

AIA Bulletin

ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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As part of its function to air matters of policy as well as reporting events in industrial archaeology, this Bulletin welcomes offers of guest editorials. Douglas Hague, a founder member of the AIA and one whose contributions to annual conferences are particularly appreciated for their good humour and elegant delivery, has occasionally found his views at variance with those of officialdom. We are delighted that he has come forward with a short account of the sort of quandary in which he often finds himself. He has called this **A Moan from Wales**.

In Bulletin Vol 6 No 3, I reported on the impending loss of the Hennebique designed reinforced concrete warehouse at Pothouse Wharf Carmarthen; at the same time I pleaded that with the exercise of a little common sense and imagination the accolade of Listing Grade 2 might have been transferred to it from the slightly earlier but hopelessly dilapidated Weaver's Mill in Swansea, also by Hennebique. One would have to be a naive optimist to expect such action to be taken, and now after putting up a tough fight against the demolishers the Carmarthen building is no more.

With this in mind and similar threats to the Militia Barracks in Aberystwyth, and to the magnificent Maesteg Blast-engine-house and the Oakwood Ironworks balance tower near Port Talbot, I put an edge to my quill and wrote a feature for the **Western Mail**. In this article Saturday 3 November 1979 page 9, signed by

me as a private individual I made no mention of my official position; this I did deliberately, partly because of my natural modesty but also because whatever precautions, brief or fulsome, I had taken to communicate the fact that views expressed were my own and not those of RCAM Wales, a possibly innocent but adroit sub-editor would have elevated my position to at least that of Chairman of RCAM. My little piece was printed in full, only a brief overture from the scriptures and a coda from Shakespeare were edited out. Quite a number of folk complimented me on it, but alas, it fell foul of official circles, largely because I, a meek civil servant had criticized Government Policy by letting slip a mildly derogatory remark about a decision of the Historic Building Council. As one of liberal views who accepts neither the Divine Right of Kings nor the Infallibility of the Pope I believe that Ministers, run-of-the-mill politicians, their

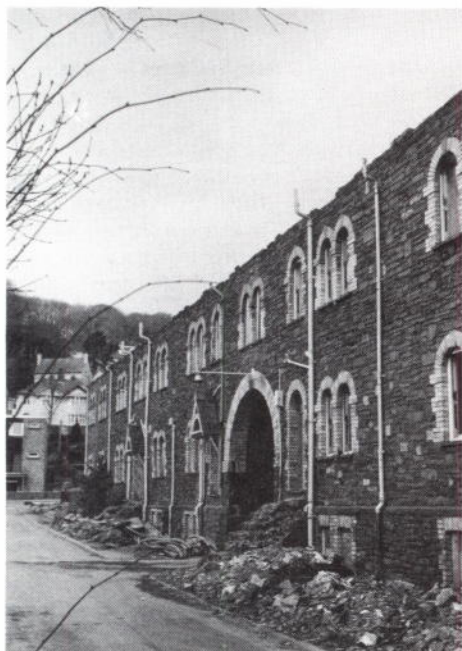


The great engine house at Maesteg

staffs and advisers are mortal and are imbued with the same foibles common to us all. Decisions made by the pundits may be entirely their own, they can accept or reject advice from counsel. Decisions can be wise or foolish; it may be a brave and difficult choice, but equally it can be expedient, doctrinaire and stubborn, or even a great deal worse.

The intention of writing these few words is not to get me into more trouble but merely to raise the question that perhaps now under the EEC 'sunshade' it might not be in order for a civil servant to write openly. Some close friends tell me that had I taken the cowardly and reprehensible step of writing under a pseudonym they would for some reason have guessed its author!

To finish on a realistic note:— the Aberystwyth Barracks are now being demolished,



a shameful and shortsighted act on which even Attila would have had second thoughts. The dramatic yet innocent balance tower at Oakwood Ironworks is now 'safe', an innocuous mound of rubble— but hallelujah! the local authority at Maesteg has withdrawn its application to demolish the great engine-house, and perhaps after all, when one's vocabulary, invective, passions and energies are spent we should resist the temptation to take the easier road of indifference and cynical apathy.

Douglas B Hague
Llanafan, Aberystwyth.

One of the younger IA (if they will pardon the term) organisations, the **Midland Wind and Water Mills Group**, has just published its first Journal. Called *Wind and Water Mills* it has appeared in A5 (210mm x 147mm) format, contains 44 pages, plus cover, about 25,000 words, 16 illustrations (all line drawings) and can be obtained for 75p plus 15p postage and packing. Described as 'an occasional publication' the initial issue; Summer 1980, contains six separate articles, a pair on a windmill, two linked pieces on the mills and watercourses on the Belne Brook, near Kidderminster, and papers on Millstone making on Anglesey and the Turtons of Kidderminster, who were iron-founders, engineers and millwrights. The windmill articles are concerned with 'Bouncing Bess' a tower mill, now converted into a dwelling

house and situated at Rowington Green, Warwickshire and its 'boat-shaped' cap, which has been measured and completely recorded. Copies of *Wind and Water Mills* and details of membership of the Group can be obtained from John Bedington, 188 Merrivale Road, Smethwick, West Midlands, B66 4EA.

