

SOCIETY OUTING

Amberley Museum Heritage Centre

20th May 2018 – Derek Donnelly

A chilly morning at the start of the trip, and a reminder that winter still lurks in the back ground, but the forecast was good for the day and so it turned out. Our coach duly arrived with Ian our driver, bang on time and with no delays at the pick-ups we set off for the Duchy of Sussex and our destination. A short stop at Clackett Lane services and then off again. As we entered Sussex, Patrick took the mike and, as he was born and lived and worked in the area by the museum, began to tell us some history and very interesting information about the South Downs in the time he was there. He pointed out various places of interest, including his gran's cottage, and told us about a few things he did as a boy, although we think he didn't tell us everything. He kept us entertained until we found we had arrived at the museum where our "greeter" Richard was waiting for us to take us through to the café where we were given a coffee/tea and a slice of homemade cake.



After we had refreshed ourselves we went to a lecture room where Richard gave a talk on the history of the museum and the industrial site, which was a chalk quarry and produced lime that was used all over the country. Coming from a town with its own history of limekilns I was surprised to learn that there are different grades of chalk for lime burning. You have the white chalk that's used to make a lime that was used in industry, including farming, and green chalk that had a percentage of clay soil in the chalk. This was burnt as it was and it produces a coarser lime that was used in mortar and it gave added strength to the mix. As the site is next door to the Amberley mainline railway station, from Victoria, the then owner (Mr Pepper) soon built a standard size branch line to connect to it and send loaded rail wagons across the country as well as using road transport. The business eventually closed after one of the two brothers, who had taken over after Mr Pepper died, also died. He was an accountant and ran the business very well but his surviving brother was evidently a bit of a "Jack the lad" and spent more than the firm was making and it eventually failed. The site was eventually put up for auction and a group of volunteers who were hoping to preserve the site for future generations persuaded the local council to bid for it. The council set a limit at £75,000 but were successful with a bid of £38,000 and so the Heritage Centre was born. It has taken years of hard work by the volunteers etc., which is ongoing, but it now houses a comprehensive display of local and national industry, some



of which are run as cottage industries. The museum hosts over 50 events every year and we were lucky to have a Home Front and military vehicles display taking place on our visit. Getting around is fairly easy as, on most days, you have vintage Southdown buses running from one end to the other as well as a narrow gauge railway. Most places are accessible for anyone with mobility issues and you can borrow wheelchairs if you let them know in advance. There are a few paths that can be awkward to use, gravel covered, but all the main tracks have a smooth service and all the displays have ramps at the access. If you have a mobility scooter you will find it will be fine to use.

The displays are very well laid out, and mostly concern local industry but there was a GPO Telecommunications museum, mainly about the telephone lines etc., and there on the wall by the submerged cable displays was a tattered ensign from the Dover based cable ship the Ariel from 1969 with the following description.

MERRY CHRISTMAS -1969

Ariel sailed from her base at Dover about 10 days before Christmas to repair faults to 2 cables connecting Norway with the UK. During passage through the North Sea she encountered Force 11 winds and had to heave to for 4 days. At the start of the voyage the ensign was new. You can see the wear and tear that took place in those 4 days. Strangely, a Norwegian weather ship just 40 miles away was recording only Force 4! Christmas and New Year celebrations were somewhat hampered by having to find and



repair the two cables, then going to Stavanger on Christmas Day to pick up fresh water (for the engines not the crew) and finally returning to Dover, arriving on New Year's Day.

Overall the visit was very good, excellent weather as it turned out, and interesting. We left the museum about 3.45pm to take a tour through nearby villages and Arundel and once again Patrick gave us more information and tales of his life including the deforestation of the downs by a certain Duke who owed taxes and so decided to sell all his trees to pay them, thankfully they were gradually replaced and the trees are thriving. He gave us a potted history of Arundel Castle, which although it looks medieval was actually rebuilt from the ruins of the original Norman castle in the 1800s. Arundel's cathedral looked beautiful as we passed by it but when we viewed it from the top of the downs on the opposite side of Arundel both it and the castle were really outstanding. Well eventually it was time to head for home and with Patrick giving us local tales and information till we came to the Sussex border. After a short stop at Clackett Lane we set off again straight back to Dover arriving just before 7pm.

All it leaves me to do is to thank Richard from the museum for the talk on arrival, Ian for his patience and excellent driving and Patrick and Pat for again organizing another lovely day out. Once again Patrick thank you for your very interesting talks on the coach, and thanks to all for the wonderful company on the trip.