

# HISTELEC NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH WESTERN ELECTRICITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

No. 22

DECEMBER 2002

## HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL

I hope you will have had a super family Christmas and are looking forward now to the longer days and, dare I say it, finer weather and balmy evenings !

## CAIRNS ROAD EDUCATION CENTRE

You will no doubt have understood the “winds of change” rattling through the Society, having read the document published with our last notice. The project at Cairns Road seems bedevilled by lack of funds, but at the least we hope to make it into a reasonable meeting place for the Society, particularly for the meetings held north of Taunton. The decoration of the office is complete and, with the transference of the General Library, we will be using the room for archival research. One should not lose sight of the fact that with the Web Site, the Archives are in constant use with enquiries from all over the globe.

The priorities at Cairns Road are as follows :-

1. New Main Access Ramp or Steps & Door.
2. Door on New Archive Room to enable us to expand the Archives as items are given to us. (Most recent acquisition – SWEB News full run)
3. Decorate New Archive Room
4. New Large Room Electrics
5. Decorate New Large Room for meeting room

In order to minimise costs, this work will have to be undertaken on a DIY basis. Anyone interested in helping should contact David Peacock, John Gale or Peter Lamb. “Many hands etc” so the more help we can get, the quicker we will be in business.

## WEEKEND AWAY 2003

Arrangements are well in hand for a super weekend and we have 46 people signed up. We will be staying at the Peverill of the Peak Hotel and although there are still a few places available, the group will be limited to the maximum size of a coach, since the weekend involves two trips out by coach.

## ELECTRICITY ASSOCIATION

The EA have approached us for membership of our Society. This could be an exciting development.

**ERRATA** - In your Programme for the AGM, the speaker should read Alan Stansbridge.

## ELECTRIC TRAM CENTENARY

Further to our note in the last newsletter about Tram Centenaries, we have been fortunate in obtaining permission to use extracts extensively from Eric Edmonds six articles in the Trevithick Society Annual Journal No.29 “The Camborne and Redruth Tramway”. Part 1 is included as a supplement to this newsletter, just scraping into the Centenary Year.

## TREVITHICK TRUST/SOCIETY

It is highly appropriate, with the current supplement taken from the Journal of the Trevithick Society, to tell you more about the industrial archaeological organisation in Cornwall. The Society is a voluntary organisation with similar objectives to the Trust, but not directly associated, but with nearly 400 members.

The Trevithick Trust, which was set up in 1994, is a limited company and a charity. It is a management organisation to identify, preserve, protect and interpret Cornwall’s industrial heritage, and employs 45 people with about 100 volunteers. It administers many industrial archaeological sites within three District Councils for a number of disparate owners, given in brackets and keyed below :- Pendeen Lighthouse (TH), Porthcurno Museum of Submarine Telegraphy (C & W), Taylor’s & Mitchell Shafts, Trevithick Cottage (NT), St. Day Old Church (C of E), Tolgus Tin, Lizard Lighthouse (TH), King Edward Mine (CSM), original Marconi Lizard Wireless Station (NT), Wheal Martyn China Clay Museum. Two other sites were under their control, but have recently been removed - Geevor Tin Mine (CCC) & Levant Steam Engine (NT).

Key :-

TH – Trinity House    CCC - Cornwall County C’l  
NT – National Trust    C of E – Church of England  
C & W – Cable and Wireless  
CSM – Camborne School of Mines

The long term aim of the Trust according to its ex-Chief Executive, Stuart B. Smith, writing in the AIA Journal is for all the archaeological sites to be linked together to guide people around the industrial landscape of Cornwall, whether it be mining, communications, fishing or farming. So you can imagine that for people with a keen interest in the industrial heritage, there is plenty to see in Cornwall.

### **CORNWALL WEEKEND ?**

The committee have discussed a possible weekend away in Cornwall in the Year 2004, i.e. not waiting two years for the next weekend away. The reasoning behind this is that there is plenty to see in Cornwall (see previous article), which we are unable to fit in with day trips for the majority of the membership. Let committee members know your views on this.

