

#### ALL CHANGE AT KING'S CROSS

The area just to the North of King's Cross and St Pancras railway stations is a delight to the industrial archaeologist and considered by many to be the best thing in Greater London. By rights it might have been expected to have been redeveloped during the 1960s but miraculously it still survives, substantially intact. This idyllic state of affairs is soon to come to an end, and what to the general public must be seen as an anachronism will be swept away in a major redevelopment. The two mainline stations themselves are listed Grade I, Lewis Cubitt's granary of 1851, three of the St Pancras gas holders, dating from 1861, and the German gymnasium of 1865, may survive but the listed King's Cross Hotel is almost certain to be demolished and a large number of lesser items will go.

To the West the new British Library is rising on the site of the Midland Railway's Somers Town goods depot. When this was constructed in the 1870s the property was surrounded by a screen wall about 30' high and 3250' in length, which consumed about 8 million bricks, the wall being faced with Leicestershire red brick. This magnificent perimeter survived with new construction going on behind, but by March 1988 more than half had gone. To the North remains of the once numerous coal drops are considerably depleted.

To the North East of the area is the Potato Market, dating from 1865 and like much else hereabouts a relatively intact survival: until last

summer when British Rail started to knock it down. This enraged the developers almost as much as the conservationists and demolition stopped. The general public took an interest. A photograph of the Potato Market appeared in *The Independent* (20 July 1988, p5) and *Time Out* (10-17 August 1988, p10) carried an article entitled 'Hot Potato'. This described British Rail's attempt at demolition. In a loft, being rained upon as the roof had already been removed by British Rail, were discovered the archives of a potato merchant going back to the 1860s and now reckoned to be of great interest. These were saved by local historian Themis Michaelidou and it is understood are now in the Greater London Record Office. Implements used in the potato trade were also found. However, since being in the limelight demolition at the Potato Market has been recommenced.

Introducing the whole King's Cross redevelopment, the London Regeneration Consortium PLC issued an A2 size brochure, depicting a man walking a dog round the area with photographs taken from a low viewpoint, emphasising the litter. Claimed to be the biggest redevelopment project in Europe, at 125 acres and £6.5 billion (Canary Wharf is a mere £1.8 billion), several proposals have been unveiled. There has been a scheme which would involve the removal of the German gymnasium and, according to at least two proposals, the Great Northern hotel opened in 1854 and listed Grade II would disappear. Interesting examples of industrial housing are unlisted and have a slim



A departure? King's Cross Hotel looking north along Pancras Road, October 1986. *Photo: R J M Carr.*

chance of survival. Norman Foster suggested the construction of a large cone-shaped steel and glass blister hanger to roof over the gap between the St Pancras and King's Cross train sheds and enclose a three-dimensional passenger interchange. It was even suggested (*The Guardian* 7 March 1988, p17) that the St Pancras hotel and Cubitt's brick arches in front of King's Cross be cleared away to give a better view of the train sheds from the Euston Road. See them soon. You may not have long!

One of the more important features of the King's Cross area is to the North of Goods Way and not readily accessible to the general public. This is Cubitt's great Granary of 1851-52, originally having interchange facilities with the Regent's Canal. It is to be retained but subsidiary features such as the flanking transit sheds which predate the main building will probably not survive. Other items very likely to go include the Midland Goods Shed, an 1850 carriage shed rebuilt in the 1880s, an 1850s goods office building, fish and coal offices (1852-62) and probably some parts of the two sets of coal drops. The Grade II listed Eastern Coal Drops, incomplete, date from 1851 and the Western Coal Drops of 1856 were converted to a goods shed in 1897. To the East of the site are remains of the temporary GNR terminus of 1850 which was used while the first bore of the Gasworks Tunnel was being completed. This station handled the profitable traffic to the 1851 Great Exhibition. On the Western side of the area, across the canal, is the site of Samuel Plimsole's coal drops dating from 1865. Mr Plimsole (of ships' Plimsole line fame) was a coal merchant who devised an improved method of coal handling which reduced breakage of the coal. An experimental example of his patent drops (no longer surviving) were erected at King's Cross in 1861.



King's Cross station looking north, about 1853.



Potato Market King's Cross, looking south west, August 1988.

