

# AIA

BULLETIN OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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## THE NEED FOR ACTION

Britain has been the birthplace of Industrial Archaeology, both in the sense of possessing the earliest monuments of the Industrial Revolution and of being the place where these monuments first became the objects of serious study. The great strength of British industrial archaeology has been the broad base of its support amongst a wide range of people of diverse backgrounds and skills who have devoted their time to restoring redundant industrial sites, canals and abandoned railways, and in the thriving societies which have been formed up and down the country to promote interest in the industrial remains of their particular neighbourhoods. The manifold activities of these devotees have achieved considerable successes in the preservation of industrial monuments which would otherwise certainly have been destroyed, and they have also done much to further research and encourage the publication of books and papers on the subject.

Despite all these activities and successes, however, there are weaknesses in the organisation of British industrial archaeology which have been spot-lighted by the comparatively recent flowering of interest in other countries. In Sweden and West Germany, for example, there has been a strong insistence on the social significance and utility of industrial monuments, and in the United States of America the Historic American Engineering Record is promoting a thoroughly professional national survey of industrial monuments. In America, also, an energetic national organisation has demonstrated the value of a lively and well informed bulletin. In comparison with these developments, British industrial archaeology has come to look somewhat narrow and parochial with too great a dependence on amateur enthusiasm.

This is not intended in any way to dismiss the undoubted and, indeed, indispensable service of amateur enthusiasm to industrial archaeology. There will always be a need for such effort. But the fact is that without adequate co-ordination the labours of local stalwarts become narrow in focus, bearing no relation to work in similar fields in other parts of the country, tending to repeat both successes and mistakes, and failing to draw on expertise which could easily be made available in the conservation of industrial monuments.

Consciousness of these inadequacies has been growing amongst British industrial archaeologists in recent years. An awareness of the need for regular consultation contributed to the success of the annual conferences, which were started at the University of Bath in 1966 and have now become institutionalised as a peripatetic national conference held at a different place in Britain every September. This annual assembly seemed the most appropriate body to consider the sort of steps which were necessary to strengthen the national interest of industrial archaeology, and it was here, amongst conference members and the special committees set up to carry out continuing detailed investigation, that the plans to form a national organisation were matured.

The decision to establish an Association for Industrial Archaeology has not been taken lightly. It was important, first of all, to make sure that there was no existing organisation which could fulfil the required purposes without adding further to the number of institutions in the field. There were two possible candidates, the Newcomen Society and the Council for British Archaeology. The former made it quite clear that it considered its role as the leading learned society in the history of technology prevented the development of the Society into a more broadly-based movement, and this point of view will be widely approved and respected. As for the CBA, it has already established a Research Committee on Industrial Archaeology which had, with the aid of financial support from the Department of the Environment, undertaken a National Survey of Industrial Monuments. Over the last ten years the Research Committee has become a most useful channel between regional societies and the government, serving as a means of making recommendations for official scheduling and listing and recognised by the DoE as an agency for this purpose. The CBA Survey Officer has been accepted as an important link in the process of securing better protection for ancient monuments.

There is no question about competing with the CBA Research Committee and its Survey Officer in the continuing performance of these functions. The procedure has been gradually improved over the years and it now operates very smoothly as a way of making official recommendations and of providing an early warning when important industrial monuments are threatened by redevelopment. There are, however, serious objections to extending the functions of the CBA in an area which is only one of several important concerns to the Council, and it seemed preferable, therefore, to maintain the CBA set-up as at present constituted while creating a separate but related organisation to attend to the other functions required of a national industrial archaeological body.

What are these functions? While it is possible to consider the creation of a national organisation in very general terms such as the need to encourage co-ordination, and to observe that no existing bodies are able fully to perform this, it is important to be clear about the more precise objects of such an organisation. However these are expressed in the formal style of a constitution, it is possible to define three specific functions. Beginning with the most general of these, the pursuit of a higher degree of co-ordination between industrial archaeologists requires a greater measure of liaison through regular publications, consultations, and conferences than has been achieved hitherto. There is an important place here for the journal 'Industrial Archaeology', although it needs supplementing by an up-to-date information service. The minimum requirement is thus for an organisation to supervise the arrangements for the annual conference and to make available to local fieldworkers a flow of news and information about industrial archaeology.

Secondly, it is becoming a matter of great importance and urgency to secure a professional standard of recording for industrial monuments, and particularly for those in imminent danger of destruction for which a good set of measured drawings will be the only surviving record for posterity. So far this has only been achieved on a small scale and piecemeal basis. The National Record of Industrial Monuments (NRIM), which sprang out of the CBA Survey and retains a close link with the work of the Survey Officer, is setting up a site record which will be of increasing value as it approaches completion, but by the very