

HISTELEC NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH WESTERN ELECTRICITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL CRUISE

The Chairman David Hutton is asking members if they are interested in a Cruise down the Manchester Ship Canal to the Mersey and then Liverpool with a bus back to Salford Quays. It should be a great weekend in April 2015. The Canal is massive which was built from 1887, opening in 1894, to take sea-going vessels to the heart of industrial Manchester to reduce the cost of exporting their goods. Being 36 miles long, involving numerous locks to raise ships 60 ft up to Manchester level, you may understand that it is trip not to be missed. Since 20 members signed up so far, it's ON!

AREVA IN TROUBLE

The French Nuclear provider Areva is in trouble with the new Nuclear power station at Flamanville, which is being constructed in Normandy, stating that it will be five years behind schedule and costs are spiralling out of control. The concern is that it could have a knock-on effect with Hinkley Point new station, which is the same design and was originally going to cost £10 billion, but now some papers are quoting £25 billion and will be lucky to be ready by 2023.

MET OFFICE NEW COMPUTER

The Met Office at Exeter are having a new super-computer. The new system consists of US multiple Cray MC40 computers costing £97M. The high performance computer has been especially designed for the Met Office and is 13 times more powerful than the current system. The first phase of the installation will be ready by September 2015 and be fully operational by 2017.

NAT GRID CONSERVATION

National Grid have publicised ideas to spend £500 million undergrounding some unsightly pylons in areas of natural beauty, which equates to £7 Million to remove a single pylon. Are they opening a "can-of-worms", I ask? Other ideas mooted include moving a pylon downhill off the ridge, but mostly these ideas would be considered only in National Parks I guess.

Also National Grid has awarded the first contract for the "T-Pylon". They will be built by Mabey Bridge and will be tested in the NG Training Centre at Eakring, Notts, but no site has been earmarked for them yet; could it be for Hinkley to Avonmouth?

CLIMATE CHANGE ARGUMENTS GO ON!

The Inter-government Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has produced a summary analysis of their 5000 page report, which was a compilation of 800 scientist's studies. They have recommended that emissions would have to fall by 40 to 70% by 2050 and to near zero by 2100. Many believe that the targets are impossible. However it is seen as bolstering the Government's Energy policy. Then there is the argument that it's costing too much involving the inefficient use of our taxation. i.e. mainly the wind farm subsidies.

Owen Patterson didn't believe in the Government's Policy and got sacked for publicly stating that the current policy would fail to meet the current targets and more importantly not meet UK's energy needs. He proposed four "common-sense" policies Shale Gas, Combined Heat & Power, Small Modular Nuclear Reactors and Demand Management.

The debate is hotting up!! Presidents of China and USA met recently to agree a very long term cut in emissions only 28% by 2025. A larger Climate Change Conference is planned for next year in Paris, where they will need Russia and India to come on board!!

GREAT BARRIER REEF IN DANGER?

Planning permission has now been given by the Australian Government for nine new coal mines in the Galilee Basin near to the coast of Queensland, Australia. The Basin has the largest reserve of thermal coal in the World. Environmentalists are concerned that the thousands of coal ships anticipated passing through the Barrier Reef will harm it, including the dredging involved to establish new ports along the coast. The coal will be going to India and China to be burned in their coal-fired power stations, which I imagine is of even greater concern!!

ELECTRICITY HOUSE LATEST

SWEB's old headquarters, Electricity House is being converted into flats. When Royal Sun Alliance were in the building they renamed it West Gate; the heartening news is that the old name is being retained. Two lady representatives from Crest Nicholson, the developers called at Cairns Road recently to seek pictures from the past, which David Cousins provided in digital form. SWEHS also donated a framed artist's impression for which we had two framed copies.

DAVID JONES “LIFE AFTER SWEB”

Our October meeting was at the Nutwell Lodge Hotel Exeter and nearly fifty members and guests listened with interest to an illuminating and humorous talk by David Jones CBE, Engineering Director of SWEB from 1986 to 1988. Members appreciated that David presented the talk in a frank and open way which confirmed our suspicions that decisions at high level can be influenced by less than straightforward factors! Even an “innocent” fishing trip may be designed to hook a possible merger between two utilities! However it was obvious that David’s very successful career in the energy business was based on much more solid ground.

