

# HISTELEEC NEWS !

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH WESTERN ELECTRICITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

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## PLYMOUTH CENTENARY

The centenary of the public supply of electricity in Plymouth is celebrated this year on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. Although one of the last towns in the South West to have a public supply, the story is nevertheless very interesting. Member, Ted Luscombe has researched its history for a few years now for a large article in a magazine produced by the Devon Association. We are pleased to publish a reduced version as a supplement to this newsletter.

Ted is giving a talk on the history at the Museum on 21<sup>st</sup> September and from 22<sup>nd</sup> September, he and Alan Hooper are staging a display of photographs from the Archives at Plymouth's Central Library. Ted also hopes to get coverage in the Western Morning News and on Radio Devon.

Members are invited to support Ted and Alan by going to the lunchtime talk at the City Museum on 21<sup>st</sup> September and visiting the display at the Central Library.

## CAIRNS ROAD CENTRE

At a recent meeting at Aztec West, members of your committee, David Peacock and Peter Lamb were given some indication that building works at Cairns Road would be given the go-ahead, only to be deferred once again due to SWEB's restructuring. However one positive action recently has been the acquisition of the Avonbank Conference Room furniture.

At a recent committee meeting, it was agreed to retitle the "Visitor Centre" to "Education Centre" to give more emphasis on its intended use.

## CORNWALL NEWS No. 1

John Haynes has recently completed 1000 word article entitled "The Early Days of Electricity in West Cornwall". It is largely based on information compiled over many years by Eric Edmonds, who kindly checked the script for John. The article was for the local "rag" Perran News, August edition. John is hoping that by writing the article under the auspices of SWEHS, a bit of local interest may be generated towards the Society.

**IRONBREDGE WEEKEND OCTOBER 1999** We are delighted to report that 46 people have now signed up for the weekend away in Shropshire on the 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> October. Let's hope the weather is kind to us!!

## SALTFORD AND BATH DAY-OUT

On 22<sup>nd</sup> April at 10.45am 35 members and guests met at the Saltford Brass Mill on the River Avon. This scheduled ancient monument is under the care of the Saltford Brass Mill Project an off-shoot of Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society. It is maintained in conjunction with English Heritage and Bath and North-East Somerset Council.

Joan and Roy Day, leading members of the Project, gave a short talk on the history of the Mill, the only surviving building from a group of 18<sup>th</sup> century mills still with a furnace and a working water-wheel. We were then taken on a guided tour of the building and shown the various features and some surviving examples of the products. On conclusion of the tour Mike Williams thanked Joan and Roy for the hospitality and headed for a local hostelry "Bird in Hand" for lunch and a chat.

Later fortified by an excellent lunch, we made our way to Bath - Horstmann Group Ltd, Newbridge Works. We were greeted by our member, Roger Horstmann, a former Sales Director of the firm and Mr. Woolner, one of the present Management Team.

Roger treated us to a very interesting talk on the history of the Company from its early beginnings, when his great-grandfather, Gustav Horstmann, set up a clockmaking business in 1854 in Bennet Street, Bath, through the foundation of the Horstmann Gear Company, to the move to the present premises. He summarised the evolution of the firm and its products from clocks through its famous gas controller and central heating controls to the electronic central heating programmers, meters and teleswitches of the present day.

We then toured the factory in three groups to see

### **SALTFORD & BATH VISIT REVIEW (continued)**

the various products from delivery of raw materials to the finished product. The manufacture of the printed circuit boards and the subsequent testing was particularly interesting, being highly automated. Everyone was so interested that the tour lasted until 5.00pm, when Mike Williams thanked our hosts.

On behalf of the members, I would like to thank Mike Williams and Chris Buck for organising such an excellent day out.

*John Gale*

### **A DAY-OUT IN DEVON**

On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> May some 24 members and friends met at the Tea-room and Restaurant at Roadford Lake in Devon. This Lake is the largest of three reservoirs that provide most of the water for Devon and Cornwall. Completed in 1990, Roadford is owned and operated by South West Water.

