

THE 115th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO
ON WEDNESDAY 29th APRIL 2019

Present:- Keith McClellan – Chairman
Peter Cole – Secretary

1) Secretary's Report

Peter said that he went to the AGM of the Northamptonshire Heritage Forum at Boughton House, Geddington, which was between Kettering and Corby the day after our last meeting. In fact he made it a day trip by going first to the Northants Records Office, which was on the way. One of his reasons for doing this was because at least two people had told him that they thought that Arthur Seccull had been the illegitimate son of Joyce Hobcraft. One of his reasons for going to the Records Office was to go through all the records of towns and villages fairly close to Aynho to see if there was any record of his birth there. He couldn't find anything, but of course she could have gone to a nearby Oxfordshire village.

Going on to the Heritage Forum AGM, he eventually found Boughton House. There were a lot of people from all over the county. He added a further 20 Aynho leaflets to the ones the Secretary had left over from the Brackley meeting, amongst a lot of leaflets from all over the county. He took a lot of other people's leaflets from the meeting.

2) Keith introduced **Jon-Paul Carr** to talk on **"Inventions and Inventors of Victorian Northamptonshire."**

Jon-Paul said that he had been asked by Northampton Museum to give a talk about Victorian Northampton. At that time there had been a programme on television by Adam Hart-Davis on "What did the Victorians do for us?" It made me think – there must have been some inventions at that time in Northants. So I did some research. If you ask people in Northampton what this county is famous for, most would say the boot and shoe industry. At the start of Queen Victoria's reign in 1837 this was really a small cottage industry. People worked at home or in a nearby workshop. Then mechanisation came in. This helped transform the whole industry. The sewing machine was the first to arrive. In 1845 an American, Elias Howe, invented a sewing machine. He came over to England, and made one strong enough to cope with leather for shoes and boots. In the late 1850s these sewing machines began to be put into the warehouses that the machinists used to take them to for sale. These warehouses became factories where shoe makers were employed. Of course you didn't buy the machine, you rented it. At first people were fearful that jobs would be lost, but in fact the introduction of these machines completely transformed the industry in Northampton. Even today there is still evidence of places to do with this industry in many parts of the town. With the basic sewing machine there are always ideas of ways to improve it.

Owen Robertson of Kettering invented a loom with a treadle, which could work faster. Health and safety is thought to be a modern thing, but a photo in 1890 shows that women all had their hair tied right back, they are all wearing protective aprons and they are all sitting on adjustable seating. They have all got a light above them.

At one time in Rushden village there were over 100 boot and shoe factories, though there are only four today. One makes boots for the British Army, and for forces in other parts of the world.

It was all about making the product as quickly and economically as possible. In Kettering Harry Mobbs and Alfred Lewis in 1885 formed a partnership. They patented an easy exit last, and an iron model of a foot on which boots and shoes could be made and repaired. They also invented a machine that by a series of levers would stretch a boot so that it fitted throughout wear.

Jon-Paul said that he never threw away receipts and things that came by post, but he dated and kept them. They are little bits of history, and you can look back and see how prices have changed during the years. There are other things too. There was a boot and shoe company that went over to making bicycles in 1890, and in 1900 they came up with the idea of a little tiny electric motor that could be clipped onto the bike to turn it into a motor bicycle. Unfortunately they got ahead of

themselves and put too much money into the company, so that it went bankrupt in 1903. If it hadn't been for somebody noting this on the back of an envelope, Jon-Paul and everyone else would never have known about it.

There was a water mill at Ditchford on the River Nene on the boundary of 3 parishes. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book. In 1838 an advert appeared in the Northampton Mercury for Southam's Paint & Cord Meshing Machine. William Southam was the miller there at the time. It was actually managed by Barwells & Co. then. There were lots of little iron foundries established all round the county. They didn't invent steam engines but they did use or modify stationary steam engines to assist in running all the belts, pulleys and other machinery used in the boot and shoe industry at that time. This ran on until about 1930, when petrol engines became commonplace.

Northampton Borough Council owned a very unique road roller, which had been made by Atkins in 1899. This had been dismantled and left in the depot yard in 1970. It has been restored by the Northampton Railway Trust.

A man by the name of George Mather son of a farmer with an inventive mind came up with a lot of ideas to help his father with the farm. I think the farmer got a bit fed up with him, because he gave him a building which had been located at the back of a pub. This was a canal dock, where they created an iron foundry and started making all sorts of things connected with farming. Jon-Paul began to make a list of these, but gave up after he had reached 170. One of the most unusual items George came up with was an invention to test for earthquakes, which is now in the Science Museum in London. He lived to be 100 years old, and left a vast amount of money, in today's terms about seven million pounds. There are still the Bradford Mather lectures held annually by the Science Museum for an annual prize of £25,000. He had a daughter who disappointed him by becoming a music hall star, and a son whose claim to fame is that he still holds the record for the time of cycling from Land's End to John O'Groats on a penny-farthing cycle, which he did in the 1870s.

