

Wheelrights

Notes of meeting on 4th April 2016 in the Environment Centre, SA1 1RY

Present: Dawn Aplin (DA), Don Ashman (DA), Simon Bailey (SB), Martin Brain (MB), Terry Cotter (TC), L. Crew (LC), Ian Davies (ID), Mike Davies (MD), Dennis Dwyer (DW), Allyson Evans (AE), Rhodri Evans (RE), Tiwyn Evans (TE), Colin Fielder (CF), Karen Gibbons (KG), Nick Guy (NG), Dai Harris (DH), David Judd (DJ), Mike Lewis (ML), Steve Mackey (SM), Tony Moon (TM), David Naylor (DN), Richard Smith (RS), Chris Walsh (CW).

This meeting was a departure from our usual business meetings in that it was entirely devoted to a presentation on the proposed opening of the **Rhondda Tunnel**. The speakers were Tony Moon and Steve Mackie, both of the *Rhondda Tunnel Society*, the latter being its chairman.

The meeting was chaired by NG.

It began with a 5 minute 'snap shot' of *Wheelrights* by DN. Tony Moon then gave a powerpoint presentation. He was followed by Steve Mackey who showed a couple of videos, with a tea break before the second one. There were then Q and A, the meeting concluding with a vote of thanks from David Judd, *Wheelrights* president. The following summarises the talks.

Tony Moon described the National Cycle Network in Wales showing how the Rhondda Tunnel could provide a key link between the extensive network to the east and routes to the west via the Afan valley. He illustrated his talk with pictures of the NCN and Sustrans work parties on it. He noted the huge growth in cycling which suggested that the time was now ripe to open the tunnel.

Steve Mackey started his presentation with a video which illustrated the tunnel in use when steam trains ran through it. He explained that the purpose of the tunnel was principally to transport coal from the Welsh coal fields to Swansea Docks. He then described its history, bringing out the following key facts.

This 3443 yards long tunnel (Just short of two miles.) was built between 1885 and 1990. It was designed and its construction supervised by Yockney, a pupil of Brunel's. It was novel in that construction was from both ends, meeting in the middle. (In answer to a question Steve advised that it closed to half an inch – impressive precision, even by to-day's standards.) There were seven fatalities. It was closed in 1968 as part of the Beaching cuts. In 1980 the portals were earthed over, access subsequently only being possible via a vertical ventilation shaft.

Steve described his close personal interest in the tunnel. As a small boy he used to spend time in it when it was open between 1968 and 1980. He was "in love with it" and so formed the *Rhondda Tunnel Society* initially with 19 members but now with thousands. He told us the story of the 1½ ton engraved stone which originally adorned a portal but which became defaced and disappeared. Steve subsequently found it and it has now been restored.

He explained what has and is being done to get the tunnel opened. There have been inspections which have shown the lining to be in good condition. There is however a problem with seepage which will require measures to keep the tunnel dry. A bat monitoring exercise is underway and further inspections relating to pollution will be required. In answer to a question Steve revealed that he has a number of key political contacts. Such support is clearly needed if the necessary funding – c. £7½m – is to be raised.

Steve's fascinating presentation was met with acclaim. We are encouraged to support the project by contributing £10 to become a member of the Society. Visit www.rhonddatunnelsociety.com.

Future meetings.

The next *Wheelrights* meeting will be at 7.00 pm on 23 May in the Environment Centre.

Note that on 20 August there will be a Gower Cycle Festival ride to Blaengwynfi at the west end of the tunnel, and that arrangements will be made to meet *Rhondda Tunnel Society* rep.s there.

Notes prepared by
David Naylor (*Wheelrights* secretary)