

Ironbridge

8th and 9th October 2015

The Iron Bridge Gorge is a World Heritage site set in the beautiful Shropshire countryside and is known throughout the world as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. At the heart of the gorge is the iconic Iron Bridge itself, designed by Thomas Pritchard as a single span to allow for barge traffic, and built by a quaker Adam Darby the 3rd in 1779; it is an amalgam of beauty, strength and function that arches gracefully, high over the river Severn. It was the first bridge built of iron anywhere in the world and symbolises the change of Victorian Britain from an agrarian to an industrial society. What was a quiet, rural landscape was quickly transformed by foundries, kilns, and fires into a noisy smoke filled port, bustling with horse drawn barges.

The story of the gorge starts in 1709, when Abraham Darby the 1st, a former brass founder from Bristol, first used coke from Coalbrookdale coal to smelt iron, and this is told in the ten separate and themed museums scattered throughout the gorge.

Today, nature has reclaimed the quarries and converted them back into green woodlands with clear brooks bubbling through, and the bridge is showing its age and is now for pedestrians only.

Colin Tufnell, our Group Leader, had arranged a full schedule of visits to seven of the museums over two days, and after a smooth get-a-way from The Bell at 8am, and despite lane closures at the junction of the M5 and M6 that slowed all traffic to a crawl, our party of 41 was listening to a short talk in the sunshine on the banks of the Severn in good time for lunch.

A convivial evening was spent in good company at The Valley Hotel in the centre of Ironbridge, and lunch al fresco in warm sunshine on the second day capped a very interesting and enjoyable trip.

Our thanks to Colin.









