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SOUTH EAST BRANCH

IHBC South East Branch Newsletter – June 2010

Branch information

For news of events and information on past events please consult the branch web pages on the IHBC web site. A report on the visit to see the restoration work being carried out by PAYE to the Eleanor Cross, at Charing Cross, has recently been posted.

The Branch bursary

The branch bursary was won by John Campbell. His report on one of the talks at the day school that may be of interest to the branch is below. Thanks to John for producing the report.

The IHBC Day School: a delegate's view of one of the highlights.

The allocation of Bob Stagg's presentation 'Keeping a lid on it: Structural works to the Royal Albert Hall' to the afternoon's "graveyard slot" was inspired. His mix of enthusiasm and dry wit in illustrating his enlightened approach to structural engineering issues in general, and those at the Royal Albert Hall in particular, ensured that the soporific effects that would normally be expected to follow the excellent lunch kindly sponsored by Purcell Miller Tritton were kept at bay.

Bob, a director of Conisbee Consulting and Structural Engineers, made the point that natural approaches to risk will inevitably be based on the interplay between a wide range of influences. However, apart from personal influences such as the engineer's mood on the day, or the directional ones of the culture of their firm, it is the individual judgment of the engineer that is critical, and particularly so when dealing with unattested historic fabric and structures where slavish application of the 'relevant' codes of practice can have an irredeemable effect. His point that working in the historic sector "emphasises the differences of opinion between engineers that can make or break schemes" was well made, and particularly noted was the value of the initial thirty or so qualified members of the nascent Conservation Accreditation Register of Engineers (CARE). Although an engineer's approach to all buildings should be that of 'innocent until proved guilty', this is particularly so for an historic building that has stood for many years. Such a building deserves more leniency,

and if the calculations prove that it should have collapsed, it may just be that it's the calculations that are wrong!

Bob's next observation was on the 'black art' of floor-loading, making the point that if you want to justify a structure for crowd-loading, load-test it properly, but if you want to condemn it, don't agree to a load test as it will most probably pass. He notes this as highlighting a fundamental dilemma which structural engineers face: "most structures are stronger than engineers say they are, some ridiculously so". His work at the Royal Albert Hall involved testing the wrought-iron filler-joists that support the floor of its encircling gallery, and although calculations based on the most optimistic assumptions failed to achieve the currently specified standard, a physical, twenty seven tonne load-test produced a joist deviation of just nine millimetres over the floor's six meter span. When assessing the Victorian dome roof, its strength was found to be such that the applied ten tonne load-test failed to register any deflection, and a computer prediction was that it could withstand twenty times that weight. My only disappointment was not being able to join the party lead by Bob the following morning to inspect the Hall's fascinating structure.

Business Plan

The draft Branch Business Plan for 2010 to 2015 is available from the South East branch page of the Institute's web page. If you have any comments about the plan then please email me at southeast@ihbc.org.uk. The draft has been available on the web site since March 2010 and I have not received any comments to date. I can only assume that there is a general consensus about the contents. The final version of the business plan will be endorsed at the branch AGM in October.

Branch Committee

Sean Rix has expressed interest in becoming the branch chair and Peter Mills who has been valiantly carrying out the role of secretary for ten years would like to stand down. Sean is at the moment an affiliate member and therefore will not be able to take the role of branch representative on the IHBC council until he is upgraded to full member. With the branch's agreement Sean could become chair at the AGM in October - in which case I would continue as the branch representative on Council until June 2011 (by which time Sean should be a full member). Nominations for the secretary role are being sought - please let me know if you are interested. Peter is happy to mentor any potential secretary for a year to help ease them into the role (Please email Peter if you are interested - peter.mills@molevalley.gov.uk). The committee has been relatively stable for several years and the involvement of new members would be welcomed.

Peg tile booklet

The SPAB leaflet on Peg Tiles is available free to members of the branch. Copies will be available at future branch events - the normal price is £4.

