

ATA Bulletin

ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

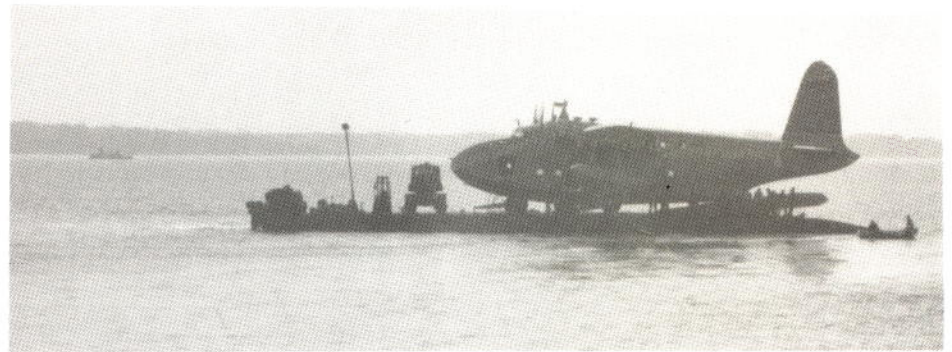
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New Home for Science Museum's Flying Boat.

A rare Short Sandringham flying boat built on the Medway at Rochester and used latterly in the West Indies will find a final resting place in a new aircraft museum being built in Southampton. *Southern Cross* was purchased and repatriated in November 1981 by the Science Museum with the help of the National Heritage Memorial Fund. There are few sites now capable of offering waterside hangarage for a flying boat of this size (the Sandringham is the civilian equivalent and a close derivative of the four-engined Short Sunderland beloved of RAF Coastal Command) but after a short spell at Calshot following its arrival in British waters, the *Southern Cross* was moved to Lee on Solent where it could be housed under cover. Local volunteers worked on it there for much of last winter. Southampton Corporation now proposes to spend nearly £1½ million on a new building to replace the R J Mitchell Museum where the Supermarine S6 A and Spitfire, both designed by Mitchell, have been housed in temporary premises now closed to the public.

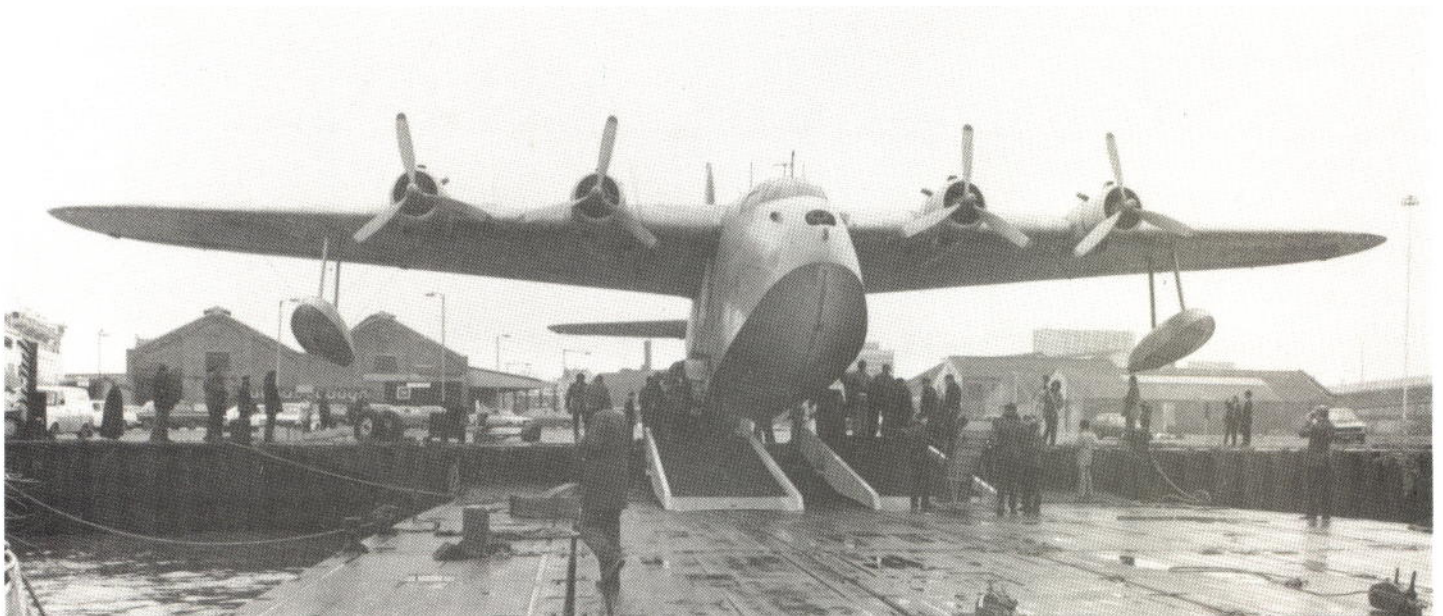
The new building will be near the new Itchen Bridge, and plans have been prepared by the City Architect. It is hoped to build it large enough to accommodate other aircraft in future as they become available.