### **AC ONLY TRAVELS IN STRAIGHT LINES**

Visitors to San Francisco will no doubt hire a car and head out east to see the wonders of the beautiful Yosemite Valley National Park. It is well worth carrying on east and leaving the Park by driving over the Tioga Pass and down to Lee Vining to see the strange lime stone "Tufa" formations in Lake Mono.

Take Highway 395 north and after a few miles turn right onto route 28 to the old mining town of Bowdie. At its peak back in the gold rush times, up to 10,000 men worked there, now it's a ghost town.

At the turn of the last century it was decided to bring electricity to Bowdie and a battle commenced as to the merits of an ac or dc overhead line to transmit the power over a distance of about 10 miles. The battle was won by ac, but the "dirty tricks" department in the dc camp had put round a rumour that ac would only travel in a straight line. To make sure that they were awarded the contract, the ac company built the overhead line dead straight for 10 miles and it still stands today.

The ghost town of Bowdie is well worth a visit if you are ever in that part of California. *David Hutton*

### **PENISTONE AND ELECTRICITY**

Penistone is a small and somewhat old-fashioned industrial town set some 800 ft up in the South Yorkshire Pennines. Its history seems to have included a greater than usual amount of electricity. It achieved notoriety as a junction between the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway branch to Huddersfield and the main Great Central line over the Pennines between Sheffield and Manchester. It was (and still can be) a bleak and snowy place. In addition to passengers, this line carried vast amounts of coal from the south Yorkshire coalfield to the industries and power stations of Lancashire. Part of the route from Wath was at the steep gradient of 1 in 40 and this necessitated as many as four steam locomotives to raise the forty or so coal trains up the bank. In 1936 the LNER started work on 1500V d.c. electrification. A new 3-mile long tunnel was dug under the desolate Woodhead Pass. The whole scheme with 57 powerful electric locos was not completed, until 1955 with further extensions in 1965. Coal traffic declined in the 1970s and the line from Penistone to Hadfield in Lancashire was closed in 1981. One of the Woodhead tunnels was used by the CEBG to underground its 275kV grid lines over

the Pennines thus preserving the wild upland scenery and protecting the lines from atrocious weather.

Today Penistone survives and boasts a very comfortable cinema with arm-chair seats, a theatre organ and a bar at the interval. The best seats are only about £2.50. The rural railway from Huddersfield to Sheffield survives with a growth in services and busy trains. Once a month a train carries a jazz or blues band and, to assist the musical qualities, real ale is served by volunteers. There is talk of re-opening the Manchester line as part of Central Railway's plan for double stacked 25kV electrically hauled trains running from Liverpool to Lille. Sadly Penistone's last steel manufacturer has just announced closure and loss of 250 jobs resulting from the Enron fiasco. See also "Slogans" *Colin Hill*

### **RETIRED PROF. ENGINEERS CLUB**

As many of our members will know there is a Retired Professional Engineers Club in Bristol. We enjoyed a joint visit to Bletchley Park last year. There is a similar club in Exeter. The Bristol Club took on a new venture for them. They engaged the services of an amateur orchestra and put on a charity concert, which proved very successful raising over £550 for Muscular Dystrophy Campaign.

*John Coneybear*

*(Editor's Note : John is being modest. He is playing member of the orchestra and would have been a main organiser of such a successful event)*

### **WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY REVIEW –**

#### **Steam, Cream and Cradles**

On a sunny Saturday in September, 32 members and guests headed towards Bishops Lydeard, the starting point for our trip on the West Somerset Railway. This had been arranged by 'steam-buff' Graham Warburton, and what an interesting day it proved to be. While awaiting our train, and our reserved compartment, we were treated to a demonstration of the model railway operated and built by Graham and members of the Taunton Model Railway Group.

