mock Tudor façade on the upper storeys. To the right of the modern ground floor shop fronts is an elaborate stone door case with 'Victoria Building' above it. This was built in 1897 by WC Henderson, a leather merchant and his warehouse extended behind the frontage into Albert Place. Later taken over by leather merchants Pfister & Vogel, the upper floors are now flats.

Along Fish Street on the south-east corner of its junction with The Ridings is the instantly recognisable five-storey brick and stone building with bulls head motifs and other decoration, formerly the premises of leather factors Malcom Inglis (Site 252 in NIAG's Gazetteer), designed by AE Anderson and built in 1900. On the south-west corner of the junction is what was Inglis's earlier two-storey leather warehouse designed by Anderson when he was still in partnership with Moseley, but today adorned with a third storey! The shallow-arched pier and panel design has four stone pilasters on the Fish street façade, each surmounted by a roundel, two of which carry Northamptonshire roses, the third contains the letters 'MI' for Malcolm Inglis and the fourth the date AD 1895. Interestingly, Roger pointed out that Moseley and Anderson's own offices were on the north side of Fish street.

In St Giles Street, near its corner with Hazelwood Road, Roger pointed out the location of two early shoe factories which were occupied by Crick & Co. and Wm Hickson & Sons in the 19th century. Both buildings were demolished in the 1930s when St Giles Street was widened. Moving on to Derngate, the house at No.45 was owned by the Horton family of cardboard box makers Horton & Arlidge. Immediately behind the house is a range of industrial buildings, now called Derngate Mews, which were used as a leather warehouse in the 1920s.

In Guildhall Road we looked at the multi-coloured brick façade of the building, now forming part of the Derngate complex but for much of the 20th century used by shoe components company Phipps & Son (Site 246 in NIAG's Gazetteer), as was the former Vulcan Engineering Works on the opposite side of the road (Site 247 in NIAG's Gazetteer). In the 19th century Mobbs & Co had manufactured shoe machinery at the Vulcan works.

In Kingswell Street, Roger reminded us that the former cooperage building of brewers Ratliffe & Jeffery (Site 250 in NIAG's Gazetteer) which for the past ten years has been used to brew Phipps beers, is still owned by Teesdale Leathers who used the building as a leather warehouse for many years during the 20th century. On the opposite side of Kingswell Street is a terrace of three small 3-storey factory buildings which are thought to have been used as shoe factories in the past. At least one of them was used in the 20th century by Bassett Lowke to produce their model ships.

Our walk finished outside No 10 Gold Street, where Phipps & Son had their drapery premises in the 19th century, with the warehouse round the corner at 6 College Street being where they began their shoe components supply business, later moving to Guildhall Road as mentioned above (see article on Phipps & Son in Newsletter No.167, page 18).

Many thanks to Roger Frisby for an informative walk.

Report by Peter Perkins

Middleton walk - 7 July 2023

In 2022 NIAG walked around the village of Cottingham (see Newsletter No.164, page 11) but there was insufficient time to see the adjacent community of Middleton. Hence our return visit this year on a warm summer evening.

Middleton used to be a part of the parish of Cottingham but became a separate civil parish in the 19th century and consequently has no parish church of its own. Unlike its neighbour, the main street of Middleton (unsurprisingly called Main Street) is on the floor of the Welland valley, with a few of the older buildings ascending the hill out of the village at its western end. Agriculture was the main source of employment in the 19th century. There were no large-scale industrial concerns but the following trades are shown in the directories: blacksmith, two shoemakers, ropemaker, wheelwright, baker, carpenter, flour dealer, miller (wind), draper, painter, plumber, maltster and the inevitable publicans. As well as the remains of several farms, there are a number of Grade II listed 'up-market' 18th century houses built of ironstone or limestone, suggesting the parish had some wealthy inhabitants.

Items of note seen on our walk:

Cast iron parish boundary marker – a three cornered casting with hollow back having the inscription: *'Parish Boundary Cottingham Middleton'*. (Photo to right.....)

There are several cast iron water pumps in various locations, some with remains of water troughs, also a well head. All are remnants of a water distribution system around both Middleton and Cottingham installed in 1854 using iron water pipes to

convey the natural spring water. This system supplied villagers with fresh water for about a hundred years before mains water was installed in 1957.

