

## ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

### DOWN THE LINE TO DEMOLITION

In June this year, after many years of neglect, one of Britain's earliest railway buildings was demolished. The case raises some important questions about the management of listed buildings of all types. Built by George and Robert Stephenson in 1832-3, the building was the incline keeper's house for the Leicester and Swannington Railway self-acting incline at Bagworth; the last remaining original building on the entire line. It was an interesting structure whose form reflected its function, and it belonged to an important phase in the evolution of railways.

The 'Round House', as it was known, was continuously inhabited until 1978 when, largely due to mining subsidence and the lack of services, Hinckley and Bosworth District Council served a closing order on the property. A short time later it was Listed Grade II as a Building of Special Architectural or Historic Interest by the Department of the Environment. At this time the owner claimed mining subsidence compensation from the National Coal Board and, quite within his rights, spent the

money from this award on his own farmhouse.

The building had been given much attention in recent years. It was surveyed in 1982 by the Leicestershire Industrial History Society and was the subject of a restoration feasibility study by a firm of architects which led to interest from the Leicestershire Historic Buildings Trust. It was even suggested it should be moved to Leicestershire County Council's new museum of science and industry at Snibston. As an Assistant Keeper at the museum I recommended that, because of its importance and its relation to the railway and incline, it should be preserved in situ. After 1987 the building fell into a serious state of disrepair, with most of the roof, parts of the walls and all windows missing.

In February 1991 the Department of the Environment, on advice from English Heritage, de-listed the structure on the grounds that not enough of the original fabric remained to warrant Listed status. The Director of Museums, the County Conservation Officer and various local historians wrote to English Heritage and DoE requesting the decision to be re-examined and the building re-listed. This request was turned down.

The building was in a very poor condition,

so much so that the District Council served a demolition order in the interests of safety. The outcome of this action was to provoke a local outcry and media attention, culminating in a report on BBC Television's *East Midlands Today*. Following this, a prospective purchaser made an offer to the owner's agents. This and a subsequent higher offer, in five figures, were turned down with the agents instructed to set a minimum sale price of £30-40,000. Hinckley and Bosworth District Council also wrote to inform the owner that if the building was demolished planning permission would not be granted for any new development: an ironic twist from the authority who had served the demolition order in the first place.

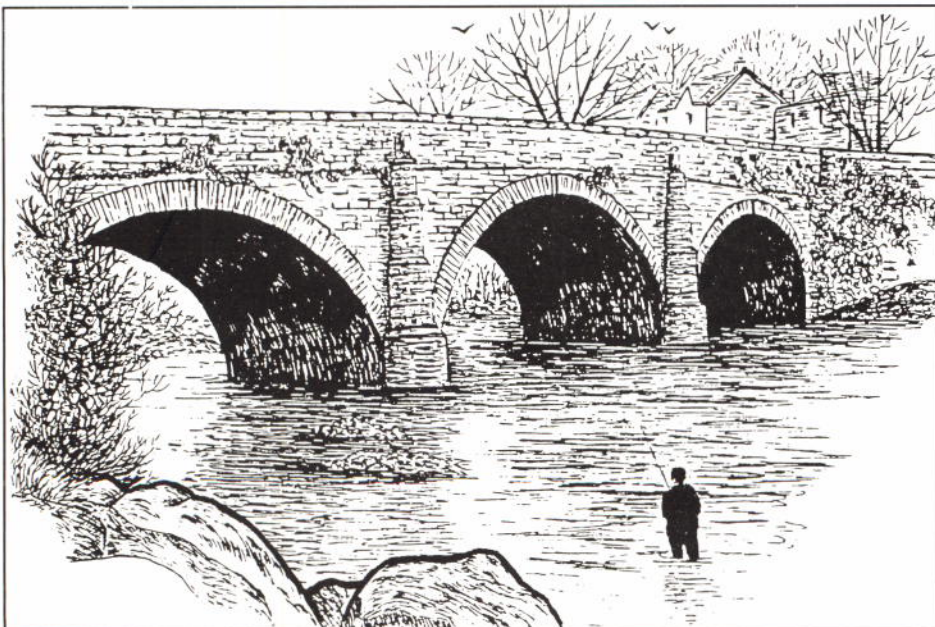
If the building had remained listed, pressure could have been put on the owner to maintain the property. Local authorities have powers to issue Building Repair Notices to enforce owners to arrest the decay of listed buildings. Any application to demolish the building through Listed Building Consent would have needed to show that it was beyond economic repair and that it had been put on the market to give others the opportunity to repair it.

Several questions of wide relevance to listed buildings, and especially to industrial ones with their frequent problems of disuse and decay, must be raised from this sorry story.

1. Why is it possible for a listed building of importance to be allowed to decay to such an extent that not enough of the original fabric remains to warrant statutory protection? Why are Building Repair Notices so seldom used, and what can be done to encourage planning authorities to take action?

2. Is it proper to use de-listing in cases of neglect? If a listed building is neglected, then de-listing it because it has been neglected is writing a charter for uncaring owners. All you have to do if you do not want your building listed is to let it rot. The mechanism of de-listing seems to have been used previously only where the original listing was mistaken. Surely, if a way is needed to permit legal demolition, the better course would be Listed Building Consent, with its wider consultative procedures.