Unfortunately the steam launch "Elegance" was unavailable as promised due to a refit and the day had to be rescheduled. After coffee we drove to the Pumping Station at the foot of the Dam, where we met Alan Burgess of S.W. Water, Energy Manager for the site. Alan gave a very interesting talk about the Company and how it fits into a larger group following privatisation. He gave details of the reservoir and its place in the total water supplies. Then we were taken on a tour of the station to see the pumps and the hydro-electric generators. An interesting part of the tour took us through an access tunnel under the dam and reservoir to the Valve Tower, where we faced a daunting climb of 140 steps to the top. It was worthwhile to see the magnificent view of the Lake and appreciate the scale of the works. Roger Christy, who organised the day, thanked Alan Burgess for his hospitality and then we adjourned for lunch in the Restaurant.

After lunch, it was then on to Dingles Steam Village for a trip back to the days of our youth to see a magnificent collection of steam powered equipment. Besides the usual steam traction engines, there were some interesting examples of how steam was used on board ships and in the factory. The ladies tried their hand at the power assisted rudder mechanism for a large ship and we all threw rocks into a crushing machine to make chippings. Finally we were able to inspect the "Elegance", which was on a trailer reach to be towed back to Roadford in a few days time.

There was an interesting collection of old road signs, which brought back memories of long car journeys with two impatient children in the back seat. The day ended with an excellent Devon cream tea with fresh baked scones and home-made jam.

*John Gale & David Hutton*

### **HESTERCOMBE GARDENS**

Thirty four members and friends joined our visit to Hestercombe Gardens near Taunton on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July. Our numbers at lunch at the Merry Monk beforehand were less than planned due to delays on the M5. Something to remember for future summer visits. Those who made it in time enjoyed the usual good food and conversation.

Hestercombe Gardens cover some 35 acres flanking a valley and using the natural water resource to good effect. The Gardens comprise of an extensive Georgian landscape, a Victorian Terrace and a formal Edwardian garden overlooking Taunton and the Tone Valley below. With the weather still dry and sunny, many of us decided to do the hiking first and took the various routes (depending upon fitness and energy) to explore the valley. The Landscape was originally created between 1750 and 1786 for the then owner Coplestone Warre Bampfylde and incorporated a series of wooded areas interspersed with follies. Our walk took us past the Pear Pond to the Great Cascade via a brick lined leat. Considerable clearance work had recently been carried out with piles of cleared timber (much to the consternation of your Secretary!) giving the appearance of a landscape in transition - it would be interesting to go back in 5 years time! After a short climb the walk headed back towards the House passing a number of unusual follies. Until recently the Temple Arthur (c1775) was derelict, but has now been splendidly rebuilt and a Witch House restored, recreating the variety and interest of the original plans.

The Edwardian Garden close to the House was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and planted by Gertrude Jekyll from 1904. It is a magnificent creation within a formal network of paved water channels. The House is now home to the headquarters of Somerset County Fire Brigade. We were unable to explore the House to find out if any parts of the old hydro-electric generating station still exist. For those of us who were unable to join us on this delightful day and wish to visit, the Gardens Tel.No. is 01823 413923.

*Barrie Phillips*

### **CORNWALL NEWS No.2**

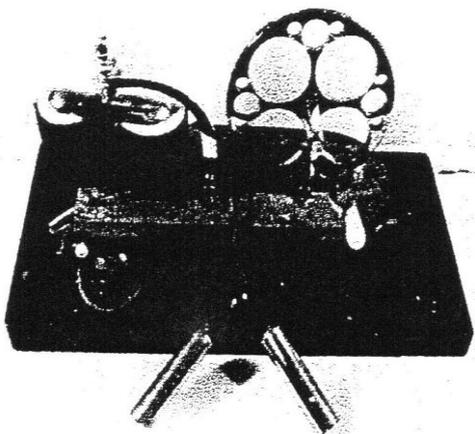
The owner of the Jamaica Inn, which incorporates two museums, John Watts, contacted member, Mike Wreford recently to ask him to identify a "machine" he had purchased.