Manor Farmhouse at 58 Main Street is an impressive 18th century building with a limestone ashlar frontage listed as having an internal dovecote to the right of the front door although there is no external evidence of this, nor indication where such a dovecote could have been located.

Tannery Cottage in Main Street, Middleton

Nos. 50, 52 and 54 Main Street form a terrace of ironstone fronted houses, with an attractive carriage arch through to the back yard. No.50 is called Tannery Cottage and behind it through the arch we noted a red brick building, single storied with a loft, which could have been the tannery, presumably dating from the 19th century. A cursory glance at the censuses did not confirm any employees of such a business but an inhabitant of the house did tell us that animal bones had been dug up in the garden which suggests the premises may have been involved with the slaughter of animals, if not tanning of skins.

No.34 Main Street is a 19th century stone built house with a slate roof. The three chimney stacks suggest it may have originally been three houses but part of it might possibly have been used as a maltings. More intriguing is the plaque on the front on the building which shows the initials '*J D'*, the date '*1871'* and the name '*Birmingham Street'* in a scroll – apparently no one knows why.

The Old Forge still stands adjacent to No.35 Main Street (now called the Farriers House) but the frontage has been rebuilt in brick so it now looks like a modern house. The datestone shows: '*1868 restored 1982'*. Samuel Swingler ran the forge here in the 1800s (his name appears in directories between 1849 and 1914) and it was working till the 1930s, but was later converted into a private house.

No.21 Main Street was originally a mid-18th century L-shaped farmhouse and still has a yard bounded by former cow sheds and stables, as well as the remains of a brewhouse to the right of the entrance to the yard.

The impressive early-18th century Cannam House has a late-18th century ashlar limestone frontage. The front door has toplights and there is a

fanlight above the front door. There are sash windows under stone surrounds with central keystones that are flush with 16the rest of the stonework. Members of the Cannam family are listed in Middleton in the 1777 Northamptonshire Militia List.

Halfway up the hill is Hill House, another stone house with a Collyweston slate roof. Immediately to its east side is a range of buildings which comprised a listed dovecote although today covered with creeper that disguises any obvious evidence of its former use.

We finished our walk by ascending a steep incline to Camsdale Walk where the 1766 school house stands, adjacent to the 1850s school buildings. We continued along the footpath to Cottingham parish church, high above the village with views over the Welland Valley, noting evidence of medieval long, narrow burgage plots of properties on Main Street which reached back up the hill to our footpath. On reaching the church, we descended the hill back to our starting point.

Peter Perkins

Flore Walk 22 July 2023 – report by Peter Perkins

NIAG's final walk of the 2023 summer programme was around the village of Flore and attracted 18 members who met in the Brodie Lodge playing field at the bottom of Spring Lane. Much of the information for this walk came from the late John Smith, a NIAG Member and Flore historian who led NIAG on a walk round the village back in 2007.

Flore was on the Warwick and Northampton Turnpike road, which later became part of the A45 until the Flore bypass was built about 10 years ago. In the 19th century apart from farming, cotton lacemaking was an important trade, with more than 30 women and girls involved in it at the time of the 1851 census. A few residents were involved with shoemaking and dressmaking and there were also two long-established family businesses of whip makers and wheelwrights.

Walking first in the direction of the church, we came across the Church of England primary school which started life as the girl's school in 1852. The wide piece of road in front of the school has been used for the May Day ceremony and we noted the circular cast-iron cover in the centre of the road over the hole for the maypole.

On the north side of High Street (the original turnpike) almost opposite the turning for Spring Lane, are the remains of Phillips' wheelwright business, an assortment of derelict brick and corrugated iron workshops. John Phillips (born c1806) was a wheelwright by 1833 and in the 1851 census his wheelwright and smithy business was located at the '*side of the Turnpike'* and was '*employing nine men*'. By the early 1890s one of his sons (James Lewis Phillips) had taken over the business and was described as a coach maker and wheelwright. It is thought that the last wagon was produced here in 1921 but horse box trailers and similar items were produced here until the 1980s. Vine House where John Phillips lived, stood in front of the workshops along with several cottages for the workers but these were demolished when the road was widened in the 1960s or 1970s. Two of our group recalled a NIAG visit to the site in 1981 when part of the site was a timber yard. They were shown the workshops, by then virtually disused, by a 'Mr Phillips' who it is thought was the sixth generation of the Phillips family. It is not known who now owns the site but it seems to have been unused for at least 25 years.

