

TCHT Newsletter '2' 2014



This is the second TCHT newsletter of 2014 and follows a very successful spring both for weather and for TCHT. The evening of the 26th Feb saw a talk by Alf Jenkins and Glynn Barratt on the Benson Brook Hydro scheme at Bitterley Village Hall. Over 50 people attended the evening, listened to the speakers and enjoyed Anji's excellent cakes. On the weekend of 15th & 16th of March TCHT hosted a day of tree planting and a celebration of Mistletoe delivered by Suzanne and Jake. Over 100 trees were planted.



Jake explaining the lore of mistletoe

The 23rd saw TCHT in partnership with Mahorall Cider Farm hosting a day of Apple grafting led by apple guru Wade Muggleton. "What a wonderful morning we shared with Wade at Mahorall Cider Farm, on the Apple Grafting Course, today. Many, many thanks to Chris King Turner, for his wonderful hospitality. The barn was the perfect location for the course. I am sure that all the

participants had both an informative and entertaining time. Thanks to everyone who contributed to making this day a success" (Jan).



Bob & Sara with proud graft, now doing well in their garden

Also in March TCHT were joined by a team from the Archaeology Dept. of Worcester University prospecting for clay. As a part of an experimental project the team is making pottery based on those found in the Bromfield BA barrow cemetery. The clay used in these prehistoric vessels has within it crushed dhustone making a direct and possibly symbolic connection to Titterstone, which is clearly visible from the barrows



Students from Worcs Uni sorting clay

On the evening of Thursday the 3rd of April TCHT hosted a talk by Peter Reavill, Shropshire & Herefordshire portable antiquities officer at Knowbury Village Hall. Among other things Peter presented the results of tests carried out at Birmingham University on an iron ingot found at Doddington by John Vail. The Birmingham report describes the ingot as broadly rectangular in plan and triangular in cross section measuring 156mm long by 64mm wide and 58mm deep. It weighs 1573 grams and is of very pure iron content. Tests indicate that the artefact was of wrought iron. The ingot is a mid grey brown colour with distinct areas of dull red colour. No direct local parallel is known and it is most likely to date from the period AD 1200-1450.



The Doddington Bloom ingot

It appears to be a billet of iron made by smelting ore in a bloomery furnace, then forged by a smith to remove impurities into an ingot of valuable iron. A full days work by a smith was needed to consolidate 2kg of bloom into a workable billet with half the weight of the bloom being lost in the forging process. Iron ore is known to have been mined on Clee Hill in the 18th century but this find pushes iron working on the hill back into the early to mid medieval period and as such is an extremely important archaeological find.

How cool is that.

The Dhu Stone – Fulcrum of Clee Hill's Industries (A Jenkins)

TCHT is organising a series of five informative walks/tours to various parts of Titterstone Clees as an important component of its 2014 programme. We hope many of you will want to join us. We look on these occasions as a two way process when we learn as well as impart information. **(THE FIRST OF THESE WILL BE TO THE BENSON BROOK ON THE 31st OF MAY, to book a place ring 01584 890946)**

On Saturday 16th August I will be concentrating on Dhu Stone area, the fulcrum of Clee Hill industries – where a major part of them , coal and stone quarrying began.

My home Dhu Stone Inn (now sadly Rowan Cottage)was immediately south and juxtapose to the railway built from Ludlow to Bitterley then on to Dhu Stone and Clee Hill village as a self acting incline to transport coal. While laying the incline the qualities of Dhu stone basalt were discovered and this led to opening of the first stone quarry, Dhu Stone Quarry for the production commercially of stone setts and road stone.

Just one hundred yards away from my home the operating of the quarry and incline railway was my 'playground' every week day.

Workmen came in hoards at lunch time to my home Dhu Stone Inn so I grew up knowing them and understanding our special local dialect.

Fifty yards away was Railway Terrace where all our immediate neighbours were customers, friends who welcomed my sister and me and were employees on the railway. Immediately in front of home, up 'the green' stood the signal box. I was allowed in there without any fear or apprehension. I was among friends who all knew Mum and Dad. I often stood on a cupboard box seat to watch

full trucks of stone being eased over the brow by Mr George Price the engine driver and start their journey to Bitterley. The endless wire rope simultaneously pulled empty, lighter trucks up the incline.

Before a 'trip' was released and Mr Price shunted the trucks forward, the operator held an ear piece to one ear, wound the telephone handle, spoke into a mouth piece sending a signal three times to Bitterley. The return signal came back five times and then the shunted trucks were released to make their descent.

