

# HISTELEC NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH WESTERN ELECTRICITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Web Site : [www.swehs.co.uk](http://www.swehs.co.uk)

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## HOW GREEN IS YOUR CHAIRMAN?

Nowadays there is increasing concern about global warming caused by the build-up of so called "greenhouse gases" in the atmosphere. These are mainly carbon dioxide and methane, which result from burning fossil fuels, (coal, oil and natural gas), to produce electricity. Governments are beginning to realise that we must use much more renewable energy from natural resources if we are to avoid permanent damage to our planet.

In the South West peninsula we are fortunate to have untapped natural resources in the wind, tides and hot-rocks. I'm not so sure about solar energy! Looking back to the past I see that in 1906 Falmouth started to burn town waste in its power station furnaces to drive steam turbines. In the 1930's Christy Bros, constructed the Mary Tavy Hydro-electric scheme on Dartmoor. No doubt you can think of other examples. It seems that those pioneers were on the right track in the early days. The Society has already visited Man Taw and Morwellham and plan to visit Delabole Windfarm in Cornwall in the future. We are too late for Falmouth Power Station, it closed in 1948!

So roll on the Severn Barrage scheme and Cornwall's hot-rocks technology and continue the tradition started by those early engineers in the South West. It looks as though studying the history of electricity can teach us a thing or two!

*John Haynes*

## CAIRNS ROAD HOLD-UP

I am sorry to report that there has been no movement on the renovation of the second room at Cairns Road. Our initial euphoria is somewhat dented, since although we have gained access to the room, no work has commenced to date.

The renovation and conversion of the room has been costed at roughly £6,000. £1,500 of this would be taken from the Engineering Budget, since it involves repair to the existing building.

The rest is for levelling the floor, decoration and separating the toilets and main access from the Operational Areas. The good news is that we have been promised the Avonbank Conference Room furniture when it closes in December. The justification for the expenditure has been prepared illustrating how we would use the additional room as a Visitor Centre. School and Scout parties and adult groups would be encouraged to visit and hear talks by members. So we now await a response from Glen Kundert SWEB's new Corporate Communications Manager.

## LARGE SUPPLEMENT

The supplement this time is a reproduction of two articles, which appeared in the BIAS Annual Journal for 1997 (published in March by Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society). The Arc Lamp article is written by your Secretary Peter Lamb and the Arc Light System by the late Cedric Blackett, who started with BCED in the 1930's as a student engineer rising to be Bristol's District Engineer with SWEB. He moved to Exeter as District Manager before retirement. He died in October 1996. An attempt was made to get Cedric's article printed in the BIAS Journal for 1996, but it was unfortunately deferred until 1997 and therefore Cedric sadly missed its publication.

## FOWEY WEEKEND GO-AHEAD

Response to our Fowey Weekend (3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Oct) has been excellent with 38 members and spouses looking forward to the event. Unfortunately one couple have had to pull out, so if you would like to join us for what promises to be an interesting and enjoyable weekend, please telephone me on 01392 860529

*Barrie Phillips*

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Bob Horne and Alan Hooper have joined us since the last newsletter. We hope to see them at some of our events. The membership now stands at 96. We only need to enroll a few more people to tip it over the 100 mark. There's a challenge for everyone!!!

### **FINCH FOUNDRY AT STICKLEPATH**

The National Trust is keen to preserve the old Hay Maryon and Co. Ltd. water turbine that has been rusting away at the Finch Foundry for some time. The turbine was coupled to a Brush 12kW 230volt single phase alternator. *Barrie Phillips*

### **SALFORD BRASS MILL, NEAR BATH**

An invitation has been received from Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society (BIAS) to visit the Mill to see the renovation work being carried out to which we have contributed in a small way. Individuals or parties are welcome.

### **COLLECTORS' LOT**

Earlier this year I turned on Channel 4 for a programme, which appears four days a week at 3.30pm called "Collectors' Lot". Normally our TV set stays off until 6.0pm and perhaps it should have done on that day! The presenter, Sue Cook, asked for anyone with an unusual collection to write in. My wife said "If you're daft enough, go on". I was and I did!

It was only a couple of weeks later that we found ourselves driving to an old house near East Grinstead with the back of my car full of electrical appliances, which I have rather haphazardly gathered over several years, originally to illustrate a talk on "Electricity in Bridgwater". East Grinstead is a long way from our home in Huddersfield, so we were glad of the offer of an overnight stay in a good hotel.

The filming took place without any rehearsal or script, merely a dab of powder to stop my head from shining. At the instigation of the camera crew, I demonstrated an old Hotpoint toaster, explaining its lack of timer or pop-up feature. The drawbacks were amply shown a few minutes later when I had forgotten all about it and Sue Cook pointed out that the toast was on fire. Sue Cook was very professional and kept the programme moving whilst putting me at ease. At the end of my four or five minutes, she asked me if there was anything I needed for my collection. Somewhat thoughtlessly I commented that most of the old appliances have lost their original flex and plug. At this point filming ceased and we went out to the chuck wagon for a plate of pasta.

Soon after my interview was broadcast, my life took on a new dimension. I became accustomed to people stopping me in the village. "Was that you on television? What a weird/ strange/ unusual collection you have. The conversation was usually accompanied by the sort of look given to someone slightly demented.

Next the post started to arrive and it hasn't stopped since! I've had parcels of unusual, dirty, broken electrical bits, questions about old appliances, letters from other collectors. I've had many offers. One of the most interesting enquiries has been from a lady whose father-in-law was the designer for Premier Electric Appliances, who were taken over by BTH and later AEI-Hotpoint. She told me about the early days of the firm and has arranged to visit me to show her granddaughter the work of her great-grandfather.