He emphasised that he enjoyed life in SWEB with its relatively relaxed atmosphere in contrast to his move to be Deputy Chairman of the more formal South Wales Electricity Board. Conscripted to be one of three Deputy Chairman handling the major job of Privatisation didn’t help him integrate into South Wales. Privatisation brought David into contact with Cecil Parkinson and latterly John Wakeham and to the complexities of the apportionment of the industry to the new players of National Power, PowerGen, and Transco. Life was made difficult by the intransigent and negative attitude of some of the Area Board Chairman. Selected for the “North America Road Show”, David went to the US to sell shares to the American Market and he enjoyed a “film star” lifestyle with a private jet etc. Back in South Wales, and now CE of South Wales Electricity, he was upset to see their price rocket when Welsh Water bought into the Company. Although the synergies of the merger were said to be advantageous, such as water and electricity mains being laid together, David was strongly opposed, and commented “How many overhead water mains would you see in this predominately rural area!”

David’s next involvement was as Chairman of Teesside Power, the gas-fired station capable of supplying 3% of National Demand. The American main player Enron disastrously collapsed in 2002. David’s next move to National Grid found him in a company initially owned by 12 Area Boards being run on a very much more compartmentalised structure with much friction between the departments. As CEO he once requested some financial information, only to be told by his subordinate that it was “private”. A stiff reminder of where the employee drew his pay was required! David successfully avoided the need for National Grid to pay the Windfall Tax but was not too dismayed to hear that Welsh Water couldn’t pay theirs and went under. National Grid’s involvement with Energis, re fibre-optics strung over transmission lines, resulted in another coup when David’s plan to sell the Energis shares netted £2 billion!

National Grid’s overseas ventures took David to meet a soon to be deposed Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan and to the USA, where business was difficult due to the issues of federal and state politics. However he welcomed their positive attitude – “In the US, do nine things

wrong and one thing right then the latter is all you will hear about. In the UK the reverse is true.”

40% of National Grid revenue was overseas based. David joined the board of Bull Information Services, whose meetings had to be translated from French into English and Japanese, and then on to Railtrack where unfortunately there had been two previous serious railway accidents. He then joined United Utilities, UK Coal, and is currently Chairman of Kodal Minerals Plc. For some of us stamp collecting may have been “Life After SWEB” but for David Jones, as you can see from above, things were very different! His goal was to retire from a full-time executive role by age 60 but he made it by 59!

John Dike

COLIN HILL’S MUSEUM

Member Colin Hill, late of Bridgwater and now living near Huddersfield has amassed a large collection of household electrical appliances (see picture), which he has used in his talks over many years culminating in creating a small museum in his home. Colin is now thinking of parting with a major portion of the collection and has asked what we would like for the SWEHS Museum. Committee members David Cousins and Brian Denham are proposing to visit Colin in the new year.



Colin with Museum artefacts in the background

BRISTOL M SHED VISIT

Members and guests (22) gathered at the Bristol harbour-side “M Shed” New Museum on a warm sunny morning in mid-September. Refreshed with coffee, the period before lunch was spent viewing the public galleries covering Bristol places, people and life, as well as going out on to the 2nd floor roof terrace to experience the wonderful views over the harbour and surrounding buildings. For those living within the city the aerial map printed on the floor of the ground level Bristol places gallery provided the opportunity to identify where they lived.

Following a lunch break at a nearby harbour-side restaurant we returned to meet up with our guide, Andy King of the Bristol Museums Department, for an afternoon visit to the reserve collection housed in what was previously known as the “L shed”.