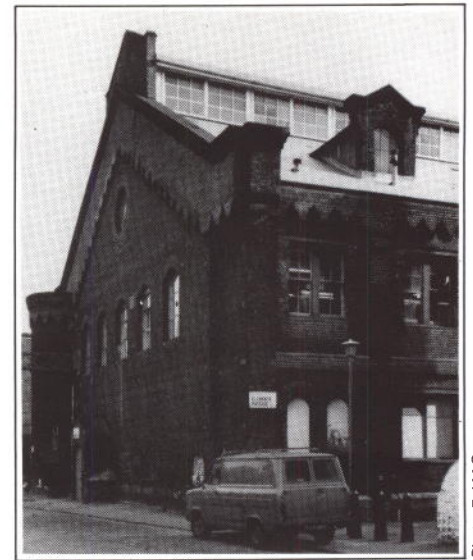
Photo: R J M Carr

Apart from railway features there are several interesting examples of industrial housing just North of King's Cross. Culross Buildings, Battle Bridge Road, were built in the late nineteenth century by the Great Northern Railway for their workers. The name comes from that of the GN chairman 1880-1895, Lord Colville of Culross. Features include heating by galvanised iron ducts which circulated warm air, landings with iron balustrades and cast iron ash disposal hatches. The basement housed workshops with access from the railway land to the South East. Close by to the South West are Stanley Buildings, constructed 1864-65 by the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company in stock brick with stucco for the ground floor. The cast iron balconies are particularly noteworthy and there are dust and ash chutes down the spine of the stairwells. Further model dwellings were constructed relatively recently. In 1936 Battle Bridge Flats were built to demonstrate the use of steel for the British Steelwork Association. They have steel frames with external cavity brickwork, iron window frames and tubular steel balustrades.

To accommodate the Channel Tunnel terminal a large concrete box is to be built beneath King's Cross railway station with a South East to North West orientation. Access for the construction of this major engineering feature is

likely to involve the demolition of unlisted property in Islington to the East of York Way and probably a little to the South. Much of interest to the industrial archaeologist is packed into this dense region of small mainly nineteenth-century industrial premises and housing, including the former Islington and North London Shoe Black Brigade refuge and home, offices in Arts & Crafts style for a varnish and colour makers and the present Scala cinema, one of the first large cinemas for the mass (silent) cinema-going era. 'Piloti' in his *Private Eye* article of 2 September 1988 (p 9) expressed fears that many of the buildings in the area to the South East of King's Cross would be demolished if cut and cover working was used to construct the new terminal. Let us hope he was not close to the truth.

The Great Northern Railway did not entirely terminate at King's Cross. Goods for the City went to a depot further South. The impressive stack of railway warehouse building just to the North West of Farringdon railway station, three storeys high along the East side of Farringdon Road, EC1, has been derelict for some time. Lettering on a door still proclaims 'LNER GOODS DEPOT' complete with a circumflex accent over the O of depot. Recently the structure was surrounded by a screen of wire mesh and by November 1988 demolition was well under way.



The German Gymnasium looking south, April 1988.

Photo: R J M Carr

At the beginning of the 1870s, unlike many of the main line railway companies who employed Pickford's and others, the Great Northern Railway was its own street carrier in London. City goods were being carted to and from King's Cross and the Great Northern maintained a total of 900 carts and 1500 draught horses, at considerable expense. Rivals had central City depots, the London & North Western Railway used Broad Street and the Great Western, Smithfield. The 'widened lines' of the Metropolitan Railway offered a route for the Great Northern from King's Cross to the City and at Farringdon the Metropolitan company had a piece of land of about four acres next to its station there. The Great Northern company leased this land in 1873 for the construction of a new goods terminus.

R J M Carr

### RESEARCHING THE PARTS OTHER INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGISTS CANNOT REACH

How should an anxious investigator conduct fieldwork in a dangerously derelict building, or in the depths of an unstable mineshaft? What goes where industrial archaeologists fear to tread? Many people have used stills cameras on ingeniously extended tripods, or have used home made periscopes to get the best view they could; but now it is possible in many situations to gain a much clearer understanding of features dangerous to investigate in person.

IA Recordings, the Shropshire-based group who make videos to record obsolete industries, have developed a special video camera which can be lowered down interesting but inaccessible holes. The camera has been tested in conjunction with Shropshire Caving and Mining Club, who have successfully lowered it down mineshafts up to 340 feet deep. The black-and-white camera is housed in a waterproof 'podule' which makes it usable even under water, and can be lowered on cables or extended laterally on rods. Pictures from the camera are monitored and recorded at a safe distance.

