

HISTELEC NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH WESTERN ELECTRICITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

No. 21

AUGUST 2002

SUMMER SOLICITATIONS TO YOU ALL

I hope you have all had and still are having an enjoyable Summer and finding a few days of sunshine, as we did at Saunton Sands in mid-July, see separate article.

CAIRNS ROAD VISITOR CENTRE

Still the progress is slow awaiting Charity Status. We have cleared out the office of WPD rubbish and hope to paint this room first. Already we can thank Mike Williams for painting the new wooden doors, which is a start. The Charity Commissioners have requested that we change one of our rules. This will require a Special General Meeting again. This will be coordinated with the talk by Brian Byng on 26th October 2002 at the ISCA Centre, Exeter.

WEEKEND AWAY 2003

The result of the member's poll was overwhelming in favour of the Peak District. Chris Buck and David Hutton have agreed to organise the weekend away and they have decided, subject to an exploratory weekend, to go for a hotel in Buxton in October '03. You will be hearing more about this shortly.

ANNUAL LUNCHEON

The Annual Luncheon will be held this year at the Globe, Topsham, a 16th Century coaching Inn on Saturday 25th January 2003. Our guest speaker will be Mr. George Ashwood. Prior to the lunch in the morning, an arranged visit will be made to the Topsham Museum, with much information about the River Exe history.

ANTIQUARIAN BOOKS

I have advised our electronic mailers that our bookseller, Eagle Bookshop, from whom we get a regular catalogue have put their catalogue on line.

For those who are not on line, but who may have access via family members, I give below their web site : www.eaglebookshop.co.uk
There are nine categories, literature, history, travel, leisure, contemplation, art, maths, science, & technology.

TWO SUPPLEMENTS ATTACHED

Princetown El. Supply and SEEBoard Experiences.

WEB SITE

Marcus has totally revamped the site, so that the various sections are more easily available at the first page. It is also getting a great deal of interest judging by the "hits", i.e. the number of times people access the web site. The number of enquiries from across the Atlantic is increasing, such that one might assume that we are the only electricity history group in the country – may be in the world!! Just to remind you, the web site name has been changed to:

<http://www.swehs.co.uk>

ELECTRIC TRAM CENTENARIES

Last year saw the centenary of Taunton trams and we had a talk on the subject by member, John Perkin. John, being a Tram enthusiast, advises us that this year is the centenary of the Camborne to Redruth tramway in May. Weston-super-Mare also celebrated their tram centenary in the same month. The Tramway and Light Railway Society staged an exhibition in Corpus Christi Hall, Ellenborough Park South. Both undertakings were promoted by their respective electricity supply companies.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Midland Electricity is no more. Now it is called "Aquila Networks", because it has been bought by Aquila Inc., an international energy and risk management company from the USA. It won't mean a lot to the average member of the public or for that matter staff morale, I would imagine!

HOTPOINT

The Hotpoint manufacturing business has been sold by Marconi and is now owned by Merloni Electrodomestici, an Italian manufacturer of appliances such as Indesit.

REDCLIFFE CAVES

The following action has been taken after our visit to Redcliffe Caves (reviewed below). Our guide around the Caves, Alan Grey, advised us that there was no protection for this historic item of industrial archaeology. Consequently we have alerted BIAS to the problem and they are intending to take it up with English Heritage. The City of Bristol do not seem very interested, as it is not possible to protect with statutory listing any construction below ground!

REVIEW – VISIT TO REDCLIFFE CAVES AND ST.MARY REDCLIFFE CHURCH

On Saturday 27 April some 50+ members, partners and friends gathered in the Redcliffe district of Bristol for a fascinating day. Redcliffe has a long and interesting history, much of it before it became part of the city of Bristol, and is full of interest as those of us, who worked at Electricity House and Bradford House, became aware in our lunch time explorations. In the 1960's Phoenix Wharf (once known as Redcliffe Wharf) was a Council Depot and not accessible to the public, so the second part of our day was new ground for me at least.

The visit was split into two parts, St Mary Redcliffe, and the so called Redcliffe Caves with the party being split into two groups as the "Caves" could not accommodate more than about 25 people at one time, so we became Groups A & B!

