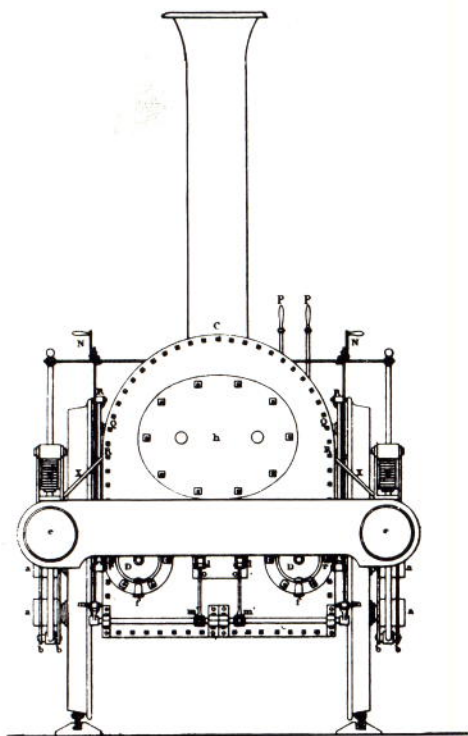


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Need it be the end of the line ?

If there is any comfort to be drawn from the four reports in this issue of railway buildings threatened with destruction, it is that campaigns by the AIA, SAVE Britain's Heritage and local civic societies amenity groups can now have an important influence on the fate of such buildings. This situation has shifted very much in our favour over the past 15 years. The loss of the Euston Arch in 1962 is recognised with hindsight as a watershed in official attitudes to conservation, and as an act of destruction which could not conceivably have been sanctioned even three or four years later. By the end of the same decade the British Railways Board found themselves obliged to heed the overwhelming aesthetic and historical arguments in favour of retaining St Pancras Station at a time when operational considerations dictated extensive redevelopment of the station or transfer of its functions to Euston. In the succeeding ten years public debate on the future of historic buildings has become an important and recognised part of the planning procedure, with a number of specialist advisory groups including the Ancient

Monuments Society, the Georgian Group and the Victorian Society (but not yet the AIA) statutorily entitled to comment on proposals to alter or demolish such buildings.

But the reassurance we may draw from the involvement of 'vox populi' in the planning process should be tempered with vigilance that the favourable wind of public participation does not shift and take us all unawares. At Bath the indication is that the failure of the hotel scheme proposed for the Green Park site and favoured by the City Council would leave the way clear for listed building consent to demolish. At Starcross one can chide BRB at best with frivolity, at worst with cynical manipulation of the listed building procedure, in applying for consent to demolish the Brunel pumping engine house in order 'to find the strength of public and official viewpoints for its retention' as a railway spokesman put it. Had the inconspicuous announcement in a South Devon newspaper not been spotted in time and objections lodged, can we assume that the BRPB owners would have proceeded with their published intention to demolish the monument? Too often the fate of such buildings is allowed to teeter on the brink, with negotiations continuing around the clock as the deadline for demolition approaches. Some, like the Starcross pumphouse, are brought back from the brink while others like the Severn Tunnel pumping engines or the Fairbairn heavy-lift crane at Hartlepool (Bulletin 1:6) are lost while talks are still continuing.

We may not associate the name of National Car Parks Ltd with building conservation, yet they it is who have led the campaign to get the Great Northern Warehouse at Manchester listed. Philanthropy or a sense of the building's history may not be high on their reasons for wishing to see the building saved, for they wish to adapt it for use as a multi-storey car park. But should we be any less grateful that the particular campaign has succeeded? A building preserved without a role is an expensive luxury, and if the conservation movement is not to lose credibility, we must continue to be selective and realistic in the buildings for whose retention on architectural or archaeological grounds we press. The surest way to safeguard the future of the Great Northern Warehouse is to make certain that it continues to play an economic role as well as an aesthetic one in Manchester. Edwin Course sums matters up when he says 'If Cirencester Station is to survive, the next move must be to find a use for it'. This is the test on which the Bath Green Park issue must ultimately be judged; in pressing for the retention of empty buildings, the onus is on us to put them back to work earning their keep.