Sutton Street was originally the commercial centre of Flore until traffic on the main road (High Street) encouraged development there. At the top of Sutton Street is Ram Bank, a triangular green which contained a well until it was capped in the mid-20th century but the well head was rebuilt for the Millennium. We noted the Old Bakery at No.12 Sutton Street and a terrace of houses with a corrugated iron roof. At least one of these appeared to have the remains of a shop window.

Two single-storey buildings on the right hand side of the yard belonging to No.7 Sutton Street (The White Cottage) were associated with whip making. One was built c1833, the other in the last quarter of the 19th century but both were re-roofed after a fire in 1966. It is thought that at least three generations of the Sharp family were whip makers here from c1800 to

1924. Certainly, Henry Sharp was described as a whip maker in 1821 when his son, also Henry, was baptised at Flore. No.7 Sutton Street was for many years a pub called the Recruiting Sergeant and in the 1871 census Henry Sharp Junior was living here, being described as a whip maker employing 4 men, 1 woman and 2 girls. Henry Sharp Junior died in 1907, after which his son Charles Henry Sharp took over the business. However, Charles Henry ran into debt which he blamed on motor cars (presumably they caused a reduction in whip sales due to the use of fewer horse-drawn vehicles). The Northampton Mercury for 7 November 1913 notes that in court the magistrate commented: *No one buys whips now except suffragettes!* – a reference to a suffragette who interrupted David Lloyd George at a meeting held at the Royal Albert Hall in 1908 and became known as 'The Woman with the Whip'. Unsurprisingly the whip making business in Flore had closed by 1924.

Returning to High Street, we noted that new houses on the north side of the road have been built on the site of PJ Green's garage and filling station which itself was built on the site of his grandfather's blacksmith premises. Another smithy was located behind No. 60 High Street on the south side of the road. In 1941 this became the main factory of Erinex Ltd, makers of metal pressings for incendiary bombs for the war effort.

Cob wall in King's Lane, Flore

In Kings Lane several of the garden walls are partly built of cob (subsoil mixed with water and organic vegetable matter – usually straw). We noted that The Manor at 2 Kings Lane, an imposing building, was built by Wm. Muscott in 1685 and was a farmhouse until 1880. The Croft at 23 Kings Lane had been the base for Botterill's steam threshing business in the 19th century, while The Hollies at 4 King's Lane with one wall deeply chamfered at the corner, was a farmhouse in 1779. A drive next to the Old Bakers Arms leads to a building, now a house, which became the earliest Friends Meeting House in Northamptonshire, having been adapted from a barn in 1678. The lawn in front of the cottage had been a Quaker burial ground 1685-1789. Finally at the bottom of Kings Lane, the footpath to Heyford passes between two cob walls which each have a thatched coping. The thatch on the right hand side wall has deteriorated somewhat since it was photographed in 2007..

Slipper baths

What is a slipper bath? As far as can be ascertained there are no longer such establishments in the UK although they lasted longer than many may have thought – for instance the North Road baths in Brighton were still in use up to 1976 and Deptford Slipper Baths until well into the 1960s. Following the passing of sundry parliamentary bills in the mid-1840s local authorities were encouraged to provide baths for their constituents but in many towns and cities delaying tactics were commonplace and, for example, Far Cotton in Northampton did not have such facilities until 1955 and that in a part of the town where existed 1,000 houses without bathrooms at the time. The bills specified that there were to be at least twice as much capacity for the 'lower classes' as there were for their superiors but exactly how it was to be determined who fitted in where is not made clear! In any event, the two areas thus described were to be strictly separated and prices charged would have deterred all except the most revolutionary souls from getting above themselves – a 'first class' warm bath cost its user 6d. (2.5p for those possessed of an ultra-modern outlook!) compared with 2d. for a 'second class' warm bath. Cold baths could be had for 3d. and 1d. according to your 'class'! North Road baths in Brighton attracted almost 650 users per week in the six months to March 1874 and queues of 30 people were commonplace even in later years Far Cotton baths, although popular on Saturdays, were markedly not so busy on their other two opening days (Wednesdays and Thursdays) and frequently only managed to notch up 50 users per week in total.