Along side the signal box was the employees outside loo and numerous sleeper built sheds which housed tools and equipment. A little further away was the imposing Drum House. It was a brick building with large west facing windows, another of my favourite visiting places. I was allowed to stand in the large doorway and watch the work proceeding; no thoughts of Health and Safety and Mum and Dad entrusted my safe keeping to the employees and my common sense.

The operator turned a large horizontal wheel, a little like that of a mariner while water poured onto large beech brake blocks keeping them cool while they regulated the speed of the enormous vertical wheel. This enabled the endless wire rope to roll via the wheel rim groove on to the incline where it was connected to ascending and descending trucks.

This huge vertical wheel was half submerged in a pit and spun on its axle enabling trucks to go up and down the railway. These transported thousands of tons of Dhu Stone to many parts of England and Wales. Alongside the railway was a large concrete and stone sett wharf and I watched smaller metal trucks coming down from Dhu Stone

quarry bringing crushed stone to be tipped into the plant which coated stone with tar.

The result was tarmacadam, men applied a retarding agent, tipped the tarred stone into awaiting trucks which were then shunted onto the railway for its journey to distant parts. The retarding agent allowed the loads to travel many miles and still be suitable to be spread on road surfaces.

A little further along towards Clee Hill Village was the engine shed. I passed this substantial building on my way to Clee Hill Primary school each day. The shed was supported by heavy wooden buttresses which apparently had been necessary to fix to support the building against the battering of inclement, prevailing winds. It was special for me to wave to Mr Price when I was coming home from school. He would sound the 'hooter', stop, allow me to climb up the foot plate and have a ride to the Dhu Stone. I can't see British Rail doing that. Then I would watch Mr Price rake out the fire box embers, leave them in a pile between the rails and shunt the engine into the shed for the night.

If we were a little later coming home, which often happened we would run to the still burning embers and like naughty boys pee on them. This created billowing acrid smoke. This knowledge led to another prank. We would run ahead of our other class mates and if the wind was blowing south, pee on the embers and the horrible cloud would drift towards our mates making them cough and splutter. Of course they would get their own back by doing the same to us. Boys will be boys!!

Many of you will know that my wife Ann and I have published numerous books, DVDs etc about our wonderful hill and we are just completing the script of "From Clee to

Eternity". It will be available for Christmas and will contain much of which I have written here; many photos of Clee Hill's industries including information about coal mining; stone quarrying; the clay industry; cider making; Bitterley hydro reservoir; records from local newspapers; Parish Council records; part autobiography; TCHT and much more. ENJOY THE WALKS.

Alf Jenkins MBE.

NOVERS RESEARCH:

The Novers Bird Survey research programme is continuing into its third year. Designed to monitor the effects of changes in woodland management on the resident nesting bird population and led by ornithologist and bird song expert John Tucker. **John will be leading a public dawn chorus walk on Saturday the 10th of this month, May. Meeting in the Novers Car Park, Follow the track down the side of Knowle football ground (SY8 3AJ, NGR SO59773).**

This is a joint TCHT/CHCWG event.

TCHT is also joining with CHCWG to take part in a long term national survey that is being undertaken by the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSDIO), the British Lichen Society and the British Bryological Society to assess the Impact of ash die back (*Chalara Fraxinea*).

Following the devastation caused by Dutch Elm disease to our native elms and their associated flora and fauna there was concern that the effect of the virtual total loss from our countryside of an important species had not been monitored and recorded. The BSBI is therefore selecting woodlands across the UK to take part in a planned long term study to examine the effect of the loss of the ash.

Ash is one of our most common trees, particularly so in respect of the Marches

where it is an important element of the landscape in hedgerows and small copses. It supports a wide range of wildlife, including hole nesting birds such as owls, woodpeckers, nuthatch and tree creeper. Its seeds keep well and are an important food source for wood mice and for birds such as the bullfinch. The ash bark is alkaline and supports a wide range of lichens and bryophytes which live upon the trees themselves. The ash has an open canopy which allows many other plant species to live beneath it, which in turn provide shelter and resources for insects and for warblers that live upon the insects, such as flycatchers and redstarts. At least sixty of the rarest or our British insect species have an association with the ash, one of the better known being the brown hairstreak butterfly (*Thecla betulae*). It will be a tragedy to lose this beautiful and useful tree but reports indicate that this may be inevitable.



Possibly the sun is setting on our noble ash