Although the new museum, in Albert Road South, is still being built, the Sandringham has to be moved in at an early stage because of its



great size and weight; its wing spans 113 ft and it weighs 19 tons so the aircraft is to be installed before the building is roofed. For the journey from Lee on Solent to Southampton Docks on 1-2 March this year, the flying boat was loaded onto one of the Royal Corps of Transport's Mexeflotes, a self-propelled barge normally used for ferrying stores ashore from supply ships. Similar units were used during the Falklands campaign last year. At 120 ft long, the barge was just large enough to contain the aircraft's 113 ft wing span. Since the move the aircraft has been dismantled for inspection and restoration work. It is hoped to re-assemble it in the new building during the autumn, ready for an opening at Easter 1984.

Threatened Sites: a Report. One of the ways in which the AIA endeavours to encourage conservation, and to represent the interests of IA at national level, is to maintain a watch on planning applications for alteration or demolition of listed buildings. Such a task is most appropriate at local level, where the juxtaposition of information and public interest provides the clearest picture, but it seems appropriate to attempt to swap experience between local areas, and to develop some ideas of valuation according to national standards. So Council collates information from various sources, and is particularly grateful to those members of AIA and of affiliated societies who keep it informed of threats to our industrial heritage in different



parts of the country. During the year over forty different sites have been discussed at Council meetings, and the following is a very brief selection. Not all, of course, demand objections — some make good news, where encouragement rather than protest is the order of the day.

In many ways it seems to have been the year of the docks, especially with progress at last on the rehabilitation of the Albert Dock, called by Pevsner the finest nineteenth century commercial buildings in Europe. The strong commitment to renewal of historic dock buildings does not yet seem to extend to London where the two remaining Gwilt warehouses still have no guaranteed future, and where the granite road setts are not safe even in a designated conservation area. However, there are hopeful signs that the several renovation schemes on the south bank of the Thames adjacent to Tower Bridge will respect the historic character of the wharves there. Meanwhile, there are schemes afoot for a Scottish maritime museum based on the harbour at Irvine, and recent events will surely lead to a spate of developments at Chatham.

Away from the coasts, maltings seem to be attracting considerable attention, with threats of demolition at Sleaford and Cirencester which have both been met with arguments for re-use of buildings which form important landscape elements. It is encouraging to see that North Kesteven District Council has steadfastly resisted the pressure to demolish the Bass Maltings at Sleaford, and has recently commissioned a major study of potential new uses. The leisure industry continues to produce new uses for such industrial buildings as canal warehouses at Blackburn and Wigan, and the Reckitt's 'Dolly Blue' works at Backbarrow, Cumbria; but new uses for abandoned railway viaducts are more difficult to come by, and the case of Bennerley Viaduct drags on with diminishing hope.

Two sites which have caused particular concern have been the Dee Mill engine, where the recent demolition of the mill has left the engine house an easy prey to vandalism while the new owners seek an unrealistic price for sale to a preservation agency; and the 'odd-work' shop at Lench's, Old Hill, West Midlands, where sale of the site has made removal to the Black Country Museum the only remaining option for this very important survivor of the once numerous hand-workshops.

Another case pursued with vigour concerned the six remaining 'Concrete houses' of the Hodbarrow Mining Company at Millom, Cumbria; the AIA objected at first to the demolition proposals, but when it became apparent that the constructional interest was considerably less than had been supposed, and that the economics of repair were unrealistic and inappropriate, the objection was withdrawn on condition that the developers funded a detailed record of the buildings. The outcome of the Public Inquiry is awaited.

Fakenham Gas Works has long been a candidate for preservation, but the decision of the DoE in 1981 not to take the site into guardianship has caused considerable concern. Now the Norfolk Buildings Trust is showing great interest, and it is hoped that a solution will be announced shortly. Meanwhile a rare survivor of a Siemens glass furnace has been identified at St Helens, Merseyside (does anyone know of any other Siemens furnaces?), and with the support of the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate for scheduling, the local authority has bought the site and building in order to preserve it.

If your area is not represented amongst the above, it may be the fault of the selection; or it may be that Council didn't hear of threats which undoubtedly arise every day: If you do hear of threats to listed buildings, by neglect as well as by development proposals, please let Council know as quickly as possible. Please send details to the AIA Sites Officer, giving details of the site and the development proposals, a copy of the planning proposal if there is one, a photograph if possible, and the closing date and destination for letters of objection, as appropriate.