The physical shape of baths so provided in early establishments resembled a slipper, hence their nomenclature, in that they were partially covered. Each bath was enclosed in a cubicle, often with duck boards to keep the user above the cold and frequently wet floor. The premises were ruled by superintendents who usually had sole control over the amount of hot water allowed to be used and in some baths the amount of cold as well. Any bather in such a predicament who was unhappy with the temperature of the water had to call out the number of his/her cubicle and await the saving form of the superintendent, preceded in extreme cases, we are told, by cries of anguish and sometimes pain. The St. Andrews Road baths opened in 1928 and an advertisement for attendants to run them, one male and one female, stipulated that only married couples need apply!

Closure took place in the late 1950s/early 1960s. In all instances sexes were, of course, strictly segregated with separate corridors leading past all the cubicles. Where numbers of baths provided were unequally split between male and female bathers it was usually the men who had the greater share although Belper Street Baths in Blackburn boasted 20 for

women and a mere 17 for men! Towels and, often, soap were sometimes included in the entrance price or could be hired/bought, at a price, for those who had not provided their own. All known Northampton slipper baths issued tickets produced by former Corporation Transport conductors' ticket machines, most of which eventually ended up in the Corporation's Fish Street offices[cellars once slipper baths disappeared.

In 1987, Kettering Working Men's Club celebrated its centenary and the Evening Telegraph's Jon Bullock composed an article in celebration of this milestone in the paper's 14 March edition. In one snippet his contact Club secretary Norman Love, recalled that members could get a hot bath at the club for 6d (2.5p in modern money!) making them the sparkliest group of herberts in town, I shouldn't wonder!

Dorothy Dewing describes using the Deptford baths every Monday night in the late 1940s:-

> *The bath cost sixpence per person, but Mum and I always shared a bath to save money. When your turn came you were ushered into a cubicle with a bath and some coat hooks, and a big water spout into the bath, but no control on it - the water was turned on from the outside of the cubicle by the lady attendant. She would put hot water in to start, and then the cold. If it was still too hot, you would have to call "More cold in No. 6, please", and she would eventually come and add some cold water. Emerging with wet hair and shivering with the cold in the winter, we would go to buy our weekly treat - fish and chips, eaten from the newspaper on the walk home - heaven!*

Another frequent attender recalled using the Deptford baths: ….. *we had no bathroom in our house in the early 1950s: it was a meeting place of sorts as you would see the same people there every week. They would catch up with the local gossip while waiting their turn to bathe. When in the bath you would hear people calling out for more hot or more cold water, and people singing at the top of their voices and others joining in. Oh the memories! There was no shame in using the slipper baths because everyone was the same – nobody had their own bathrooms at their homes.*

Tying down locations of Northamptonshire slipper baths has proved strangely difficult with opening and closing dates even more so. Barry Taylor, however, has kindly undertaken research in the local newspaper archives and here are some of the results of his labours:-

14/05/1892 Turkish baths formally opened by Mr M.P. Manfield, chairman of the company, on Tuesday next May 17 – open to public following day.

Constructed in brick and Bath stone with a frontage of of 44ft on to **Guildhall Road, Northampton.** 'Turkish, Russian, vapour, shower, medicated, needle, slipper and other baths provided' all designed by Charles Dorman at a cost of £1500 and built by J.T. Wingrove.

13/8/1894 **Guildhall Road** baths 'now reopened after complete renovation' so obviously closed at some point after only two years' usage.

4/12/1906 Northampton Council still debating the opening of 'Ward slipper baths' for the 'working class dwellings' around Northampton – motion defeated.

