

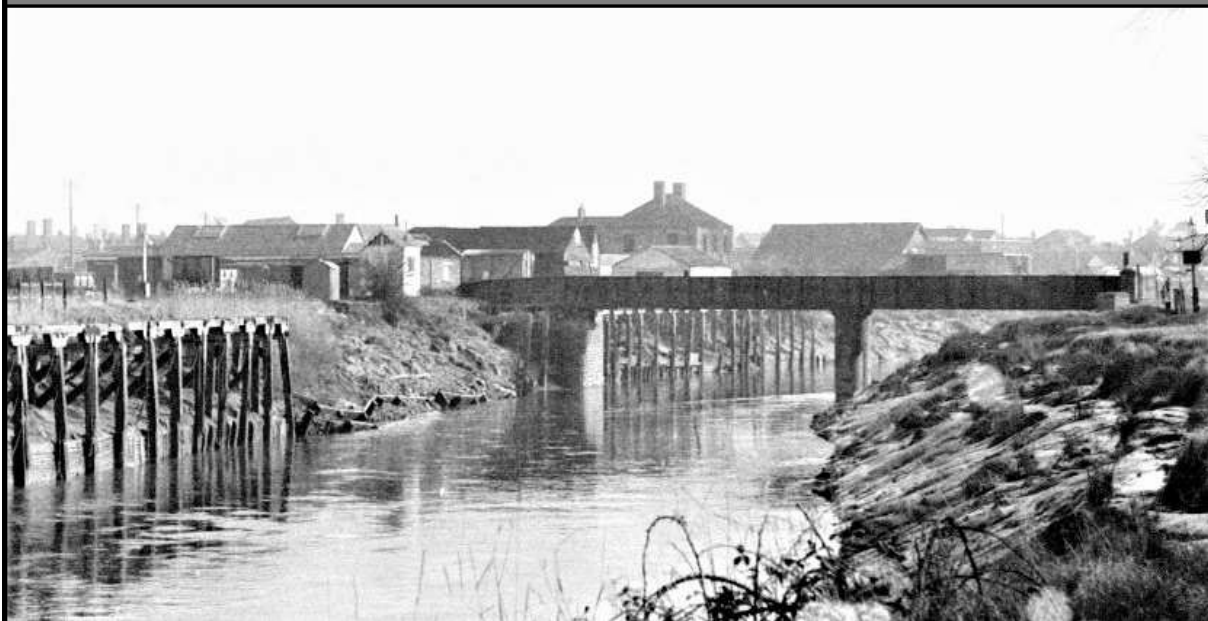
SIAS@50

When We Were Very Young !
(Or a bit younger than we are now)

Those of us that were raised post war, witnessed a great change. Many things that had survived the war were wanted out as being old fashioned and not good enough for the new generation. Anything that hinted "Victorian" was out and you dared to question it at your peril. None were worse than my parents and I don't think they ever got over my interest in mechanical history! I would like to show you some of what was still around to spur like minded people into forming SIAS in 1972



In the mid to late 1960s many changes were taking place. Coastal shipping had almost gone, with BW docks closing by the end of the 60s. Coal imports had stopped in 1966 as British Cellophane went over to oil and then gas, with Sully's, the coal merchants, stopping importing soon after. That meant that the coal trains from the dock ceased and with only a small amount of other imports being handled the docks became uneconomic. The telescopic bridge and Dock, of course, figured strongly in SIAS' story over its first ten or so years.



The Telescopic Bridge in 1960

On the left, are the remains of the Corporation's wharf, built just after the B & E Railway reached Bridgwater in 1841. It was linked to that line by horse tramway.



SS Crowpill

Ex Tynesider built 1911) one of Sully's last colliers which was scrapped in 1966.



The drag boat, unofficially known as “Bertha”, built in Bristol. She worked by dragging herself back and forward across the dock on fixed chains and pulling a scraper blade which pulled accumulated silt to a position that could be flushed out into the river through culverts in the dock floor.



