Drawing local history

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Url: https://elhleics.omeka.net/drawing

Drawing has long been an important technique for local historians. For the antiquarians, it was used to record objects and landscapes, establish typologies and styles, and to appeal to the visual senses of readers. From the 19th century, photography took over as the main means of documentation, but drawing continued to be important. W.G. Hoskin’s classic handbook *Local History in England* provides practical advice on drawing building plans, for example. Here the focus was on documenting the interiors of buildings and their functions. Writing in the 1960s, Hoskins was particularly concerned that domestic and industrial buildings should be recorded before they were altered or demolished.

Several authors in the collection followed this advice. One of the nicest examples is D. A. Iredale’s study of *Barnton* in Cheshire. Barton had been a small settlement until the arrival of the Trent and Mersey canal in 1777-78. Then pasture was enclosed and converted for industrial use, and the township became a small port serving the canal. An important aspect of Iredale’s thesis was to document the industrial and residential buildings that sprung up after the 1770s. There are at least 14 plans recording the appearances, dimensions and layout of various buildings.

Plan of a canal side smithy in Barnton, Cheshire c.1837. From Iredale's thesis 'Canal Settlement', pp.84-85.
He also drew several maps. The use of watercolour for this map gives it a rather attractive appearance.


But Iredale’s went further by proving a picturesque frontispiece for the thesis. This view of Barton is almost a fantasy images of how it might have looked c.1800. The spirit of antiquarian illustration lived on.
Frontispiece from Iredale's thesis 'Canal settlement'.

For those interested in drawing as method, Historic England have a very useful online guide. Jen Morgan's blog post discusses how to use drawing to explore changes to places.

References