We eventually set off along the line towards Minehead, but at Williton Station, most of us alighted to visit the signal-box, the workshops and a small display area containing photographs and other items. Here the party split into three groups. I was in the group starting at the signal box, where we met volunteer signalman Geoff, who during the week works for the TSB. He explained the mysteries of 'block working', train staffs (for single-line working), and red and yellow signal lever collars.

At that point we were thrilled to see a large green loco approaching, and this proved to be GWR King Edward 1st. It stopped at the station, was uncoupled from its carriages, and ran round the loop to go back from whence it came. Many photos. were captured of this event! Our group entered the workshops, where

### Continued – West Somerset Rail Review

Mike showed us around, mainly concentrating on a loco in the process of being restored. This was the Southern Region 'rebuilt' West Country class "Braunton". It had been bought from Barry Scrapyard after being there for 20 years. A photo taken then showed a rusty hulk! Four years of heavy work have so far been spent on this loco and Mike said at least another two years were needed to get it running again. After signing the Visitors Book, we caught the next train towards Minehead.



Photo by John Haynes

At Washford Station, Bernard Melling temporarily alighted, and slightly delayed the train while he took a couple of photos. This was to remind him of the time in the 'olden days', when he travelled from Washford to his school in Minehead. The train then continued past Dunster Castle to the terminus at Minehead. This station was crowded with people, and several locos and carriage sets were in evidence. I spotted GWR Dinmore Manor (in green livery) and a BR side-tank engine (in black). Both these engines were in steam. GWR Odney Manor was also on view, cold and lifeless, with a neat black polythene cover over its chimney! It was now time for a late lunch, and what better at the seaside, than fish & chips! Some of us walked up North Hill to see the scenic Church Steps, and its cobbled lanes and thatched cottages, then down the other side for a birds-eye view of the town, to end up at the old quay. In the late afternoon we travelled back along the railway, enjoying an excellent Somerset cream tea en-route. Graham extolled the beauty of electricity overhead line 'cradle guards', and said the WSR were lucky enough to have no less than three of these crossing its line at various locations!

At the end of our journey, there was to be a sting in the tail! At Crowcombe Heathfield Station, the unexpected happened. Graham had arranged for our engine to run out of steam within a stones throw of an overhead line cradle guard!!! Here we stayed for over half an hour admiring both the cradle guard, and Graham's cunning ruse, until the "cavalry" arrived in the form of a diesel shunting engine. We were towed back to Bishops Lydeard Station by the smirking little monster, to finish off a very interesting and happy day.

*John Haynes*

### **REVIEW – STANDING STONES ETC**

The talk by Brian Byng on Standing Stones in National Parks was an intriguing look into the distant past. Without any written indication of the beliefs of the time, the purpose of these structures has to be to a large extent a matter for conjecture. Brian illustrated the point by taking a ruined church at Buckfast as an example and inviting the audience to consider what someone looking at the cross like outline, the east/west alignment, the smaller side rooms etc., would be able to make of the building without an understanding of Christian beliefs.

To come anywhere near an understanding of the stone rows and circles, requires a study of astronomy and is greatly helped by computer programs to calculate the position of the stars about the time the stones were erected. It also involves assumptions about the time of change of belief in a moon god to a sun god. Given appropriate calculations, it is possible to show that 12 of the stone groupings on Dartmoor were aligned to moonrise whilst others were aligned to sunrise on the shortest day. Others appear to have been aligned to stars. Stonehenge, however, may have originally been aligned to the moon but subsequently realigned on sunrise. Brian did not confine his discussion solely to National Parks, however, but discussed locations ranging from the Nile, to Irish rock tombs and to the Old Man of Gugh off St. Agnes in the Isles of Scilly.

The true purpose of these stone structures can never be known with certainty, but it is thought that, to an extent, they were probably a means of predicting the future, since star groupings and planetary alignments were then believed to be significant in influencing events on Earth. Indeed even today there are those who believe in astrology, although Brian was able to demonstrate that, because of the apparent movement of the constellations when viewed from the earth, many people will have determined their 'birth signs' incorrectly and so be reading the wrong horoscope.

