



BULLETIN OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

BULLETIN 2.1

1975

1. The object of the dig was to expose the foundations of the engine house at the pit, known to have housed a Newcomen-type steam engine in 1781 and to clear the pit top masonry lining, thereby revealing the entrance to the sough (or drainage adit). Clearance of vegetation and undergrowth on the site had been begun in the Summer of 1974 by Mr. G. Catterall of the N.W. Museum of Science and Industry working with Community Service volunteers, and a piston of the engine, which had been lying partly buried on the surface had also been removed to Manchester last year with the assistance of Cumbria County Council. Further work was now urgent as By-pass road works had begun in the vicinity of the site and there was the fear that it might be obliterated by dumping of contractor's materials. For the time being the site had been fenced off by the County Land Agent. Local tradition is that part of the engine was rolled down the shaft at a re-filling about 50 years ago, but since the topfill is 30 ft. thick it was not considered possible to test this without assistance from the N.C.B. should tests for site stability prove necessary, and the shaft have to be capped. Use of a metal detector, however, may reveal something.
2. The Dig was carried out by students of the John Dalton Faculty of Technology of Manchester Polytechnic under the direction of Mr. A. D. George, Department of General Studies who is Field Secretary of the Manchester Region Industrial Archaeology Society, at the suggestion of Cumbria County Council and the request of Prof. D. S. L. Cardwell of the Dept. of the History of Science and Technology, UMIST, who gave financial support. The work was also undertaken on behalf of the N.W. Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester, whose director Dr. R. L. Hills maintains a close watch on the site and is responsible for the custody of the exhibits. The results of the Dig were photographed by Mr. R. G. Manders, Assistant Director of the Museum, and recordings made by Radio Carlisle on the progress of the work. Dr. J. D. Marshall, Director of the Centre for N.W. Regional Studies, University of Lancaster and Joint Secretary of the Cumbrian Committee for Industrial Archaeology is also supporting the project.
3. The party left Manchester on the afternoon of Friday, 9th May, arriving at Bridgefoot about 4.30 p.m. and establishing camp at The Forge in accommodation kindly provided by the owner Mr. Wilson who also provided assistance with equipment and footwear and whose cheerful enthusiasm and advice is always welcome. A word of thanks too, to Mrs. Wilson who often provided very welcome refreshments.
4. The first task on the Friday evening was to introduce the party of nine students to the site, with the aid of an estate plan, make some trial soundings and explain the work to be done.

Saturday was damp and misty, but the rain held off until about 6.00 p.m. allowing a full day's digging. The party was divided into two groups—one to work in the pit shaft, the other on the foundations of the engine house. Picks and spades were used to remove sods, spoil and rubble and the existing spoil heaps to N. and S. of the shaft used for dumping. Digging and brushing-up operations continued on Sunday morning when part of the engine was located.

(a) The Top of the Pit Shaft

This was taken down to a depth of about 4-5 ft. revealing the masonry lining of dressed stonework about 2 ft. thick. The shaft is oval in shape as was the Lowther practice with winding being accomplished in the W. half and pumping in the 2 section divided by brattice boarding.

I.A. EXCAVATION IN CUMBRIA

Although Cumberland was one of the most heavily industrialised parts of Britain during the 18th century, the relative absence of industrial development in the region in the past 100 years suggests a high likelihood of relics of 18th century industry surviving there. David George, of the Manchester Region I.A. Society, has paid particular attention to surviving records of Newcomen engines used for draining the Cumberland mines. Sir James Lowther, owner of extensive coal-bearing lands around Whitehaven and Workington, was an early client of Thomas Newcomen. At Bridgefoot on the River Marron near Workington, Lowther constructed a wooden waggonway down the Derwent Valley to Workington, which served a number of pits on the land of the Curwen family, collectively known as Reel Fitz Colliery. Mr. J. Martin, the Workington representative on the Cumbrian Committee for I.A. has supplied information which suggests that parts of the Newcomen engine known to have been installed at Reel Fitz just prior to 1780 might still be found on the site. An exploratory 'dig' at Reel Fitz was held over the weekend 9-11 May 1975, and David George who directed operations has compiled the following report:-

The south side of the lining had all disappeared probably pushed down the shaft on filling, and the E. side stonework had tumbled in near the top. Much of this latter was recovered and laid out in approximate position. The presence of tree trunks and tree roots (the pit was abandoned in the 18th century) made the going difficult. We did however manage to dig down to just below the drainage adit which was examined and found to be of bee-hive shape 2 ft. 6 ins. wide and 3 ft. 6 ins. high with dry stone walls and a flagged roof and running about 50-60 ft. to its mouth at the river bank.

