

# Newsletter

Newsletter of the **Broseley Local History Society**  
*Incorporating the Wilkinson Society*



May 2003

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## Meetings

Meetings of the Broseley Local History Society are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm at the Broseley Social Club, High Street, unless otherwise announced. Car parking is available at the back of the Club. Members are requested to be seated by 7.30 pm to allow speakers a prompt start.

## Programme

- 4 Jun Summer event. Visit to Golding Hall, near Acton Burnell, which has links with the Langley family of The Amies.
- 14-15 Jun William Reynolds Bicentenary Weekend, the Long Warehouse, Coalbrookdale. This event is now fully booked.
- 23 Jun Guided tour of Willey Hall by Lord and Lady Forester. Numbers restricted, see page 2.
- 2 Jul 'You try and stop me!' A summer walk around Jackfield led by Ron Miles. Meet at Jackfield Village Hall at 7.30 pm. Participants will be asked for a small donation in aid of the cost of resiting the Alexander Brodie memorial tablet presently in Jackfield Church.

- 3 Sept Memories evening - Benthall Edge.
- 1 Oct Annual General Meeting, speaker to be advised.
- 5 Nov William Reynolds at The Tuckies
- 3 Dec Annual dinner

For further information, contact Neil Clarke (01952).

## Society News

### New Members

The Society would like to welcome the following new members:

- Mr & Mrs Bonsall
- Mr K A Davis
- Mr Cyril Jones
- Mrs Jones
- Mr & Mrs R Hartley, Golding Hall, Golding, Shrewsbury
- Mrs Mary Whitehouse, Cannock

### Golding Hall Visit

**4 June**

**Cost £2.50 each, £1.50 senior citizens, towards maintenance of the fabric of the house.**

Richard and Sue Hartley have invited Society members to a guided tour of their house and garden, Golding Hall. This house was, from 1668 to the early 1900s, the home of the Langley family which has associations with The Amies of Broseley and The Tuckies of Jackfield. Weather permitting the tour will be followed by a glass of wine on the terrace to round off what promises to be a lovely evening.

In order to give the Hartleys some idea of numbers, please confirm with John Freeman on 01952 883459 if you are going, and also indicate if you can offer a lift to those without transport. However, don't let a last minute change of heart keep you from coming. Cars and people should be at the Social Club car park by 7.00 pm or you

can go straight to Golding Hall for 7.30 pm. Directions from the crossroads in the centre of Cressage are as follows: Take the A458 to Shrewsbury, at 2.4 miles turn left to Cound; go over the bridge and turn right towards Acton Burnell; go to T junction and turn right to Pitchford; take first left to Golding; at 1 mile (immediately past Bakehouse Cottage) turn right into lane which is the entrance to Golding Farm and Hall. If you need a map, phone John Freeman.

### **Willey Hall Visit 23 June, 6.30 pm**

Those lucky winners whose names were drawn out of the air raid warden's helmet at the 2 April meeting will need little reminder of Lady Forester's kind invitation to a guided tour of the Hall by herself and Lord Forester. Please be at Willey Hall by 6.30 pm prompt.

### **Benthall Edge Field Trip 14 July, 7.00 pm, meet in Benthall Church car park**

The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust has invited members of the Society to join them on a field trip to Benthall Edge to research its land use history and to gather together memories and tales of this area. Anyone who would like to help with this project and who has particular knowledge of this area will be welcome.

As a follow up, the next Memories meeting will also focus on Benthall Edge, so if you are not able to make the actual field trip come along on 3 September to share your knowledge.

The Trust is hoping to publish the results of this research in the new year as well as incorporate it into a trail leaflet for Benthall Edge Wood.

### **Wrekin Local Studies Display**

The Society was represented at the Wrekin Local Studies display held at the Telford Town Centre on 10 May, from where David Lake reports that considerable interest was shown in the Society's activities.

### **Best wishes**

The Committee and members of the society are sorry to hear that Hilary Callcut has been unwell and wish her a full and speedy recovery.

### **Memories Evenings**

The transcript for the January Memories meeting is now available. Both this and previous ones are available from Janet Robinson at a cost of 50p each.