Burnham Jetty and the S & D Rly

Burnham and Highbridge had once depended on cross channel traffic to feed the S & D as part of a scheme to link Wales to France. Highbridge Wharf for goods and the passenger traffic through Burnham. This had gone by the end of the 19th Century with the goods through Highbridge finishing by 1947. Burnham Jetty dated from 1858, only being used for cross channel traffic for a very short time. The rails survived, pretty well complete until the mid 1960s but any vestige had gone by the early 70s. The Jetty, with its rails, originally broad gauge, found a longer lifespan as the slipway for the Burnham lifeboat.



Highbridge Works

The Workshops had been established in the 1860s after the Somerset Central had divorced the B & E and went in with the Dorset Central, changing to standard gauge. As most will know, the S & D shut in 1966, with the length to Basin Bridge milk factory lasting into the 70s, when the milk trains stopped.



Until that dreadful day in 1966 when the line beyond Bason Bridge was shut, the milk trains went to Templecombe for onward collection for London. After that date, the tanks were moved to Highbridge and taken via the old Great Western route until milk transport by rail ceased about the time that the M5 was built. The milk factory closed in the early 1980s.



Highbridge Station

This is the old GWR station in 1971. The S & D station directly beyond it had been gone 5 years and likewise the surviving B & E building. The rest would follow soon, to be replaced with "bus stop" type shelters. At least Burnham and Highbridge still have a railway station.



