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Crisis to synthesis: building recording by RCHME

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Recent work by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) has shown how a broad perspective can arise from emergency recording of threatened structures in a way that significantly advances understanding. The work of RCHME's Emergency Recording Section was last reviewed in AIA Bulletin 17.4 in 1990. This article describes some of the latest rescue projects which are helping to promote more complete knowledge of our industrial past.

RCHME's Emergency Recording Section's work with industrial recording is continuing across England. Its value was clearly demonstrated with the publication of an entire issue of *Industrial Archaeology Review* (Vol XVI No 1) devoted to the Section's recording of textile

mills. This showed how the national perspective provided by the emergency recording programme could be utilised to produce significant works of synthesis from one-off recording projects. Encouraged by the success of its work on textile mills, RCHME is keen to identify topics on which to concentrate in the immediate future. These include the buildings of the brewing industry, buildings relating to the early development of power supplies, buildings of the coal industry, fenland drainage, the production of oil from coal, railway engineering works and associated settlements, the shipbuilding industry, and waterfront buildings generally. The collapse of the coal industry has led to an accelerated programme of colliery recording, and some of

this work has recently been published in a synthesis as *Images of Industry: Coal* (1994).

A common factor of these themes is that they require the study of large numbers of sites in different parts of the country, many of which increasingly are liable to alteration or demolition. They are also the subject of widespread interest, often spanning several academic disciplines. However, existing published information rarely deals specifically with the buildings themselves. Hence RCHME staff feel that there is a need to develop recording methodologies which are specifically tailored to these building types.

A selective list of recently recorded sites shows their variety and significance. The emergency recording of the Derby Railway Works, in advance of selective demolition, is a good example of the relevance of this work. This large complex, dating from 1839-40, originally included locomotive, carriage and wagon works, running sheds and ancillary structures, and is the earliest substantially intact example of the first generation of railway works. Its recording not only has provided valuable comparative material to enhance understanding of the Commission's work at the Swindon Works, but also has resulted in many of the earliest, unprotected buildings being Listed Grade II*.

Building upon the Commission's previous work on the textile industry, especially in areas outside those covered in the three recent RCHME publications, the Section is continuing to uncover significant regional variations in the development of the textile mill. A recent example is Otterburn Mill in Northumberland, a water-powered fulling (and possibly scribbling) mill dating from the 1820s, with an unusually complete survival of ancillary structures. At Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire, RCHME is working in cooperation with the local authority and a development company in a survey and assessment of three integrated woollen mill complexes. An even larger integrated woollen mill complex has been recorded at Tonedale Mills, Wellington, Somerset. This remarkably well-preserved site, ranging in date from the late eighteenth to the



Derby Railway Works: the interior of the Roundhouse

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