

BULLETIN 1.6

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THE CRANES ARE FLYING

Britain's dwindling population of Fairbairn fixed-jib heavy-lift cranes suffered a further depletion recently when a large example at Hartlepool was demolished to make way for dock redevelopment. Cranes of this type, usually with a wrought-iron box-section jib of fixed radius, steam slewing and lifting gear and requiring extensive foundations below the ground, were originally introduced by Sir William Fairbairn and manufactured by his Company, but several other nineteenth-century crane builders took up the design and produced their own versions.

The Hartlepool example, thought to date from the turn of the century and estimated to weigh 400 tons, belonged to a local firm until 3 years ago, when the lease on its dockside site ran out and ownership reverted to the Hartlepool Dock Authority. Its foundations were in a poor state, but proposals were in hand to move the whole structure, possibly at one go with the help of a floating crane, to another site where its future could be assured. Pressure to redevelop the site for container traffic led to its rapid destruction, despite its scheduled status. The Dock Manager at Hartlepool, Haydn Williams, had previously been quoted in "The Sunday Times" as saying "I could tell you what I would like to do with it, but being a gentleman I won't".

One of the earliest surviving Fairbairn cranes is still to be seen at Bristol, where it was erected at Wapping Wharf, City Docks by Stothert and Pitt in 1875. This crane is plated to lift 35 tons, although it regularly lifted up to 50 during its long working life which extended up to less than five years ago. One general problem of Fairbairn cranes was keeping up with the increase in ships' dimensions, particularly the beam. The absence of any luffing motion in the jib meant that placing several loads across the width of a ship's hold often required the ship to be juggled around under the crane and turned right around to achieve the desired positioning.

The future of Bristol's Fairbairn, which weighs 120 tons and originally cost £3,600 excluding foundations and engine house, was threatened recently by the general run-down of the City Docks at Bristol and the transfer of all commercial facilities to the mouth of the Avon. But the City Museum has taken over the crane for preservation on site, and initial restoration will begin shortly with the help of a £500 grant from the Science Museum.

At Aberdeen there is another example, which will either flourish as its heavy-lift capabilities are exploited for North Sea oil traffic, or perhaps disappear as rapidly as that at Hartlepool when the site is required for something bigger and heavier. And Dover boasts a rare hand operated Fairbairn, originally manufactured by Fairbairn's own Company.

STOCKTON & DARLINGTON TIMETABLE

A wide range of events is planned for the 150th Anniversary celebrations of the Stockton & Darlington Railway. Coinciding with these is the opening of the National Railway Museum at York.

August

- 16-23 BR Exhibition Train - Darlington.
- 18-30 Railway Exhibition - Darlington.
- 24-30 The Rail 150 Exhibition and BR Exhibition Train - Shildon.
- 31 Steam Railway Cavalcade - Shildon.

September

- 1-27 Exhibition - St. John's Street Ticket Office Museum, Stockton.
- 21-27 BR Exhibition Train - Stockton.
- 20-27 Railway Exhibition - Preston Park Museum, Stockton.
- 26 Lecture 'The Next 150 years' (Prof. E. R. Laithwaite) - Stockton
- 27 Re-enactment of cutting of first sod - Preston Park Museum, Stockton.
- 27 Opening of the National Railway Museum - York.

From 1 July Darlington North Road Station Museum, Darlington Water Works (Beam & gas engines), Timothy Hackworth's Cottage at Shildon and an exhibition 'Railway Images' at Billingham Art Gallery, will be open to the public throughout the summer.

PUBLICATIONS

21st Annual Report, Ancient Monuments Board for England. H.M.S.O. 50p.

Includes a useful review of recent progress in scheduling Industrial Monuments. An appendix suggests some priorities for the preservation of industrial monuments of the iron and steel industry.

'**Waterway Users' Companion 1975**', British Waterways Board, 45p, (56pp) from BWB, Melbury House, Melbury Terrace, London NW1 6JX (01-262-6711). Index of over 1,000 names and addresses of every organisation associated with inland waterways: conservation, BWB regional offices, boat hire, angling, boat clubs, including privately owned navigations. Add 10p for p&p.