

GSIA AND THE INTERNET

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Appropriately enough for the start of a new millennium 2000 has seen GSIA take up an additional means of communication, the Internet. Our website www.gsia.co.uk was launched without the usual fanfare but then perhaps our aims are different to many sites. Certainly there is no intention of becoming a commercial site which is just as well given the spectacular demise in 2000 of so many of the initial wave of commercial sites or “dot.coms”. Furthermore, there was no wish to emulate the outlandish colour schemes complete with somersaulting text so prevalent on many sites created by individuals either for themselves or voluntary organisations. The aim of the GSIA website is to provide a ‘no-frills’, easy to navigate site which gives ready access to information of use to both members and the public alike.

The GSIA home page deliberately avoids the use of pictures as these can significantly increase the time taken for the page to appear on the screen. Once loaded the home page provides separate direct links to pages relating to the Society, our events and industrial archaeology in general. The first of these gives a brief introduction to GSIA for potential new members. The second link gives details of our summer excursions and winter talks. Here we have the potential to provide more information on our activities than we may have space for in the News Sheet. In particular, we now provide a link to a very detailed map (scale 1:500) showing the meeting place for the event. We currently have a policy of leaving in place details of visits or lectures that have taken place until the next years programme is ready. This serves to give a very good idea of the sort of activities we do even though the new programme may not be available yet.

The third link to “Industrial Archaeology” offers the most scope for future development. We already have some key items such as the Lists of Contents for all the Newsletters from 1964 to 1970 and then for their successor, the annual Journal from 1971 to the present. There are also General Indexes to all the Newsletters and the Journal for 1971 to 1989 inclusive. The General Index for the Journal will soon be greatly enhanced by the inclusion of the index for 1990-1999 compiled by Derrick and Judy Hall and published elsewhere in this issue.

The General Index and List of Contents are responsible for a steady stream of enquiries from the UK and overseas including Australia and Alaska. Many of these are ‘family historians’ who may have had ancestors working in local industries. Sometimes this can be very useful as it can put flesh on the bones that we find in the history books. An example of this is a copy of a late 19th century letter that we were sent relating to a William Henry Anstie. His widow had written to her son describing her late husband’s early life in the cloth industry in the Nailsworth area in the 1850s. She said that he had been born in Wiltshire and he been apprenticed to a clothier at Nailsworth at the age of 21. Five years later “his father took a mill for him at Woodchester”. However, there was no mention of which mill it was and we were asked to help. It proved to be remarkably easy as both Tann and the Victoria County History Volume 11 have one line ‘mentions’ that Dyehouse Mill, Woodchester was in the occupation of W. H. Anstie in 1856. Unfortunately, these sources go on to record that Dyehouse had a different occupier within a couple of years which may suggest that our youthful clothier was not very successful. Either way it is very interesting to learn something about one of the clothiers from documents like these and it is most unlikely that we would have learnt about the letter without the website.

Inevitably we get requests for copies of Journal articles which we are pleased to supply where we can. It is easy for enquirers in the UK to make a small payment to cover the cost of photocopying and postage. It is of course much more difficult for people abroad to send these relatively small amounts of money and the costs to the Society to convert currency are prohibitively high. One way round this is to create an electronic version of the document which can then be sent ‘free’ by e-mail. This is the way in which copies of Tony Youles’s two articles on H.J.H. King of Nailsworth were sent to Juneau, the capital of Alaska. The initial enquiry was from someone who had visited our site and had found the articles from the List of Contents. We explained the difficulty with supplying a paper version of the articles and the enquirer said that she would try the local library (in Alaska!) for a copy of the GSIA Journals! We did not seek to dissuade her and a few days later we received a request from the Juneau Central library asking if they could obtain copies of the H.J.H. King articles from us. The library was more than content to be sent electronically the articles in the standard Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF) and they undertook to print the articles from the PDF files and pass them on to the enquirer.

The process worked well and the subsequent “thank you” e-mail bore the invitation to “call in and see them if I was ever in Juneau”. Naturally I replied that I would be delighted to if I was ever in that part of Alaska but at the present time I would have to be content with what I could find out about Juneau on the Internet! This reply was sent at about 11 pm and the time difference is such that it was only 3 pm in Alaska and during the Library’s opening hours. The reply from the Library was almost instantaneous and directed me to its own web site which has a web-cam (a TV camera supplying pictures to a web page). The web cam was showing the picture over the Bay as seen from the Librarian’s office. It really brought it home how powerful a means of communication the Internet really is. We later heard from the original enquirer who had been thrilled to get the articles.