M Shed Visit continued

First Andy briefly explained the history of the building and its former life as a transit shed for the Bristol Steam Navigation Company, when it was used for the storage of a wide range of goods both imported as well as for export. He explained that the former warehouses around the dockside had been sequentially lettered with the adjacent "L" and "M" sheds connected at first floor level and, following conversion into the former industrial museum in the mid 1970s, now arranged as one building known as the "M" shed. He also drew our attention to several large wall-mounted photographs showing Queen's Square and the Centre pre-war, i.e. pre-SWEB Electricity House days. We then were able to wander among the storage racks containing an assortment of items in various states of preservation, with Andy commenting on some of the more interesting artefacts and answering questions as we progressed. One notable item was the Duke of Beaufort's Dormeuse Chariot, built around 1830 for transporting the Duke to London for his parliamentary duties. This, of course, was in pre-railway days and as the roads then were not much good the journey would have taken several days. The construction of the chariot therefore had been designed to enable the Duke to lay down fully for sleeping purposes during his long journeys. The advent of the GWR provided a much quicker means of travelling to London, particularly as the Duke would only give permission for the line to be built across his estate if he was provided with his own station at Badminton and given the right to stop any train there! Thereafter, the chariot became redundant and had a somewhat chequered history, including suffering bomb damage in 1940 during storage.

Other artefacts related to different aspects of work in Bristol in former times. These included a pair of landing wheels from the Bristol Brabazon plane, a Douglas motor cycle, several models of ships built in Bristol, a machine for making chocolate Easter eggs and a pneumatic compressor which, in more recent times, had been used by the company Warmwall Cavity Insulation in the early days of pumping foam into cavity walls. There were also the somewhat sparse remains of a Bristol Tramways Company trailer car. Such tramcars didn't prove to be very practical, since it was soon found that the motorised trams used for towing them were not sufficiently powerful to pull them up the Bristol hills. The condition of some of the items in storage posed the question of what best to do with them – attempt restoration or simply aim to preserve the remains from further deterioration, particularly bearing in mind the limited resources available to the museum. Thanks go to Andy King for his very interesting and informative commentary throughout, which brought many of the items to life for our visit.

Chris Buck

STOP PRESS

We lost our electricity supply in Backwell at 8.05 on Sunday 7th December and within 15mins many people had an automatic phone message from WPD with information on its return timing!! What a service!!!

WARBURTON ON PRIVATISATION

The Privatisation supplement was most interesting and went to show what a disaster it was. We have lost control over all our utilities as referred to in the Conclusions. The electricity industry is in disarray. We have just blown up Didcot that produced more electricity than all the windfarms put together, more reliably and at 1/6th of the cost. Gas was allowed to be used in generation that was denied to the CEBG. The Spanish owners of Scottish Power in 2011 used a cash surplus of £800m to make a ten year loan to its sister Company in the US, when it was later found that Scottish Power had raised prices an average of 40% since 2007. Meanwhile it's American consumers had had their electricity bills frozen since the mid 1990's. Between 1987 and 1997 electricity profits went from £249m to £1.5b, hence Brown's £6b windfall tax, followed by the exit of the American Companies who came over here to avoid the tightly controlled regulation in the USA. London Electricity bought by US firm Entigy was bought for £1.3m and sold to EDF two years later for £1.9b.

When we get to the "On the other hand" piece - As for share ownership, how many of us still have electricity shares? Was SWEB the only Board where its staff did not get its full allocation of shares? SWEB would have embraced computer systems and on-line systems had it continued, indeed SWEB way back in 1983 took on board computerized mapping and even sold on digitized maps to the Ordnance Survey.

The only problem at the time of privatization was that staff certainly required reducing. For example on the engineering side too many tiers that required reducing. While it was necessary at a time when SWEB had to electrify some 28,000 farms with thousands of miles of lines and substations. Once that was completed a staff reduction was needed. CCD was closed down in 1981. The 1981 SWEB re-structuring saw the Areas replaced by Groups with 80 staff retired but more was needed.

SWEB as a Nationalised concern did a fantastic job in bringing "Power to the People" and now we have a Nationalised French Company dictating terms for power station construction and doubtless ripping us off in the process. Ah well!!!! I have just switched to 1st Utility?

Graham Warburton

Editors Note : This is a personal view and not necessarily the view of the Society.

BATTERY OF THE FUTURE?

A student at the University of Maryland has invented a new type of battery, which can be replenished in a few minutes instead of overnight. It is part of Nano-technological research using nanopores, holes 80,000 times narrower than a human hair set in a ceramic sheet and filled with electrolyte. A billion nanopores will create a battery the size of a postage stamp, so it sounds more suitable for mobile phones than for driving cars, although it is being hailed as a potential for larger uses when scaled up.

