RCHS Early Days (The Journal)

They say that the past is a different country, and so it is as far as the Society is concerned, if the early Journals are anything to go by.

The first decade of Journals was duplicated, and the original paper copies have been scanned and OCR-ed (Optical Character Recognition – a process to identify the words, dates, etc. so the document can be searched). Unfortunately, the process is imperfect, particularly where the quality of the original printing is poor, so the OCR in these Journals is being edited manually to correct the errors.

Thus far, the 1955 and 1956 Journals have been processed, and they make fascinating reading. They demonstrate that the Society was actively involved in a number of events from the beginning, organised meetings and visits much as now (Covid excepted), and very quickly reached a membership of over 100. Contributions to the Journal were made by a number of members whose works still reside on our bookshelves, including Clinker, Hadfield, Borley, Holt , Greville, Spence, Course, Biddle, Vallance and many others. A few of our early members, including Gordon Biddle, remain members of the Society to this day.

In addition to the articles on railway and canal history, there were also items of more general interest. The article in the July and September 1956 Journal by M D Greville, entitled "Some Pitfalls in Research into Railway History" is as relevant today as it was then, and is recommended to anyone new to serious historical research in our area.

Also, as a reminder of the days before scanners, photocopiers and fax machines (indeed the whole digital revolution), there was an article in the November 1956 Journal explaining how to make copies of documents using the "reflex printing" method. As well as being very laborious, the intending user might be required to obtain some strong nitric acid, which I doubt is still available over the counter at Boots!

Nick Higton, October 2020