

## 2018 AGM WEEKEND – Wrexham



To ensure that GDPR stipulations are not breached I have decided not to name anyone who appears in the ‘people pictures’ which are in this Bulletin, nor – if people appear and may be recognisable – the locations but I hope those who attended will recognise the faces and those who did not, this year, the places. I did attend and much enjoyed the occasion so ‘thank you’ to those who organised the programme, secured the Hotel (Ramada Plaza Hotel, Wrexham) and the excellent coach driver, and led us to the splendid sites we visited.

We enjoyed a delightful canal day on Friday 04 May, walking from Plaskynaston Canal Basin to Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, a cruising across the Aqueduct and a fascinating visit to the CRT Ellesmere Depot, opened in 1806 and subsequently enlarged. The range of Depot buildings, and an adjoining covered dry dock, is one of best preserved canal workshop site in the UK – and it is still working. We were guided round by expert and very knowledgeable staff, justifiably proud of the site and the maintenance and repair work they continue there.



The main workshop doorframe illustrates the mixture of old and modern co-existing on this site and the green high-lighted saw-cuts in the doorframe illustrate the pragmatic, ‘*we’ll not be beaten*’ attitude of the workforce. A replacement lock-gate for a broad canal was built but when time came to move it out of this doorway it proved to be unusually broad. Solution? Take a section out of the wooden doorframe both sides and out goes the lock-gate. Replace the bits of door-frame and explain to visitors, with a smile, that the saw-cuts are ‘*there for a purpose.*’

Those of us who were practically minded were intrigued to see that nothing was wasted. Several cupboards contained very purposeful collections of nuts and bolts of assorted lengths, threads and diameters so that unusual jobs could be completed with sensible respect for the age and structure of surviving canal woodwork that might be well over 150 years old.

Overlooking, and at one time overseeing, the Depot was Beech House and the Canal Offices, both Listed and preserved to show how the





Ellesmere Canal Company managed its workshop business. Most of us were familiar with Ellesmere Port but I, for one, had never seen Ellesmere Depot so much enjoyed and appreciated it.

## CANAL COTTAGE

This cottage is typical of many found throughout the canal network. The Foreman or Section Inspector would have lived here. Most canal cottages had a pigsty and a boiler house to wash their clothes. Damson and apple trees were always grown in the garden. Any surplus fruit would often be sold to passing boaters or bartered for goods to supplement their low wages.

I was also reminded by the need to ensure proof-reading of interpretative panels; clearly the Canal Company ensured that even the pigs, which were kept at Canal Cottage in the Depot complex, were clean and well cared for!

Saturday 05 May, after the AGM in the Hotel, was an industrial day, visiting the Brymbo Ironworks Heritage Project which is telling the story on what remains of their site of iron and steel making at Brymbo.

Coal mines, blast furnaces, open hearth and subsequently electric-arc steel furnaces and sheet-steel rolling mills were progressively developed on this historic hill-side works. It was renowned for the high quality of its products.

Brymbo Steelworks was rail-connected until 1982 and it is likely that the consequence of using road transport to serve a physically remote uplands area was a factor in closure. The site was taken over in 1986 by United Engineering Steel [UES] Ltd of Rotherham and – no doubt predictably to the on-site staff – production was moved to Rotherham. On 14 May 1990 UES announced that steel-making would cease at

Brymbo on 27 September. The news was a major shock to the district, particularly because UES had earlier claimed that “. . . during the last two years trading conditions have been very good throughout most of Europe and North America and this has enabled Brymbo to operate at reasonable levels of activity and with improved profitability.” Hindsight suggests that these were weasel words; ‘reasonable’ and ‘improved’ could be read – and perhaps were written – by the Company’s bean-counters as meaning that Brymbo’s work and output was not good enough . . .

Sunday 06 May was a Llangollen canal and railway day and Monday 07 May was principally a railway day with the nice juxtaposition of a railway and a canal crossing a valley forming a splendid view at Chirk.



The principal railway emphasis was on the narrow gauge Glyn Valley Tramway ending at Chirk, alongside the standard gauge station and beginning at Glyn Ceiriog where it served several granite and slate quarries above the town and provided a passenger service. Two physically separate Trusts are now working together, one from Chirk and one from Glyn Ceiriog, to recreate as much of the GVT as may be possible and to celebrate its story. Many R&CHS members will know that member John Milner has been researching, recording and publishing the story of the GVT and the Ceiriog valley in a number of well-illustrated books.

### TRANSPORT HISTORY *BOOK OF THE YEAR* AWARDS 2018

With the R&CHS Book Awards now in their fifteenth year, the 2018 prize-winners were announced on the evening of Friday 04 May during the Society's AGM Weekend.

Three railway history titles were short-listed: *GWR Goods Train Working* (2 volumes) by Tony Atkins, published by Crecy Publishing, *George Carr Glyn: Railwayman and Banker* by David Hodgkins, published by Wolfe Press and *Festiniog Railway* (2 volumes) by Peter Johnson, published by Pen and



Sword Transport. The judges decided that the 2018 Railway History Book of the Year would be *George Carr Glyn*. Before an audience of over 70 members and guests, Society President Mike Clarke presented its author, David Hodgkins, with the Society's framed certificate and cheque for £300.

No canal or waterway history books made it onto the short-list this year so the second award of the evening was in the 'other forms of transport' category. Two books were short-listed: *London Carriers and Coaches 1637-1690*, self-published by Dorian Gerhold and *The Edinburgh Horse Tram: nineteenth to twenty-first century* by Alan W Brothie, published by Stenlake Publishing. The winner was *The Edinburgh Horse Tram*, and the President duly presented Alan Brothie with his certificate and cheque. Alan joins an exclusive band of authors, now three in number, who have won an RCHS award on more than one occasion.

The evening's third award was in the Popular category and again two books were short-listed. These were *The Canal belongs to me: the life of a towpath tractor driver* by Tony Byfield, published by London Canal Museum and *A Most Deliberate Swindle: how Edwardian fraudsters pulled the plug on the electric bus and left our cities gasping for breath*, by Mick Hamer, published by RedDoor Publishing. *A Most Deliberate Swindle* was the judges' choice and Mike Clarke accordingly presented the certificate and cheque to Mick Hamer.

The final business of the evening was to announce which of the three category winners was adjudged the overall 2018 Transport History Book of the Year and winner of the David St John Thomas silver trophy plus further monetary prize. This year's judging panel (Bob Haskins, Robin Welton and myself) decided in favour of *George Carr Glyn*. Once again our president, Mike Clarke, made the presentation to David Hodgkins.

Copies of David's book may be ordered on-line from <mybooksource.com> at the discounted price of £20 post free. Enter the code RCHS to obtain the discount. Alternatively, order by telephone from 0845 370 0067.

The full 2018 judges' report may be read on the Society's website. Philip Brown, Book Awards Administrator