

BOOK REVIEW

**The Real Oliver Twist – Robert Blincoe:
The Life that Illustrates an Age**

**By John Waller Price: Icon Books £16.99
Hardback 468 pages.**

August 25, 1832. The mills in and around Manchester are still. The streets are thronged with working-class men, women and children, a crowd estimated at between 8 and 20 thousand. At 2 o' clock an open-topped cart brings the three representatives of the Ten Hour Movement: Michael Sadler, Richard Oastler, and Reverend bruiser, George Bull, three men united in pressing Parliament to reduce the working day of factory children.

Hours later the multitude disperses leaving the Manchester Guardian reporter to find an angle for his story. He focuses on a banner with a message and image repeated on hundreds of flags. The message is a simple one, borrowed from the Anti-Slavery Movement: "Am I not a Man and a Brother?" The image is of a deformed, knock-kneed man - Robert Blincoe, a former factory child, whose life had been published as a pamphlet earlier in 1832.

Written by the Lancashire author John Brown, Blincoe's memoir remains one of the few insights into the lives of the urbanised poor, told by one of the urbanised poor, and read widely by the urbanised poor. It was to become the model for more famous accounts such as Dickens' Oliver Twist, and Francis Trollope's, The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong. Few people these days will have heard of Robert Blincoe, so John Waller's effort to correct that oversight is a valuable one. More than that, Waller combines an account of vicious abuse by the factory owners with a reconstruction of Blincoe's life and an illumination of his age.

Born in 1792 in London, Blincoe was destined for the life usually accorded to the lowest caste of his age, a poor, illegitimate, orphan - nasty, brutish and mean, with a life expectancy of just 17 ended by violence, starvation or disease. But Blincoe refused to accept this fate. Throughout his life he brimmed with determination, spurred by a strong sense of his own worth, and fired by a pursuit of social justice. As an adult he married, set up his own business and laboured to provide a gentle and better situation for his children.

At the age of four Blincoe was left at the St Pancras Parish Workhouse where the primary objective was to work the inmates for long hours - six in the morning until 6 in the evening. The only respite was the time devoted to a rudimentary education and religious teachings, both of which served to convince the poor of the virtues of servility.

For all the physical hardships of the workhouse, Blincoe laments more the loss of his identity. It was not until he was 15 that he was able to obtain official papers stating his full name. Even then he was not sure that this was his real name and not the surname of one of the Parish overseers. Not surprisingly, the older Blincoe complained: "I am worse off than a child reared in the Foundling Hospital. Those orphans have a name given to them by the heads of those institutions, at the time of baptism, to which they are legally entitled. But I have no name to call my own."

For most workhouse children the only escape was an apprenticeship which cost the Parish £30 and was much cheaper than keeping a child in the workhouse. For the girls this meant service in the mansions of the rich. For the boys it invariably involved a short and hazardous life cleaning chimneys. At the age of 6, Blincoe tried to be a chimney boy in the hope that it would be able to change his life for the better and allow him to seek out any surviving members of his real family. Sadly, for him, he was deemed too slight and immature for the chimneys.

Months later, he was given another chance of an apprenticeship in the textile mills in the north. Nearly two-thirds of the children apprenticed by the Parish during his last years there were sent to work in mills hundreds of miles from their places of birth. If the children had any reluctance at this enforced migration, the mill owners' agents encouraged them with glorious accounts of the lives they would live in their new surroundings. It was easy for the children

to believe such lies. Anything had to be better than the workhouse.

Blincoe was apprenticed to the hosiery firm of William and Francis Lambert, four miles from Nottingham, at Lowdham. He was to be indentured to the Lamberts until his 21st birthday. Lowdham Mill presented a pleasing first impression to Blincoe, set as it was amid fields and coppices. But the apprentice house was unpleasantly similar to the workhouse he had left. The greetings of the locals were also disquieting: "What a fine collection of children, little do they know to what a life of slavery they are doomed." That first evening at Lowdham justified those remarks. Their evening meal was far worse than anything they received at the workhouse, and their complaints were met with a whipping from the mill governors. The next day was even worse. Woken at half past five in the morning, fed an unpalatable breakfast of weak porridge, and rushed to the mill. Blincoe began as a scavenger, collecting any stray cotton that fell on the floor so it could be passed back through the machines. It was back-breaking and hazardous work lasting for up to 16 hours with only one break at lunchtime, and only Sunday off.