Although parts of St. Mary Redcliffe Church date from the 12th century the main structure was completed during the 14th century, when the people of Redcliffe were vying with their neighbours across the Avon in the City of Bristol, as to who could build the more magnificent place of worship. The uniform building style and proportions make the church probably one of the finest example of perpendicular style parish church in Britain. We were taken on a very interesting tour of the Church by one of their guides and spent much of our time gazing up at the vaulting bosses, of which there are supposed to be over 1100 - all different! In the Chapel dedicated to St. John there are two windows made up from fragments of medieval glass that survived the destruction of the Civil War. It is perhaps a miracle that the church escaped any serious damage in the 1939-45 War, as it is so close to the main railway centre and the commercial centre of the city. The second part of the day took us across the road and underground. Redcliffe Caves, though not as old as the Parish church, have as well, a long and interesting history. Despite their name they are not caves in the accepted sense, but the results of generations of "mining" by the locals. They have been known for many years but it was only in the 1990's, that the Axbridge Caving Group were granted a licence by the City Council to explore the Caves and to take visiting parties into them. We were taken around by a member of the Axbridge Caving Group, who explained that the history of the caves is sketchy. The sandstone rock forming the "Cliffe" of Redcliffe was mined for sand in the 16th century to use in the local glass making factories and as a slip for glazing pottery. Subsequently the caves were used for storage (including Spanish & French prisoners!), as they are close to Phoenix Wharf. Our guide came up with various other uses - including a sewerage disposal system for the houses above - and as an extension to the shot tower that used to be on Redcliffe Hill.

We had lunch at a Belgian restaurant in Welsh Back, part of the old warehouse known as the Granary - a

striking decor of ventilating ducts - but good food and interesting beers. A very big thank you to David Peacock for the research and organisation of the day.

Roger Hughes

ELECTRICITY IN ICELAND

Iceland is one of the few countries in the developed world that can claim 100% of electricity generation being from renewable sources. Historically this has been provided by hydro-electric schemes, however more recently geo-thermal energy has provided a source for electricity generation. In previous centuries the utilisation of geo-thermal heat was primarily limited to bathing and laundering.

Reykjavik District Heating began operations in 1930, providing 14 litres/second of hot water at 87 degrees centigrade. The water was piped 3km to a primary school and proved so successful that further geo-thermal sources were sought. In 1948, the mayor of Reykjavik approved the city's participation in geo-thermal research on an area near the mountain Hengill, which is about 30km east of the city. The geo-thermal activity stems from volcanic activity in the area and research has shown that rainfall in the highlands to the north trickle deep down into the rock foundation through faults and fissures. Below ground the water is heated up by the surrounding hot rock and bursts up through the faults and fissures under Mt. Hengill. The area has experienced nearly 24,000 earthquakes exceeding 0.5 on the Richter scale between 1993 and 1997, of which the largest registered 5.3 in June 1998.

At Nesjavellir close to Mt. Hengill, 20 water bore holes have been drilled to depths of between 1000 and 2000m, where temperatures of up to 380 degrees centigrade have been measured. The power plant which the bore holes feed has an output of 200MW in thermal and 60MW electrical power. The thermal output (hot water) is then transported some 23km via a steel pipeline insulated with rock wool covered with plastic and aluminium on the outside. The insulation is so effective that the temperature drop is less than two degrees at either end and where the pipeline is above ground snow does not melt off it. Hot water is then used to feed district-heating scheme in the Reykjavik area.

Although geo-thermal energy may be regarded as a renewable source, it does produce carbon dioxide (7500 tonnes per annum at Nesjavellir) and hydrogen sulphide. In comparison with fossil fuels the quantity of carbon dioxide is small and there is some debate on the environmental impact of hydrogen sulphide. Research findings suggest that it changes into sulphur, which falls to the ground as harmless salts, however the alternative theory is that it changes into sulphur dioxide the main cause of acid rain.

Clive Goodman

REVIEW – HAYNES & HEATH TALKS

The Return of the Two Johnnies

On Saturday 26th May members and their guests met at a new venue for us in Exeter, the ISCA Centre. This had been highly recommended by Brian Grimshaw and it did not let us down. We enjoyed an excellent buffet lunch and were able to view the other facilities available, mainly sporting.