WARBURTON'S BALTIC TOUR

In June Pam & I went on our second cruise to the Baltic. The ports of call were Zeebrugge for Blankenberge and Brugge. Gdynia for Gdansk, Klaipeda (Lithuania), St. Petersburg, Tallinn and Copenhagen. Many members will be aware of my interest in public transport that tends to take preference over Cathedrals and Palaces.

When cruising our objective is to avoid the usually expensive tours operated by the Cruise lines and this trip was no exception. One learns a great deal more about the area "doing your own thing". Arrival at Zeebrugge required an immediate visit to Blankenberge station for the train to Brugge that was a double deck Intercity train to Brussels, the fare being 4 euros return (£3.30) for a trip of about 15km each way. We travelled on the upper deck and what a contrast to the awful UK HST125 trains having now been modified to increase capacity with their high backed seats, few tables and exceedingly poor luggage space. Although it is fair to point out that the British loading gauge precludes the use of double deck trains.



The 10.10am train from Blankenberge to Brugge

Having spent a few hours in Brugge we returned to Blankenberge to sample the tram system that also served the dock where our P&O Oriana ship was berthed. The next port of call was Gdynia where the station was the first objective for a train to Gdansk. Well known as the city where Lech Walesa started his Solidarity movement. The fare equated to £2.50 return for a journey of 21km each way. Compare that with UK fares?

On arrival we strolled around the city and marvelled at the way it had been re-constructed following its destruction by the Nazis in 1945. So many destroyed cities and towns on the continent such as Dresden have all been rebuilt as they had been originally, not so in the UK where, for example, Coventry Cathedral was replaced by a modern structure.

Another striking feature of many European cities and towns is the beautifully paved squares and pedestrian precincts in contrast to say High Street, Taunton.

Again the city had a tramway network that saw us taking a trip on a couple of routes.



The Tramway Centre in Gdansk that serves all twelve city routes

Having sampled the trams we returned on a mid-afternoon train to Gdynia for tea and cake before returning to our ship - we had to use our remaining polish money! It was then on to St. Petersburg for a couple of days where, without a Russian visa, we had no option but to partake of P&Os excursions that included The Hermitage in the Winter Palace and various other palaces as well as a jet-cat trip from Pushkin Palace back to St. Petersburg.

The highlight was trip on the Metro that has 67 stations and is currently 113km long. The first train ran in 1955 and several more lines are planned. The system is one of the deepest in the world, the deepest station being 86 metres deep to go under the Neva River. The system is blessed with chandeliers and paintings etc.

The next port of call was Tallinn that sports another tramway well worth exploring but not before we walked up to explore the Old Town and partake of the usual morning coffee. It was our second visit to Estonia and so we were familiar with the town. Our final port of call was our third visit to Copenhagen where regrettably there are no trams. However we explored the city on an open deck tourist bus that included a very nice cruise around the canals and river, again noting the many beautiful buildings together with some very modern examples. **Graham Warburton**

Editor's Note : Graham included 12 photos which would have dominated the newsletter. Sorry Graham!

HISTORY & RESTORATION OF AUST FERRY

It was unfortunate we had a small turn-out for the talk on the old Aust Ferry, the Severn Princess by Tim Ryan in late November, since he was extremely interesting and entertaining. He included many witticisms in the fascinating tales he had unearthed about the days of the ferry, before the Severn Bridge opened in 1966, when the ferries became redundant. His talk included films of its operation taken in 1939 showing a superb collection of old British-made cars traversing the ferry, plus one on its recovery from Ireland. Also a fantastic model was shown. **Peter Lamb**

SOX HOSEGOOD EXTRA

In the last newsletter a tribute was paid to SWEB's own pioneering helicopter pilot the late Sox Hosegood. Reference was also made to his spectacular flying accident at Filton stating the date as 1952, but John Dike maintains it was 1956.

In 1956 as my sister Anne worked for Bristol Siddeley (Rolls Royce) engines, I got an invite to the employees' air show at Filton. This was on 16 September 1956.

One of the finales to the display was a presentation of Bristol Aeroplane Company (BAC) products and it was intended that that a type 173 twin rotor helicopter, a forerunner of the Chinook type, would hover in front of the crowd, whilst a Bristol Freighter overflew it. This **173**, serial G2382, was the second prototype and Sox was the Chief Helicopter Test Pilot at BAC.

