

### VOLUME 9 NUMBER 1

**Michael Rix** dec 26 September 1981.

It was tragic and yet in a way rather appropriate that Michael Rix should have died during a visit to an industrial plant in the West Midlands. For more than three decades he had been an enthusiastic participant in many such visits. Michael suffered a severe heart attack in the early summer, from which he seemed to be making a steady recovery, but he collapsed and died on Saturday 26 September during a visit to Walsall Power Station with the Newcomen Society. A memorial service was held in Wolverhampton on Friday 2 October, at which the Association was represented, and we take this further opportunity to express our condolences to his widow and family.

Michael Rix will be remembered as one of the founding fathers of Industrial Archaeology in Britain, and it is generally accepted that he was the first to use the term in print. But Michael's lively mind followed many other themes. He was a man of boundless interests, whose enthusiasms were never confined by the

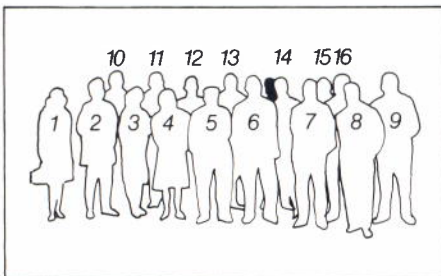
arbitrary limits of academic subjects, who was as ready to gasp with delight at a flint arrowhead as at the most ornate of beam engines, as appreciative of flying buttresses as of industrial ballads. In an era of increasing and sometimes stultifying specialisation, he refused to be pigeonholed as an authority on any one subject, and tramped happily over the whole rich field of historical learning.

Michael grew up in the London area and attended St Paul's School, before he went up to University College, Oxford. He served in the Education Corps during the Second World War, and, like so many of the Corps's officers, entered the sphere of civilian adult education in peacetime. He joined the Extramural Department of the University of Birmingham in September 1946 as resident staff tutor for Wolverhampton and district, and remained a member of the Department until September 1980, when he retired at the age of 67. In 1950 he was appointed by the Department to the post of Tutor in Local Studies at the Shropshire Adult College, Attingham Park, which was to prove one of the turning points of his life. Through his work at Attingham he became acquainted with the industrial monuments of the Ironbridge Gorge, and developed a consuming passion for the remains of the

Industrial Revolution. In 1953 he became the Department's staff tutor in architectural history, a post which he held until his retirement. He returned, by choice, as he always insisted, to live in Wolverhampton, for he had a great love of the Black Country and its people.

Michael Rix's early studies were in the field of folk life and anthropology, but his interests and influence in the late 1940s and 50s were extensive, and he was a lively element in that widespread ferment in university and adult education circles in the Midlands from which emerged such concepts as landscape history, vernacular architecture and the study of the deserted settlement. From the mid 1950s he was best known as an advocate for the conservation of industrial monuments, but he remained essentially a polymath. A story often told in adult education circles concerns a lecture on industrial archaeology which he had arranged to give in Clun Museum. On seeing the museum's remarkable collections of flints, he decided to lecture on prehistory instead, and did so with great lucidity.

Michael Rix was a founder member and vice-president of the Association for Industrial Archaeology, and was a member of the executive board of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust from the time of its establishment. The list of



*We are grateful to Audrey Morton for lending us the photograph reproduced here. It shows Michael Rix taking part in the 1st Annual Conference of the Historical Metallurgy Group held in September 1965. Also in the picture are: Mr and Mrs Norman Bridgewater (3/10), Audrey and Reg Morton (4/5), Norman Mutton (11), John Butler (12), W H Bailey (13), Fred Williams (6), Ken Barraclough (14), Michael Hallett (7), Henry Cleere (8), Alan Shorer (15) and the Coach Driver (9). We should like to know the names of 1, 2 and 16.*



