

Neil Cossons is leaving Ironbridge to become **Director of the National Maritime Museum.**

This simple statement, which most readers will already have heard anyway, conceals what could be the end of an era for Industrial Archaeology in general and the AIA in particular.

Of course Neil will remain an industrial archaeologist. Of course he will still support the Association's activities but equally obviously Neil will find it difficult to take the same personal interest in, and to influence the outcome of, the activities of the organisation which he was largely instrumental in setting up.

In 1964, when he began lecturing to a Group which eventually became the Bristol IA Society (and he was BIAS's first secretary) he talked enthusiastically about the need for a National IA Society. Nine years later the AIA was established in the Isle of Man and Neil became its first secretary. In 1977 he was elected AIA President and although he had to stand down in 1980 under the Association's 'three-year-rule' he has remained a more-than-usually-active Council member ever since.

As for the future, and it would be a rash person who tried to predict the outcome of any activity Neil had an interest in, we will possibly have to make our decisions without the undoubted benefit of Neil's advice and support. Our feelings seem to be summarised by the final paragraph of a 'Tribute to Neil Cossons at Ironbridge', written by Barrie Trinder for the Friends of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, and reproduced with his permission:

Two qualities epitomise Neil Cosson's achievements at Ironbridge. The first is his ability passionately to involve himself in all that

is going on. On the eve of the opening of almost every major addition to the Museum he has been among those wielding paint brushes, adjusting spotlights or sweeping floors. He has the essentially democratic qualities of the most successful officers of the war which was fought as he grew up. Had he been born twenty years earlier he would probably have led a tank regiment across the Western Desert or organised the D-Day landings. Secondly, he has believed, with J M Keynes, that the obvious course of action, that which seems correct to the great majority of right-thinking men and women, is almost always the wrong one. Ironbridge has prospered because Neil has ensured that the Museum has rarely taken the course which is predictable, safe or advisable. It will need to retain his taste for adventure if it is to continue to flourish.

If one substitutes the words Association for Industrial Archaeology for Ironbridge or Museum, as appropriate, the challenge is very apparent.

Thank you Neil for all you have done and our good wishes go with you to Greenwich.

The AGM of the AIA. The Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held at the Annual Conference in Lincoln. Details of the Annual Conference were circulated with the last Bulletin. With this Bulletin are enclosed the various AGM papers and members are reminded that nominations for Council must be made not less than four days before the commencement of the AGM. The Conference papers include a nomination form and if you feel able to help the Association by proposing new members of

Council please do so as quickly as possible and return the form to the Company Secretary, c/o the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, Ironbridge, Telford, Shropshire TF8 7AW, at your earliest convenience. Please note however, that the Proxy Form if you cannot attend the AGM is to be sent to Neil Wright at Lincoln.

David Alderton, AIA Council Member, Conference Secretary and Editor of the AIA Education Newsletter has moved house. His address is now: The Old Police House, Hackford Road, Wicklewood, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 9TJ and the telephone number: 0953-603130.

Atmospheric Experiment. The failure of I K Brunel's scheme for atmospheric traction on the South Devon Railway in 1848 may not necessarily be the last word on this elegant scheme for propelling trains on steep gradients with a power plant that remains stationary. **New Civil Engineer** recently reported that contract for a 1.2 km single track line in Porto Alegre, Brazil, has recently been awarded to engineer Oskar Coester. He has already built a full-scale test track evidently in ignorance of the 19th century failures in England and France, and hopes that the success of his 1.2 km pilot line will lead on to a longer 7 km passenger line linking Porto Alegre's administrative centre with the new commuter railway serving the town.

The failure of the SDR scheme, which lost the struggling company over £350,000 when all assets had been sold, is usually attributed to faults in the greased leather seal closing the top aperture of the vacuum pipe. Rats are said to have been attracted to the grease used to keep the leather supple and water-tight. Coester is pinning his hopes on a much larger pipe of some five times the cross section, rectangular and closed at the top with a plastic material. Modern materials will also help to keep down the weight of the passenger vehicle, planned with a capacity of 150.

Some spectacular acceleration figures are recorded for some of the four 19th century atmospheric railways of which Brunel's was neither the first nor the last but certainly the longest and most costly. With the importance now realised of economising on fossil fuels, any means of transport that avoids the necessity to carry with it the heavy price mover deserves serious evaluation and the brave Brazilian experiment will be watched with interest elsewhere. In particular, control over the trains in an emergency will need to be carefully worked out.



Tower Bridge and the Pool of London before river traffic drained away. The vessel on the left is the ss Laverock built at Troon in 1909.