As the Bristol freighter overflew the helicopter I got the impression, as I was directly in front, that the freighter was too close and it's propwash knocked the air out of the front rotor of the **173** which nose-dived into the runway - fortunately from not too great a height! I really appreciated that the flying bits of rotor blade didn't land in the crowd! Sox and crewman John Daniels walked away unharmed but probably highly embarrassed. However the helicopter was written-off by the accident. The official reason for the accident was vague but hinted at a problem involving the transition of the helicopter from hover to forward flight rather than the freighter being flown too close. The attached photo, taken from a 35mm slide, shows the moment Sox nosed-in.

John Dike



DISUSED TUBE TUNNELS FOR SALE

London Underground has 750 disused tunnels and stations beneath the streets of London and plans to put them up for sale, suggesting that they may be suitable for retail hubs, hotels or museums, but no mention of night-clubs!! It is believed that the estate is worth £3.6 billion, which would, I suggest, be stretching the potential value?

HAYLE WAVE HUB

We have been sent details of a large Wave Hub which was supposed to be installed 10 miles off Hayle, but that was in 2007. It was a research project financed by the South West of England Regional Development Agency costing £28 million and was purported to be able to generate 13.8 megawatts. Does anyone know what happened to this project? Is it working? May be some of our members could report on this?

EXPLODING PAVEMENT BOXES

During September, whilst spending a couple of days sightseeing in London, an item on the local evening TV news programme galvanized my attention. The report concerned an explosion involving a pavement electricity box (aka LV network link box), apparently one of about 40 explosions that were alleged to have occurred so far this year. Fortunately no one had been injured on this occasion. The incident brought to mind the fact that many parts of the former LEB LV distribution system were, and I suspect still are, run as a solid network with a number of secondary substations interconnected, coupled with fringe fusing. This can help minimize the number of supply interruptions but can result in higher fault levels and hence enhanced pyrotechnics when something goes wrong. For obvious reasons the HSE Electrical Inspectors were never particularly enthusiastic about such a system because of the risks to the public but grudgingly accepted it on an historic basis.

Lo and behold on the day of our October meeting at Nutwell Lodge, the Daily Telegraph carried a short report titled "Exploding manhole injures five people". This particular incident had occurred on the Holloway Road in North London and was said to be one more than 60 that had occurred so far this year! It was reported that the explosion was believed to have been caused by an electrical fault and UK Power Networks had been warned by the Health and Safety Executive to improve checks! So at least they are on the case, or are they? One wonders whether there is anyone left within the HSE with an electrical background who really appreciates and understands the subtleties of the London network.

Chris Buck

NAIRNE'S MEDICAL MACHINE

In a recent visit to Bath we visited No.1 Royal Crescent, a Georgian town house on the end of the Crescent. It was furnished in the Georgian period as it would have been in its heyday as the grand residence of Henry Sandford. An inventory was found of the house at the time of his residence and the artefacts have been carefully restored from many sources, including an electro-medical device by Edward Nairne. I was surprised to find that it was dated as early as 1796! It is an electrostatic generator intended for medical use and was reconstructed by a firm in Bristol. Nairne was an optician and scientific instrument maker at 20 Cornhill, London and made the first marine barometer that went with Captain Cook's second voyage to the South Pacific.

Peter Lamb

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

Six months ago David Cousins completed digitising the entire photographic archive. It has taken two years to cover 8,000 photographs in our many albums. What a tremendous task, we owe him a big thank-you for his diligent effort. This enables us to give copies to anyone without bothering to get reprints as in the past.

BLACKPOOL ILLUMINATIONS

Did you know that the Promenade Illuminations at Blackpool preceded the first public electricity supply at Godalming in 1881 by three years i.e. 1879? It consisted of only eight arc lamps before the filament lamp was invented. However the display similar to the modern display started properly in 1912 using 10,000 light bulbs. Today the illuminations contain 10 Million lamp bulbs covering 10 kilometres of the Promenade and cost £1.9 Million to stage.

ENERGY SUBSIDIES PORKY PIES

Letter to the Western Morning News

As seen in recent letters to WMN the pro-wind energy lobby are now so desperate to make their case that they are deliberately confusing the issue of energy subsidies for renewable energy and fossil derived energy. By definition subsidies for any product can achieve one of two purposes -" To produce a return for the supplier above market value or to reduce the cost to the customer below market value".