James Shah was assistant manager at Northampton Gas Works. Gas came to the county in 1838, and was used initially to light the town street lamps. He gave a demonstration of a gas cooker in a Northampton public house. He invited the Earl Spencer to attend. A small chicken was cooked, and the Earl immediately asked for a cooker to be sent to his household. So gas cooking took off. It wasn't until the 1890s that electricity works were built in Northampton. People were warned that their servants should be provided with rubber-soled shoes to avoid electrocution, and believe me this did occasionally happen!

In January 1891 Mr Robert Hickman came up with the idea of a heater for greenhouses. This was just a pipe with water going round, and a smaller pipe with gas jets just underneath it. Another invention around that time was for a flushing toilet. Mr Springer demonstrated a quiet flushing cistern that didn't wake up the entire house when it was used. Toilet paper wasn't talked about in Victorian times, but you could buy it at a chemist's shop. It was just kept under the counter. It wasn't until 1932 that the toilet roll was invented. In 1889 there was an advert for a bouquet holder by William Gardener – a metal clasp into which you could pop a flower stem and attach it to a lapel of your coat. It had a bit of padding inside to keep the flower watered.

Mr Bassett-Lowke was a model maker and he had bought an early Box Brownie camera. In 1898 an express train was coming fast up the line from London. At Wellingborough station a postman had a heavy trolley of post to be put on a train. The trolley slipped off the platform onto the line. It was too heavy to be shifted before the express train arrived to pass right through the station. The trolley derailed the train and several people were killed and a lot injured. A subsequent Inquiry ruled that all station platforms must slope upwards towards the line, and that all big trolleys should have good braking systems. Mr Bassett-Lowke took a lot of photos with his camera, and sold them to national newspapers, which is how he made enough money to build up his model-making business. He made quite a large model railway for the garden of Charles William Bartholomew at Blakesley Hall. Charles was a founder member of the R.A.C. His father had owned several coal mines in Yorkshire, and Charles invented several things to help the mining industry. In particular he made a device for cleaning gauzes on mining lamps. This could clean a thousand lamps a day. Previously it had taken 20 minutes to clean every lamp, so this was a very worthwhile invention.

In 1850 a William Gilbert Elliott had the idea of making bricks, tile and pipes from a plastic material. It didn't last very long, but of course today pipes and guttering are all made of plastic. John and Basil Austin went out to America and invented the Austin Wind Chest for church organs, which only had to be filled once and then the air circulated. They formed The Austin Organ Company in Connecticut, which is still going today. In 1880 Joseph Grosse invented a bicycle which could cover 20 miles in 58 minutes on a track (the roads were terrible in those days.) and several other useful cycling items.

Charles Wicksteed had a keen interest in engineering. In 1871 he came to Kettering to display his steam plough. He liked the area and set up business there. He invented an automatic gearbox, a circular saw, and other things. Later he went on to make playground equipment, and he used land to demonstrate this on, which eventually became Wicksteed Park.

Joe Ingram was originally a bricklayer, but in 1911 he described himself as a bricklayer, inventor, steeplejack, chimney builder and pyro technician. He acquired the name "Parachute Joe" because he wanted to climb church steeples and jump off with a parachute he had invented. He was forbidden to do this by the Authorities. In 1888 he was allowed to construct a 20-foot tower, but he was told that he could only drop a dummy of his weight from it. This was obviously a good idea, as the dummy only crashed straight into the ground. Then he came up with the idea of making some wings mostly out of straw. He wanted to glide this from the roof of a Rushden factory. Again this was forbidden, but local people built a haystack for him to glide from. He didn't get very far. He had very firm views about aviation. He made a model of an airship. He said that one day it would carry hundreds of people around the world. This is just what happens today, so he was quite far-sighted. When the First World War started he went to the War Office and told them that his airship could also be used as a bomber, but they were just not interested.

Keith thanked Jon-Paul for a fantastic talk.

3) Forthcoming Meetings

Wednesday 26th June – **The Life and Times of the Culworth Gang by David Hewitt**

There are no meetings in July or August

Wednesday 25th September – **Rainsborough, the Iron Age Fort by Andrea Gladden**

Wednesday 30th October – **Oxford Castle & Prison from Oxanfora to Malmaison by Alistair Duncan**