In 1803, Lowdham Mill closed. Blincoe and the other apprentices were despatched to the Litton Mill of Ellis Needham in Derbyshire. Waller's account of Blincoe's years at Litton make harrowing reading. Yet he survived and in 1813, he at last obtained his indenture papers. His struggles were not entirely over. For several years he travelled the North West, working in a number of mills, and taking every available opportunity to improve his education and understanding of the society that treated him, and thousands like him, so cruelly. In 1816, he began working for himself as a dealer of waste cotton. By 1818, he had made his first profit, was the proud renter of warehouse space, and had his own lodgings.

Beyond the personal account of the life of Robert Blincoe, Waller succeeds in recounting the socio-economic factors that shaped life and work in the northern mill towns. The major part is devoted to Blincoe's struggle against the Lamberts and the Needhams. But significant parts also chart the efforts of others such as Richard Arkwright and Robert Owen to temper the pursuit of profit with an element of humanity.

Bob Cartwright

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The Life that Illustrates an Age**

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Become a Member of the Arkwright Society

If you join the Arkwright Society your subscription will assist this valuable work and many people have become members to lend a hand in this way. But if you live in or near Derbyshire you may wish to take a more active role in one of the Society's projects or committees. Volunteers are needed at Cromford Mill to share in the daily tasks and to help organise the many local projects.

As a member you can take advantage of the programme of lectures and outings which the Society provides each year and you will receive a newsletter at regular intervals which outlines the Society's activities and progress.

I would like more information about the
Arkwright Society

I would like to join the Arkwright Society

Individual Membership £15.00 per annum

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Arkwright Society News

Quiltessential

Quiltessential opened for business on 15 October 2005. Located in the Mill Yard, next to the gift shop, it is a specialist textile craft shop selling a wide range of patchwork and quilting fabrics and equipment, along with a range of items useful for a variety of textile crafts. General sewing equipment is also stocked, as are decorative trimmings including ribbons and beads, and handmade gifts and cards. There is a changing range of quilts on display, some of which are for sale.

Owner Ann Mayner has 25 years experience of patchwork. She started sewing at the age of four and has never really stopped! Past interests include dressmaking, tailoring and soft furnishings but patchwork has become an all-consuming passion in recent years. Patchwork is enjoying something of a renaissance and more people see it as an exciting contemporary art form. This is reflected in the growing number of national and international exhibitions, which attract many thousands of visitors. Ann has exhibited quilts in a number of major shows. She particularly enjoys creating small decorative items such as wall hangings. Ann is an active member of The Quilters' Guild of the British Isles, latterly as regional co-ordinator and she currently serves on the Guild's Exhibitions team.

This is Ann's first business, and it is the fulfilment of a long-held ambition. She took the decision to open a shop in July last year, and after a day spent searching for suitable premises, visited the Café in the mill yard for much-needed refreshment. Unbelievably, there was an empty shop unit in the Mill, and it was the ideal size for the venture. The synergy between textile crafts and the historic cotton mill make for an ideal partnership!

Ann has expertise in many patchwork techniques and is also knowledgeable about the history of the craft and about the place patchwork and quilting has in contemporary textile art. She gives individual tuition and also arranges regular practical workshops on a range of techniques.

**The shop is open every day, from 10 to 5 Monday to
Saturday and from 11 to 4 on Sundays.**

Sir Richard Arkwright's Cromford Mill

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Newsletter enquiries to Sarah McLeod

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Arkwright Society News

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Farewell Old Friend

Angus Watson, Vice-Chairman of the Arkwright Society writes:

The nation has mourned the sad loss of Phillip Whitehead. Tributes to him and his major contribution to national and international politics, as an eminent television producer and as a writer have been made in the House of Commons, on television and radio and in all the major newspapers.