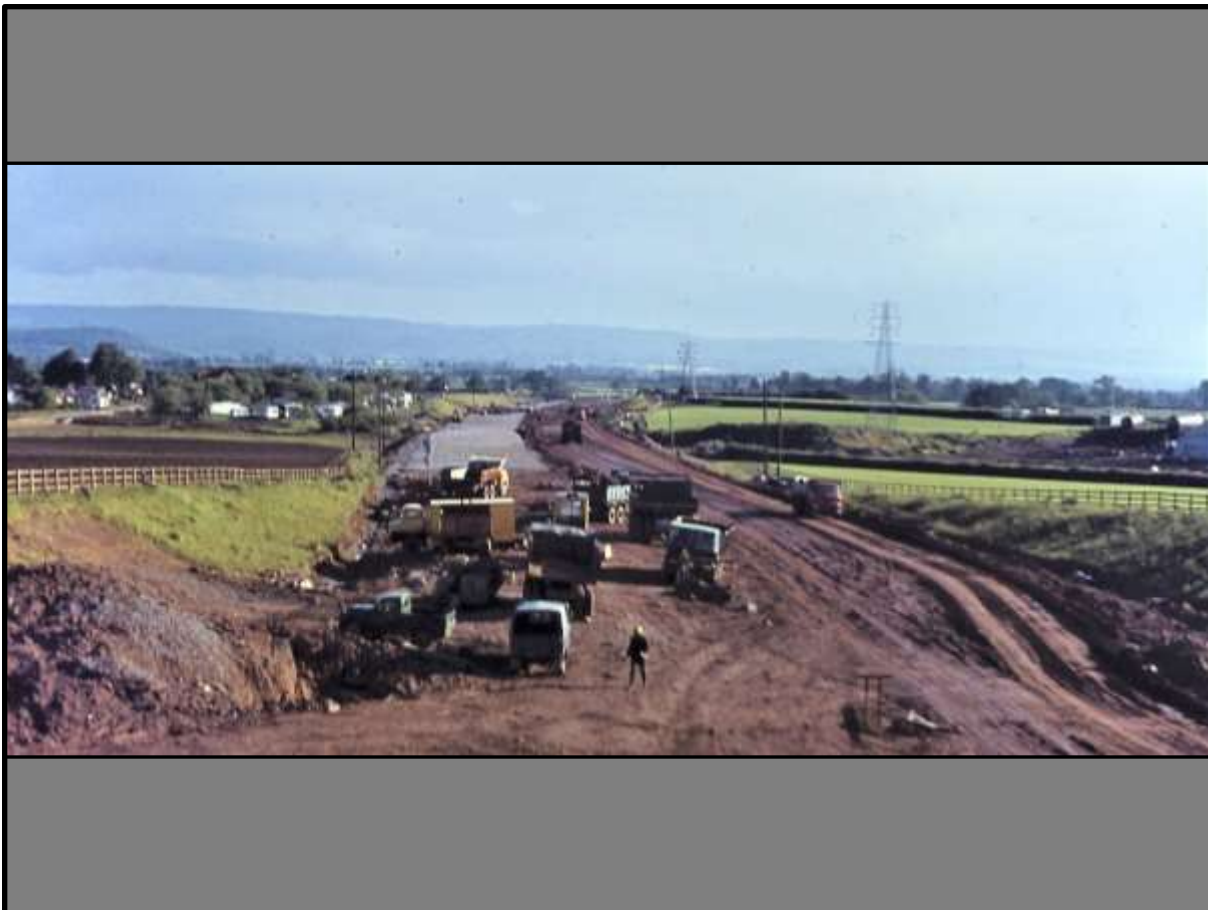
Barry

This is what was happening on our railways. This was Barry scrapyard in 1970. All steam had gone from BR, but luckily Dai Woodham had provided a large storage area which resulted in many steam locos being saved!



Collumpton By-pass

A changing political face to transport. The start of the Motorway pandemic in our area. When started in 1966, it wasn't even certain that the Cullompton Bypass would form part of the system. The M5 only came down as far as Tewkesbury, but the political mood wanted a road based economy. A major trunk road had been planned, in theory, down to Exeter pre war. Luckily, I managed to get a diesel hydraulic heading north.



M5 Construction

I present some views of its construction in our area. This is a view of the works looking south, from the A361 at Walford Cross.



The start of work looking north from Moon Lane, nr North Newton.



As the M5 rolled south, so it swept anything in its path aside. As work progressed, a large army of volunteers were recruited to keep an archaeological watch on sites. They mostly looked for sites dating from pre Post Medieval times, as that is what the professionals of the time felt was right! Luckily there were enough enlightened ones involved to take it further. The interest was growing and could no longer be pushed aside. I had already run off a couple of films on the site of John Board's Cement Works at Dunball, which dated from the 1840s when the B & E railway arrived. This was totally obliterated by the M5 work.



Highbridge Wharf

Highbridge Wharf was gradually filled and lost in the late 1970s, and is now unrecognisable. The Cattle Market closed more recently, combining with Taunton and Bridgwater to a new site at Junction 24, Bridgwater South.



Highbridge Cattle Market in its final years.



Highbridge Patent Fuel Works.

What could have become a major industry, if only for a while, was the attempted manufacture of Patent Fuel blocks on the Wharf. The original scheme was piloted by the Eclipse Peat Co. and it is thought that peat was intended to form some of the ingredients. This building was erected in 1921 and closed in 1923 but was re-established in 1925 making blocks from coal dust. Little has been recorded about these works, but I am currently researching the history, with an intention to publish something one day. It finally closed around 1931 and remained empty, apart from WW2 use by the Military, prior to the D day invasion in June 1944. In the 50s and 60s it was a great playground and helped to get me interested in IA! The old building was demolished around 1980 and a sewage pumping station built on the site.



SIAS on the Scene

After the formation of SIAS, came the demolition of the main part of W Thomas' brick and tile works at Wellington. Mary and I attended on the day that some stacks were blown by Blaster Bates, The Fred Dibnah of his day.

One of the early projects with which SIAS was involved was the recording of one of the Hoffman Kilns. Tony Ward , one of our early members, surveyed and drew it.

Demolition, over an extended period of several years, resulted in a future spin-off for the new Westonzoyland Engine Trust, which had been started by SIAS. The Manager of the new brickworks donated several tons of old but useable bricks, rails and various hardware. The new works itself didn't last long, bringing brick making in the County to an end about 20 years later.



Looking in the other direction, one of the chimney stacks is felled,...



...shock waves run up through it...



...and down goes 100 years of history.



The date stone is now in the Brick and Tile Museum in Bridgwater.