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The Albert Dock Revisited. It is almost two years since the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, pronounced his verdict on the Albert Dock, and more than two years since details of the Public Inquiry into the dock's future were reported in the **AIA Bulletin (Volume 8, No 2)**. Since then the fortunes of the site have changed very radically; and if a lot of mud has flowed into the River Mersey during the interval, it has certainly **not** ended up in Albert.

After the Inquiry itself came the usual period of bitten fingernails as Merseyside waited for the Secretary of State's decision. It was not entirely a period of inactivity; for during the spring a new force arrived at its offices in the Royal Liver Building — the **Merseyside Development Corporation**, central government's latest answer to the planning problems of Britain's largest derelict areas. The arrival was received with some suspicion, as yet another planning authority in an area where planners didn't seem to do much good; and at first the potential of docklands redevelopment seemed out of tune in a city gathering itself for a summer of riot and arson. The Secretary of State's decision almost coincided with Toxteth, and a refusal to allow Gerald Zisman Associates to proceed with the infilling and development of the dock may have seemed in some quarters to be another denial of urban aid to Merseyside. To the conservation lobby, Albert was 'saved'

again, and as on several previous occasions it slipped quietly away from public consciousness, to languish, decline, and decay.

But not so! Such a view doesn't allow for the presence of the Development Corporation, sorting out its staff and its telephones, and very quickly getting down to strategic plans and to negotiations with the Dock Company. Despite the relatively small area, compared with the London Docks, there was enough to do in getting the 1984 European Garden Festival scheme going; and Mr Zisman was left in peace to seek support for his scheme — until, that is, the expiry of his planning option at the end of 1981. At that stage the Development Corporation became the planning agency; and from May it also became the owner of Albert Dock. What is more, it was already apparent that the conservation of the historic landscape was seen as an essential element — indeed, as the cornerstone — of the regeneration of the derelict docklands.

One of the features of the Public Inquiry was the amount of guesswork and fantasy which was presented as evidence. In fact there had never been any concerted effort to assess the condition of the dock and its buildings; and so a programme of very detailed structural appraisal was the first stage of the new activity. Holes were knocked in walls and ceilings to ascertain the condition of the buried ironwork; samples of stone and brick were extracted for crushing tests; a detailed survey of cracks and movements was made; sections of the iron roof were subjected to load-tests; and at last there were deep excavations to reveal the condition of the famous timber piles which provide the foundations for the western half of the site. The reports were all very good — the building is in excellent condition and no major works are required. Unfortunately the same couldn't be said for some sections of dock wall **outside** Albert itself, and for the timber piles under the Dock Traffic Office; and these items are demanding major civil engineering work to prevent total collapse.

So much for the investigative stage, which was absolutely fascinating because it revealed structural details which haven't been seen since the building of the complex back in the 1840s. Now the work itself is in full swing, and it is fascinating again to observe both the evolution of the plans, with their compromise of con-



servation and commercial interests, and also the engineering methods being used to effect the regeneration. With the appearance of the structural reports came the arrival of a dredger. If there had been one nasty flaw in Albert's image, it was the silt at low tide — so the obvious treatment was to get rid of it! The dredger, a sort of floating vacuum cleaner with rotating cutters at the end of a long suction boom, removed some three quarters of a million tons from Albert, Canning, and Salhouse docks in about twelve weeks. More recently, work has begun on preparations for the new lock gates which will allow ships, notably the Tall Ships race in August 1984, to enter the south docks system once again. Purists will not see these gates as an ideal solution. They are to be single flap, hinged at the bottom, in order to allow a flexible water regime without the excessive costs of pumping and dredging. The housings for the gates are begun, and though the form of dock walls will have to be changed to accommodate them, the original outlines will still be obvious.

Another early starter has been the provision of mains services: water, sewerage, and electricity. After very detailed mapping of the quaysides and service roads, all surface materials and artefacts have been lifted and taken to store, the ironwork for cleaning and restoration, and the setts and kerbstones for replacement once the services are complete. Again, the pattern will not be exactly as it was, though almost all the quay furniture will be accurately located, and new items such as lamp-posts and safety chains will be exact copies of existing items, even down to the twist-link chains. Local amenity societies have expressed reservations about the very small amount of tree-planting which has been planned close to the warehouses — Albert was never likely to have been sylvan — and consultation is still in order on such matters despite the rapid march of events.