Green Park Under Siege Again The Association was represented by Past President Dr Angus Buchanan at the public enquiry in January to investigate four alternative schemes for the occupation of Green Park station. Bath terminus of the Somerset and Dorset Railway. Designed by J C Crossley who was engineer to the Midland Railway Company from 1857-78 and whose frontage has been described as 'one of the most beautiful classical facades to survive', the building was listed Grade II following its closure as a station, but the City Council in Bath applied for listed building consent to demolish, a proposal which aroused alarm both in Bath and nationally. Since then more enlightened counsel has prevailed, the Council has withdrawn its application to demolish and has given detailed consideration to no less than six schemes for the commercial re-use of the site. Three of these schemes are for supermarkets, all of which will use the covered train shed as a car-park, and are backed respectively by Tesco, J Sainsbury and the Co-operative Society. Another scheme envisages the conversion of the office building to a Holiday Inn Hotel, the train shed housing an elaborate foyer and swimming pool. Two further and more extensive schemes involve a complex development of the Green Park site in association with the Midland Road site on the opposite bank of the Avon.

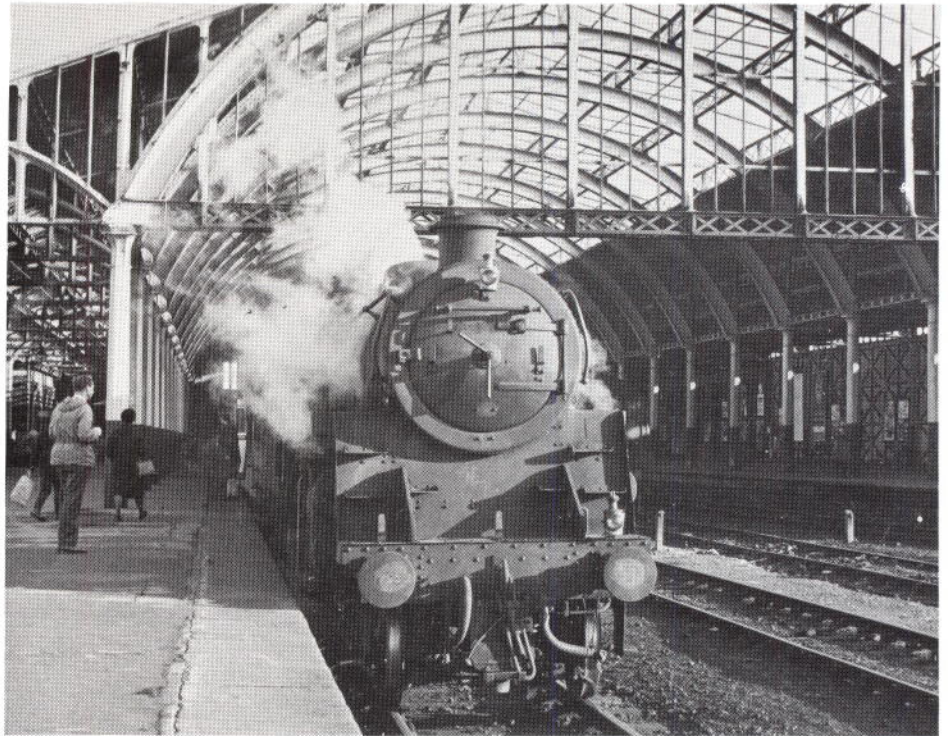
In his evidence to the enquiry, presented on behalf of the AIA and BIAS, Dr Buchanan pointed out that despite its comparatively late date (1874) the station is a most distinguished specimen of the dwindling type of covered train shed, using iron girders and glass panels, of which St Pancras is the outstanding national example. The office block, in the Palladian style and local stone which is the characteristic architectural idiom of Bath, is a splendid example of the willingness of railway companies, in their hey-day, to conform to local styles; it fits naturally and unostentatiously into the Bath townscape and is capable of sympathetic adaptation into a variety of acceptable uses. He went on to express alarm at the inclusion in the hotel scheme (which had the strong backing of the City Council) of 'unembellished mirror glass' as cladding for the new building, described by its proponent at the enquiry, Roy Worskett, as 'architecturally exciting'.

The absence from the enquiry of any representative of the Holiday Inn Group to explain in detail their scheme for conversion suggests that the likelihood of this or any other hotel scheme actually going ahead on the site is remote and in the event of the hotel scheme obtaining planning acceptance and then failing to materialise, Professor Worskett's evidence

made it clear that the Council would then re-apply for listed building consent to demolish. Dr Buchanan's evidence at the enquiry favoured the 'eminently reasonable' supermarket scheme put forward by J Sainsbury Ltd, but a decision must await the outcome of a separate Enquiry into plans to redevelop the Midland Road site across the river, since two of the recently submitted schemes for Midland Road also involve the Green Park site. The Minister is expected to announce his decisions on both Enquiries simultaneously.