End of The Collieries

Another industry that finished in 1973 was coal mining. One of the earliest visits that SIAS made was to Kilnersdon Colliery, a week before it closed. There was a plan to make a museum at Writhlington, which had operated with Kilnersdon latterly, but this sadly failed. This also caused the closure of the Bristol to Radstock Railway as the coal was being used at Portishead Power Station. The line would have been a major asset today, running into Bristol through an area which is crying out for better transport.



Writhlington Colliery

The pithead at Writhlington, 1975. This would have made an excellent small colliery museum for the area, had it happened. The shaft is out of view to my left. The loaded trams would have come from there and rolled into the tippler, been turned over to empty them and then been pushed along the tramway and returned to the shaft via the crawler under where I am standing.



Recording of Pitts

Another brick and tile works that we recorded in a small way, was Pitts at Highbridge. This had been taken over some years before by Westbrick of Exeter and we were able to spend a day or two recording some of the remains. It was a far more typical Somerset yard than Thomas' at Poole. The M5 rolling South had helped the demise of our Bridgwater B & T Industry. Dunball Steam Pottery Brick & Tile Works was the last to close. A short film was made by some members of the Bridgwater & District Arch. Soc. as part of the M5 recording, Just too early to have had a SIAS input.



Visits

The Society started making visits early on. I can't remember what came in which order, but here are pictures of some of them. The first was of our group at the Haytor Quarries on Dartmoor.



Here, we are enjoying a day on the Grand Western Canal, led by Sandy Buchannan and Frank Hawtin.



One of the sites we visited on that day was the Tone Aqueduct at Nynehead. Over the years there have been attempts to conserve this structure.



Another visit was to Weymouth and Portland. In the background you can just make out the ghostly image of Portland Bill Lighthouse with its foghorn blowing!



One of our members demonstrating some of his other skills on the crane rope!