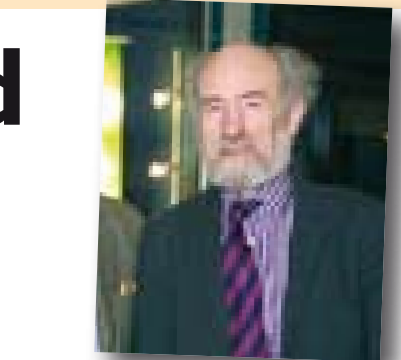
However, in his obituary in the Guardian, Roy Hattersley referred to Phillip's crucial role in the restoration of Cromford Mill and it is as a passionately committed supporter of the Arkwright Society that we have treasured him.

Born in Matlock Bath, brought up in Rowsley and educated in Bakewell, Phillip was first and foremost a Derbyshire man. Though much of his life was spent away he constantly returned and involved himself with local projects. Such a one was the Arkwright Festival of 1971. In subsequent years his wise counsel was always at our disposal and

he gladly accepted our invitation in 1994 to become a Vice President of the Arkwright Society and later a member of the Executive.

In this capacity he was particularly associated with the Annual Arkwright Lecture at the University of Derby. Not only was he able to persuade distinguished speakers such as Loyd Grossman, Liz Forgan and Melvyn Bragg to attend but he helped to give a distinctive character to the lecture by his own vibrant and adroit chairmanship. He also strongly supported our commitment to the Derwent Valley World Heritage Site and was instrumental in securing a visit by the then, Minister for the Arts, Tessa Blackstone MP in May 2003. He chaired a session of the National Conference of the UK World Heritage Sites held at Cromford Mill in November 2004, a cause for which he constantly lobbied at home and abroad.

In so many different ways we benefited from his forceful intellect allied with his



great sensitivity and acute judgement, always garbed in an unassuming manner and often laced with biting wit. A compassionate man, he appreciated and contributed to the employment and education opportunities which the Mill offers. Many times when faced with a problem we have said "better find out what Phillip thinks". Sadly no longer an option but how grateful we are for his prompt responses, wisdom and friendship over so many years.

Phillip will be commemorated by the renaming of the Annual Arkwright Lecture in 2006 to The Phillip Whitehead Memorial Lecture.

Pictured above: The late Phillip Whitehead MP – a committed and much missed supporter of the Arkwright Society.

TV Diary

Those with Sky TV may have seen "Britain's Best Breaks", screened on Channel 160 on 16th November. The show included the Mill as part of a Peak District feature of twelve local attractions.

Arkwright enthusiasts will be interested to know that the Channel 4 programme "Time Team" featured an archaeological dig at an Arkwright Mill in Manchester in their 5th February screening entitled "Rubble at the Mill". In the programme they particularly looked for the source of two steam engines and the water that powered the mill, and highlighted the relationship between industrial archaeology and social history.

Though not featuring Cromford Mill itself, "My Famous Family" to be screened in May will be following the family tree of the Nightingale and Browner families, both of whom were engaged in the textile industry in Derbyshire in the 18th and 19th centuries. The programme (one of a five part series) will include a sequence about Peter Nightingale's Mill at Lea Bridge (now Smedley's) and his relationship with Richard Arkwright.

Finally, filming is now underway for Melvyn Bragg's "Twelve Books That Changed the World". Arkwright's patent for his spinning machine is one of the key texts in focus and the show will feature Melvyn Bragg at the site, both inside the mill buildings and outside looking at the broader landscape of the area.

SUPPORTED BY



Art at the Mill 2006

This year the Art Gallery room is fully booked with artists from all over the county displaying and selling their work. The gallery room is open from 9.00 – 5.00pm every day of the week following the programme outlined below. Further details of individual exhibitions and exhibitors are available from **Louise Sweeney** on **01629 823256** or by email visitorservices@arkwrightsociety.org.uk

Lynn Price, Cliona Coyle and Tracey Castro **Sunday 19th-23rd February**

Lynn's exhibition will feature fused glass wall pieces with metal inclusions in addition to smaller hanging and free standing pieces. The work is precise looking, clean, crisp and contemporary. Cliona's work concentrates on the atmospheric effects of the Peak District landscape, rendering these in earthy tones in acrylics on canvases full of light, with hills suggested by a blur or sweep of merging colours.

Alan R Potter and Maude Allen **Friday 24th-28th February**

Wanda Brookes and Mike Booth **Wednesday 1st-5th March**

Mike Booth works in both oils and watercolour and teaches adult classes in all media. Fascinated by surface texture and reflections his work reflects the rust, rot and detritus of railways.