26/11/1907 **Guildhall Road** premises to let either as baths or warehouses – apply Northampton Cooperative Society so presumably this is what later became the Coop cheese, etc. warehouse at the bottom of the that road.
14/9/1909 **Guildhall Road** Turkish and Slipper baths reopening tomorrow – including 12 slipper baths on first floor and are privately run.

15/4/1922 Opening of Turkish and slipper baths in **Cattle Market Road, Northampton** (formerly Phipps swimming baths and refitted by the Council after a lengthy period of closure) on Thursday April 20th. Open Mondays to Saturdays with separate times for men and women and various charges from 3 pence (slipper) up to 6 pence for swimming. Turkish, plunge, and slipper baths, inclusive of hire of towels, also available. Higher charges for swimming baths on 'fresh water days' (Mondays and Thursdays)!! Two towels per bather on fresh water days – only one on other days. Mr & Mrs Tarbox in charge.

26/10/1926 '**Kettering** now has up to date slipper baths', which were apparently still in operation in 1957 (street address so far unconfirmed but possibly the WMC in Montagu Street/Wellington Street).

26/04/1928 Notice concerning the reopening of **Guildhall Road** baths on Monday 30th (so presumably had been closed again at some point).

27/04/1928 Opening of new Slipper Baths opposite Miller's Meadow (**St Andrews Road, Northampton**) – 12 for men 6 for women, built of Kenilworth red bricks with artificial stone dressings and green Delabole slate roof, all lined internally with white glazed bricks and heated by low pressure steam with water for baths and laundry provided from separate boiler; electric light all at a cost of £5,320. Foundations had to be sunk to a considerable depth due to proximity to the River Nene; designed by Mr A. Fidler, Borough Engineer and built by T. Wilson & Sons of Northampton.

St Andrews Road / Spencer Bridge Road, Northampton slipper baths in 2023

2/10/1936 New baths on **The Mounts, Northampton** to be opened tomorrow by Lord Burghley including swimming, Turkish and slipper baths – three hot rooms, a vapour bath, and two baths for 'Zotofoam', whatever that was! (*I wish I had been there! - ed.*)

The excellent Rushden Research Group website reports on an Urban District Council meeting in February 1925 when deliberations were under way *on* the possibility of building an open-air swimming pool, *and slipper baths, if means will allow.* The swimming pool was eventually built (I learned to swim there!), a meeting in the following year hearing that the building (99ft. by 53ft.) and bath would cost £7,620 with provision of a filtration plant costing an additional £1,400 and slipper baths £2,250.

If any member is able to fill in any of the woeful gaps evident from the above then I will be more than pleased to include such detail in a follow-up piece in a future issue of the Newsletter.....

Roy Sheffield

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A horse-drawn vehicle and hand cart builder of Northampton in the 1920s

Before motorised transport came into general use in the 1920s there existed a small industry in Northampton for the manufacture of horse-drawn delivery vehicles and hand-carts. Whilst still at school in the 1920s I saw some of the workings of one such coach building business in which my grandfather was a partner. The business was that of Walker and Cook and the partners had premises at 29 King Street and 3 Victoria Street in the town.

The King Street premises consisted of a yard for the accommodation of vehicles and a large workshop where carts and trucks could be worked on using a range of mainly hand-driven machines including a massive iron drilling machine with a large flywheel, a lathe for turning wheel hubs and truck handles, etc., a band saw for making wheel felloes and the curved parts of coachwork and a guillotine for cutting sheet metal. Hand tools in use were many and varied from a large number of smoothing planes and spoke shaves of all sizes, many types of saw including a sort of fretsaw, braces and bits, chisels and gouges to a set of heavy, steel rasps. Racks of wood of all types and sizes themselves took up much space.

Any ironwork required was worked up on site in a forge which stood in the yard as did a wheel pit where iron tyres were shrunk on to the wooden wheel rims. Coachwork was built up in the workshop from softwood strengthened with hardwood edging and bound with iron wherever knocks were deemed likely to occur. Joints were held firm by large coach-bolts with washers and square nuts, likewise iron reinforcing plates. Wheels were made in-house and customers chose their spoke designs from a pattern book which also allowed them a choice of paintwork patterning. Any built or repaired vehicle leaving the works always had at least two top coats of paint (individually mixed for each job) and one of heavy varnish to finish.