Then of course there is the work on Hartley's massive warehouses themselves. The great urgency has always been to allow the Merseyside Maritime Museum to expand across the Canning Half-tide Dock into the north stack, Block D. No surprise, then, that this was the first building to undergo structural

appraisal, and that it is now the first building to enjoy the attentions of the engineers and builders. Scaffolding began to appear in mid-May, to allow blast-cleaning of the building inside and out. Cracks and voids are being filled with epoxy resin, injected under vacuum with the dual aim of consolidating the structure, and protecting the buried ironwork from water percolation and corrosion. Soon the 'pagoda' roof section (a later addition) will be demolished, to be replaced by a steel roof of exact internal profile, though not to Hartley's original design. Window frames have been removed, to be replaced by exact replicas cast in aluminium. Parts of the mezzanine floor (a Hartley feature, allowed for in the original design and fitted to most areas soon after the completion of the warehouses) have been removed to allow greater headroom and more flexible display space. Changes . . . and compromise again!

In my last report on Albert I suggested that in Britain we have no experience in the rehabilitation of large industrial buildings, and that there are crucial lessons to be learned. Some of those lessons may turn out to be painful, as the commercial realities of rehabilitation become ever more overwhelming. To pontificate about the 'integrity' of historic buildings in the context of new uses is to see buildings falling down through lack of progress. One cannot argue with the notion that, however much the architecture is restored to what it once was, Albert can never again be a working docks. It will either be a working something else, or it will fall down! So a compromise has to be sought between the commercial demands of new uses, and the survival of the historic site. There are bound to be additions and subtractions; adaptations of the old to the new; and the word 'sensitive' is our accolade for the retention of historic character in line with new use. That 'sensitive' appears in the vocabulary of rehabilitation at all shows that we have learned something from the now fruitless search for Telford warehouses at St. Katherine's Dock!

Thus the price to be paid for Albert's commercial viability is being revealed. The Maritime Museum sees Block D as its largest exhibit, so to speak, and so the form and function of the building rank high in the interpretation strategy. Yet parts of the mezzanine

must go to provide adequate headroom, and some walkways at mezzanine level be provided where there were never mezzanines before. Wooden infill and floors dating from the turn of the century, when Block D became an ice-warehouse and cold store, are also going. The late-nineteenth century curtain walls on the dock edge have already gone, and a glass screen will eventually appear set back behind the dock-side colonnade. New railings, where railings would once have hindered dock-work, will prevent the avid public actually falling into the dock. The one internal lift-shaft (it contained the only hydraulic jigger in the whole complex which still had its complete control gear) has come out to make way for a staircase, and the existing staircase will eventually come out to make way for lifts!

In the other blocks no work has been started though the first planning applications are awaiting approval. Basically, policy is to restore the whole of the building structure, but to replace with small-pane windows only those which face the dock itself. Windows facing outward will have large panes, and hoist doors will have angled windows inside the inner face of the walls. Investment money demands that the whole of Hartley's iron roof be replaced by steel to the same external profile. In Block E will be (subject to approval) a group of shops and restaurants, glass-screened from the public access area along the inner edge of the dock. A replica clock-tower (shades of Zisman) will occupy the original foundation on the top of Block E. The Dock Traffic Office will keep its huge cast iron portico (full external restoration), but the once impressive entrance hall will be halved to provide sufficient office-space to produce an economic return. None of these decisions would automatically escape the wrath of purists, but they are providing visible proof that Albert will live on for posterity. By August 1984 the Maritime Museum will have opened some of its Block D extensions, and the locks and dock will be welcoming the Tall Ships race and the arrival of historic ships for a moment at least. There will be some shops and eating facilities in Block E, and a safe perambulation route right round the inner edge of the dock. We may have to wait a little longer for the opportunity to buy a flat in Block C, overlooking the river; or to visit the Northern Tate Gallery in the same block. But no-one who passes the site can fail to notice the frantic progress now being made. So don't wait for the next report — put August 1984 in your diaries, and come and see for yourself that Albert is once again alive.

John Crompton

The Station now Departing . . . One of Scotland's earliest and finest railway termini will soon reappear as part of a major preservation complex at Bo'Ness on Forth. Opened in 1842 as the eastern terminus of the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway, Harmarket Station has been extended over the past 140 years to serve passengers travelling northwards over the Forth Bridge and southwards via Carstairs as well as the twice-hourly inter city trains to Glasgow. The elegant and economical cast- and wrought-iron shelter erected to serve the E and GR's first passengers is currently being dismantled and moved 25 miles to Bo'Ness at a cost of £43,000, the sum being raised by the Scottish Railway Preservation Society. Grainger and Miller, the engineers of the E and GR, achieved some of the finest civil engineering structures seen on Scottish railways