Tim Dowdell, Maggie Cullen and Freya James **Monday 6th-10th March**

Freya will be displaying Michael's House School (Stiener School) Photos.

Lydia Solomon and Betty Norton **"Visions"**

Saturday 11th-15th March

Visions exhibition group of Derbyshire, shows a variety of styles, local views, flowers, animals, abstracts in watercolour acrylic and mixed media.

June Haywood, Lydia Friar and Hazel Crowe

Thursday 16th-20th March

June Haywood will be exhibiting both originals and prints of her watercolours in addition to cards.

Tony Fisher, Susan Mulroy and Jo Bunbury. **Sunday 26th-30th March**

Bill Nicholson, Khris Eggleston and Karina Goodman (Studio 61) and Janette M Court **Friday 31st March-4th April**

Art studio gallery and designer crafts.

Wallis Spence **Wednesday 5th-9th April**

Elaine Casey and Louise Vincent

Monday 10th-16th April

Elaine is an artist living and working in the Peak District. Her paintings inspire the imagination and spirit through images of the natural world, mysticism and her use of vibrant colour. Louise is a photographer who lives and works in Sheffield. Her images capture the essence of a subject and inspire new ways of looking at the world.

The Heritage Group of Painters **Monday 17th-23rd April**

This group of painters will be holding their exhibition for the fourth year at the Mill. They will be showing a variety of work – all medleys.

Amber Art Group **Monday 24th-30th April**

A local art group newly formed last May with over 30 members of mixed ability, who meet once a week to paint, sketch or draw.

A.D. Beresford **Monday 1st-7th May**

Jude Whitby and Friends **Monday 8th-14th May**

Peak Artists **Monday 15th-21st May**

Students from the University of Derby

Monday 22nd-25th May

BA Honours in 3D Design.

Yuko Sekiguchi **"Images of Japan"** **Friday 25th May-5th June**

Born in the port city of Yokohama, Japan, Yuko wanted to give insight into her own images of where she came from and to express her past – her paintings have now turned into a search about herself. This exhibition is mainly about water and more specifically the Sea. Being raised near the coast of the Pacific Ocean, it is a subject naturally close to her heart and her pictures reflect her inner feelings and memories of sounds and smells she

experienced growing up.

Derbyshire Open Arts Exhibition "DARTS" in the Gothic Warehouse **Monday 27th-29th May**

DARTs is the first county wide event showing arts and craftwork in the tradition of "open studio" type events in Britain. Over seventy artists and crafts people will be taking part across Derbyshire, throwing open showcases free of charge to the general public. Two artists Yuko Sekiguchi and Andy Taylor will be at Cromford Mill. Yuko as detailed above, Andy's work will be on show in the Gothic Warehouse throughout the Bank Holiday weekend.

Further details are available **www.derbyshireopenarts.co.uk or call 01246 230925**

H.Stanley Traynor and Tully Crook **Tuesday 6th-11th June**

Doreen Andrews and Ken Spencer **Monday 12th-18th June**

This will be the 5th year, popular couple Doreen and Ken are holding an exhibition at the mill, this will also be part of "Celebrating Cromford". They will again be showing paintings in most medias - showing their love of art.

The Matlock Thursday Painters **Thursday 22nd-29th June**

Hazel Crowe and Niall Young **Friday 30th June-4th July**

Hazel will be showing Riverside Stained Glass.

Matlock Art **Wednesday 5th -10th July**

Matlock Artists Society **Tuesday 11th-17th July**

Matlock Artists Society are a thriving group, reformed from Tawney House Artists Society.

There will be a good selection of work shown, also during the week the picture will be chosen for the Presidents Trophy Award. They meet at All Saints Church Hall, Matlock.

NOTICE BOARD

A Sad Goodbye

It is with great sadness that the Society reports the recent death of Maureen Summers on 21st January 2006.

Maureen, a talented artist, was a long term friend and supporter of the Society's work and had, for many years, displayed her paintings in the Restaurant. By her own request, those of her paintings still hanging in the Restaurant will remain on sale. She will be sadly missed.

