

## Panel for Historical Engineering Works Newsletter

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### Heritage is really about the future by Robert Carr

The television personality Griff Rhys Jones is the President of Civic Voice, an organisation concerned with the built environment of England. He was present at an All Party Parliamentary Group meeting at Westminster in London this year where he made a remarkable speech, the thrust of which we should take note of. He made the point that rather than just being about the past, Heritage is really about the future.

Speaking from his own experience, he said that it was owing to the strenuous effort of many people, objectors, NIMBYs and so on that Britain is the pleasant place that it is. It is of paramount importance to continue with this demanding and uncongenial effort if people in the future are to have a pleasant place to live.

Rhys Jones said that he liked living in London but, say 50 years ago, London was a horrible place, it was called the Big Smoke. People tried to leave London and not live there. It was the hard work of all the protesters that changed London from being undesirable to being a very pleasant place to live in. Some of the protesters were well placed socially and had access to lawyers, even prestigious QCs - which of course is rather useful. It is quite clear that Rhys now very much enjoys living in London.

Half a century ago it was planned to build motorways through most cities and this included London. London was to have a motorway box, an inner ring road and a motorway was to run through Belsize Park. The well-to-do residents of Belsize Park objected; their campaign was one of those that made a difference. If you look at Tottenham Court Road you may notice that on the west side the more recent buildings are set further back from the road - see photograph.



This is intentional because it was planned to build a six-lane motorway from the north ending at Centre Point. Because of objections, thankfully this was never built. We never had a motorway box and the motorway schemes for London were finally abandoned.

London contrasts with some other British cities, for example Bradford, and this is also probably true of Glasgow and Birmingham. Take for example that City's 'concrete collar' - if during the week you have visited the site of the Watt beam engine on the Dartmouth Circus roundabout at Aston you will appreciate only too well that what was being proposed for most large towns was appalling. Thankfully the example of Aston is relatively uncommon.

In Nottingham, Maid Marian Way built about 55 years ago cut a swathe through the City's mediaeval streets and just two years after completion it acquired a title that has stuck to this day - 'the ugliest street in Europe'. The phrase was coined by Arthur Ling, professor of town planning at the University of Nottingham. The strenuous defence of Bath by the architect and civil engineer Professor Sir Colin Buchanan is a particularly notable case. Bath might easily have been so very different.

What people are campaigning for in Heritage is the future - not the past. Griff said important things about London that many of us may have forgotten and his speech was something of a revelation. Even though at first his style was humorous, the message that emerged - Heritage is really about the future - should be taken seriously.

## Edinburgh's new Marriott Courtyard Hotel

### By Roland Paxton, Emeritus Member

Since 1968, the PHEW has significantly and increasingly recorded and promoted civil engineering and the authentic conservation of important works. Marriott Hotels in association with a heritage developer, the Chris Stewart Group, have adopted an iconic Stevenson lighthouse engineering theme in their redevelopment of Georgian Buildings at Baxter Place, Edinburgh, which was formerly owned by Robert Stevenson C.E. This initiative comprises more than a thousand permanently displayed images, a bust, and a plaque.

The historical significance of Baxter Place is that the first and second generations of Scotland's Northern Lighthouse Board Engineers, Thomas Smith and Stevenson, lived and worked there from its completion in 1804. Thomas died there in 1815 and Robert in 1850. During this period the world-renowned Bell Rock Lighthouse, eleven miles out to sea from Arbroath, was erected under Stevenson's direction as resident engineer [from 1808-42 the Board's Engineer]. The success of this project enabled him to found the remarkable Dynasty of Engineers that practised widely for 1½ centuries.

The hotel redevelopment, only the façade of which is now original, is understood to be part of a £30m project. The hotel's bust of Stevenson is a full size replica of the finely sculptured marble original. The original bust was conceived by Commissioners in 1824 in the 'Stranger's' Room or 'Library', under the dome of Bell Rock Lighthouse, as a tribute to their engineer's 'distinguished talent and indefatigable zeal' in erecting the lighthouse. It was then executed by leading sculptor Samuel Joseph and from c.1828 adorned the 'Library', a facility enjoyed by lighthouse keepers more or less as shown, for 140 years



Bell Rock Lighthouse library furnished by Stevenson as seen in writer R.M. Ballantyne's watercolour painting in 1865. Courtesy National Library of Scotland N.L.S. Acc. 11962.

When I visited in 1986 the room's grandeur had diminished and it was in use as a kitchen leavened with exciting paperbacks. The bust is now at the Northern Lighthouse Board's H.Q. in Edinburgh].

The hotel replica bust was made [from a Stevenson family copy] by Clare Flatley of Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop in white jesmonite with marble stone filler. Recently it was unveiled by James Will, Robert Stevenson's great, great, great, grandson and his daughter Anna, who has just graduated in mechanical engineering, the first member of the Stevenson dynasty to engage in this discipline for several generations



Stevenson Bust unveiled at Marriott Hotel by Anna and James Will ©Mike Wilkinson

My attendance at this congenial commemoration, in co-operation with Peter Mackay Chairman of the Northern Lighthouse Heritage Trust, stemmed from advisory contributions as the project progressed and on the day, presentation of copies of the book *Dynasty of Engineers – The Stevensons and the Bell Rock*, courtesy of the Lighthouse Board, to Marriott Hotel staff and General Manager, Douglas Winfield. He commented on the hotel's enormous respect for the building's past and his expectation that the bust would provide a real talking point for arriving guests. Mike Bullock, Chief Executive of the Northern Lighthouse Board added, that it was exciting to have one of the most important buildings in the Board's history brought back to life. He commended the Chris Stewart Group and the Hotel for telling the story of the Stevenson family and their amazing contribution to maritime safety.

## Warwickshire's Industrial Archaeology Database

### by Roger Cragg

Over the 28 years of its existence since its foundation in 1989, the Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society (WIAS) has, through the efforts of its members, accumulated a large fund of knowledge about sites of interest throughout the County. (It should be mentioned that historically the Society considers the adjacent Districts of Coventry and Solihull to be within its remit although they have both been a constituent part of the County of West Midlands since the re-organisation of local government in 1974).

Recently the Society's committee considered how best to make this information more accessible to its members and others with an interest in the subject. It was decided that a database of sites would be created with the main aim that it should generate a list of sites which would be readily accessible via the Society's web site. Sufficient information would be contained in the