The name P.Cutts, Sutton & Sons, Sheffield appears on its handle and Mike instantly recognised it as a Magneto-Electric machine often known as a "Faradic" machine used for medical purposes. The first practical machine of this type was made by M.Hippolyte of Paris in 1832, Soon after an Improvement was made

### **JAMAICA INN continued**

by Clarke of London, which is very similar to the one at Jamaica Inn. However the Clarke's machine had a vertical permanent horseshoe magnet, whereas Mr. Watts machine has a horizontal magnet.

When the coils are rotated on top of the magnet, electric current is produced, which is fed to the two pillars and connected by wires to the brass handhold tubes. These machines were used to give an electric shock, which was supposed to have wide-ranging medical benefits in the 1870's from headaches, rheumatism, piles and muscle problems. This is but a precise of a long list of the supposed benefits.



**Cutts, Sutton Magneto-electric Machine**

Mike also included a copy of the advertisement showing two human bodies (back and front) with numbers illustrating parts of the body where one could place the contacts for best effect. If the patients found it disagreeable, then they were advised to use wet sponges between contact and the skin to obviate the pricking sensation!

*Mike Wreford*

### **A VISIT TO CAIRNS ROAD**

As working member, I recently paid a rare visit to Cairns Road during one of the Historical Society workdays. For those who don't know it, Cairns Road is a 33/11kV substation in North Bristol. The Historical Society has taken over a disused switch-room as a museum and archive, and members meet there at 10.30am the first Thursday of each month.

A lot of hard work has gone into converting the switch-room and setting up the displays of engineering and domestic equipment, which range from classic fault location gear like a Wheatstone Bridge (none of this new-fangled electronic stuff) to electric shock machines, allegedly for medicinal use!

*(Editor's Note ~ see article by Mike Wreford)*

When I arrived, I found a hive of industry. Several people were putting together a display of electrical wiring, old and new. Others were restoring appliances or researching in the archives, which contain a wide range of documents from the old private companies, which existed before SWEB.

There is a major collection of photographs going back over many years, which was how I became interested in electrical history initially, long before we had the Archive or had started the Historical Society, helping Peter Lamb to sort out the large quantities of photos we had been sent.

The Society also owns a collection of films, which have been lodged with the South West Film and TV Archive in Plymouth for preservation under proper conditions. Video copies are available for loan to members - do you remember for example the classic film "Power Comes to Widecombe"?

Another good reason to visit Cairns Road was the excellent pub lunch at the nearby Cambridge Arms. If you have some time to spare, I would recommend that you come along on the first Thursday at 10.30 am and see what's happening for yourself. Just turn up, or if you would like to know more, you can ring Peter Lamb on 01275 463160, or Mike Williams on 0117 9864991.

*Paul Hulbert*

### **ARCHIVAL ACTIVITY**

Since April we have had four enquiries, one of which involved the use of excerpts from our film "Electricity Comes to Widecombe" made in 1962. West Country TV interviewed people, who were featured in the original film and still living there! It was quite fascinating and a video copy of the programme has been given to us.

Also again we have had donated to us a large archive, this time Electricity magazines (BEA & CEA) by John and Margaret Roberts. Since we only collect items associated with the South West, your Secretary has approached the National Electricity Archive at Manchester and they are very interested.

Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society (SIAS) have approached us to review an article written by one of their members about Thomas Oswald Belshaw an associate of Sir Ambrose Fleming. Since he was not associated with the South West we have another problem?

### **CIGARETTE CARD CORNER No.3**

John Haynes has a series of interesting old cigarette cards. Here is the first of the 1927 series no.29 "Wills Engineering Wonders", with the following reverse script:- (See overleaf)

## ELECTRIC WINDING ENGINE YORKSHIRE

One of the largest winding engines in this country is situated at the Harworth Main Colliery, Yorkshire. It is driven by two Metropolitan Vickers electric motors, each of 3,000hp. The diameter of the rope-drum, which is of the cylindro-conical type, varies from 14 feet to 26 feet. The shaft is 3,000 feet deep and it is the duty of this winding engine to raise 7 1/4 tons of coal at a time from this depth at a speed of 3,150 feet per minute. The necessary power is supplied by a 2,400hp turbo-generator provided with a steel flywheel weighing 22 tons and revolving at the remarkable peripheral speed of 28,000 feet per minute."