Call to all Heritage Open Day Supporters

It is time to get our plans for this years HODs underway. If you have any ideas for places to visit, tours or talks that you think might fit into our programme please contact Louise Sweeney on 01629 823256 or by email at visitorservices@arkwrightsociety.org.uk

Clock Face Recovery

What a wonderful surprise it was to receive a call in November from the Gartland family of Mansfield. "Hunting for treasure" at a car boot sale they had come across a clock face which looked interesting, and after purchasing it, they began to try and trace its history. The wonders of today's modern internet facility meant that as soon as they entered its details on to their computer it came up as registered stolen. After enquiries with the Police the Gartlands got in touch with the Society to say they believed it was indeed the face of our clock, stolen in a bungled robbery in February 2003.



Examination of the face revealed that they were correct, and the face is now safely back in the hands of the Society reunited with the pendulum which was dropped by the burglars and the clock case which was badly damaged during the break in.

The mechanism and hands are still missing but the clock is now being fitted with another mechanism and hands of the same era and, from the outside at least, will certainly look like its old self once again.

Details of the process of restoration will be given in our next newsletter as we follow the clock's progress through to its reinstatement at the Mill.

In the meantime, a very warm thank you to the Gartlands for their detective work, and to all those who helped in our campaign to recover the clock. Remember – the mechanism is still out there so keep on looking!

Plants Please!

May is fast approaching and as usual we will be hosting both the Specialist and the Cottage Garden Plant Sales here at the Mill over the two bank holidays. Sales of plants bring in much needed donations to the Society and any plants donated to us will be on sale outside Shop in the Yard throughout the Spring and Summer months. So come on all you green fingered supporters – pot up a few extras in your greenhouse for us and deliver your donated plants to the Shop in the Yard. Your help is very much appreciated.

Volunteer Opportunity

Interested in books? – our new bargain bookstore needs a volunteer to help with the running of shop one day a week. No experience necessary but a love of books a must! Call Ros on 01629 823256 for details

The Learning Centre – A New Look for 2006

The Cromford Learning Centre, and the Karten CTEC Centre have been given a face lift by the University of Derby in Buxton. The centres provide training focused around IT and because of the nature of the building the activities of the centre are split between two floors. The ground floor has been designed with facilities for disabled students with adaptive devices that include voice recognition software, Braille printer and graphic tablet. Upstairs able-bodied students are offered an ever-widening curriculum supporting the University's development of e-learning and its commitment to bringing learning to smaller communities in Derbyshire. The facilities available will therefore continue to improve.

The location, adjacent to Arkwright's Cromford Mill and within the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site is significant for the local community in terms of placing the modern world at the centre of an old world; for the students it joins them to the developing commercial environment.

The staff at the centre is experienced in meeting the needs of all students and gives support and guidance where needed. IT courses offered include ECDL and CLAI T levels 1 & 2, together with other LearnDirect and Basic Skills courses. All courses, based upon flexible individual learning, are offered at very competitive prices and are available for an immediate start. Free tasters are possible.

For further information please call in to the centre at **Carriage House on Mill Lane** or call us on **01629 826285**, alternatively Email: karten@derby.ac.uk

Events Calendar – February 06 to September 06

Peter Shelton – An Illustrated Lecture **Medieval Glass in Derbyshire**

Wednesday 15th February at 7.30pm

Although Derbyshire does not possess a wealth of window glass when compared to some other counties, its forty-seven sites reveal a considerable time-scale range, from pre-Viking times to the period immediately before the dissolution of the monasteries.

This illustrated lecture will draw attention to the more significant locations and indicate the changing trends in colour and design across the centuries. Particular reference will be made to border glass and its links with other sites in the Midlands and elsewhere. A collection of colour prints will be on display.

The Derbyshire Archaeological Society present **The English Sewing Cotton Company by Tony Bowker**

Friday 24th February at 7.30pm

The Derbyshire Archaeological society is holding a meeting at Belper Community hall. The subject is "English Sewing Cotton Company" and the speaker is Tony Bowker. The Talk is open to all and free.

Dudley Fowkes – The Industrial Archaeology of North East Derbyshire

Thursday 16th March at 7.30pm

From the industrial archaeology point of view, North East Derbyshire is an area of more than passing interest: a whole spectrum of sites exist within the area from the remains of basic early agricultural processing industries through to structures associated with abandoned modern transport and public utilities. Settlements such as New Bolsover and Cresswell Colliery Village are arguably of modern significance. This talk will provide an overview of the wealth of industrial archaeology this area offers.

