

Visit to Cheshire archives and local studies

Bernard Anderson



A fascinating display of both facsimile and original maps and plans illustrating the history and development of Cheshire was arranged for the CCS visit to Cheshire archives and local studies by archivist Adam Shaw with the assistance of CCS member Michael Richardson.

Adam used original and facsimile maps to give an outline of the history of Cheshire from the time of the Domesday Book to the present day.

This showed the extent of the changes that have taken place with the passage of time. Initially comprising twelve hundreds it included areas that are now in Wales. More recently changes in local government mean areas have been lost to or gained from surrounding counties most notably Lancashire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester. More recently again Halton (Runcorn and Widnes) and Warrington became unitary authorities and most recently the Cheshire County Council has been replaced by two further unitary authorities – Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester. Cheshire now has just ceremonial significance.

The progressive development of mapping Cheshire was illustrated using a series of maps including those of Saxton (1577), Speed (1610), Blaeu (1645), Burdett (1777), Greenwood (1819) and Bryant (1831).

A second group of maps were those drawn at larger scales, for example the carefully surveyed plan of Vale Royal Manor House and Estate (between Northwich and Winsford) produced in 1616 and the enclosure map of the Commons of Cuddington from the late eighteenth century. Cheshire Archives have digitised Tithe Maps these show both land holdings and land utilisation. Like the digitised mapping produced by the National Library of Scotland it is possible to view the Tithe Maps alongside contemporary mapping.

As in other parts of the country, the industrial revolution had a major impact. A detailed plan produced by Francis Giles and deposited on 30 November 1830 showed an early proposal for a line linking Chester to Birkenhead. This clearly illustrated the preparation required for such projects since each plot of land through which the projected line would pass was clearly identified, although the book of reference which would have identified the owner of each plot and its use was not

on display. Eventually, a railway linking the two towns was built, but as Michael Richardson pointed out it was on a different alignment.

Still on the subject of railways, Cheshire is the location of perhaps the most famous of railway towns, Crewe. This town did not exist until the coming of the railway in 1837 and interestingly the town is named after the railway station rather than the reverse as the settlement served was Monks Coppenhall. The railway arrived prior to OS large scale maps and thus it was not possible to use these maps to illustrate the early influence of railways. However, the maps chosen did reflect the way in which the railway had resulted in the development of a large urban area.

Other maps on display showed the developments around Ellesmere Port first with the canal and then subsequently the Manchester Ship Canal and the oil refinery at Stanlow. Specific proposals for developments in Chester were drawn up in 1944 by Charles Greenwood surveyor for the City. The detailed large-scale plans showed what he had in mind only some parts were put in place. Later, Cheshire saw establishment of new town at Runcorn and with that development the replacement of the transporter bridge by a more conventional road bridge in 1961 (*below*). The increase in road traffic resulted in the construction of the Mersey Gateway opened in autumn 2017. There are now three road bridges although the new one is much further to the east.

Although formerly in Lancashire, Warrington was the site of another new town in Cheshire. Its development on land once part of the extensive Royal Ordnance Factory was again illustrated by means of maps and plans.





Local meetings – Wall, Staffs and Redbourn, Herts

The Midlands group (*above*) met at Wall to hear Bill Henwood's *reductio ad absurdum* of *The Contoured Map of the Thames Basin*. This map was produced by the Ordnance Survey because they could, and it was Bill's thesis that they couldn't, or at least didn't try very hard. The published date of the map was 1870, some time after the report which it was intended to accompany, and Bill was able to point to numerous anachronisms in the information depicted. His chief concern, however, was the contouring, which in some areas of the map was spot-on and in others, wildly off.

Throughout the map, villages and towns are indicated by a little circle with the appropriate name: even a cursory inspection reveals a lot of unnamed circles. Bill's view here was that they ran out of time to do the engraving.

An illustrated article by Bill Henwood describing the map will appear in the next issue of *Sheetlines*.

The Redbourn meeting (*opposite page*) comprised a series of 'show and tell' on the theme of railways and airfields.

David Watt showed, on behalf of Peter Jones and Caroline Watt, GWR network maps of 1930s, one of which included pictures of the abbeys and castles after which their locomotives were named; Quarter-inch air charts, an RAF edition of 1938 and a GSGS of 1943; and a 1933 LPTB one-inch composite map based on a Popular edition base map.

Bill Batchelor's contributions included a Tactical Pilotage Chart of the Kuwait/Iraq area, personalised to show where his son had served with the RAF, a 'one-off' produced by the Air Information Documentation Unit at Northolt bringing together all the civil air information over the south-east of England on one sheet, and a beautiful manuscript strip map of the railway line between Harpenden and Hemel Hempstead, known locally as the 'Nickey Line'.

Chris Dean produced an 1839 Bradshaw's railway map of Gt Britain, which include a depiction of the gradient profiles of all the major railways; a 'Citizen Map' of Glasgow railways, with several proposed lines; and a pocket-sized network diagram of the Blyth and Tyne Railway and its neighbours.

Roger Hellyer, who had separately asked participants to bring any examples of Quarter-Inch air maps ahead of the forthcoming Hellyer & Oliver publication on the Quarter-Inch, showed not only a 1928 Quarter-Inch air map produced as a proof for the covers but then maps as artefact, a set of maps contained with an



aluminium carrying/protective case the airman pulling out the roughly ten-inch square piece of map he needed.

Gerry Zierler discussed the Thames Water Company maps of the Lea Valley water catchment area (all 2500 sheets arrived still in their green metal storage cabinets) and then sheets covering Bletchley at 1:1250 probably from an early Milton Keynes development plan.

Frank Iddiols mentioned his new joint publication 'The Newlyn Tidal Observatory'¹ before opening a case of air charts, London Underground and/or Transport Museum maps, plans and books and the 1970 David and Charles reprint of John Cook Bourne's London and Birmingham Railway, with all its beautiful plates of early railway building and operation.

Stephen Hall showed the nineteenth century large-scale OS of the Caledonian mainline near Beattock summit. The OS erroneously depicted the aqueduct carrying the Evan Water as a normal under-bridge. How did this happen? Surely the surveyors got it right and the cartographers wrong, but then why over multiple editions when OS quality assurance was so stringent?

Bernard Anderson and Deborah Stebbing presented a 1939 Barts 'Administrative map of Britain's Railways', interesting for its inset of London showing lines to be taken over by London Transport but which weren't, but not showing some that were, a legacy of the outbreak of war possibly; then a little British Railways publication 'Rambling in Essex' containing a Harry Beck diagrammatic depiction of Essex railways and the front cover of which is a reproduction of a watercolour by Terence Cuneo; and finally a Soviet 1:100,000 covering Worcester, the only map Bernard had found showing the airfield at Pershore.

Caroline Watt was thanked for providing lunch, tea and cake.

Meetings organised by Lez Watson and David Watt respectively

Photos by Lez Watson and Julian Williams

Reports by Michael Spencer and Bill Batchelor

Next Midland Group meeting on 9 January is a 'show and tell'. For more information contact lez@watsonlv.net

Next Redbourn meeting, focussing on canals and roads, is on 16 March. For more information contact david-watt@outlook.com

If you would like to arrange a local meeting, please contact the editor.

¹ ISBN 978-0-9567528-4-0, a review will appear in April *Sheetlines*.