Starcross Engine House Remains survive of four of the pumping stations built to serve the South Devon Atmospheric Railway, engineered by I K Brunel to convey trains over the steeply-graded route west of Exeter towards Plymouth, but abandoned as a total failure in 1848 after less than 2 years. Two of these pumping stations, located at Torre and Totnes, were never used; that at Exeter went on to form the base for a water column, and the fourth, at Starcross, survives as the most complete, having been used lately by its owners British Railways for storing coal. The building now lacks some of the Italianate detail recorded by Nicholas Condy in his pencil and washdrawing, now in the Elton Collection, produced at some time during the pumping station's short working life. But the walls and floors are still substantially sound, and the site offers some 4,000 sq ft of floor space and 140 sq yds of adjoining land. Planning consent was granted some time ago to convert the building into a Masonic hall but this scheme has lapsed and details of the pump house, listed Grade II, were included in a recent quarterly list of properties issued by the DoE's Historic Buildings Bureau as being available on a long lease to a tenant prepared to undertake the necessary repairs. Late in January this year, however, the Teignbridge District Council published 21 days' notice of the owner's intention to demolish the Starcross building. The AIA was one of several organisations which reacted promptly to this threat; Keith Falconer wrote on behalf of the Association protesting most strongly at the idea of demolition and pointing out the national significance of the

A train leaves Bath Green Park, November 1965



building as an early railway monument. Some three months later it was announced that BR had withdrawn its application for consent to demolish, and was about to approach local authorities and the Historic Buildings Council for financial help with restoring the building. BR's estimate for repairing the roof is £40,000 'money which the Board simply does not have for a project which is of no operational benefit to the railway system', said a spokesman. All main services are either connected to the building or are readily available for connection, and it is conveniently close to the existing railway station at Starcross as well as having road access from the A379. But its proximity to the road may impose a further constraint on its use, in that passing motor traffic must not be impeded. Proposals will be welcomed by its owners, and any enquiries should be addressed to the British Railways Property Board, South

West Region, Temple Gate House, Bristol BS1 6PX, whose Mr H C Jones FRICS can be contacted on 0272 24191 extension 2720.

COSIRA is one of a number of organisations that have expressed interest in the building, but no firm arrangement has yet been made for the building to be put back into use, which is the only hope for this unique monument if it is to survive.

Deansgate Goods Warehouse, Manchester

Professor Owen Ashmore (AIA) was one of nearly twenty representatives of various national and local conservation groups, including the Duke of Grafton, Professor Sir Colin Buchanan and Sir Hugh Casson who collectively appealed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Peter Shore MP, in March this year to list the massive Deansgate goods warehouse in Manchester, leased like its near-neighbour Central Station

Pencil and Wash Drawing by Nicholas Condy - Elton Collection





(Bulletin 5:4) to National Car Parks, but threatened with demolition by its owner who would like to realise the considerable re-use value of the building materials. Built in only 15 months and opened in 1898 at a cost of £1m (about £50m at today's prices) the warehouse represents the last of the massive engineering projects associated with the growth of Victorian railways. Its conception as a multi-level road, rail and canal interchange gave the Great Northern Railway a long-sought freight facility in Manchester to replace the previous unsatisfactory and vulnerable arrangement for interchange of traffic with the Great Central Railway. Designed as two separate goods stations one over the other, the building was linked to the Cheshire lines metals by a massive approach viaduct. Communication between the high and low level yards was by means of two rail inclines of 1 in 28 enabling up to 8 wagons at a time to be raised or lowered by hydraulic capstans and shunting locomotives, a marked improvement on previous two-level goods stations which depended on hydraulic lifts accommodating only one wagon at a time. Both high and low level goods stations were connected by lifts to the 3 warehouse floors above. In addition a link with the Manchester Ship Canal was achieved via an underground dock 140 ft long x 40 ft wide linked by canal with a dock on the River Irwell. This interchange facility meant that the Deansgate building was the first railway warehouse directly connected to the Ship Canal, completed only 4 years previously. This link between rail and canal was used regularly particularly for corn until 1922, and occasionally until 1936. During WWII the tunnel was sealed and floored with concrete, transverse blast walls were constructed and it served as an air raid shelter. When visited by a party of industrial archaeologists in rubber boats three years ago, the tunnel was found to be in excellent condition (Bulletin 2:6).