Tower Bridge Opens Up. What the Eiffel Tower is to Paris and the Statue of Liberty is to New York, Tower Bridge is to London; a potent symbol recognised worldwide as the unofficial emblem of the city that surrounds it. Tower Bridge achieved this popular status within a few years of its opening by the Prince of Wales in 1894, but the mysterious procedures by which its bascules are lifted to permit the passage of ships have for most of its life remained hidden. Those who since childhood may have yearned to peer behind the neo-Gothic stonework that clads the bridge's steel framework and climb up to the two pedestrian walkways that link the tops of the two main towers can now indulge their wishes. Following an extravagant and unnecessary replacement of the hydraulic lifting machinery, which had operated without mishap for nearly 90 years, by a less reliable electric system at a cost in excess of £2 million, the Corporation of London has made further inroads into the funds of the Bridge House Estates, a medieval foundation from which all Thames Bridges within the City of London are financed, to equip Tower Bridge as a tourist attraction. The cost of making it ready for tourists is estimated at another £2½ million, and it is hoped that 300,000 visitors a year will pay the admission charge, presently at £1.60 to tour the Bridge.

New electric lifts have replaced the slow old hydraulic lifts inside the main towers. On the landings and staircases around the lift shafts, new display panels provide background on the origins of Tower Bridge and of the City's three road bridges, Southwark, Blackfriars and London. Although the text of these panels is, not surprisingly, aimed at the general visitor rather than the engineer or historian, it is sad that the opportunity has not been taken to provide an engineering appreciation of a structure which, with its sophisticated mixture of cantilever and

suspension bridge principles, represents a remarkable achievement in providing an adaptable and reliable river crossing at a point where access by ocean-going ships had to be maintained and close proximity to the Tower of London imposed strict aesthetic constraints.

A 32-page souvenir brochure is available, produced like the exhibition displays by Robin Wade Associates. Although attractively produced in full colour, this regrettably represents another lost opportunity, for it relies heavily for its content on the graphic material in the displays and only nibbles at its subject. Two double page spreads are squandered on a montage of modern picture postcards depicting Tower Bridge and of tourist souvenirs featuring the same motif. Anyone seriously interested in the Bridge or its mechanism is unlikely to find much of interest in the brochure.

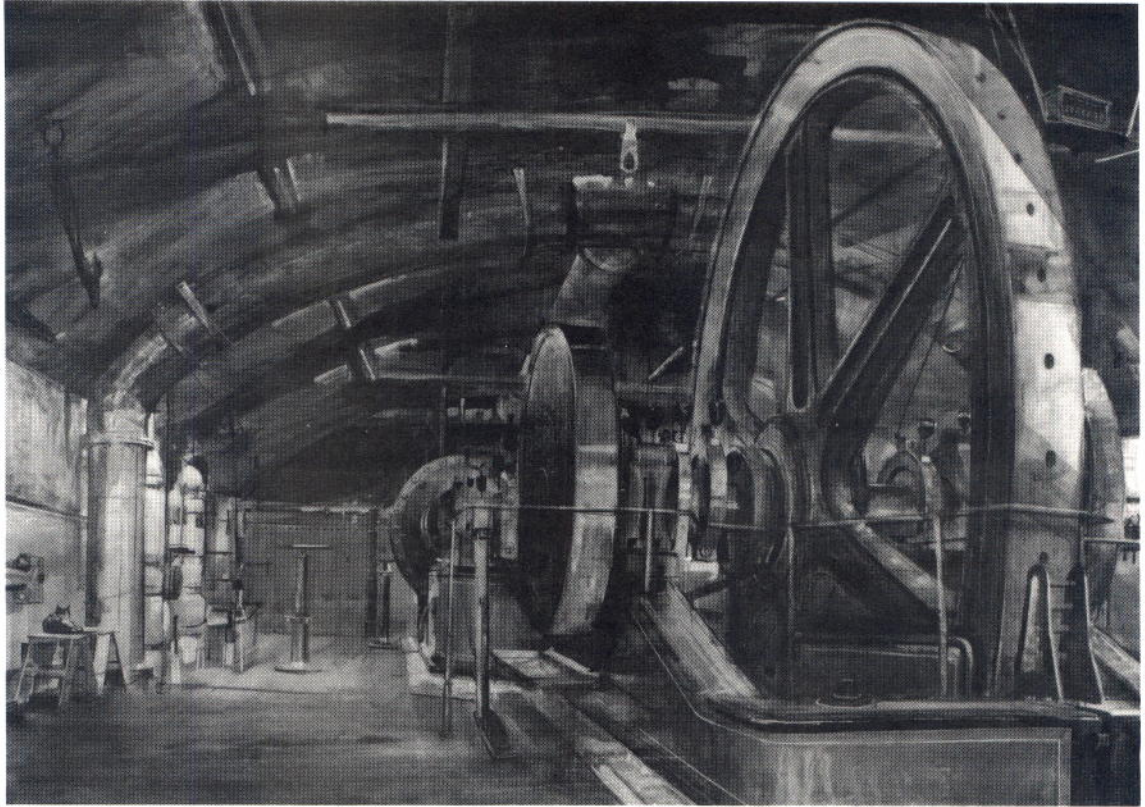
With an investment income estimated at £5 million per year and only 4 bridges to spend it on, the Bridge House Estates might be forgiven for attracting proposals from contractors and consultants anxious to help it spend its money. How much happier our successors would have been, however, if only 5% of that income had been devoted to maintaining the original and faultlessly reliable hydraulic machinery in its proper function rather than expensively removing it in the forlorn hope that American museums and collectors would queue up to buy it; in the event the dismantled machinery could not be given away. London has lost one of the world's finest examples of the application of silent and pollution-free hydraulic engineering, entirely self-contained with its own hydraulic power station. It will be interesting to see whether the new electrically operated lifting machinery is as reliable after ninety years as Sir John Wolfe Barry's splendid Armstrong hydraulic engines were when they were disconnected and dismantled in 1976.

