

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - July 2010

The Science Museum Store and Archive

In July the Wargrave Local History Society had a most interesting visit to Wroughton, near Swindon, where the Science Museum have their large exhibit store, which is rarely open to the public.

The area we were able to visit mainly included items of transport interest, from commercial aircraft to bicycles. These included motor bikes, cars, vans and aero engines - a Rolls Royce Merlin and a Junkers, for example. The cars ranged from early 20th century ones to a mini - and there were alternative forms of propulsion too - even in the early 1900s, electric cars were in use. Amongst the more unusual items were a Chinese sailing barrow, used to cross the Sahara desert, and a Sno-Cat, used for the Trans Antarctic Expedition, whilst a car registered MAV1S was designed to demonstrate various mobility aids - and was a double ended car, with 2 bonnets and no boot! There were non-transport items, such as a model of a Cornish pumping engine made by Harvey & Co of Hayle for display at the International Exhibition of 1862 and the first electron microscope used in the Department of Human Anatomy at Oxford.



A general view inside the main display area, with a Constellation aircraft towering over the display of motor cars.



The display of vintage bicycles and tricycles is set on racks above some aero engines.



The Sno-cat, used for the Trans Antarctic expedition



An electron microscope



A Rolls-Royce Merlin aero-engine



Once a familiar site, the "Stop me and buy one" tricycle was used by ice cream vendors.

The group then moved to the Science Museum Archives, also on the Wroughton site, where a guided tour behind the scenes showed the way in which these irreplaceable resources are stored. Members were also able to examine a selection of documents from the archives - including a book signed by Albert Einstein, an original copy of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, photograph albums of C S Rolls and Donald Campbell, items relating to Barnes Wallis, or to nursing at Scutari in the Crimean War.

The Archives are open, by appointment, to researchers - information is available at SMLWroughton@sciencemuseum.org.uk.

Members then travelled the short distance to Blooms Garden Centre, where the traditional 'afternoon tea' part of a Wargrave Local History Society visit was taken.

Our next meeting is after the summer break, on Tuesday, September 14th, when Marshall Barr, chairman of the Berkshire Medical Heritage Centre, will tell us about the history of The Royal Berkshire Hospital. Then on Tuesday, October 12th the topic will be The Robert Piggott Junior School, when David Poynter will recount some of his memories as Headmaster there.