### **Previous Meetings**

#### ***Today Broseley; tomorrow the world!***



*John Wilkinson, a portrait by Lemuel Francis Abbott*

At the March meeting this year's John Wilkinson lecture was given by David Lake, the Society's curator. At last year's lecture Diana Clarke had discussed Wilkinson's achievements in the 'spirit of the age', this year David showed him in the light of the Janet Butler archives. A full account of this lecture will appear in the next Society Journal but some extracts from these archives may shed another light on the character of this remarkable man.

John Wilkinson was born on a cart on the way to Workington Fair and his unconventional entry into this world appears to have set the pattern for his life. A true entrepreneur, he seems to have had as much trouble with bureaucracy as we do today, on one occasion expressing the wish that "every man will be permitted to pursue his business without further regulations on the part of the Government. . . . My wish is that they may let us alone."

On another occasion he complained that since every expansion of his works simply increased his contribution to the poor rate, he proposed to set up his own sickness club for his workers and petitioned parliament for exemption from the poor rate once this had been established.

He also did not suffer fools gladly, saying of one gentleman "I can better submit to suffer by attempts at improvement, though they miscarry, than to be plagued with a man that hath no ideas of his own".

Essentially a pragmatist, however, he asserted on one occasion that he "had much better spend my time in making of iron than in writing about it", a sentiment borne out by his obituary which appeared in the *Birmingham Gazette* on his death in 1808.

"Few men are more entitled to the praise and gratitude of his country, for unwearied and successful exertions in raising that important branch of our national production, the iron trade, to a height unknown until that period that constituted the zenith of his useful powers. Frugal, though not parsimonious, he acquired an immense fortune, presenting to society the satisfactory testimony that, in this free and happy country, industry and prosperity go hand in hand."

Subsequent to his lecture, David Lake received the following letter from Frank Dawson who, together with his wife, had travelled down from Castlehead in Cumbria specially for this occasion. Frank is currently researching and writing a book on John Wilkinson.

*"It was a great occasion, a large appreciative informed audience, and for us an astonishing welcome for a couple of strangers from the backwoods. The Broseley Local History Society is clearly a very special forum as well as being the meeting place for a gang of old friends. What I know of the Lunar Society comes to mind. Thank you for including us, for the reminder, for the scholarship, and for a wonderful welcome from you all."*

### **My Valley – the Industrial History of the Taff Valley and its links with East Shropshire**

In April Steve Rowson gave a talk entitled *My Valley – the Industrial History of the Taff Valley and its links with East Shropshire*. Steve, who is co-

author of a book on the Glamorganshire Canal, lives in South Wales but has been on secondment working in the Telford area for some months.

Steve began by saying he felt justified in talking about the Taff Valley to people in Broseley on the basis that Cardiff had a physical link with Broseley - they were both on the River Severn! He then went on to present a series of slides tracing the history of the industrial development of this area and the interaction with Shropshire industrialists and engineers.

Because of its natural resources, as well as its proximity to a port, a thriving iron and steel industry had developed in the Taff Valley and as early as 1784 Thomas Humphry was known to have taken workmen from Calcutts iron-works down the Severn to Cardiff, while Isaac Wilkinson, Ed Blakenay and John Guest had all been involved in the Plymouth works at Merthyr Tydfil.

In 1839 the Cardiff docks, which had been financed and built by the Marquis of Bute, were opened, adding further impetus to the Valley's industrial development. Cardiff eventually became the busiest port in the world shipping out coal and steel, by which time there were more people in South Wales working in industry than in agriculture.

Shropshire engineers also became involved in the development of this area when, as early as 1821, Thomas Telford proposed building a barrage across Cardiff Bay, though this project was never carried out. William Reynolds was also consulted on the building of an incline plane. This project was, however, eventually rejected in favour of building a series of locks.

Cardiff's connections with Broseley did not stop at technology transfer. As Paul Winter from the audience pointed out, the entrance hall to the old library in Cardiff was lined with tiles from Maw's tileworks.

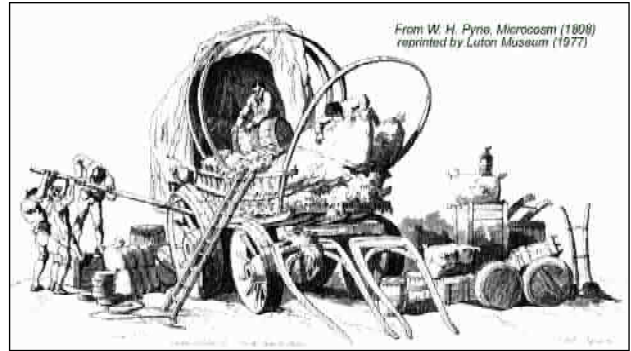
Another member of the audience, Barbara Tyler, subsequently wrote to say how much she had enjoyed Steve's talk and that she had since bought his book. She also wondered if it would be possible for the Society to arrange a visit to the area. Certainly food for thought!