In earlier times there was a thriving trade in such work as delivery vehicles for bakers, milkmen, carriers and farmers but once horse drawn coaches were replaced by motor transport the trade decreased markedly even though some repair work on these vehicles for the local squirearchy continued for a few more years. Outlying customers would bring in their vehicles for repair and return home by train or carrier and my grandfather employed the same means in reverse in delivering the repaired vehicle to the customer, getting back home by the best available transport.

The sale and repair of horse-drawn vehicles declined rapidly after the Great War but trade in hand carts, both for sale or for hire, persisted for quite a period – they were hired out at rates of 1/- per hour for an average sized cart up to 1/6 for a the one or two larger versions available. Some boot and shoe firms used them as did jobbing printers for collecting their bulk paper and butchers for their ice blocks and occasionally poor families needing to move house because of eviction or sometimes moonlight flits!Market traders were regular hirers at the beginning and end of their working days – very disgruntled after a poor trading day or one affected by bad weather!

Hand trucks needed to be strongly made to stand up to the hard usage they had by their users – frequently overloaded with a great variety of goods and being manhandled over the cobbled roads of the town. The average truck was around four feet square, built of wood bound with iron at all vulnerable

points, crop flaps with chains front and rear, a single shaft about three feet long with a round 'T' handle. Its sides had iron stays for the use of the 'driver's' assistants in getting the truck up hills. The leg, 2-3 inches square, supported the body at the junction of the shaft with the body and had an iron-bound tip and iron strips as stays. Wooden wheels of around three feet diameter were mounted on a steel axle which was suspended on half-elliptic leaf springs.

(*I can clearly remember an Irthlingborough jobbing builder acquiring a brand new handcart in the late 1950s, sign-written with their name, and it still being used by an employee of his (and a classmate of mine), into the late 1960s – no doubt other members may have similar memories – ed.*).

(Original article written by Ken Gardner, a keen NIAG member in its early days, for newsletter number 3 of December 1980, and re-edited for number 168 of October 2023)

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Some techniques of industrial archaeology: *Part 4:- more complex sites*

So far in this series we have considered one view of the guiding principles of our 'vocation' (*January 2023 newsletter*), a series of methods of researching a particular site of interest to us as industrial archaeologists (*April 2023*) and followed this up with guidance on the means of measuring up a simple building to allow the production of a set of drawings (*July 2023*). In this issue we will attempt to traverse the apparent minefield of more complex sites before, in the next issue, dealing with photographing of sites and finally, getting a set of measured drawings produced which, along with the photographs we will have to hand after the next issue, will give us a means of portraying our information and leaving the whole for posterity.....!

'More complex sites' for our purposes will generally mean either a single, medium to large building with internal features (e.g. machinery and/or architectural features of some note) or a site with multiple buildings. Both these examples will certainly need more than one measuring team of three people per team (or, alternatively, more than one working visit to site). A watermill which I organised the measuring of in 1989 led to two or three visits by 6 people, 15 rough sheets of A3 drawings culminating in 5 sheets of fair copy drawings, also A3. One team dealt with the buildings themselves, two in number, one of three storeys, both had had dual purposes and had been altered and added to over the years requiring

explanation. The second team dealt with the machinery within and outside the mill building itself and contained Geoffrey Starmer, NIAG's resident mills expert. It goes without saying that to have tackled this task without an expert on hand would have taken infinitely longer and would not necessarily have ended with a worthwhile set of drawings – a point to keep in mind when planning such a project.

A short while after our joint labours around this site concluded we had access to a set of professionally produced drawings and were not too disappointed with the comparison!

The other 'more complex site', that of multiple buildings to deal with, would also require at least two teams along with an extra technique and a considered inspection of what is being taken on – missing a building out is not the stairway to success. This could, if possible, be undertaken before the measuring-up day(s) proper and a sketch plan made to as good a degree of accuracy as possible. That sketch plan, whenever it is done, will become a 'working document' come the measuring day and, I would suggest, the first one to be worked on on that day.