After lunch we were entertained by the “Two Johnnies” with some friendly badinage :-

John Haynes led off with an illustrated talk on the Falmouth Undertaking. The only undertaking in the South West to have an incinerator among its steam raising plant. This was still in operation at nationalisation in spite of many difficulties with burning the rubbish. John Heath followed with some fascinating information on the St. Austell undertaking, the first company to establish a public supply in Cornwall. He covered other aspects of the St. Austell Company including Mevagissey supply.

These two undertakings were the only ones to escape the clutches of the Cornwall Electric Power Company.

John Gale

REVIEW – VISIT FORDE ABBEY

On Sunday 23rd June around thirty members and their guests met at the Windwhistle Inn, near Chard, for lunch prior to visiting Forde Abbey House and Gardens in the afternoon.

We had an added lunchtime bonus as the Windwhistle Inn was also the venue for an exhibition of Military vehicles and small arms, mainly from the Second World War, so our party was able to inspect various Jeeps, rifles, Bren guns, etc. at close quarters.

A short car journey after lunch took us to the Abbey, which was founded as a Cistercian monastery in 1141. The monastery flourished for four hundred years, during which time it became one of the richest and most learned institutions of its kind in England. In 1539, however, Henry VIII ordered the dissolution of the larger monasteries, whereupon Forde Abbey was leased by the Crown for the next 100 years.

In 1649 the Abbey was purchased by Edmund Prideaux, who was the Attorney General to Oliver Cromwell. He was largely responsible for transforming the Abbey into the magnificent private residence it is today. The tour of the house revealed a host of fascinating treasures, including a set of tapestries of the Raphael cartoons drawn for the Sistine Chapel and also some magnificent plaster ceilings of exceptional quality.

After touring the house we were able to wander around the grounds, where we were treated to another bonus, as the Alvis Car club were holding

one of their events there and we were able to inspect some fine examples of pre-war Alvis cars.

Our thanks go to Paul Hulbert for organising another interesting day out and for sorting out the weather so as to give us a dry and sunny day. *Brian Grimshaw*

SUNDAY LUNCH – WHERE?

The sky is blue, a few clouds far out over the sparkling sea. White surf rumbles over golden sands, the beach stretching far into the distance. High above on the hotel terrace a slight breeze is welcome, a cold drink refreshing. Within, the dining room bright, sunlit but cool, enjoys the same stunning view. The food, perhaps a little different, is good and tasty, your companions familiar, friendly; conversation amusing, free and easy.

-----Today, here, life is good, life is relaxing!

The Caribbean? No. The Seychelles then? No - not even the Costa Del Sol. This is the Saunton Sands Hotel, July 14th. A trifle fanciful you might say - perhaps, but such was the day that 21 members enjoyed their Sunday luncheon with great enthusiasm. Saunton did seem far from anywhere, the weather did look set to be foul forever, but was the trip worth it? Definitely! Thank you Roger Christy and Co. Well done - a **most agreeable 'historic'** day!

David Hole

MEMBERS NEWS

David Hood

Seen by another member on the Scilly Isles. One can't go anywhere can one?

Bernard Melling

You may recall that Bernard did a Histelec News supplement in June 1998 on “Humphrey Davey”. Recently he was asked to give a talk to the local community association and chose for his subject the research information used for the supplement. However the Cornish Times seems to have got the story twisted, when reporting forthcoming events as follows : “At our next meeting on July 3, Sir Humphret Davey will tell us about the Great Cornishman - Mr Bernard Melling”. Bernard says the 45 people present did not seem too disappointed.

John Haynes

You may recall that we reported that John with the Trevera Male Voice Choir attended the Eisteddfod recently. John says they came 5th out of nine, which is very good for a first time effort.

David Legg

David has pulled a ligament in his ankle recently, which stopped him playing golf for a few months, but has started playing again once a week.

NEW DRINK FOR MEMBERS

Whilst imbibing in a Bath bar, a new cocktail was spotted by members Haynes and Lamb. It was called “An Electric Chair”. We enquired what were the constituent parts, answer = Tequila and After Shock.