### **From Packhorse to Railway**

*Bell-horses, bell-horses what time of day?  
 One-o'clock, two-o'clock, three and away.  
 Bell-horses, bell-horses what time of day?  
 Two-o'clock, three-o'clock, four and away.*

Part of a children's rhyming game recorded in the playground of Stanton Lacy school in the 19th century, this little jingle introduced the May meeting talk, entitled *From Packhorse to Railway*, given by Dr Trevor Hill. Trevor first became interested in the development of transport systems in Shropshire while doing a dissertation on the trading community in Shifnal.

In his talk he said that, contrary to the belief that roads in early times had been considered impassable for the transport of goods, records showed that as early as 1390 there had been an established transport system using packhorses. Indeed, traces of these old packhorse routes may still be seen in Shropshire and are characterised by their V shape when ascending the side of a hill. This was long before the development of the carrier networks which had emerged by the early 17th century.

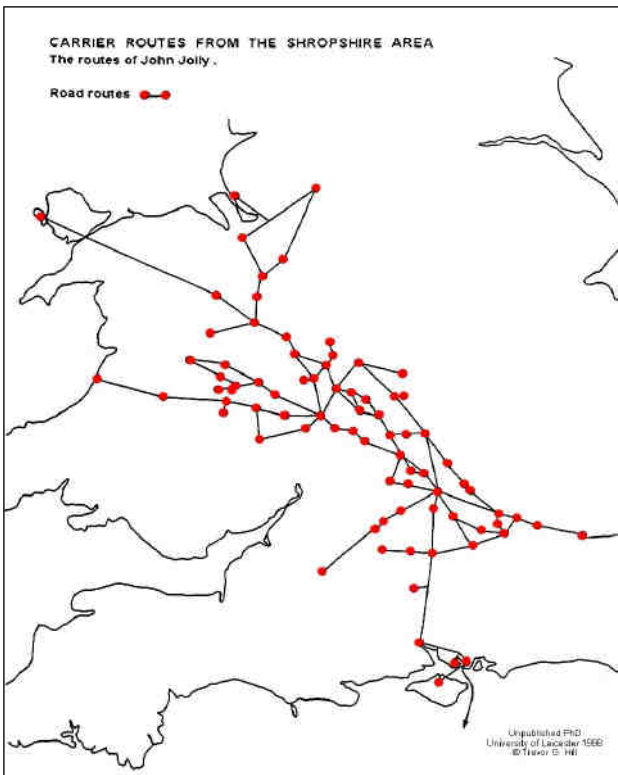


*A wagon loads up for the journey.  
 Wagons with wheels over nine inches wide  
 were exempt from toll charges*

These carrier networks, which were initially set up to transport goods as the need arose, later ran scheduled routes, some of which connected land-based centres to navigable rivers and coastal ports. An example of one such route through Shropshire was the network run by John Jolly of Worcester in the 1820s and '30s. By 1637 this national network of carriers had become so extensive that a London Directory called *The Carriers' Cosmographie* of that year listed services throughout the country. According to this publication the route from London to Shropshire was serviced by wagons, after which packhorses took the goods further on into the mountainous areas of Wales.

With so much increased traffic the roads had to be kept in reasonable repair. Since Tudor times this had been the responsibility of the local parish which had appointed a surveyor for this purpose. It was an indication of the importance attached to the transport routes that this surveyor had the power to gather repair materials from anywhere, including private land. This system of road repair, however, was not suitable for long distance transport and so the turnpike system was introduced. These roads were operated by turnpike trusts and were regarded as national roads not subject to parish control.

The coming of the turnpikes saw certain rules and preferences being introduced. In order to minimise damage to the road surface wide wheels were encouraged, a practice which became law in 1753. In 1755 a further law stipulated that wagons with wheels at least nine inches wide would be exempt from toll charges.