Job Opportunities in IA. The Association is frequently asked for advice on careers in industrial archaeology and it is inevitable that, of the hundreds who discover initially through involvement with evening classes or local survey groups, that they would like to devote their working lives to it, the majority will be disappointed, for the number of full-time jobs in industrial museums and on the staff of adult education centres remains limited by the public finance available. In the museum sphere, industrial archaeology is by far the fastest-growing interest, if the 'appointments vacant' section of the monthly **Museums Bulletin** is anything to go by. Posts advertised in the May 1980 issue, for instance, include a museum assistant in the Department of Technology at Bristol Museum, established 12 years ago with Neil Cossons as the first curator of the department, and a trainee post in the Museum of London's Modern Departments where industrial material represents an important element of the collecting policy (the Museum of London's collections are divided by period rather than by discipline). Caudwell's Mill in Derbyshire is looking for a Manager at about £5,000 pa. to develop this water-powered roller flour mill, under the aegis of a charitable trust, and candidates should be capable of any task 'from lecturing to a learned society to clearing out the mill goit'. In the same issue the new Maritime Museum to be opened at Liverpool in its first phase on July 18 seeks someone to take over the direction of this new development as well as being responsible for the Merseyside County Museums' collection of land transport items and industrial and maritime archives. Two other posts are advertised, the scope of which would have seemed unimaginable as little as five years ago; Lancashire County Museums Service wants to appoint a HND-qualified textile or mechanical engineer to maintain in running condition the cotton-spinning machinery, including a spectacular floor of condenser mules, at Whitaker's Mill, Helmshore which ceased production late in 1978 and was shrewdly acquired *in toto* by the County Council, before serious deterioration set in. The building, still virtually fully equipped, will be developed as a museum of Lancashire cotton in conjunction with the water-powered Higher Mill adjacent. And the University of Birmingham advertises a temporary appointment on the Lecturer scale to develop the Institute of Industrial Archaeology being developed in conjunction with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum. Short courses in ia. will pave the way to a diploma course in industrial archaeology, the emphasis of which is likely to lie in the direction of practical conservation work rather than academic studies in industrial and technological history.

With one-third of the 21 vacancies advertised in the May **Museums Bulletin** strongly slanted towards industrial archaeology, we cannot complain that the openings for would-be professionals are limited; even where candidates are required to have already made a career in ia, promotion will lead to fresh vacancies at less senior levels in museums and universities. The **Bulletin** is distributed by post to members of

the Museums Association, most of whom are professional curators, but others who wish to do so may subscribe without necessarily joining the Association. Details of subscription rates from Christina Brockhurst, Museums Association, 34 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2SF.

Ship Shops Shattered. After the completion of the Iron Bridge in 1779, more than 50 years were to elapse before civil engineers made use of iron arches to provide uninterrupted roof spans in large buildings. The best known of these is Paxton's Crystal Palace of 1851. But well before this date, the Admiralty were looking to iron roofs to provide a controlled environment for the building of wooden warships, many of whose lower timbers would already be rotten by the time the ship was launched, if the slipway had been open to wind and weather. Several wooden-roofed covered slipways of the eighteenth century survive at Devonport and Chatham, but the large warships being built in the 19th century required larger building ships and for the span of nearly 90 ft required for the new covered building way at Portsmouth in 1843, soaring semi circular arches of cast-iron, assembled with wrought-iron straps were specified. The two enclosed building slips built at this time at Portsmouth continued to launch ships until well into the present century. Following the construction of a new berthing jetty, Ship Shops No 3 as they were known had their floors levelled for use as enclosed workshops. Plans to demolish these important industrial monuments, the earliest surviving iron arched buildings known anywhere, were announced in 1973, and the faculty of architecture at Portsmouth Polytechnic was among those bodies who made strong representations to the Property Services Agency of the DoE, responsible for buildings within the Royal dockyards, that the Ship Shops were sufficiently important in engineering history to be preserved on site. Successive cuts in defence expenditure provided a stay of execution in the scheme to modernise this part of the dockyard, and the case for preserving the Ship Shops was tossed to and fro until late in 1979, when it was announced that the contract for demolishing the 136 year old building would shortly be let. The case against preservation rested largely on the fact that a similar building of slightly later date survives in the dockyard at Chatham, where it is not currently threatened, and on the location of the Portsmouth building, remote from that part of the dockyard where visitors can be admitted and in which most of the buildings already scheduled as of historic interest are situated. The AIA pressed for a reversal of this decision, stressing the unique significance of the Ship Shops as the earliest iron arched buildings in the world.

When it became clear that the Ministry of Defence held out no hope of retaining them as part of the redevelopment of that part of the dockyard, an offer came from the recently established Chalk Pits Museum at Amberley to dismantle and remove as many roof trusses as could be saved; the columns on which they stood had been grouted 8 ft into the ground when the building was erected and with subsequent levelling of the floor and concrete topping it would have been impossible to extract the original columns except at prohibitive cost. This offer met with a frosty response from the PSA however, who announced that dismantling the structure carefully would involve the use of mobile cranes and skilled cutting gear, at a cost over and above that of straight demolition estimated at £60,000. The Southern Industrial