Rochester Castle

Rochester Castle has degraded to such a state that it has had to be closed to the public many times over the last decade. It is no longer safe to walk around the keep and it is fenced off. Special netting has had to be

installed to prevent visitors from being hit with falling Kent ragstone. The lime and mortar pointing has degraded at a faster rate since the 1980, Partially due to the concrete fix applied in the 60's but also through neglect.

Short of funds and no new funds for urgent repairs to the keep and walls, the castle stands waiting for the final insult to its great history. A recent online campaign has discovered such great feeling for the castle and determination to return it to a living community building. We are now progressing to a real time campaign. Voids in the walls fill with water and a recent collapse of a supporting wall for the bailey curtain wall demonstrates how hard it is to predict what else could be lost and when.

The campaign is to repair the walls, removing the concrete repairs of the 60's, constructing a historical representative roof and returning the floors.

In doing so we wish the castle to become a museum to the history of the river Medway and Rochester. Highlighting the Roman invasion and fort of post AD47 and representing the history post Roman Empire through to the present day. Only in returning the keep to community, use will assure its future for generations to come. Just repairing the walls which we agree is urgent will not secure its future as the inner mouldings are being lost at such a rate the classic 11th/12th century designs will be lost forever if the keep is not re-roofed.

We would like your help, assessing the current situation of the castle and forecasting based on current evidence where possible the current urgent threats the castle keep faces. We would also like your view on restoring the castle to a community building, with a floors and a museum.

The web site is: www.restorerochestercastle.co.uk

Events

17th September – **'Traditional lime plasters and renders'** – a hands on training day with Paul Reed of Chalkdown Lime, The Yard, Gate farm, Northiam Road, Staplecross, East Sussex. Details are on the Branch web page

24th September – **Study day at Canterbury Cathedral** looking at stone work and repairs of the South West Transept. This is a unique opportunity to have an explanation and guided tour of the stone repairs being undertaken. The day will be led by Heather Newton (the Cathedral chief stone mason) and Alison Hicks (of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust). Programme below – the cost is £59.50 (including lunch and refreshments). Places limited to 20 (maximum) and there are only 11 places remaining – so email southeast@ihbc.org.uk asap



09.30 **Welcome / coffee**

10.00 **Introduction** by Heather Newton, Head of Stone Conservation

10.30 **On site, SW Transept project.** Alison Hicks, Archaeologist of the Archaeological Trust, and Heather will explain the work they have done to try to establish the cause of recent cracks. Please note: ladder/stair access on scaffolding to see the problem areas in situ.

12.30 **Sandwich lunch** in International Studies Centre

13.30 **Stonemasons' Yard**, to see the stonemasons in action, and possibly have a go. The group will be shown the whole process of planning projects, designing, carving and finishing on site.

14.30 **On site: Corona Tower.** An interesting project as it is half finished so the group will see how bad the problems are on the unfinished side, and the end product on the other side. You will see and be able to try various stone cleaning methods. Conservators are also working on the Bastion Chapel (in the city walls), and depending on time, we may be able to visit that site.

15.30-16.00 **Tea / Q&A**

15th October – **Annual day school 'Set in Stone'** - the geology and stones of the South East – their use and repair'. The venue will be the Ashdown Forest Centre, Wych Cross, Forest Row, West Sussex.

November – **The Heritage Crime Initiative** – evening seminar by DCI Mark Harrison. Mark has been seconded to English Heritage for a year to work on a protocol and procedure to tackle all aspects of heritage crime – from 'nighthawking' to theft of lead, to off-roading on ancient monuments. He will report back on his research and the conclusions reached plus discuss best practice from case studies. Venue to be Westerham Village Hall – date to be confirmed.

Future events may include:

A visit to the Watts gallery, Near Guildford

A Wassail tour of historic inns in London led by Sean Rix in December

David Kincaid
South East Branch Chair