*Figure 1. Carrier routes run by John Jolly of Worcester in the 1820s and '30s*

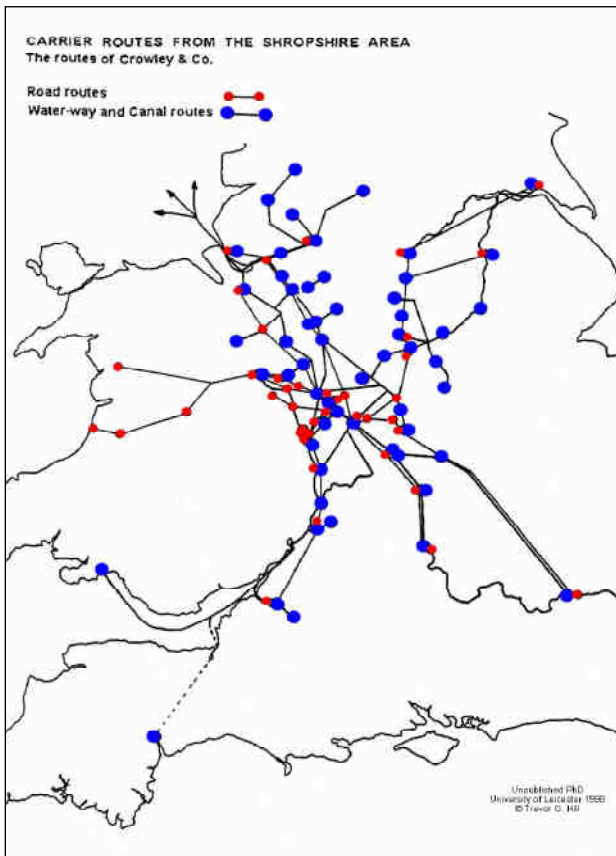


Figure 2. Carrier routes run by Crowley & Co

It also imposed a weight limit of four tons which led to the building of public weighbridges.

By this time a vast range of goods was being transported all over England and even as far up as Edinburgh. Within the Shropshire area itself 100 tons of pot ware a year were being sent from the Potteries to Bridgnorth and Bewdley for export, at a cost of £2.10 per ton.

The building of canals was a further step in the development of the transport system and many carriers used them in conjunction with their road networks. The onset of the railways, however, saw a change from long distance road transport to that of short haul to and from rail stations.

It seems, however, that the wheel has since turned full circle. These days rail transport is either unreliable or non-existent and the canals are used mainly for pleasure. But the roads are busier than ever.

### Acknowledgements

Figures 1 and 2 by kind permission of Dr Trevor Hill  
 Figure 3 from *An illustrated History of Carts and Waggons*, published by Spurbooks, 1975

### Backbarrow Ironworks

According to a recent report in the *Westmorland Gazette* the site of the historic Backbarrow ironworks, which has important connections with John Wilkinson's father Isaac, has been acquired by a firm of property developers who propose building workshops, offices and homes on the now derelict site. Planning permission, however, will only be granted provided the archaeological remains such as the blast furnace complex are preserved, with access to the public being guaranteed.

### William Reynolds Bicentenary

#### 3 June, 7.30 pm, Coalbrookdale Museum

Don't forget this celebration of the life and achievements of William Reynolds, who died 3 June 1803.

An exhibition of documents, maps and artefacts associated with Reynolds will be open on 3 June with a 7.30 pm cheese and wine reception hosted by the Friends of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum. The evening will include a talk on portraits of Reynolds by David de Haan and a visit to Reynolds's gravestone in the nearby Quaker Burial Ground. All, in particular members of the Society, are welcome to attend this opening for which there will be a nominal charge. This exhibition will run until 15 June (admission free by prior appointment – tel: 01952 432141).

#### 14 & 15 June, 10.00 am - 4.45 pm, Long Warehouse, Coalbrookdale

All places at this conference are now fully booked. The programme will cover various aspects of Reynolds's life and achievements, with a series of illustrated talks on the Saturday and a tour on the Sunday, and promises to be a most interesting weekend.

### Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

As well as working with the Society in researching Benthall Edge, the Trust is involved in the Workers' Walks Project which is being launched on 11 June with a guided walk along the old Workers' Walks in Dale Coppice and Lincoln Hill. Anyone interested should meet at the Museum of Iron car park in Coalbrookdale at 7.30 pm.



Other events are:

**29 June, 2.00 – 4.30 pm**

Guided walk through the meadows and grasslands in Coalbrookdale. Meet at Museum of Iron car park, Coalbrookdale

**30 & 31 August, 2.00 – 4.30 pm**

Jackfield Festival walks, a walk around Jackfield with local historian Ron Miles. Meet outside the Boat Inn, Ferry Road, Jackfield.