As well as providing a unique example of a Victorian 3-way goods interchange the building is nationally important for its fire proof construction, framed in mild steel as opposed to cast iron. The high level yard is built upon a series of steel stanchions supporting steel beams,

from which spring 9" brick jack arches. The stanchion bases, protected by cast iron guards against damage from wheeled vehicles, rest on granite blocks which are laid on concrete piles going down to bedrock. The jack arches are covered with concrete and a layer of asphalt to render them water tight. The 3 warehouse floors above are of similarly robust construction, and roadways are paved with granite setts or blocks of jarrah. Aesthetically the building is a striking and distinguished example of functional architecture, its characteristic features unaltered since the day of its opening. The proposed insertion by National Car Parks of internal ramps to give motor car access to the top 3 floors will leave its external appearance unchanged, but NCP could not contemplate the £½m required for these alterations unless the threat of demolition could be lifted. Not long before the recent change of Government it was announced that the Deansgate warehouse had been listed Grade 2; while this by no means rules out demolition, Manchester as the premier Victorian city of England is now less threatened with the loss of one of its foremost surviving Victorian railway monuments, and one for which an appropriate and remunerative use is available.

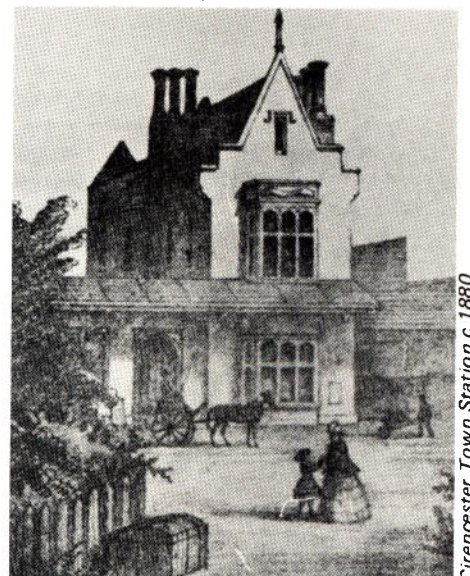
Cirencester Town Station Edwin Course has supplied the following note:— Members may be pleased to know that following a Public Inquiry, the Inspector recommended that listed building consent for the demolition of the Railway Station at Cirencester should not be granted, and that his decision has been confirmed by the Secretary of State for the Environment. The building has been acquired by the Cotswold District Council who wish to demolish it. The opposition came from three directions — the Town Council, the Victorian Society and the Association for Industrial Archaeology in association with the Gloucestershire Society and Southampton University Group.

In his report the Inspector listed the points which seemed to him most relevant — first, the importance of the building, second, its structural condition, and third, the cost of repair and adaption for future use. Each of the

objectors concentrated on one of these points. The two speakers for Cirencester Town Council stressed the possibility of alternative use, including the possibility of an annexe to the Corinium Museum. The Victorian Society was represented by a qualified architect and his evidence was particularly important as the District Council had stated that the structure was unsound. The speaker for the Victorian Society refuted this and convinced the Inspector that in fact the building was in a very fair state of repair. The industrial archaeology interest was represented by the Rev Awdry for the Gloucestershire Society and myself for the AIA and the Southampton University Group (I should explain that our special interest arises from field visits to the Cotswolds, and from the fact that the Curator of the Corinium Museum is a former secretary of the University IA Group). I pointed out the importance of the building as a relic of the transport history of the local area. Attention was drawn to the association with Brunel and to the use of the building for meetings of the Cheltenham and Great Western Union Company until its absorption by the Great Western. Various modifications were made over the years, including the removal of the overall roof and the addition of a new annexe by British Railways, Western Region. These did not, however, destroy the character of the original building. While it was not a major feature, in the same class as Temple Meads or St Pancras, Cirencester Station was of importance as a good example of a station for a market town.

I would suggest that two major factors in achieving a stay of execution on the station were the expert architectural evidence and the support of the local community. However, this is only a beginning. If Cirencester Station is to survive, the next move must be to find a use for it!

David Viner, Curator of the Corinium Museum adds that the Cotswold District Council has included monies for the upkeep and improvement of the building in the current year's estimates. The survival of the building looks reasonably assured but the CDC still seeks a suitable tenant for it. With its convenient proximity to the M5 motorway, it would for instance form a convenient store for a travelling theatre group, or a workshop for a craftsman setting up on his own. Suggestions would be welcomed by David Viner, who can be reached at the Corinium Museum, Park Street, Cirencester, Glos GL7 2BX. Telephone 0285 5611.



Cirencester Town Station c 1880