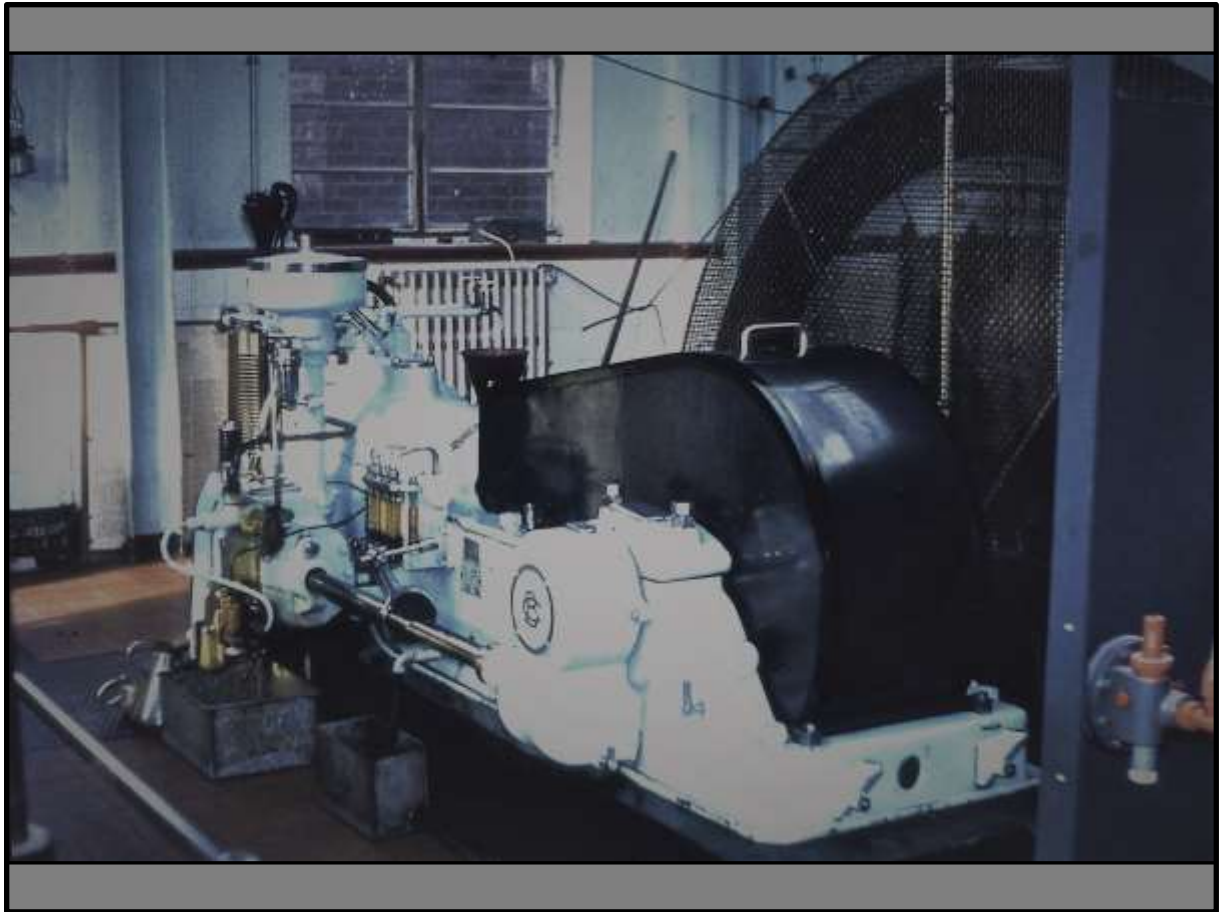


Chipley Sawmill was another site. This is now a delightful residence still retaining its waterwheel.



Water Industry Supply Sites

Yet another evening visit took us to Westford Pumping Station. A very interesting site. Originally the pumps were driven by gas engines, then converted to steam and then diesel. It pumped from the well source to the brick tower at Rockwell Green.



This picture was taken in another supply station; one of the engines in Durleigh Treatment Works, Bridgwater, which drove the pumps. I show these three photographs as I worked for the West Somerset Water Board in the early seventies. The Crossley engine is now at Westonzoyland Pumping Station. It sounded far better than the high pitched whine of the electric pumps which gradually replaced the diesels.



This little Ruston worked in one of the smaller supply pumping stations. Originally belonging to Williton Rural District Council and sited at Washford Road Pumping Station, I believe it went into private preservation.



Interest in Brewing and Private Research

Even in the early days, some of our members were already working on private research. Your Chairman is looking at a most unlikely site in 1974! Brewery history has been of interest to us both for more years than we care to think! This unlikely site, now a car sales business at the junctions of St. James Street, Canon Street and Middle Street in Taunton was the piecemeal development of Hanbury and Cotching's Brewery, which developed occupying a number of old cottages and some purpose built buildings.

Even now, some buildings survive, the best being the Malthouse opposite on the corner of Priory Avenue, out of view to the right. Some years ago it was successfully converted to flats.



Westonzoyland

One of SIAS' major successes has been the spawning of the Westonzoyland Pumping Station Museum. I won't spend any time mentioning more than that, other than to say that it all happened as a result of member Sandy Buchannan's suggestion that we arranged a visit to the old steam pumping station in 1977. This, of course, was the site of the first land drainage pump in Somerset. I took this picture in 1969 when Cluffy Thyer, the last driver, was still living on site. I little knew what lay ahead for us then!



Glass Cone - an example

The Society would go on from those early days fostering many aspects of IA. The Chandos Glass Cone Base, now conserved with an interpretation panel, is an asset to the Northgate area of Bridgwater. Peter has already referred to it. Again, its survival is down to the involvement of past members of SIAS.



Any Society can only survive if its members enjoy a social atmosphere and can attract new blood to share our interest in the past. SIAS rode on the post war idea that the last 250 years was worth recording, in spite of some academics still having other ideas! What has changed over the last fifty years has been a greater awareness and acceptance of modern and technological history and the argument that our interest doesn't start with Thomas Newcomen; it starts in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. I am sure that most of you will agree to sharing an interest in both the earliest copper mines and the latest technology at Hinkley Point.

May SIAS long continue with its work.

THANKYOU

Iain Miles