3. Should local authorities be issuing demolition orders in respect of listed buildings rather than orders to make them safe? In most cases it is possible to block or fence off structures while a more permanent solution is found, for example by the issue of a Building Repair Notice. Are



Old Glais Bridge. The stone bridge at Glais in the Swansea Valley, which carried the B4291 across the River Tawe. Constructed in 1806 the old bridge was regarded with affection by residents who appealed to the Welsh Office when its replacement was planned to improve traffic flow, but objections were overruled. The old bridge was of stone with three segmental arches and stepped cutwater buttresses.

Contributed by R J M Carr with information from Graham Cadwalladr of Clydach Historical Society; drawing by Phyl Turner



The Good . . . . . Bagworth Incline Keeper's Cottage, c1908



The Bad . . . . . Before materials were scavenged, 1987



The Ugly . . . . . Demolition, 1991

## THE DILEMMA OF THE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGIST

Industrial archaeology has not improved the quality of its work in line with other areas of archaeology: IA has a problem, of fragmentation into increasingly specialist groups: it is no longer good enough merely to enjoy IA. These were some of the points made by Jennifer Page, Chief Executive of English Heritage, presenting the annual Ironbridge Lecture at the University of Birmingham in February. Her title was *Historic record or economic resource—the dilemma of the industrial archaeologist*.

Miss Page outlined the work of English Heritage and the problems it faced, claiming that conservation is a victim of its own success in that it has outgrown the resources available. The archaeology of the industrial period is more affected than other periods, because of the scale of so many monuments, and their

the health and safety and planning departments consulting one another where listed buildings are concerned?

4. If a subsidence claim is granted for a listed building, should it not be a condition of the award that it be used for the maintenance of the building in question, not as 'cash in hand'?

5. Will de-listing be used on a larger scale in future? It is said that the DoE and English Heritage are concerned about the large numbers of listed structures in the country following the national re-survey. Might de-listing be a tool for paring away the most contentious structures, which may be out of use and decaying?

6. If de-listing is to continue to be used, should not English Heritage and DoE consult others on such proposals, just as they consult district and county councils on listings or as Listed Building Consents are referred to amenity groups and advertised in the local press? This would provide an opportunity for objections to be made and would alert local authorities and other agencies so that ways of rescuing a building might be found while the powers offered by listing were still in force.

Such questions are pertinent to many industrial buildings, which are often disused but stand on large sites with high redevelopment value. Corporate owners may be eager to demolish historically important structures in these circumstances, which are in the way of their plans. We all know of cases where buildings have been demolished on the eve of listing or have been engulfed by mysterious fires after listing has taken place. De-listing on the grounds of decay seems to put a new and easy tool into uncaring hands.

*Stuart Warburton  
Leicestershire Museums*

English Heritage was invited to comment on this article, and the Inspector who made the recommendation to de-list the building, Peter F Smith, has made two points. First, the Incline Keeper's House was re-considered for listing as part of the re-survey of listed buildings in Leicestershire; and second, English Heritage now has a policy of consulting local councils and amenity groups before considering buildings for de-listing.

Mr Smith's comments are helpful in assuring the public that the Incline Keeper's House was not singled out for de-listing because it was a problematic case, but was removed as part of the normal process of re-examining the building stock to add or delete buildings from the lists according to their merits. It is also encouraging to learn that English Heritage have already taken the decision to consult upon future de-listings. Other more complex problems raised in the article, especially those of taking action to ensure that listed buildings are properly maintained, remain among the most important in British building conservation. Perhaps this article will be a contribution to the debate. The Editor would welcome further discussion from all quarters, be they the statutory authorities, local councils, conservationists or building owners.

contexts of high land value or political sensitivity. She saw the role of English Heritage as a leader of public taste, though it was counter-productive to be too far ahead; Albert Docks and Battersea Power Stations were now publicly acceptable, but the problems of preserving twentieth-century industries might only ever be tackled on a European or even a world scale. English Heritage would continue to improve its systems in seeking to identify monuments, and advise on their conservation. But protection needs to start before threats become apparent, and it was important to co-ordinate the knowledge and records already held and made by local groups all over the country. The deficiency of county Sites and Monuments Records for the industrial period was now widely recognised, and new guidelines were being developed for classes of later buildings.

Miss Page saw the whole of English Heritage's work as a dilemma, in balancing the elitism of conservation itself with the value of historic monuments and buildings (or their

sites) in economic terms. Again the dilemma is greater for industrial sites where site value, the value of reclaimed materials, potential pollution, and the intangible 'values' of 'environmental benefit' and 'sweeping away the grim reminders of past oppression' are all stacked up against preservation. Fortunately, industrial buildings are often better able to cope with the compromises of adaptive re-use because of their robustness, but the historic record must be researched and available if compromises of re-use are not to submerge historic significance. English Heritage will press for better systems, better guidance and greater recognition of conservation objectives. But industrial archaeologists must continue to survey, record, research and publish in order to provide the critical mass of high quality data on which public recognition depends and on which constructive policies can be built.