The afternoon was thought provoking and wide ranging and we are grateful to Brian for his most interesting presentation. *David Peacock*

### **MEMBERS NEWS**

#### Marcus Palmen

Marcus fancies himself as a mason. No, he hasn't joined the brethren, he has built a folly in his garden. It is very artistic and looks like a monastic relic.

#### Peter Lamb

Peter has been elected Chairman of Bristol Brunel Probus Club from January 1<sup>st</sup> and so next year will be a very busy time for him.

#### Ted Luscombe

Ted has shot off to Australia until Christmas to see the Eclipse in the Southern Hemisphere. We would hope to hear about this in the next newsletter.

## **MANCHESTER MUSEUM of SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

A couple of weeks ago I visited the Manchester Museum of Science and Technology. The prime purpose of the visit was to explore their archives relating to the Electricity Industry, as they are the reported national custodians for our Industry. Their records were frankly disappointing consisting solely of a pile of beautifully bound copies of BEA, CEA, and CEGB reports that were once the property of the Electricity Council. Even these sets were not complete and did not include the Statistical Year books that the CEGB issued from 1976 onwards. (There are dozens of ERA reports if you fancy them!). But what superb conditions their archives are kept in - air conditioned - filing cabinets on wheels - secure access - no ball point pens allowed anywhere near the records - and gloves on to handle any of the pictures - and your briefcase must be left at the door!

Their collection of meters and other artefacts are kept in glass topped drawers in yet more filing cabinets - all in all very impressive except for the search procedure - you hunt through hand written A4 files arranged in random order.

But the site is fabulous - for those interested in railway history. It is the original Manchester terminus of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway (of Rainhill Trials and Chat Moss fame) built in 1830 and still in the original condition. Luckily for history the original terminus was soon superseded by what became Manchester Victoria and like Brunel's original Temple Meads was relegated to "goods shed" status and left unaltered. The original station has now been restored to its original condition as part of the Museum. Another of the buildings now in use, as part of the Museum is an original Great Western Railway (yes in Manchester!) warehouse also in mint 18th century condition.

The Museum aims at inspiring children's interest in Engineering, but nevertheless the extensive section devoted to Electricity is good, as is the building following the development of power. All in all well worth a visit, if you are in Manchester - right in the centre - the Metro tram runs a short distance away, but there is plenty of parking on the site.

*Roger Hughes*

### **WEB SITES -**

We have 2 web sites at present by accident, since the old one is still active <http://go.to/swehs>

### **LYME REGIS**

We had a request to visit an old-timer from the Lyme Regis undertaking. David Hood kindly went along. He has brought back a welter of information. The most exciting seems to have been during the War when one of the generator sets blew up, damaging others and leaving only one unit (75kW) supplying the whole Town at DC, lighting only of course!

## **SLOGANS from the Penistone Almanack 1940**

Heat your water electrically by installing immersion heaters.

Electricity! At your command instantly.

An electric smoke absorber will clear the air in a few minutes.

Make your club a cheerful place by using electric light.

Don't catch cold; use an electric hair dryer.

Gloom – cast it out, use electricity.

Keep your pictures and decorations clean by using electric lighting.

Don't have a stuffy kitchen, hire an electric cooker.

No more "housemaid's knee". Try a vacuum cleaner.

When wiring your house, put in heating plugs for radiators.

Make ironing easy, use an electric iron.

Make your shop the centre of attraction by using electricity.

Washing day is a joke with an electric washing machine.

Why have dirty ceilings? Use electric light.

Brighten Penistone by using electric lighting.

You desire electricity in your house? Good! Phone 20493 Leeds.

This is the electric age. Live it fully.

Electricity saves more than it costs.

Cut out doctor's bills. Use electricity – no fumes, no smell.

Don't paper-hang every year, use electric light.