Subsidies for wind and solar energy largely fit into the former category whereas subsidies for fossil energy largely fit into the latter category. Nuclear energy has a bit of both. This can be seen in the recent report by the Environmental Audit Committee that showed that energy subsidies in the UK amounted to £12 billion annually. Of this around 2-3 billion went to renewables, 2-3 billion to nuclear, and the remaining 6 billion to help customers control their energy bills by reducing the vat on all gas and electricity to 5%.

Obviously the majority of the large 6 billion subsidy to reduce vat will be attributed to the non-renewable sector as it produces the majority of our energy. This is to help the customer. The subsidy on wind and solar is there to line the pockets of the profiteers at the expense of the customer.

John Dike

MEMBERS' ARCHIVES

Recently Chris Buck and Peter Lamb were asked by Jan the daughter of the late Glyn England, past member and ex-Chairman of CEGB, to look through a vast collection of books, magazines, photo albums etc., with a view to us taking some of the material and absorbing it into the SWEHS archives. Chris and Peter spent an afternoon at the farm cottage in the Chew Valley, walking away with four boxes of memorabilia.

Also we have received a large complement of old books from current member Mike Wreford, who is having a clear-out. He was obviously an avid collector of old technical books. One especially should be noted here – the biography of JJ Thomson, who was noteworthy for being a Noble Laureate and Professor of Cambridge University in charge of the famous Cavendish Laboratory, only the third professor after the well-known James Clerk-Maxwell.

FOR DISPOSAL

Surplus from Cairns Road – meter crates and one pull-down screen. Contact Peter Lamb (see next column).

MEMBERS NEWS

Mike Gee – Member Mike was presented recently with a 50 year certificate by WPD's Chief Executive, Robert Symons along with two other colleagues. What a super achievement. Congratulations Mike!

Mike Wreford – Mike has been acting as consultant to a petroleum company ever since he retired. Some don't want to put their feet up, so it keeps them young!!

Peter Lowe – New member Peter has had back surgery and is not too good but with some therapy it is hoped that things will improve.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome two new members in this issue, Ken Brooks and Peter Satterley. Look forward to seeing you guys at our coming meetings.

SatNav

**I have a little SatNav, it sits there in my car,
A SatNav is a driver's friend and tells you where you are.
It gives me full instructions, especially how to drive,
It's sixty miles an hour, it says, you're doing sixty five
It tells me when to stop and start and when to use the brake,
And tells me that it's never ever safe to overtake.**

**It tells me when the light is red and when it goes to green
It seems to know instinctively just when to intervene.
It lists the vehicles just in front and all those to the rear,
And taking into this account it specifies my gear.
I'm sure no other driver has so helpful a device
For when we leave and lock the car, it still gives its advice.**

**It fills me up with counselling, each journey's pretty fraught
So why don't I exchange it and get a quieter sort?
Ah well, you see, it cleans the house, makes sure I'm best fed
It washes all my shirts and things and keeps me warm in bed!
My hearty little SatNav, I've had it all my life,
It's better than the normal ones, my Satnav is my wife!!**

HOW SHOCKING!

I met an ingenious electrical engineer recently, he was quite a bright spark and definitely knew watt's watt!

The Grim Reaper called on me last night, I managed to beat him off with a vacuum cleaner, you could say I was Dyson with death!

FOR YOUR DIARIES – COMING EVENTS

Sat. 7th Feb. ANNUAL WINTER LUNCHEON AT THE DEVON HOTEL, EXETER Followed by a talk "Finland in the Raw – Trekking with Huskies" by Norman Maudsley.

Sat. 21st Mar. AGM & TALK AT TAUNTON

Taking place at the WPD Training Centre at 11.00am followed by lunch at the Merry Monk Inn, with a presentation in the afternoon at 2.00pm by Paul Jewell entitled "Producing and Storing Electricity at Home" detailing research projects by WPD.

NEXT EDITION - This newsletter is produced every four months. Please send articles, photographs etc to :- Peter Lamb 35 Station Rd, Backwell, Bristol BS48 3NH or telephone on 01275 463160 or e-mail him on lambpandv@btinternet.com.