WE ARE SURVIVORS

We were born before television, before penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, plastic, contact lenses, videos, camcorders, Frisbees and the pill. We were born before radar, credit cards, split atoms, laser beams and ballpoint pens, before dishwashers, tumble dryers, electric blankets, air conditioners, drip-dry clothes, and before man walked on the Moon. We got married first and then lived together, (how quaint can you be). We thought "fast food" was what you had in Lent, a 'Big Mac' was an oversized raincoat, and crumpet we had for tea.

We existed before house-husbands, computer data, dual careers, when a meaningful relationship meant getting along with your cousins, and when sheltered accommodation was where you waited for a bus. We were born before day centres, group homes and disposable nappies. We never heard of FM radio, tape decks, electric typewriters, artificial hearts, word-processors, yoghurt and young men wearing earrings. For us "Time Sharing" meant togetherness, a 'chip' was a piece of wood or a fried potato, 'hardware' meant nuts and bolts, and 'soft ware' wasn't a word.

Before 1940 "Made in Japan" meant junk. The term "making-out" referred to how you did in your exams, "stud" was something that fastened a collar to a shirt, and "going all the way" meant staying on a double-decker to the bus depot. Pizza, MacDonalds and instant coffee were unheard of. In our day cigarette smoking was fashionable, "grass" was mown, coke was kept in the coal house, a 'joint' was a piece of meat you had on Sunday, and "pot" was something you cooked it in. Rock music was Grandma's lullaby, Eldorado was an ice cream, a "gay" person was the life and soul of the party and nothing more, while "Aids" just meant beauty treatment or help to someone in trouble.

We, who were born before 1940, must be a hardy bunch, when you think of the way, in which this world has changed and the adjustments, we have had to make. No wonder we are confused and there is a generation gap today. BUT, by the Grace of God,

WE HAVE SURVIVED.HALLELUJAH

LETTERS

To the Editor, Histelec News

May '02

Dear Sir,

I write to protest about an annoying trend I have recently noticed among those attending the Society's slide lectures.

As soon as the lights go down and the slide show begins, a small minority immediately settle down and enjoy "forty-winks". I feel this is most distracting to others in the audience and rather an insult to those presenting the lecture. It is fortunate that the rumble

of the slide-projector fan is sufficient to drown out any light snoring noises, but this is not the point.

Do these people not realise the many hours spent by the speaker in researching and preparing his talk? The agonising over which slides to reject, and the best way to prune his talk from 16 pages down to 7?

Then let them take steps to curb their somnolence. Perhaps an early night immediately prior to the lecture would suffice, or, dare I say it, less intoxicating liquor just before the lecture commences.

We are lucky that 'histe-lecturers' are prepared to go to great lengths to inform and entertain us. Let these cat-nappers return the courtesy by at least remaining awake.

Yours despairingly

B. A. Lert. (address supplied)

FOR YOUR DIARIES **PROGRAMME for the** **NEXT HALF YEAR**

Sat. 21st Sept. **VISIT TO WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY**

Starting at Bishop's Lydiard with host Graham Warburton with lunch at Minehead

Sat. 26th Oct. **"STANDING STONES IN NATIONAL PARKS" talk by Brian Byng**

Lunch at 12.30pm at the ISCA Centre, Summer Lane, Exeter with talk at 2.00pm. A short Special General Meeting will follow to agree a small change of the Rules.

Sat. 30th Nov. **"ILLUMINATING HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN THE SOUTH WEST"**

Talk by Mark Wood-Robinson at Clarence House**, Portishead – Lunch there also at 12.30pm

** Clarence House is a very well appointed privately run club, which was once the CEGB Social Club. It has a pleasant hotel air about it.

25th Jan. 2003 **ANNUAL LUNCHEON AT THE GLOBE INN, TOPSHAM** Visiting the Topsham Museum beforehand in the morning.

NEXT EDITION

This newsletter is produced every four months depending upon material available. Please send information, articles, photographs or letters to :- Peter Lamb at 35 Station Road, Backwell, Bristol BS48 3NH or telephone him on 01275 463160 Or e-mail him on lambpandv@talk21.com