The Society’s first venture in web pages dates back to 1997 when recent developments in technology were exploited to assist the History Department at Rednock School, Dursley with their annual course on the local woollen industry. Source material in the form of web pages was created for the students using colour images from the GSIA collection together with suitable extended captions. The pages show old and new views of the various mills in the Dursley, Uley and Wotton-under-Edge area and the processes that went on in them. Originally the pages were stored on computers at the school but the material now forms part of the GSIA website.

Another section in the general Industrial Archaeology section is a site devoted to The Victoria History of Gloucestershire which forms part of the national series entitled The Victoria History of the Counties of England and is familiarly known as “The VCH”. The aim of the project which was started in 1899 is to provide individual parish and town histories for the whole of the County and they can provide an invaluable starting point for industrial archaeologists on a new topic. Gloucestershire now has eight volumes already published and these are listed together with the parishes covered so far. There is a map of the area covered and information on how to obtain copies of the publications.

GSIA has supported the Gloucestershire 2000 Photographic Archive project which involves the creation of a large collection of digital images which will provide future generations with a detailed picture of Gloucestershire and its people at the start of the new millennium. The GSIA web site has a link to the Photographic Archive site which has photographs of the old bridgekeepers cottage by the side of the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal at Hardwicke showing the cottage both before and after restoration.

The Gloucestershire Population Tables 1801-1901 Site gives the populations for towns, villages and sometimes hamlets in the county at 10 year intervals throughout the 19th century. Details are given for the individual parishes of the Cities of Bristol and Gloucester. The tables are based on the summaries of the eleven censuses taken between 1801 and 1901 that were published in Volume 2 of the Victoria History of Gloucestershire. The data shows the remarkable changes in population that could occur due to changes in the fortunes of particular industries. For example the population of Uley was 2655 in 1821 and 2641 in 1831 but had fallen to 1713 in 1841 following Edward Sheppard's bankruptcy in 1837.

The preliminary list of Boulton & Watt steam engines supplied to Gloucestershire that was published in the GSIA Journal for 1990 is now included on the web site. The list was compiled by Nicholas Kingsley (Birmingham City Archivist at that time) from the Boulton & Watt records held at Birmingham Central Library. There are over forty engines on the list which is split into categories such as sun and planet type, canal engines, independent engines and (beam) crank type engines.

A booklist for local historians compiled by D. J. H. Smith, the former County Archivist for Gloucestershire, is a site of more general interest. The list is annotated with brief notes indicating the relevant strengths of each volume. All the books listed are available at the Gloucestershire Record Office and many of the titles are also available at other libraries in the County.

The Association for Industrial Archaeology (AIA) maintains a small website and the GSIA site is linked to this as well as the one for the Gloucestershire Local History Committee and GADARG (The Gloucester and District Archaeological Research Group). The AIA site has a list of contents for *IA Review* between 1990 and 1999. The Local History Committee site contains useful advice to both new and experienced computer users on how to make effective use of their machine and relevant software for local history research (or industrial archaeology). It also contains a list of the contents for *Gloucestershire History* from 1987 to 2000. The GADARG site contains an index to the articles published in issues 1 to 25 of their journal *Glevensis* and a contents list for issues 26 to 33. There are also links from the GSIA site to a number of on-line catalogues such as those of the Public Record Office, British Museum and Gloucestershire County Library.

Plans are afoot to develop the site, particularly in so far as industrial archaeological material is concerned. The creation of pages which utilise the Society's rich slide collection like the ones on the Dursley cloth industry is one obvious area. The site could also act as a noticeboard where members can post their interests which hopefully could encourage collaboration. The articles for the GSIA Journal are all prepared with a word processor and the illustrations processed electronically and so the publication on the web site of complete articles is a distinct possibility.

The main GSIA site together with most of the web pages referred to above (with the exception of the AIA material) have been prepared by the Author. The efforts of the many individuals who produced the original material is gratefully acknowledged. Clearly there exists tremendous scope for the publication on the web of existing 'hard copy' material and completely new material. It is really only the beginning.