When winter comes use an electric radiator.

The light that never fails – electric light!

The brightness of summer in winter! Touch the switch – that's all.

Don't spoil your eyesight, use electric light.

Install electric light, you will never regret it.

At your service: Electrical Distribution of Yorkshire, Ltd.

Abolish cleaning kettles, have an electric one.

Don't fall downstairs: switch on the electric light.

Live to an old age, using electricity.

Don't cut yourself while shaving, install electric light.

The silent salesman – an electrically-lighted window.\*

*\*This is on a page warning of wartime black-out restrictions! Colin Hill*

## **ELECTRICAL MUSEUMS**

Colin Hill writes " We've been on holiday in Berlin, Prague and Budapest. If members happen to be passing through Budapest, I thoroughly recommend an hour at the Hungarian Museum of Electrotechnics, 21 Kazinczy Utca, Budapest. It is open 11.00am to 5.00pm on Tuesday to Saturday".

Could we ask members to tell us, if they come across electrical museums or something of similar interest. Colin suggests the Castle Museum, York as a starter.

## REVIEW – ILLUMINATING HISTORIC BUILDINGS

A good turnout of 34 members and friends assembled at our new northern venue, Clarence House for a hot lunch and a super talk by Mark Wood-Robinson on 30<sup>th</sup> November. Everyone seemed to enjoy the venue, the old CEGB Social Club, which has been turned into local community club. The food was reasonably good and the Club is comfortably appointed with a decent car park, which is reasonably close to the motorway.

After lunch, Mark started his talk by giving us a brief outline of the history of lighting with a strong bias to Joseph Swan over Edison. He gave direct comparisons of candles with electric lamps and showed some basic examples of lighting with fluorescent lights in troughs with varying diffusers and low voltage lamps, used in illuminating buildings both internally and externally.

He showed us some magnificent slides of historic buildings, both inside and out, including the SS Great Britain, around the UK and around the World, finishing with some beautiful shots of Wells Cathedral. Chris Buck thanked Mark for an excellent talk.

*Peter Lamb*

## HEREWITH COW CROSSING PHOTO



Seen in Cornwall recently!

## BBC2 PROGRAMME ?

We entertained a BBC2 producer at Cairns Road recently with a view to using our historical electrical appliances for a programme called “Every Home Should Have One”. This will be about development in the home, specifically dealing with the machines and appliances which have transformed our lives.

## The Editor -HISTELEC News

Dear Sir,

I must protest at the unkind letter in the August issue of Histelec News concerning those of us who have problems in keeping awake during lectures after lunch. Does the writer not understand that we have travelled up to 100 miles to attend these events in all winds and weathers and need a good lunch and a drink to recover? In his book “Scouting for Boys”, Baden Powell recommends that everyone should rest for an hour after lunch and so a darkened room and the rumble of a slide projector provides the ideal setting.

In deference to the speaker, I always try to sit to the back of the lecture room, so as not to offend. My wife has a very pointed elbow and I come away with bruised ribs after a long talk.

I will do my best in future not to nod off, but perhaps more dynamic presentations would help.

Yours,

*I. Snooze Esq.*

## FOR YOUR DIARIES – a Reminder PROGRAMME for the NEXT HALF YEAR

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

Sat. 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar. AGM AT TAUNTON + Talk “WORLD HERITAGE RAILWAYS” by Alan Stansbridge At WPD Training Centre at 2.00pm and lunch beforehand at 12.30pm at the Merry Monk Inn.  
Sat. 26<sup>th</sup> Apr. VISIT BATH AT WORK MUSEUM Bowler Collection -Lunch at a Pub followed by a conducted tour of this fascinating Museum.

Sat. 17<sup>th</sup> May VISIT MORWELLHAM QUAY Meet between 10.30-11.30am for coffee and film and organised tour with stop for lunch on the Quay, also including train ride into the mine and maybe the hydro power station.

## 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](mailto:lambpandv@talk21.com)