

Notes

IA CONFERENCE OF THE LEA VALLEY

DID the Iron Age begin in 1709? According to Mr. Rix of the University of Birmingham the Cast Iron Age certainly did! Mr. Rix opened the conference at Capel House, Herts., with a fascinating lecture entitled "What is Industrial Archaeology?" England had been the centre of the most important revolution since neolithic man first took to agriculture. The pioneering achievements of Abraham Darby and the Coalbrookdale works were illustrated, also the late lamented Euston Arch. Mr. Rix warned his audience that unless strenuous efforts were made to record and preserve these unique treasures our age would be remembered chiefly for its Philistinism.

Dr. D. Barker of Enfield College of Technology sketched an account of the formation of the Lea Valley; and John Carr (also of Enfield College) described the way in which geological characteristics had affected the valley's development. The valley was a servicing area for London and its development a response to conditions there. In fact the valley was not only London's kitchen garden, but also its well and its privy!

Dennis Smith of West Ham College spoke on the survey of industrial monuments in the Lea Valley, anything from wasteland yielding unsuspected relics to opulent "temples" for pumping sewage. Much is threatened with destruction although the proposed museum at Abbey Mills Pumping Station should help to avert disaster.

The Royal Gunpowder Factory at Waltham Abbey and the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority were further papers read at the Conference.

The success of the Conference, so well organised by Peter Huggins on behalf of Enfield College and Enfield Archaeological Society, was enhanced by an excellent handbook complementing the lectures and a display of maps and photographs.

Johnathan and Anne Powers

SHROPSHIRE VISIT

THE Shropshire visit of T.B.A.O.G. and S.L.A.S. took place on May 3/5. It was attended by 23 members and based upon Wellington. The primary object was to study physical remains of the early iron industry.

At Coalbrookdale, at the Coalbrookdale Company, the progenitor of an important part of the industrial revolution was inspected, the Old Furnace of 1638, rebuilt 1777, in which the first successful coke fired smelting of iron was effected in 1709. Also seen were the New Furnace erected c. 1792 but never blown in, early cast iron rails, the 1792 warehouse and museum.

Amongst important IA monuments visited were the great iron bridge, the first in the world, over the Severn at Ironbridge, the members having been cast at the Old Furnace by Abraham Darby III in 1779, and Telford's cast iron aqueduct (1796) at Longdon, which took the defunct Shrewsbury Canal over the Tern.

At Shrewsbury the party visited the first multistorey iron framed building (Charles Bage, 1796/7), originally a flax spinning mill, now maltings; George Steuart's St. Chad's church (1790/2) with its iron arcading and roof supports above a circular nave; and two compound beam engines.

Parts of the old tramway systems associated with the ironfoundries were traced and the remains of the Hay Inclined Plane at Coalport ascended. The site of the latter,

dating from c. 1791, is undergoing clearance by members of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, and the dock and beam engine housing are already exposed. At the foot of the incline were seen the remaining bottle kilns of Coalport Pottery.

The use of iron in the neighbourhood was universally evident, from iron chimney pots, doorframes, lintels and sills, to the iron tombstones at Madeley or the secondary iron bridge at Coalport (1818).

Apart from IA sites the party saw Much Wenlock Abbey, Buildwas Abbey, Acton Burnell Castle (1284) and church, and the Roman city in the fields at Wroxeter (Viroconium) with a highly informed introduction and commentary by Ralph Merrifield.

At one point a handful of clay tobacco pipe enthusiasts strayed to seek out the remains of the last pipe workshop at Broseley. A novel and unscheduled item was the penetration of an 18th century brick tunnel at Coalport under the hillside of the Hay Inclined Plane.

The visit concluded with experiences of modern ironworking to illustrate the continuous advance since the period of ferrous eotechnology. At Oakengates the romantic spectacle within the Priorslee Rolling Mill was preceded by a look in the great engine houses with giant beam engines for blowing purposes and the truly colossal vertical engine, all now defunct and boilerless, which members were able to minutely inspect by way of narrow catwalks climbing to giddy heights. The very latest in fully automated iron founding was seen at the Eagle plant (1968) of the Allied Ironfounders at Ketley.

Before leaving Wellington, Ralph Merrifield on behalf of the party vigorously thanked Paul Carter, John Ashdown and Marion Bennett, who organised and administered the visit.

Charles Hailstone

GREATER LONDON INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The official formation of G.L.I.A.S. took place on April 12, 1969. Mr. R. M. Robbins was invited to be the Society's first President.

The main aims of G.L.I.A.S. will be to stimulate people in and around London to become active in the field of industrial archaeology. The emphasis will be on showing what has been done, what needs to be done, and methods of recording and preservation so far adopted. The main letter, giving details of both society and other societies' activities, members' projects and requests for help. Where a local group is already active, G.L.I.A.S. will give every assistance possible. It is hoped to hold at least one all-day conference on I.A. each year, and in addition there will be meetings, visits, field days, etc. Members will receive annually a list of all members, their interests, affiliated societies, etc., as an encouragement to contact others in their locality, and as a guide to where specialist technical help may be available. The society may also consider promoting projects of its own, for example, assisting the restoration of the beam engines and engine house at Crossness Sewage Treatment Work (TQ 484811).

Subscriptions for the new Society are—individual members £1, juniors (under 18) 10/-, affiliated societies £2, to be sent to the Hon. Treasurer, G. C. Oxley-Sidey, 32 The Avenue, Cheam, Surrey. Other details available from the Hon. Secretary, Paul Carter, 20 Chestnut Grove, Wembley, Middlesex.

Paul Carter