IA Recordings are willing to provide their services, and those of their camera, to industrial archaeologists with such special needs. They can be contacted at PO Box 476, Telford, Shropshire TF8 7RH. Meanwhile, work is progressing on the next generation of the camera, which it is hoped will allow it to be carried along with its batteries, monitor, cable and recorder by one person.



Interior of the German Gymnasium. The roof is supported by laminated timber arches.

## EXCAVATION AT BERSHAM IRONWORKS

Excavations have been carried out recently at Bersham near Wrexham by the Clwyd Archaeology Service of Clwyd County Council on the eighteenth-century ironworks of John Wilkinson. Excavation was concentrated on three main areas. The first, begun in 1987, was thought to have been the base of a blast furnace. Excavations in 1988 revealed a substantial, roughly circular structure, some 4.5m high and 5.6m in diameter, with a single opening at its base supported by a cast-iron lintel. Large quantities of lime were excavated from the hearth and adjacent areas, indicating the use of the structure as a limekiln. Whether this was its original function is uncertain, since a glassy slag adhering to the firebricks of the bowl would appear to suggest an ironworks function. A possible interpretation might be that it was a calcining furnace, used to roast iron ore prior to smelting.

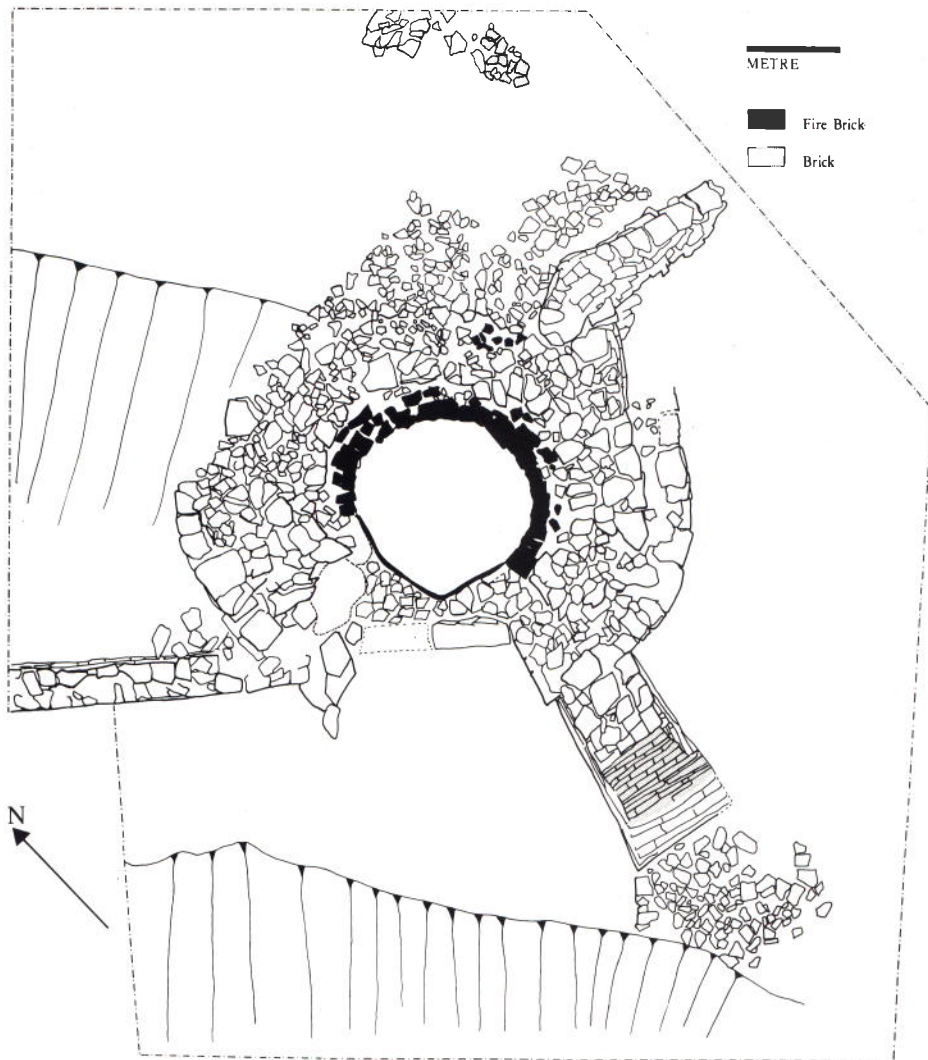
An extensive area was also excavated to the south of what later became a corn-mill. Excavations here revealed part of a complex range of buildings, earlier than the mill building itself, which ran parallel to the course of the River Clywedog prior to its diversion in 1763. Attached to the south-east side of this range was the remains of a reverberatory or air furnace, and a brick building, the floor of which had consisted of 7' by 1' iron plates. Excavations will continue in this area in 1989.