## THE CHAGFORD ELECTRIC LIGHT

This poem by G.H. Hurrell written in 1891 was found in a bundle of papers in a bookshop in Ashburton. The poet is believed to have been the blind organist of St. Michaels Church, Chagford :-

Dear Friends, the Electric Light draws nigh,  
I hope you will see it with your natural eye,  
Gas is a thing we can well do without,  
For ill Chagford they tell me it's not much count.  
Mr. Reed, McSweeney and Bartlett too,  
I am sure they are trying their work well to do,  
So I hope dear people, you will do what is right  
And take the beautiful Electric Light.  
Winter will come, yes, after a time,  
My words you will find I have put in rhyme,  
No candles, or matches, but turn on the switch,  
Enabling the tailor to sew a fine stitch.  
So, now I have done, and shall say no more,  
These words I do mean to rich and to poor,  
So friends pull together, one & all with your might.  
And bless good old Chagford and the Electric Light.  
At Chagford the Gaslight will soon be put out,  
There is nothing to fear and nothing to doubt,  
The Electric was lit on Wednesday night last,  
There's nothing that glorious light can surpass,  
Dear people you've seen the light with your eyes,  
If you do without Gas, I am sure you'll be wise,  
So take my advice which I give one and all.  
Very soon in Chagford, you'll have no Gas at all!  
It's cool, it's harmless, it's free from fire,  
I am sure you can touch the Electric wire,  
One thing you can do, and that you' find right,  
Just turn on the switch and there's the Light,  
Good bye my dear people! God bless you dear folks.  
My words I do mean, and I'm sure they're no jokes.  
Take heed my dear friends and read what I say,  
And Chagford at night will be light as the day!!

## PROGRAMME -put dates in your diary

Thurs. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

### Sat 25<sup>th</sup> Sept BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

At Exeter, John Dike to give an unusual interactive presentation involving live entertainment of pictures and music. Before lunch at Exeter Arms.

Thurs. 7<sup>th</sup> Oct. Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

### Fri./Sat/Sun. 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> Oct IRONBRTOGE

Weekend at the Madeley Court Hotel and visiting the five major museums in the Gorge.

Thurs. 4<sup>th</sup> Nov. Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

### Sat 27<sup>th</sup> Nov. BRISTOL SHIPPING

10.45am Visit SS GREAT BRITAIN & THE MATTHEW, then lunch at the Pumphouse Pub before walking to the Create Centre, Cumberland Basin at 2.00pm Rodney North will give a talk on "CABOT & THE MATTHEW some history plus a description of part of the ship's voyage to America

Thurs. 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec. Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

## YEAR 2000

Thurs. 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

### Sat 29<sup>th</sup> Jan. ANNUAL LUNCHEON

At Tiverton Hotel, Tiverton with morning visit to Tiverton Town Country Museum Thurs. 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb. Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

Thurs. 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar. Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

### Sat 18<sup>th</sup> Mar. AGM + Talk "SOMERSET LA."

2.00pm at the Electricity Training Centre, Taunton by Roger Eckersley with lunch at the Merry Monk

Thurs. 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar. Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

Thurs. 6<sup>th</sup> Apr. Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

### Sat 15<sup>th</sup> Apr. VISIT UNDERFALL YARD.

BRISTOL Old Workshop of Bristol's City Docks with lunch at the Pumphouse Pub beforehand

Thurs. 4<sup>th</sup> May Bristol Get-together - Lunch 12.15pm  
Cambridge Arms, Coldharbour Road

## NEXT EDITION

Please send information, articles, photographs or letters to Peter Lamb at 35 Station Road Backwell, Bristol BS48 3NH or telephone on 01275 463160.