Painter of Industry. Regular readers of the *Illustrated London News* will have seen a series of paintings of London bridges from the palette of Yorkshire artist Edna Lumb.

Industrial subjects have always attracted this versatile artist who grew up in Leeds in the 1930s where she developed a particular feeling for the mills and machinery of Yorkshire and Lancashire. Difficult locations have seldom daunted her; in 1969 she covered the mercy airlift to famine hit Biafra, and throughout the bitter winter of 1973-4 she worked in the damp machinery spaces of Tower Bridge recording the hydraulic machinery before it was all swept away. More recently, Edna has been commissioned to paint Liverpool's dockland, the building of earth dams in Upper Volta, the interiors of London's sewers and the conversion of Covent Garden Flower Market into the London Transport Museum.

Nearly twenty paintings of bridges in London have come from her easel since 1981, since when Edna has spent more time by the Thames than anywhere else. She says 'Bridges, especially river bridges, fascinate me. They seem to be suspended in space — islands surrounded by light. Structural strength is reflected in forms with the intricacy and delicacy of lace. In other cases, grace is sacrificed for power and presence as with several of London's railway bridges. At first I painted the bridges in a 'landscape' format. It seemed the most appropriate composition. For the ILN series I had to think again. The magazine has an upright format and as each bridge painting occupies an entire page, I need to look at London's bridges with new eyes. My solution to showing a bridge taller than it is wide is to look not only at the bridge itself but the bridge in its context and setting. The tower of Big Ben and the spires of Parliament are virtually part of Westminster Bridge just as palace and bridge blend at Hampton Court. The

*Three of Edna Lumb's Tower Bridge paintings;
Top: Engine house with cat.
Centre: Hydraulic Bascule Engine.
Bottom: South East Cabin.*



graceful spire of St Bride's sets off Blackfriars Viaduct viewed from Pilgrim Street'.

An exhibition of these paintings, entitled **A Web of London**, took place at the Campion Gallery in Barnes last year, when 37 pictures were on display. Anyone interested in the sensitive recording of our industrial surroundings would do well to look out for further work from the brush and pen of this talented interpreter.

Enquiries to Edna Lumb at 2/14 the Paragon, Blackheath, London SE3 0PA. Tel. 01 852 8189.

Take French Leave from your Ferry Crossing.

With its museums almost wholly under State control, and administered in the hallowed traditions of the Ministry responsible for antiquities and monuments, France has yet to see the growth of the industrial and open-air museums established by private initiative and subsequently developed by charitable trusts, whose flair and ingenuity have done so much to brighten the museum climate in Britain in the past two decades. The Ecomusee at Le Creusot in Burgundy blazed a trail 10 years ago that is now being followed rather gingerly by other municipalities in France like that at Beauvais. Less well known among British industrial archaeologists and indeed among the growing number of adherents in France itself, are the 'traditional' museums at various places in France which, although sticking to the conventional approach of labelled objects individually displayed in glass cases, nevertheless house important collections of technological exhibits which make them well worth seeking out.

At Nancy the **Musee de l'Histoire du Fer** shows a remarkable collection of artefacts in cast and wrought iron. Very much the creation of one man Bertrand Gille, this delightful museum is well worth a visit from anyone interested in the history of European iron-making. As an