The extra technique referred to is that of establishing a base line at a location where as many as possible of the strategic points of the structures to be measured are within a line of sight. It is the principle on which all serious survey work, up to that of the Ordnance Survey itself, is based. Where that level of accuracy is required, triangulation is a necessary adjunct to the base line – for our purposes as enthusiastic amateurs the base line on its own will normally be sufficient as long as it is possible to finish the job in a day. As implied, the base line consists of two supports (e.g. tripods, ranging poles) at fixed points to which are affixed a cord. From each end and (less ideally but still workable) at measured points along its length measurements are made to known points (corners, prominent features like door and windows) on the site's structures and the results marked on the working drawing. An example will be reproduced in January's newsletter, of such a site plan for the remaining portions of the Premier Cement works in Wellingborough Road, Irthlingborough as they existed in August 1990 (now long gone and replaced by a housing development). This sheet was measured by Geoffrey Starmer, Judith Hodgkinson and the late John Raybould who also produced an interim fair copy drawing for me to work up a final drawing from – although the version illustrated looks to be a spider's web of measurements, it was actually very easy for me to work with John's fair copy, needing only minimal amendment.

The second team (myself, Vicki Sheffield and Ron Whittaker) were not standing idly by; we were measuring all the individual buildings and (as

best we could) the ruins of those found in that state. Ruined buildings present particular challenges and those constructed of stone as opposed to brick can be especially troublesome to say the least!

One of the aspects of measured drawings I have not covered in this rudimentary account is that of sloping sites. Although the cement works site was not quite pancake-flat, we decided the variations in level were insufficient for us to spend time in annotating – we were purely interested in recording the relevant latitudes and longitudes, as it were, of the buildings making up the whole. This, I think, we achieved and taught ourselves the lesson that seemingly unnecessary complications are often just that – unnecessary!

Roy Sheffield

Thomas E. Gray & Co. Ltd.

In approximately 1925 the former Isham ironstone quarry adjacent to Polwell Lane in Barton Seagrave, previously worked by Isham Ironstone Co., a subsidiary of Lloyds Ironstone, was re-opened by Thomas E Gray & Co. Ltd. to quarry siliceous clay from the contiguous geological strata for the production of ganister for the lining of furnaces and foundry ladles, etc. Much of Thomas E. Gray's output went to iron founders and their two brand names were 'Silacene' and 'Ramolith', the two designed for use in different types of furnace.

Exchange sidings and thence into the works area from the LMS main line were in use and a mill was erected at the south end of the site, near to the company's boundary with the present day Weetabix plant. Various ancillary buildings were also put up. The quarry was on the east side of Polwell Lane, the Isebrook Works proper and exchange sidings with the LMS on the west side.

Twelve years after Thomas E Gray's reopening of the quarry, in 1937, a diesel powered 2' gauge line was installed in the quarry and 'V' hopper wagons loaded with material were propelled to a loading dock where the quarried material was discharged into standard gauge, wooden bodied wagons of sundry vintages which were then themselves propelled to

Trans-shipment dock at T.E. Gray's quarry

the works for processing, milling and bagging. The company quarried limestone (possibly overburden of the ganister) and, particularly during World War 2, small quantities of iron ore (750 tons in 1941). The iron ore was of poor quality, however, and the diesel shovel and compressor borrowed under the auspices of the Ministry of Supply were returned whence they came, the shovel's route home being enlivened by assisting a United Counties bus regain the road after it had swerved to avoid a collision in the path of the quarry machine!

A photograph exists of the 2' gauge to standard gauge trans-shipment dock in use in 1978 by which time it was thought to be the last remaining example of such an operation in Great Britain. In 1982, however, a steady decline in demand for the company's products brought about the closure of the whole Thomas E. Gray operation. Very soon after that I had cause to visit the landowner who was busy wondering what he could do with the large hole in the ground the company had bequeathed him! The northern edge of the site is now occupied by the A14 dual carriageway which I would imagine managed to put a bit of a spring into his step!