his publications is not especially long. He contributed numerous short notes to **The Amateur Historian** and later to the **Journal of Industrial Archaeology**, but three works stand out above the rest. The first was his article on 'Industrial Archaeology' in **The Amateur Historian** ii.8, 1955, in which he suggested that there was much of interest and sometimes of beauty to be found in industrial landscapes. It is impossible for anyone who has grown up since that time to appreciate how revolutionary were the sentiments in the article, even if the thinking behind it was shared with other academics. In 1964 he put forward 'A Proposal to establish National Parks of Industrial Archaeology' in the **Journal of Industrial Archaeology** i.3. Much of the article concerned Ironbridge, and in some ways he did no more than reiterate some of the arguments concerning what should happen to the monuments of the Ironbridge Gorge which were being discussed quite widely after the designation of the area as part of a New Town, but the piece had a prophetic quality, and it is fascinating to re-read it on a sunny late autumn day in 1981, as schoolchildren from Rubery, polytechnic students from Leicester and tourists from Belgium make their way through Coalbrookdale, are fascinated by the Museum of Iron and stand in admiration of the Iron Bridge. His third publication of especial note was the pamphlet **Industrial Archaeology** written for the Historical Association in 1967, extracts from which were translated into Italian and appeared in Antonello Negri and Massimo Negri **L'Archeologia Industriale**, published in Florence in 1972.

Michael Rix will probably be remembered as a teacher rather than as a writer, as a communicator of enthusiasms rather than as a scholar or an organiser. He was a speaker of rare eloquence, who could always produce words appropriate to a particular occasion. His habit of beginning conference lectures with the words 'Fellow industrial archaeologists . . .' was but one example of his ability to establish an easy rapport with an audience. He was for many years a highly successful adult education tutor, and perhaps his most important achievement in this field was the series of summer schools which he ran in a former Land Army hostel at the Preston Montford Field Centre from 1957 onwards. His first course was put into the programme to fill a gap between two Wroxeter-based schools on excavation techniques, but it was so successful that it became a regular part of the Department programme, and subsequent schools numbered several prominent industrial archaeologists of the present generation among their students. Uniquely amongst lecturers on industrial archaeology, Michael operated with neither camera nor car, but such was the range and depth of his friendships that he never lacked slides or transport.

Michael Rix's achievements can be aptly summed up in his own words. Having been brought up to regard factory chimneys, canals, railway stations, coalmines and gas works as revolting symbols of Blake's 'dark satanic mills', he wrote in 1967, 'it is exciting to find oneself deriving pleasure from looking at all these things'. His enthusiasm led many others to find similar pleasures. The Romantic Movement of the late eighteenth century utterly changed our attitudes to mountains and wild, rugged scenery, and there is a sense in which Wordsworth and Coleridge are responsible for rucksacked weekenders climbing the path to

Snowdon Ranger or for coaches disgorging trippers into a rain-soaked Ambleside. In a similar way our attitudes to our industrial past were radically altered during the 1950s and 60s, a change which was accomplished by a small group of **animateurs**, amongst whom Michael Rix was prominent. Others have subsequently contributed their scholarship, their manual labour and their ability to organise, but the original inspirational sparks came from Michael and a few contemporaries. If we seek his memorial we see it in the labours of Derbyshire youths conserving the stonework of Arkwright's mill at Cromford, in the measured beat of a Fairlie hauling holiday-makers into Tan-y-bwlch, in the queues at the Llechwedd slate caverns, or, perhaps most fittingly, in the words and gestures of the unknown and anonymous teacher from Nuneaton, Nurnburg or Newhaven, Connecticut, standing where Michael stood so often and enthusing to his students about the Iron Bridge. Without Michael's work he would probably not be there.