Rolls Royce Enthusiasts' Club Car Rally **Sunday 19th March 2006**

Over 20 classic cars will be on show in the Mill Yard from 10am.

Barrie Trinder – An Evening of World War Experiences: The Industrial Archaeology of World War II

Saturday 8th April **6.30pm for the meal, 7.30pm for the lecture**

Eat their food and learn about their buildings, machines and landscapes! The two world wars have been portrayed as the most potent engines of social change in 20th Century Britain. This lecture will consider the artefacts, images, structures, sites and landscape that provide evidence of some of the social and economic changes that occurred in Britain between 1939 and 1945, and their long-term consequences considering among others the Royal Ordnance Factories, and the adaption of the railway system to wartime conditions.

Dr Barrie Trinder, social historian and industrial archaeologist, was first drawn to Cromford by the Arkwright Festival in 1971 and has subsequently written about the Derwent Valley in several books including The Making of the Industrial Landscape.

Before the lecture you are invited to join Barrie Trinder in the Cromford Mill Restaurant at 6.30pm for a War time Supper based on the recipes of the period but not the ration book portions.

The MG Car Club Gathering **Sunday 9th April throughout the day**

MG owners will be showing their cars in the yard and car park throughout the day.

A Tour of Claytons of Chesterfield **Saturday 29th April 2006 at 1.30pm**

Claytons of Chesterfield have been established for over 160 years and through the marriage of experience and technology, have become leaders in the business of high quality tanning and leather manufacture.

Witness first hand the various stages of production from raw hide to the finished article in the warehouse on this fascinating tour.

Meet at the entrance opposite Autofit Garage Joseph Claytons and Son, Clayton Street Tannery, Chesterfield S41 0DU

Edensor Model Village with Angus Watson **Wednesday 24th May at 7.00pm**

Pevsner wrote "The Village of Edensor was removed from its original to its present site between 1838 and 1842." But was it? Did the 6th Duke of Devonshire build it merely for amusement? Join Angus Watson to try and answer these and other questions.

This tour is always extremely popular and tour participants are restricted so booking in advance is essential

Meet at Edensor Green. Parking is limited in Edensor, so we ask that participants try to share transport.

Bradbourne – An Historical Landscape **Wednesday 14th June at 7.00pm**

Join a fascinating guided walk with the County Archaeologist Dave Barratt.

Meet at Bradbourne Church. Numbers for this tour are restricted so booking is essential.

Wirksworth Schools, Chapels, Churches and Cemeteries

Wednesday 5th July at 7.00pm

By 1800 Wirksworth had demonstrated its growing independence from the Church of England with the development of nonconformity. The 19th Century saw the process accelerating, but also witnessed a revitalised Church of England endeavouring to rebuild its former power base. A unique opportunity to partake in this extensive tour with David Hool.

The tour takes approximately two and a half hours starting in the Market Place

A Tour of the Lafarge Hope Cement Works **Wednesday 9th August at 2.00pm**

A cement works has operated in Hope since 1929. One of the UK's largest cement factories Lafarge Cement has a capacity to make up to 1.3 million tonnes of cement a year. Follow the highly skilled work force through the cement making process, from raw material preparation through to the final product. Sturdy footwear recommended.

The National Parks of England and Wales – A lecture by Peter Ward

Wednesday 20th September at 7.00pm at Cromford Mill

This talk will take a look at the twelve National Parks that we currently have in England and Wales, considering what they are, why they are so special and why we need to protect them. As well as the strengths and opportunities presented by them, it will also consider some of the issues and threats that face them and look at what is being done to protect these very special areas of landscape, it will also explain the work of the Council for National Parks, a small campaigning charity that works to protect and enhance our National Parks.

Heritage Open Days 2006 **7th-10th September**

Four days packed with talks and tours on a wide range of local heritage issues. A full programme will be released later in the spring and all events details posted onto the website at www.arkwrightsociety.org.uk

For all of the above events booking is **ESSENTIAL**. Please contact our Visitor Services Department at Cromford Mill 01629 823256 or e-mail info@arkwrightsociety.org.uk