Finally a large area within the mill building itself was excavated. This building was converted into a corn mill in around 1828, some years after the closure of the ironworks. It had previously been thought a likely site for Wilkinson's cannon boring machine of 1774. However, excavation indicates it was built as a foundry, probably quite late in the history of the works. The excavation revealed numerous casting pits, seemingly for relatively small castings. One pit contained the lower part of a box mould or 'drag' *in situ*, within which was the impression of the casting itself. Brick floors associated with the range of buildings under excavation were also revealed beneath the foundry floor. The mill gearing had utilised a very much earlier stone foundation some 2.5m deep, which was associated with an apparently circular brick lined pit, only a fragment of which extended into the excavation area. The function of these structures is as yet uncertain, but they may be associated with a Newcomen engine installed by Isaac Wilkinson, John's father, in the mid 1750s.

Work will continue in 1989. *Stephen Greuter*

### AIA FIRST DAY COVERS

From 4 July a new set of stamps will be available featuring sites of historic importance to the Industrial Revolution. The designs, by Ronald Maddox, show the Iron Bridge, the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, a tin mine at St Agnes Head in Cornwall, and the mills at New Lanark. The stamps will also be issued in the form of a miniature sheet on 25 July. Adrian Bradbury of Leicester had been asked by both the **AIA** and New Lanark Conservation to produce First Day Covers. The **AIA**'s envelope illustration is reproduced here: a drawing of the Iron Bridge by Susan Isaac, a professional illustrator and graduate of the Ironbridge Institute, who also did the drawings for the current **AIA** membership leaflet. The envelope for New Lanark shows an architect's drawing of the New Buildings at New Lanark and portraits of both David Dale and Robert Owen.



Bersham ironworks, probable calcining furnace.

Clwyd County Council

### NEW CBA PANELS FOR ENGLAND

In view of the success during the past few years of the Scottish and Welsh Industrial Archaeology Panels in establishing priorities and strategies for industrial archaeological conservation and recording, several bodies have felt recently that there is a need for something similar in England. The Council for British Archaeology convened a sub-committee meeting of their Industrial Archaeology Committee on 31 March to consider the possibilities. Representatives from various interested organisations attended, including the **AIA**, English Heritage, the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments in England, the Association of Conservation Officers and voluntary societies.

Outlines of the work of the Scottish and Welsh panels were given by John Hume and Stephen Hughes respectively, and there was general agreement that their pattern should be followed. The 'terms of reference' of the Welsh Panel were considered in detail, as they had been circulated at ministerial level. With one or two minor alterations, this was accepted as suitable for the proposed English Regional Panels.

The number of panels was then considered. At the last CBA Industrial Archaeology Committee meeting it was concluded that England was too large and diverse to have a single panel. Initially it was suggested that five panels might be the appropriate number, covering the North East, the North West, the Midlands, the South East and the South West. Various existing regional structures were considered, such as the CBA areas, regional industrial archaeology conferences, and other regional organisations. Dividing a single industry between a number of

panels could lead to problems. Eventually it was decided to set up six panels, dividing the Midlands into East and West. The larger the number of panels, the more difficult it would be for the official bodies to provide representatives at regional meetings. However, they did express their support for this six-panel structure. Finally, a list was drawn up of people who might be prepared to co-ordinate the establishment of the Regional Panels (some had already volunteered). Anyone interested in taking part should contact S R Hughes, Secretary of the Panels Sub-committee, CBA IA Committee, RCAHM Wales, Edlestone House, Queen's Road, Aberystwyth, Dyfed SY23 2HP, ☎ 0970 624381.

*Don Storer*

### SMALL STITCHES IN HISTORY

The Ruddington Framework Knitters' Museum in Nottinghamshire, winner of both the **AIA** Dorothea Conservation Award and the Museum of the Year Award in 1984, is continuing its detailed work of interpretation and research by publishing last month two books relating to aspects of the museum's site. These should be popular purchases for the visiting public as well as providing information about usually neglected aspects of industrial history. One book is entitled *Hannah's Pantry: Cooking in a hosier's cottage*. The other, *The Parkers of Rantersgate*, is a detailed history of three generations of framework knitters who lived and worked in the Ruddington workshops from their construction in 1829.