The Trust is currently conducting a survey to identify what it is that people enjoy about their sites, what problems they experience and what difficulties they may have in accessing them. The public is invited to complete a questionnaire, copies of which are available from their office, from libraries or via their website [www.telford.gov.uk/sgctaccess](http://www.telford.gov.uk/sgctaccess). Or you may phone 01952 433880 for information on this or any other event.

### **Muck & Brass**

Interested in local or family history in the West Midlands? Then the Muck & Brass project could help you. This project, which plans to convert 58,000 pages of archive catalogues into electronic format, includes archive repositories representing 800 years of West Midlands history dating from the 12th century. Check it out on [www.a2a.pro.gov.uk](http://www.a2a.pro.gov.uk).

### **Secret Shropshire**

Secret Shropshire, a project sponsored by the New Opportunities Fund, is working with Shropshire Records and Research Centre to digitise some 30,000 items relating to Shropshire's history, archaeology and natural environment. Six areas have been identified, Ironbridge (which includes the Broseley area), Wroxeter, Bridgnorth, Clun, Ellesmere and Oswestry, with the object of developing a website aimed at people interested in lifelong learning.

The project will be using such things as photographs, postcards, maps and documents and the organisers are looking for help in finding suitable items as well as people with local knowledge and spare time willing to identify and write captions to this material. They stress that this would not necessarily mean

having to use a computer, the work could easily be done at home.

Anyone interested in this project should contact Helen Gibbons on 01743 255352 or e-mail her at [archive@secretshropshire.co.uk](mailto:archive@secretshropshire.co.uk). You can also go into their website which, while still at a very early stage, already has some interesting information, [www.secretshropshire.org.uk](http://www.secretshropshire.org.uk),

### **Salopian Art Pottery**

By Roger S Edmundson

This beautifully illustrated book contains an introductory history of potting in Benthall from the 18th century as well as a survey of Salopian art pottery products from 1880 to 1930. It is available from the Coalport Museum shop at a cost of £4.99 or by e-mail from [roger@edmundson02.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:roger@edmundson02.fsnet.co.uk).

### **Mailbox**

We have received a communication from a Jan Verbruggen in Holland who is researching an 18th century Dutchman, J D H van Liender (1732-1809), a key figure in the introduction of the steam engine in the Netherlands. From about 1770 to shortly before his death, van Liender was in contact with James Watt and BW&C, and Mr Verbruggen is attempting a reconstruction of their extensive correspondence. Below is an extract from his letter.

*Van Liender's first feat was a demonstration engine of the Newcomen type which was erected in Rotterdam in 1776. This engine seems to have been designed and paid for by Steven Hoogendijk, a wealthy clockmaker, who enlisted van Liender for the practical project management. The cylinder was cast and bored at the New Willey foundry and shipped via Chester in early 1775, together with most of the other ironwork.*

*Some time in 1776 van Liender visited the New Willey foundry and on the way probably picked up a copy of the booklet 'Report on an improved Steam Engine' by N D Falck MD. Falck proposed to put two Newcomen engines on a single boiler, letting them make their working strokes alternately so that they would take turns in admitting steam from the boiler. Thus the boiler would only supply one engine at a time and it would not have to be bigger or use more fuel than a boiler for a single engine. This*

would double the duty/efficiency. The Watt idea may sound nice, but the engine is too complex and expensive and should be viewed with caution.

Falck precedes this with a quite readable brief history of the steam pumping engine. Van Liender immediately makes a Dutch translation which appears in August 1776. He adds a foreword and some notes, defending Watt. In one note he includes the intriguing statement "Mr Watt's engines are now in demand everywhere. I myself have erected one in Whilley (sic) which fully answers expectations". At the time there appear to be two Watt engines at New Willey: the beam blowing engine and the slightly later inverted-cylinder pumping engine (which seems to be a conversion job of an older engine).

Van Liender was not an engineer (although he had an avid interest in engineering matters). My guess is that John Wilkinson may have given him the opportunity for some hands-on experience, possibly on the conversion job, which van Liender later exaggerated a bit. But it would be nice if the surviving Wilkinson records show something of this visit.

Anyone who can help Mr Verbruggen in his research should contact Neil Clarke on 01952 504135.