All this goes to show the enormous interest in old appliances and bodes well for the potential of the Redland Museum and Visitor Centre.

*Colin Hill (member)*

### **SHOE MUSEUM, STREET**

Visiting the Clark's Shoe Museum in May was particularly fascinating, since their collection involves shoes from all "walks of life" and for that matter from a wide range of time, including some early Roman footwear. A large proportion of the shoes came from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and these are in a remarkably good condition.

A separate room had been reserved at the Bear Inn opposite the Museum for Sunday lunch and 23 of us sat down to an excellent lunch in very pleasant surroundings. A shopping spree around the Clark's Village of factory shops provided an entertaining afternoon in glorious sunshine!

### **DARTMOOR WALK**

This year's Summer Solstice was celebrated by 18 loyal members of our Club not by worshipping the sun. but at least wishing it would gain dominance in the sky over the brooding rain gods of Dartmoor.

On Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June following a very enjoyable lunch at the Two Bridges Hotel. Brian Byng guided our party on a walk around the pre-historic remains to be found at Merrivale, near Princetown. Brian explained that following the end of the Ice Age in 10,000 BC, this Moor had gradually become a dense forest, which was used by Pre-historic Man to hunt for food.

In about 4,000 BC the land started to be cleared as primitive farming slowly developed. By about 2,000 BC these early fanners commenced to establish stone buildings and other features, the remains of which are visible today. For the next 2,000 years which encompassed the Bronze and Iron Ages, field systems were established together with stone huts, stone circles, stone rows, standing stones and cists (burial chambers sunk into the ground and covered by granite slabs).

Huddled together in our wet weather clothing with backs to the wind, rain and hail, our party was asked to imagine the warmth of the day as the sun rose gloriously in the east in an adjacent hill rock formed aperture and traversed the heavens to set in the west on a similar hill shape. The factual and yet humorous nature of Brian's description of these events just about enabled our party to see through the driving rain the possibilities for the sun's daily journey!

Another interesting feature were the Guide Stones. These mark the routes between towns (not the distances) and were set up not by pre-historic man but as the result of an Act of Parliament in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The ones at Merrivale mark the route between Asburton and Tavistock by having the letters "A" and "T" inscribed on opposite sides of the upright stones. Surprisingly the "A" is on the side facing Ashburton so that a traveller would encounter the "A" having come from that location, and similarly for Tavistock - understand?

So with this confusing thought in our minds, the promise of a cream tea and a drying wind blowing from the west, our party set course for the return to the Hotel. Our thanks to Brian and his wife for making the trip thought provoking, humorous and stimulating.  
*Mike Williams*

#### **BATH CANAL BOAT TRIP**

A excellent day out was enjoyed by 34 members and their friends on the 20<sup>th</sup> July on the Kennet/Avon Canal. The weather was gorgeous and the company good.

We started out from the Top Lock at around 11am nearly leaving behind Barrie Phillips, who had journeyed from Exeter that day. He had not come the greatest distance however, since John Haynes and Roger Christy both from Cornwall were on board and Mike Williams had friends from Norway with him. We journeyed to The George at Bathampton for lunch and then to the Claverton Pumping Station, an enormous waterwheel pumping station for the canal, which has now been superseded by an electric pump alongside. Then to Dundas Aqueduct before turning around to return by 6pm. A great day out! *Peter Lamb*

#### **CASTLE DROGO HYDRO-POWER**

Those of you who enjoyed our visit to the turbine house below Castle Drogo in the Summer 1995

may be interested to know that the National Trust is still hopeful of restoring the station to life.

Unfortunately the Environment Agency requires the NT to obtain a new Abstraction Licence and arc insisting on a full study of the River Teign from source to sea, before considering the application. The study is being undertaken for the Trust at a cost of over £3.000.

*Barrie Phillips*

#### **PHILLIP'S TESTER**

The answers to Barrie Phillips crossword is given below :-

##### ACROSS

1 Track, 8 Modulate, 9 Shunt,  
10 Transmit, 11 Datum, 12 Reg,  
16 Kettle 17 Ampere, 18 Dip  
23 Scans, 24 Ferranti, 25 Draft  
26 Electric. 27 Smart

##### DOWN

2 Reheated, 3 Conducts, 4 Course  
5 Turns, 6 Gamma, 7 Heath (-Robinson)  
12 Red, 13 Gap, 14 Spectrum, 15 Transfer  
19 Intuit 20 Offer, 21 Trees 22 Earth

#### **STORY OF CHRISTY BROS**

You may remember that we reported that Bill Tincknell has written up the history of Christy Bros, which is available at £30. We are indebted to Roger Christy for donating a copy to the Archives.

#### **DIARY NOTE**

**SAT 6<sup>th</sup> SEPT.** Meeting deferred.

#### **FRI/SAT/SUN. 3.4.5<sup>th</sup> OCT. FOWEY**

**WEEKEND** Visiting English China Clays, Lost Garden of Heligan and Sunday Boat Trip.

#### **SAT. 8<sup>th</sup> NOV. BRISTOL INDUSTRIAL**

**MUSEUM VISIT** 2.0pm

Lunch before at the Pump House at 12 noon

#### **SAT. 24<sup>th</sup> JAN. 1998 ANNUAL LUNCHEON**

St. Olaves Court Hotel, Exeter at 12 noon

#### **SAT. 21<sup>st</sup> MAR. AGM & TALK at Taunton**

"Anecdotes of a Wayleave Officer" by Noel May

#### **SAT. 18<sup>th</sup> APRIL SLIDE/TALK at Bristol**

"Early Days of Helicopter Flying" by Sox Hosegood.

#### **NEXT EDITION**

Please send information, articles, photographs or letters to Peter Lamb at 35 Station Road, Backwell, Bristol BS19 3NH or telephone him on 01275 463160