(b) The Engine House Foundations

The approach here was to trench along either side of the outside walls which were located down to a depth of 2-3 ft. The walls were of two courses of stone about 1 ft. 9 ins. thick. At the S. East corner was discovered a flagged stone well-preserved with entrance leading off which we took to be the boiler house or coke store (there was no wall on the S. side) and adjacent were a mass of red bricks which we took to be the boiler setting. About half way along our trench at a depth of 4 ft., and lying inside the S. wall was turned up a 2 ft. 9 ins. long piece of cylindrical cast iron 2 ins. thick with three lugs attached to one end. This was deduced to be part of the connection between the piston rod and link motion attached to the beam end of the engine. After being photographed in position, it was lifted out of the trench pending removal to Manchester. This find suggests that all parts were not removed by scrappers or tipped down the shaft and more may be found if some of the spoil obscuring the south end of the engine house can be removed by mechanical means.

It is hoped to have the site protected in the interim and to return in July for a further attempt. A link from the connection has subsequently been donated by a local resident and has joined the piston recovered last year in the museum.

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A. D. GEORGE

A LINK WITH BRUNEL

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Angus Buchanan
June 1975

ANTIPODEAN I.A.

A ninety-year old blast furnace near Ballarat in Victoria is giving Australian industrial archaeologists cause for concern. The crumbling stone structure, 60 feet above the winding Moorabool River at Lal Lal, was one of the first iron-working sites in Victoria. Gold prospectors at Lal Lal noticed outcrops of iron ore and smelting was undertaken there as early as 1857. In 1873 the Lal Lal Iron Mining Company was formed, following exploratory smelting on the site, to work the deposit, and in 1875 the first blast furnace was 'blown'. This development reduced local dependence on imported pig iron. Special Stourbridge firebrick was imported from England to line the new furnace, and an enlarged furnace was built in 1880. Up to 150 men were employed on the site, and more than 2,000 tons of pig iron was produced between 1878 and 1885. A tramway linked the works with the Ballarat main line. After a financial setback early in the 1880's the Company recommenced mining and smelting in 1883. Production reached its peak the following year, with 1,600 tons of ore being raised which yielded 800 tons of pig iron. Then the Company suddenly collapsed and most of its plant was sold up. But the blast furnace survived for more than 90 years, despite the efforts of vegetation and local vandals to topple it.

SOCIETY NEWS

The Arkwright Society continues its exemplary work in producing Local History Trails, to a high standard of accuracy and presentation. The first guide, on the Cranford Canal and High Peak Railway, appeared to mark the Arkwright Festival in 1971. Since then sixteen more titles have been added and nearly 60,000 copies have been sold. The Butterley Company's industrial settlement at Ironville in the Erewald Valley forms the subject of the latest guide; the village remained the property of the Company until 1968, and although redevelopment is now taking place, many of the original early nineteenth century features survive. Thanks to the Society's work in providing this well-illustrated guide, visitors to Ironville will understand more of the village's development. 'Ironville' and other local guides are available from Tawney House, Matlock, Derbyshire at 10p plus 6p for postage.

Following a very successful lecture course on Industrial Archaeology in the Surrey area at the University of Surrey, Guildford, last winter, the Surrey Archaeological Society decided it needed to improve its organisation to deal with I.A. matters in the County and accordingly formed a new Committee to supervise this work. The Chairman is Mr Eric Wood, author of Collins' 'Field Guide To Archaeology' and expert on the Wealden Glass industry. The Committee is now at work planning a wide range of activities, including another lecture series for the next University session.

The River Thames Society is concerned at recent disfigurement to two of Brunel's railway bridges across the Thames. Apertures have been cut in the parapets of the red-brick bridges at Gatehampton and Moulsoford and steel refuges inserted for railwaymen walking across the bridge. The resultant breaks in the line of the stone-capped parapets spoils the sweep of these flat-arched structures, hitherto little-altered since the early days of the G.W.R., and their splendid proportions are sadly blemished by this ill-conceived tampering. The Society seeks to have the bridges restored to their former appearance, and to have them brought within protective legislation. The Society's Honorary Secretary, R. R. Bolland, is at Hythe End Road, Wraybury, Middlesex.



HARWICH'S ELECTRIC PALACE

'Roman theatres are a good deal commoner throughout Europe than movie houses of the first decade of the 20th century' commented David Robinson in the 'Financial Times' two years ago, when the first murmurings were heard of a scheme to preserve what is probably the most complete pre-First World War cinema in Britain. But for the strenuous efforts of the Harwich Society, this rare survival, tucked away in King's Quay Street, Harwich would have been demolished to provide a parking lot. But now the Electric Palace Trust, formed under the patronage of Sir John Betjeman and with pledge of support from prominent filmmakers all over the world, will see to it that this unique reminder of the early days of cinema is properly cherished.

For reasons of convenience public showings of early silent-screen epics usually took place in theatres or other buildings which lent themselves to temporary conversion during the early experimental period of the cinema industry. But as the medium flourished, promoters were prepared to finance the construction of purpose-built premises, many with grandiose names befitting the wide horizons opened up by the new medium. Harwich's Electric Palace opened its doors in 1911; its survival is fortunate, for the building is a curiously ephemeral affair, with an ornate round-gabled plaster facade concealing a workaday brick building seating only 300 or thereabouts. Plaster was used extensively in the interior decor, employing garlands, rosettes and laurel wreaths in the manner beloved of theatre architects. Another claim to distinction is that the architect is known—he was Harold R. Hooper of Norwich—and all his plans and working drawings survive. They are presently looked after by the National Film Archive.