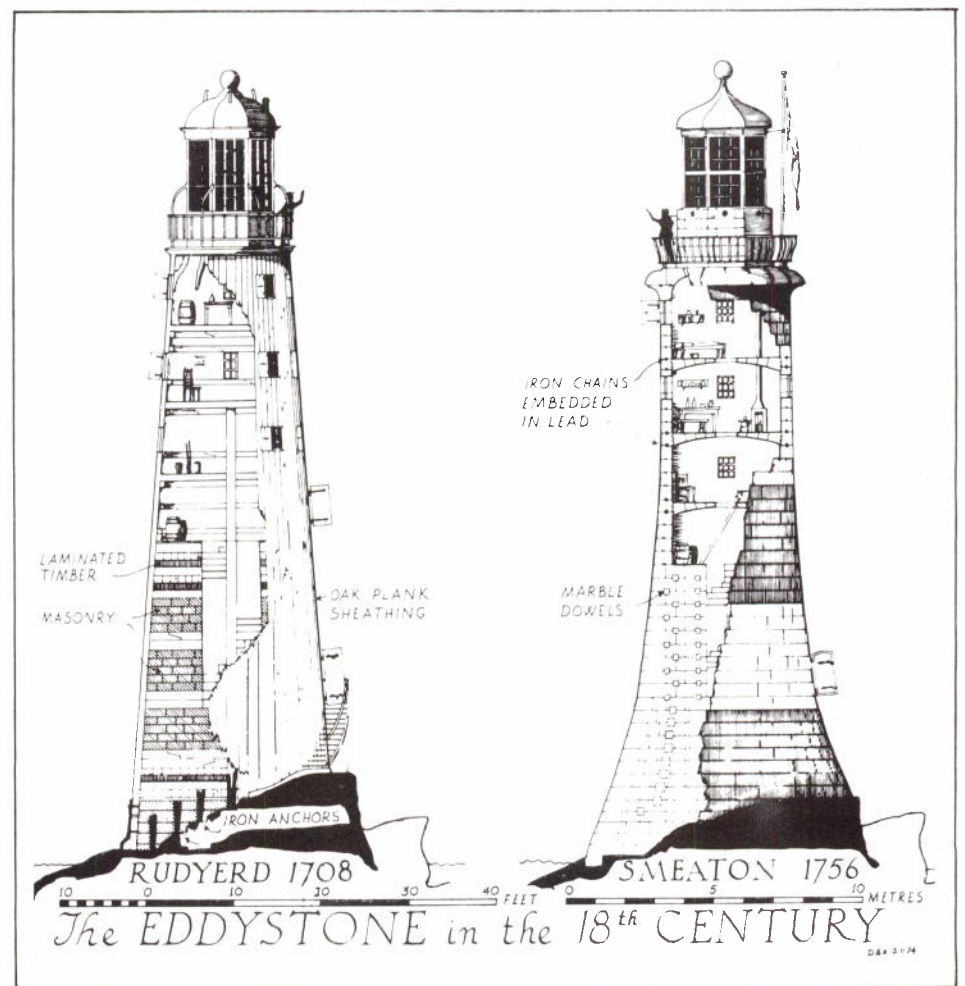
Neil Cossons  
Barrie Trinder

**The 'depersonalisation' of the Eddystone Lighthouse.** The sophistication of modern electronics is now eroding the venerable profession of lighthouse keeper. It can be argued that these worthy men eventually draw pensions, can claim compensation for an accident, and now only work one month on station and one off; but coming are the days of unmanned lighthouses. Switched on and off by an automatic device, with only the roar of air-conditioning plant to evoke the magical sounds of the sea, they will no longer judge whether a passing wisp of mist

warrants blasts from the fog-signal; all is decided by the microchip or some more sophisticated device. Some will say 'We are living in the electronic age, in a twinkling of an eye the pocket calculator can tell us how many seconds we have lived on this earth . . . this is exciting . . . protests are merely the death throes of sickly sentimentalists!' But when these highly complicated pieces of equipment do go wrong, even in manned stations a specialist technician has to be flown out to diagnose the trouble and then perhaps again with a replacement unit. In the 'old days' much of the equipment was of a nature that it was possible for an adept keeper to make a temporary repair.

With the departure of the last keeper a tower becomes unloved, in his place a clammy sepulchrous silence, once bright brass becomes tarnished and dust and dirt take over for only the most fastidious house-wife could vie with the exacting standards of bright cleanliness of a keeper-loved tower.

