

David Grayland

For the April History Group meeting, our scheduled Speaker, Melvyn Thompson, was unable to be with us. However he arranged for a colleague, David Grayland, to take his place and we are very grateful for this thoughtful gesture.

David introduced himself by saying that his great-grandfather had been a handloom weaver.



A handloom weaver.

He then continued by introducing the first of two films he had brought with him. This was a 1960's Tomkinson Carpet's promotional film called '**Carpet Magic**'. It was a very sprightly documentary with 1960's documentary style music and a clipped BBC/Pathe News-style documentary voice-over. The film showed the production of a carpet, from concept to completion including carpet design, dyeing, weaving etc. The production techniques were shown with very technical explanations, intended, I am convinced, to impress the lay person that Tomkinson's Carpets were at the very forefront of industrial and commercial technology.

Revolutionary new methods and advanced techniques were promoted and phrases such as 'The great spool Axminster looms', 'These standards are assessed in an almost clinical condition', and 'Carpets and rugs of every texture and hue. Another dimension of luxury.' were accompanied by close-ups of nimble fingers working the looms, earnest carpet workers wearing suits and ties, and sweeping film footage of contemporary patterns.

David explained the differences between Wilton and Axminster carpets, in both construction and production and reminded the group that Kidderminster was the woven carpet capital of the world for 200 years until the 1960's.

David recalled anecdotes of the trend to move to fitted carpets in the home from lino and carpet squares, something which stirred the memories of many of the members. Altogether, this film was a gentle trip down 'Memory Lane' for both former carpet workers and the uninitiated.

The second film, a more recent documentary (2010), was titled **'The Water Boatman'** with Alan Herd. This was the first programme of a TV series on the Stourport Ring and began at the Stourport Basin.



The film demonstrated lock techniques and canal boat techniques and skills as a canal narrowboat journeyed from the Stourport Basin to just past Sainsbury's Supermarket in Kidderminster.

On the journey various people and buildings were encountered. Among these was Melvyn Thompson who was interviewed in the programme. A visit to a carpet factory was also included, where the original way to design a carpet using the Jacquard (punched card) system was talked about and demonstrated.



The Bird in Hand, Stourport

Then the programme moved on to Sealine (recently closed) where the whole production system, including teak decking and the testing station, was filmed. There was a lot of humour in this part of the film.

Graham Booth, a canal narrowboat owner, was also interviewed in the programme. There were many familiar, local waterside scenes in this documentary.

The History Group appreciated the opportunity to see local industry and leisure activities in a new context.

Heidy Hague