

art and bookkeeping displace or revise conventional thinking? I suspect not. Western society did not just drift into the mental state he suggests. Rather, a few exceptional individuals exercised a profound influence over other thinkers,

practitioners and society as a whole. Certainly measurement was part of the foundation of the scientific revolution, but this went hand in hand with inquisitive minds. Measurement was the tool of enquirers like Galileo.

#### NOTES

1. Osiris, 2nd series, 11 (1996): 221–236.
2. Crosby, xi.
3. The Tholos in Athens was the equivalent of our Institute of National Measurement Standards or Industry Canada's Legal Metrology group.
4. Crosby, 84.
5. Ibid., 95.

## Barrie Trinder, *The Industrial Archaeology of Shropshire*

R. JOHN CORBY

Trinder, Barrie. *The Industrial Archaeology of Shropshire*. Chichester, England: Phillimore & Co. Ltd, 1996. 278 pp., 215 illus., cloth, £25, ISBN 0-85033-989-8.

Shropshire is England's largest inland county. Long noted for its bucolic delights and as the "green lung" of the West Midlands, it has of recent years become more widely known as the "cradle of the Industrial Revolution," to use a somewhat hackneyed expression. In 1709 at Coalbrookdale in the Severn Valley, Abraham Darby discovered that coke could be used in lieu of charcoal for the smelting of iron ore, thus freeing ironmasters from the use of an increasingly scarce resource: the economic and social changes wrought by this pivotal event have continued to the present day. Industrial activity in the area slowly declined after the Second World War, but the decision of the government in the late 1950s to establish the new town of Telford led to the creation of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust to protect and interpret the extensive remains lining the banks of the Severn River. In 1973 these efforts were rewarded by the designation of the complex as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Dr. Barrie Trinder, a teacher and scholar, was very much involved with these events and has been a leader among those who have succeeded in elevating industrial archaeology (IA) to the status of a respected academic discipline from what had been previously regarded by some as the purview of eccentric hobbyists. With a long association with Shropshire and already the author of several books on various aspects of its

industries, Dr. Trinder's latest work, *The Industrial Archaeology of Shropshire* — British usage adds the second "a" in archaeology — presents an eminently readable and concise overview of the subject that will appeal to the academic and interested layperson alike. From the opening pages one is immediately impressed with the amount of detail in the presentation, obviously the result of many years of study by Dr Trinder and his associates.

The book, though, is no mere catalogue. Rather than simply listing the individual remains of past activities, the author in his introduction emphasizes what he refers to as the "landscape" approach. He contends that the more notable sites and industries have already been exhaustively researched and publicized, citing as examples the Ditherington flax mill (1805), the world's first building framed with iron, and the Sentinal Wagonworks Co. Ltd., whose steam vehicles were a common sight on British roads in the interwar years. (One might note at this point a tenuous Canadian connection to this company: they supplied several self-propelled railcars to Newfoundland in the late 1920s.) Dr Trinder contends it is therefore time to restore some balance by identifying and studying the remains of rural industries and those in the smaller urban centres, how they were affected by changing technologies and economic conditions and what their contribution was to the development of the county as whole. He illustrates this by showing the influence of an industry on the location and design of housing for its workers, particularly in those communities that were company-sponsored.

Furthermore, he argues one cannot treat technologies in isolation; there is always cross-over and interdependence. In this he echoes the dilemma of museum administrators seeking to assign areas of curatorial responsibility in a time of shrinking resources.

Chapters in the book cover rural and urban industries as well as the coalfields and the exploitation of other minerals, textiles and transportation. Dr Trinder evidently hopes that this work will be an organizational blueprint for others engaged in similar research in other parts of the United Kingdom. If so, they will not go far wrong in using his format. Every site and photograph throughout the text is map-referenced; there are no fewer than twelve pages of additional references and eleven of bibliography. These are supplemented by three appendices. One, of great interest to molinologists, lists all the rivers, streams and water power sites, again with map references. The second covers the development of the turnpike network with the location of the tollhouses (many of which remain) and the third lists organizations in the United Kingdom with interests in industrial archaeology. The last pages are devoted to a three-part index that covers the contents by name, place and subject matter. Would that all publishers of similar works were so meticulous!

Faced with such a carefully edited work and a refreshing absence of typos, any criticisms

are minor. For the overseas reader, particularly one whose knowledge of English geography might be sketchy, a map positioning the county in relation to the United Kingdom cities mentioned in the text would have been useful. There is also the occasional intriguing reference deserving of amplification: at one time barrels of blood were collected from butchers to assist in the evaporation process in the production of salt. As a non-chemist contemplating what must have been a gloriously messy procedure, one wonders about the why and how. The addition of a short glossary of the more industry-specific terms that are strewn about the text would also have been an asset for the average reader. This reviewer considers himself to be fairly IA-literate but had to resort to Oxford and Webster for *frankpledge*, *posset pot* and *huckaback*; neither authority lists *lucams*.

As a quality publication in hardcover, this book is not inexpensive and will naturally have its greatest appeal to those resident in or visiting the United Kingdom. Despite this, any student of industrial history will find much of interest and value within its covers since Dr Trinder's lucid prose is complemented by over 200 excellent black-and-white photographs. For others contemplating authorship on similar topics, it creates a benchmark to which they can aspire.

## Stephen Fenichell, *Plastic: The Making of a Synthetic Century*

JACQUES R. GIARD

Fenichell, Stephen. *Plastic: The Making of a Synthetic Century*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. 356 pp., 24 illus., index, cloth, US\$25, ISBN 0-88730-732-9.

In his book *Plastic: The Making of a Synthetic Century*, pop-culture enthusiast Stephen Fenichell delves into the fascinating world of plastic — the “Rasputin of modern materials ... [that] stubbornly refuses to die” (p. 3). Fenichell's premise is that, as a society, we are not what we eat; we are what we make. And what do we make? We make plastic objects. Fenichell stakes out his position unequivocally very early on in the book:

*In the five decades since the end of World War II, plastic has crept unceasingly, and often invisibly, into our homes, cars, offices and*

*even our bodies. Some of us have plastic hearts, joints, valves, limbs.*

*Plastic has become the defining medium of our Synthetic Century precisely because it combines the ultimate twentieth-century characteristics — artificiality, disposability, and synthesis — all rolled into one. The ultimate triumph of plastic has been a victory of package over product, of style over substance, of surface over essence. (p. 5)*

In eleven highly readable chapters, Fenichell chronicles the evolution of polymers and plastics. More importantly, he situates their evolution in socio-political and cultural context. In order to accomplish this, it is clear that Fenichell has conducted considerable research. For example, Chapter 7, “The Vinyl Solution,” is a riveting and persuasive account of how the Allies’