The 'depersonalisation' of the famous Eddystone lighthouse took place in July of this year. The light was exhibited from the tower for the last time on the 20th, the keepers were withdrawn on 22nd, and in place of the tower Trinity House light vessel No 6 was brought into operation on the night of 21st to remain on station until the tower is operational as an automatic unmanned light. A light has been shown from the Eddystone Rocks continuously since 1698, with two breaks of five and four years marking the destruction of Winstanley's tower in 1703 and Ruyder's in 1755. Much has been, and could be, written on the history and construction of all the towers of Eddystone. Winstanley's bizarre looking tower was a truly remarkable building and the first of its kind to

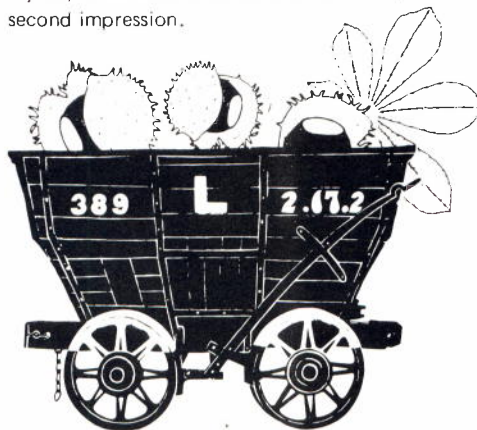


be anchored to, and erected on such an exposed rock. My drawing, part section and elevation is intended to show the appearance and design of the two 18th century towers. Rudyard's clean functional lines were in marked contrast to the earlier building, whilst on the right is Smeaton's justly famous tower. After the burning of Rudyard's tower Smeaton avoided all inflammable materials by using stone alone. For this purpose he devised a brilliant and original method of dove-tailing and dowelling, whilst in order to resist the thrust of the arched stone floors iron chains embedded in lead embrace the tower. This tower displayed a light for 123 years, and could well have survived for much longer had the rock beneath not been undermined. After it had been replaced it was dismantled and rebuilt on Plymouth Hoe, an early and remarkable example of conservation. The present lofty tower designed by James N Douglass was first lit on May 18th 1882 having been built in the astonishingly short time of less than four years, by this time steam renders and compressed air greatly facilitated such operations, but none should belittle the erection of any building on such an exposed and terrifying site.

There is no doubt that the story of Eddy-stone is unique and very well known throughout Britain, but its context in the history of lighthouses is not so well known. It is not the first rock lighthouse site in the world, by many centuries. We must look to Meloria, a reef a few miles off Livorno, the port of Pisa on the west coast of Italy. The tower erected there was destroyed in 1284 by the Genoese, during the course of a Christian dispute between rival Italian City States, perhaps more concerned with trading concession with the east than the crusades. After this defeat the Pisans built another tower on a rock much nearer the harbour, in fact today incorporated into the harbour installations. It stood until it was blown up by the Germans in the last war. However with great imagination, taste and reinforced concrete the Italians have rebuilt to its original appearance and have even pieced together its original date tablet of 1304. In 1712 a day-mark was built on the reef of Meloria, and this still stands. It is a remarkable gazebo-like structure on four legs, through which the waves wash: it is in fact the forerunner of later pile-lighthouses. The oldest working rock lighthouse in the world can be claimed by France; this is Cordouan in the Gironde at the entrance to Bordeaux. In fact the English built a tower on the island of Cordouan in medieval times, and this was standing when the present unique building was started in the 1580s. However by the end of the century the greater part of the island had been washed away by the sea, but this gave the engineers time to build sea defences in the shape of a sturdy circular wall; this still stands and protects this tower which by force majeure has become the oldest working, wave-washed lighthouse in the world. It is the pride of the French circuit, but its evolution and architecture cannot be described in anything but an epic. Great concern is being expressed in France today, because it is being threatened by the same fate as Eddystone. Although landing is very difficult, it is possible, and fears are expressed that vandals might wreck its unique Royal chapel and other regal apartments.

*Douglas B Hague*

The illustrations on page 2 are taken from *Lighthouses, Their Architecture, History and Archaeology* by Douglas Hague and Rosemary Christie published by Gomer Press, Llandysul, Dyfed, SA44 4BQ at £6.00 and now in its second impression.



**They came, they saw, they conkered.** Although most of the international questions discussed at the ICCIH 81 meeting in France in September remained unresolved, one matter which has raised controversy in British industrial archaeological circles for many years was at last conclusively settled. The title 'cradle of the Industrial Revolution' has been claimed at various times by most parts of Britain, and at meeting of the British delegation at the Maison d'Or, Grenoble, on Friday 18 September decided to settle the matter once and for all in a traditional British manner, by a contest of strength with the seed of *aesculus hippocastanum*. This much-beloved British pastime, which has been such a delightful feature of every autumn in our islands since shortly after the middle of the 11th century, aroused much interest amongst those of lesser breed who were also in attendance at the Maison d'Or.