*John Crompton*

## SLIPPERY ELMS

In April 1991 a public local inquiry was held in Nailsea, Avon, to consider an appeal against the granting of Scheduled Monument Consent for works to the nearby site of the Elms Colliery (ST 4822 7057). Many inquiries are held every year where such consent has been withheld by English Heritage in order to hear the case for development, and English Heritage fights many stirring battles alongside other bodies to argue for conservation. The case of the Elms Colliery was unusual in that English Heritage found itself fighting a public inquiry on the side of the developers, arguing for redevelopment within the area of a Scheduled Ancient Monument against local conservationists.

The site of the Elms was scheduled as an ancient monument on the advice of English Heritage in 1986 for its remarkably complete remains of a late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century colliery, consisting of two shafts, an engine house, the bases of two horse-gins which have been uncovered by excavations, two boiler houses and a weigh-house. The colliery was fairly typical of several working the narrow seams of the Nailsea coalfield in the period. Initially, a beam engine with two haystack boilers was used for pumping water, and winding of coal was done with horse power. Later, a winding engine replaced the horse-gins and plant was upgraded with a new engine and boilers. The colliery was closed at the beginning of this century and became part of the estate of a country house. The industrial remains were incorporated into a garden, mostly by levelling with slag. One engine house was re-roofed and used as a water tower to supply the house. The entry in the Schedule of

Ancient Monuments reads: *This is among the most complete examples of a late eighteenth-century colliery known in England and the site is scheduled in order to protect the archaeological deposits associated with the listed structures which are also included in the schedule.*

Once sites are legally protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments, consent has to be obtained from English Heritage and the Department of the Environment before any work is done to the site. This is in addition to the normal planning permissions which are required if new developments are intended. The developers of the Elms site made an application for Scheduled Monument Consent to build four houses within the scheduled area. This would have involved the demolition of the weigh-house and the destruction of unknown underground archaeology. New buildings would have come within one metre of the standing remains and a driveway would have gone over an impressive ash tunnel which served one of the boilers. Contrary to expectations, English Heritage recommended consent be given for these works. However, local objection was so strong that a public local inquiry was called to examine the case.

At the hearing, objections to the consent were made by Avon County Council, Woodspring District Council, Nailsea Town Council, Nailsea and District Local History Society, Woodspring Museum, Avon Industrial Buildings Trust and two local residents. Written objections were received from the AIA and the Bristol IA Society among others. Most of the objections centred on the proposal to destroy the weigh-house and the unexplored archaeology within the scheduled area.

The weigh-house is a small building stand-

ing on the road out of the colliery at which the check-weighman would have measured the amount of coal leaving the site. There may have been a mechanical weighing machine, or it may have been measured by volume. Miners would have been paid according to the amount of coal they produced and so the check-weighman was responsible for determining both the total output of the colliery and the wages of the miners.

The developers and English Heritage together argued that demolition of the weigh-house would secure the 'most important' elements of the mine which demonstrate technological changes in mining during the nineteenth century, and that the rest of the site could be developed once properly recorded. However, the Inspector at the inquiry agreed with the objectors that while the weigh-house is not architecturally important, the check-weighman's role and therefore the building he occupied were crucial to the operation of the colliery. Thus, the weigh-house was significant evidence of the organisation and administration of a nineteenth-century mine.

The Inspector considered it self-evident that the demolition of the weigh-house would mean that the complex was no longer complete, and that the loss of the unknown archaeology would be unacceptable. As a result of the inquiry the application for Scheduled Monument Consent was refused by the Department of the Environment, who referred to their Planning Policy *Guidance Note 16* which states that for nationally important monuments (ie those which have been judged suitable for scheduling), there should be a presumption in favour of preservation in situ.

The decision was a great victory for the Elms and for those who put an enormous amount of work into preparing for the inquiry. It shows that it is worthwhile for local people and amenity societies like the AIA to object to decisions by the 'experts' if a good case is prepared. The difficulty is, as in so many cases of preservation, that the site remains in limbo, with the 'victory' at the inquiry leaving its future in doubt. The developers may appeal against the decision or put another, more sensitive, proposal for redevelopment. The objectors would like to see the site taken over by the local authority and opened to the public as a monument in an attractive setting retaining the surviving elements of the former garden. Part of the rationale for English Heritage's action in granting consent in the first place was that the loss of parts of the site for redevelopment would have provided the means for consolidating and maintaining the remaining features. For the time-being, the site is now very vulnerable to neglect and vandalism.

*Jessica Laurence  
Avon County Council*

### NEW HEAD OF RAILWAY MUSEUM

One of the most popular museums in Britain related to industrial archaeology has a new head. The National Railway Museum at York has announced the appointment as head of the Museum of Mr Andrew Dow, previously the Head of Business for Rolls Royce in North America. Mr Dow is the son of the railway historian George Dow, and has been responsible for a range of publications and television programmes on railways, including a study of the Norfolk and Western Railway in the United States.



Overgrown but not over-built: the weighhouse at the Elms Colliery

*Photo: Nailsea and District Local History Society*