The Electric Palace flourished for many years under its original identity, but when the novelty of the 'Electric' epithet had worn off, they settled for the shorter and more prosaic 'Palace'. The cinema suffered the decline common to most of its fellows when television came along to keep people snug at home. The projection equipment was removed (it is hoped to recover this from local safe-keeping) and the building fell into disrepair. Rain penetrated the roof and spoilt much of the ornate plasterwork; but recognition came in the nick of time, a very full survey of the building was carried out by students from Kingston Polytechnic led by staff member Gordon Miller and the Harwich Society closed ranks to oppose the demolition threat from the Borough Council. Now the Electric Palace Trust has acquired a lease which requires the building to be made weather-proof within six months and restored to use within three years. It is thought that about £30,000 will be required to carry out the scheme. Since neither Harwich nor neighbouring Dovercourt has a single existing cinema, it is hoped that the restored Electric Palace will find a viable role, for intimate concerts and touring theatre companies, as well as housing a working museum cinema, with gas-lit, carbon-arc and other early projection equipment on show and occasionally in use.

LEICESTERSHIRE MUSEUMS

In the same issue of the Newcomen Bulletin is a note regretting the break-up of the technological and transport collection built up by Leicester City Museums over the last ten years . . . 'In these days of galloping inflation and threatened financial depression we may need to be narrowly discriminating in future proposals for the preservation of industrial monuments. A sad warning is at hand from Leicester where the Leicestershire County Council has abandoned a seven-year old plan for a railway museum and proposes to disperse the extensive transport collection assembled during the 1960s. For the industrial conservationist this is tragic news, for there are often relics of outstanding interest that have ceased work and of which the future is still undecided. The museum on the site of Abbey Park pumping station has been re-named Leicester Museum of Technology'. How gloomy should we be? Leicester's project got going on a city owned site with guarantees of city cash if matching money could be found from private sources. The idea was for an East Midlands Museum of Technology and at that date there was no real preservation activity in the surrounding area.

Nottingham and Derby museums both now have active industrial departments and Lincolnshire is showing signs of interest. When the Leicester scheme started these schemes did not exist; presumably the material collected by Leicester would otherwise have been lost. Now the collection is being pruned by offering items to other museums, so they should still be safe and perhaps will end up in more appropriate places. Leicester Museums went over to the County Council on local government reorganisation and so new strategies are being worked out in relation to the new role the museum must play in the county; but the site at Abbey Lane, with its four great beam pumping engines is still partly city property and partly—as an active pumping site—the responsibility of the regional water authority. Try and develop a regional museum of technology on that sort of basis. Yes, there is clearly a need for fundamental thinking, discrimination and far-sightedness in determining our industrial archaeological conservation priorities. Let us hope Leicestershire works out a good scheme. But there is much more to the problem than meets the eye.

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN MANCHESTER—PROGRESS AND CONSERVATION

Mention of the scheme for redevelopment of the Market Area, the threat to the fish market and the plans for Central Station together with the summary of Dr. R. L. Hills' report on the proposed Quarry Bark Mills Museum at Styal in a recent issue of the Bulletin (1.3), prompt me to attempt a brief review of the stage of I.A. in the City.

The revised schedule of listed buildings issued by the Department of the Environment(1) contains over thirty industrial and commercial examples, many of which are associated with the city's canal complexes. Notable inclusions are part of the Soho Iron Foundry of Peel Williams & Peel in Pollard Street although it is true to say that it is in a poor state of repair and close to the line of the proposed inner ring road scheme. A rescue operation for the crane in the forge and the gear wheels on the gable end is proposed. A serious omission, however was the absence of a cotton mill selection from those remaining in the Chorlton and Ancoats districts associated with the names of Robert Owen, The Birleys, Macintosh, James Pollard, McConnel and the Kennedy Brothers. This has now been remedied by the addition of Miller House, off Redhills Street, part of the former complex of Messrs Adam and George Murray. Incidentally Adam Murray's memorial in Cheetham Hill Churchyard has also been incorporated in the list.

Among the items which will be affected by redevelopment proposals is the Dale Street Basin of the Rochdale Canal Company which has been a Municipal car park for some years. Agreement has been reached with the developers however, for the original three-storey stone-built warehouse of the early 1800s to be restored and re-opened as a restaurant and for the entrance archway and lodge to the basin to be conserved.(2)

The news of the decision by the Greater Manchester Council working closely with the City Council to restore the Station Building, frontage and stationmaster's house on Liverpool Road, has been widely reported. Here is a focus for possible future development as a Transport Museum, to which one hopes it might be possible to bring the collection of trams and buses of the Manchester Transport Museum Society and possibly one or two Manchester-built locomotives (Beyer-Peacock etc.) and motor cars manufactured in Salford and Openshaw.

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