'Isebrook' 1926 Sentinel at the works, in use as a buffer stop in 1970. Photograph © Gordon Edgar - used with permission (https://www.flickr.com/photos/12a_kingmoor_klickr/ and https://preservedbritishsteamlocomotives.com/contact/)

The company was almost a life-long user of vertical boilered, coal powered Sentinel locomotives for their standard gauge line and three of them still survive in preservation in various states of repair. The first known example was a 1926-built example originally destined for the Great Western Railway but very soon returned to Sentinel as being unsuitable for their requirements. After various modifications and short term trials elsewhere the loco percolated to Thomas E. Gray in 1934, working their quarry until 1958 carrying the name 'Isebrook' and numbered 2 in their fleet. A newer Sentinel was purchased to replace it ('Musketeer' built in 1946), joined later by an identical machine, 'Belvedere'. These two in turn were replaced by diesel traction and both Sentinels donated to Northamptonshire Ironstone Railway Trust, based at Hunsbury Hill, in 1975.

A news story in the Kettering Evening Telegraph in March 1957 recounted how a doctor's receptionist was motor-scootering her way home just after 10p.m. when she was engulfed in smoke whilst in Polwell Lane. She raised the alarm with Mr. L. Clulow, Thomas E. Gray's works manager at the time, who lived nearby, and the fire was found to stem from the company's motor vehicle garage holding 8 lorries and a van along with a large underground fuel tank. As well as the fire brigade, Mr. Clulow managed to get 6 of his drivers to the scene and they rescued as many of the vehicles as could reasonably be saved – several vehicles were damaged, some seriously, and one completely destroyed but Mr. Clulow was full of praise for his drivers as well as the fire brigade, who turned out with appliances from Burton Latimer, Kettering and Wellingborough. A surprising fact came to light in the report in that the fire brigade were able to use water from the company's swimming pool which stood very close to the affected buildings...

Thomas E. Gray works, Barton Seagrave in January 1981

Roy Sheffield

Tony Hill

News has reached NIAG that one of our early members, Tony Hill, died on 24 June last. No further details have yet come to light which will probably not surprise those who knew him. Tony was very much a free spirit, quite happily living his life in idiosyncratic fashion. He was fond, in the most extreme way, of all things railway and everything else was kept in the background, however important others may have deemed such things to be! Malcolm Hill (no relation) recalled how Tony organised a two week jaunt around Europe for himself, by rail of course, without the need for hotel accommodation at any time, by travelling on various long distance, overnight, trains! He contributed to NIAG events from time to time and was a quietly entertaining speaker on one or two members' evening sessions. I recall him showing a slide of a decrepit tram in India, succinctly commenting that it had all the hallmarks of having been designed by a redundant builder of allotment huts – and that is exactly what it looked like!

NIAG Publications

This is a reminder that NIAG members can purchase copies of NIAG publications at a reduced price.

NIAG publications currently for sale are as follows:-

TITLE	Full price	Members' price
Water and Steam Mills of Northamptonshire (2022)	£20.00	£12.00
A Guide to the Industrial Heritage of Northants. 3rd ed. (2022)	£9.00	£5.00
Edward Harrison Barwell: 19th Century Northampton Ironfounder (2019)	£9.00	£5.00
Northampton's Boot & Shoe Quarter (2015)	£7.50	£5.00
Evolution of Northaamptonshire. Ironstone Industry (2013)	£7.00	£5.00
Irchester Ironstone Quarries: Key Dates & Events (2011)	£2.00	£2.00

For a summary of what each book covers, see:
https://www.niag.org.uk/publications.php

Copies are available from Terry Waterfield (email treasurer@niag.org.uk).

If you want them posting, postage and packing is extra – Terry can advise – or see NIAG website: www.niag.org.uk/publications.php

Copies are also available to collect, from Peter Perkins (secretary@niag.org.uk).

Editor's holiday snaps!

The final gasp of the July 2023 newsletter may have been familiar to some and a mystery to others.....the structure is situated on the north Somerset coast near to the village of Kilve and only 100yds. from the shoreline. It is the listed, last remaining UK example of an oil shale retort. Oil-bearing shale was baked to extract the usable commodity. It appears that this project of 1924 was bordering on the shady side of business dealings, although high sulphur content of the feed material and failure to attract investment also played into the plant's failure. In any event 'production' only lasted for 2 months prior to abandonment. An interesting relic for all that.

NGR: ST145443 (OS Explorer sheet 140: Quantock Hills & Bridgwater)

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