After many hours of breathless excitement, the contest was won by the champion of Tyne and Wear, despite the strong challenge of Shropshire, who brought forward three contestants managed by an able chef de commisariat. South Wales fared ill, although the Alps around Grenoble echoed time and again the strains of *Cym Rhondda* which swelled from the Gallic supporters. Many tears were shed that night when the news reached Abersychan and Twyn-yr-Ddyn, and there was much sorrow in Llwynypia and the Upper New Ranks. The Lancashire team was lured from the contest by a Swiss agent in the pay of the Shropshire team. The East Midlands failed to put in an appearance while Cornwall and the West Riding were not even represented at the conference. The little-favoured London and South East team, with good reason, saw no prospect of success and remained on the sidelines. For Scotland the contest did no more than arouse memories of Argentina 1978..

The news of the decision was welcomed with delight in the North East and the strains of the *Blaydon Races* which echoed through the valley of the Ise were soon repeated on local radio in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, which remained open for the rest of the night playing martial music. Working men's clubs in Esh Winning, Seaham Harbour and up to the heights of Alston Moor and Kielder Forest celebrated the victory in traditional style. Many a Northumbrian hinny passed long solitary hours awaiting the return of her man, and many a club netty saw heavy use. The Tyne Bridge had to be cleared by the 'poliss' of enthusiastic dancers who threatened its stability.

Local government in the region has not been slow to respond to the distinction which it has gained. The main approaches to the area are to be dignified with the inscription 'Welcome to the Cradle of the Industrial Revolution'. It is understood that planning consent has already been obtained for this message to be displayed in neon lights on Durham Cathedral to greet visitors coming from the south. Those arriving by sea are to be welcomed by the same message on a vast plastic arch spanning the Tyne from Wallsend to Jarrow, which is to be designed and erected by Manpower Services Commission project teams. To the north the Forestry Commission has agreed that the message will be shown in trees of different shades to be grown in a new plantation north of Alnwick. Some controversy has arisen over the western approach and several prominent north eastern firms have subscribed £2,000 in prize money for a competition for the best suggestion.

It will be a matter of relief to our readers that this question has at length been settled and that the decision has been greeted with such enthusiasm in the successful region, although as we go to press we hear that objections have been raised by other competitors about the conduct of the contest.

#### **The 1981 AIA Conference at Norwich. A personal report by Douglas Hague.**

One of the factors which made the Norwich conference different from most previous ones, and certainly from most archaeological field meetings was that it was 'alive'. What we were shown were not dead and abandoned sites but activities. More often than not one is called on to conjure up the grinding clamour of working machinery or draw back in imaginary fear from the heat and fumes from an overgrown furnace. But in Norfolk there seemed to be a plethora of crafts and industries where the human eye and skill are still paramount; conspicuously absent were conveyor belts and clinical electronic devices. Alas it was true that many of us were aware that short of a social, and political revolution, we would probably never again see brushes and matting made by hand, or a 'human chain' used to hang bloaters over the still smoking embers of an oak fire. Indeed, for one carried away more than visual and audible memories; the aromas of freshly cut wood mingled with fish, malt and freshly poured molten iron, flavoured with that unforgettable effluvium produced by the early processes of tanning, all linger tenaciously in the nostrils.

The penultimate visit was to the last celluloid factory in Britain, where the exacting standards required to avoid immediate self immolation were indeed terrifying. But our impressions were curiously tempered by the knowledge that apart from armaments, the products of the factory also included the raw material for making table-tennis balls, and beautiful thick slabs of red celluloid specially made for the manufacture of dice for the gaming tables of Las Vegas. Perhaps the most memorable for the few lucky enough to make up the crew, was a trip on a Norfolk wherry, the *Albion*; only such an experience can really bring home to one the skills and energy needed to sail such a vessel up a narrow water-way, and the hazards of handling a twenty five foot quant.

It is impossible to comment adequately on the lectures which covered such a wide range of subjects, some general, some specialized. On the one hand, there was a detailed study of 19th century factory farming, whilst at the other