

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

101
SUMMER
1997

THE BULLETIN OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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It's all a bit different over there, or is it?

Michael Coulter

This paper discusses aspects of the work of the Environment and Heritage Service of Northern Ireland, focusing on the legislation, organisations and structures in NI, to provide some clarification of the similarities and differences between the 'situations' in NI and the rest of the UK.

Northern Ireland has a very rich and diverse industrial heritage. This includes the earliest summit level canal in the British Isles, the largest dry dock in the world, the only intact beetling mills in the UK, and the only traditional spade mill still operating in Ireland. In addition, there are extensive remains of the linen industry scattered throughout the six counties, plus remains from coal, lead, iron and bauxite mining, glass and pottery manufacture, and the production of kelp. The remains of the Belfast Rope Works, in its day the largest in the world, were demolished only recently.

Most of the legislation, organisations and structures involved in the industrial heritage in Northern Ireland are modelled on British parallels, but nearly all have variations which are peculiar to NI. In the past, most of the parallels were drawn from English practice, but Wales and Scotland have been much more appropriate in recent years. There are also significant parallels with the Republic of Ireland. Some of the major differences are

- the absence of a Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Northern Ireland
- the absence of County Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs), although there is a central SMR which is arguably the equivalent of a National Monuments Record
- the absence of County Conservation Officers
- the relative dearth of volunteers/voluntary organisations in the built heritage sector
- the absence, or acute shortage, of tourists, money, big firms/sponsors
- the 'Troubles'

It is easier to identify these major differences than it is to identify the major similarities, most of which have

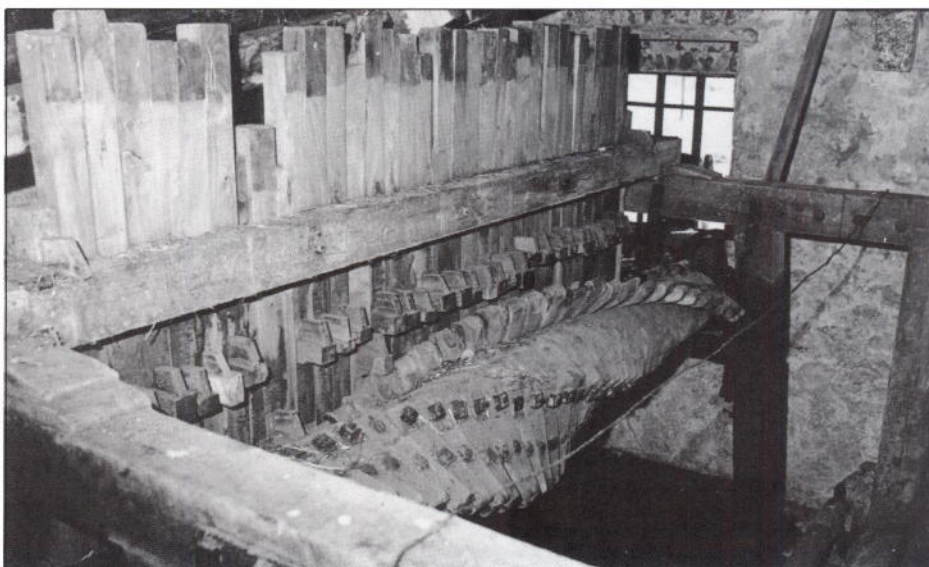
that element of variation from the 'expected' norm.

There are two main legislative orders under which the built heritage is recorded and/or protected. The Planning Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 includes provisions for listing buildings and establishing Conservation Areas, much as in Britain, except that these are duties of the Department, rather than councils, although they are consultees. It is also worth noting that provisions for listing were only introduced to NI in the early 1970s, very much later than in the rest of the UK.

The Historical Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 – we like snappy titles – replaced and extended the provisions of the Historical Monuments Act (Northern Ireland) 1971. One of the major changes was the provision of Scheduled Monument Consent. Until the new Order was established, the Department was only entitled to six months' notice by an owner of intention to alter, remove or destroy a scheduled site or feature. In other words, we were given the opportunity to make a record of the site before it was altered or destroyed. In some instances it was possible, through negotiation or acquisition, to arrange its survival. In comparison to this relative weakness, the present Order and the former Act have a strong provision for the licensing of any, and all, archaeological excavations in NI. This very useful provision is without precedence in Britain. Two other noteworthy differences are that national significance is not a pre-requisite for scheduling in NI and, unlike the rest of the UK, it is the Department and not the Secretary of State which is responsible for carrying out the duties described in the Order.

The organisation for which I work, the Environment and Heritage Service, has no direct parallels in the UK. Created on 1st April 1996 as an agency within the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland (DOENI), it comprises three limbs: Environmental Protection, Natural Heritage and Built Heritage.

The EHS was put together in a very short timescale. Throughout a very hectic period of reorganisation and metamorphosis, our aims have



Wiper blade and beetles in Tildare Beetling Mill, Co. Antrim

Photo: N.I. Environment and Heritage Service

COVER PICTURE

Visitors at Victory Shaft, Geevor Tin Mine (see pp 12-13)

Photo: Trevithick Trust

remained constant. They are to protect and conserve the natural and built environment and to promote its appreciation for the benefit of present and future generations.

In support of these aims, the agency's objectives are to implement the Department's responsibilities for:

- controlling the pollution of air, water and land
- conserving nature and the countryside and protecting species
- protecting, recording and conserving historic monuments and buildings
- promoting awareness and appreciation of the environment and heritage

So, in relation to the built heritage, we provide the services of a Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Northern Ireland, and the equivalent of a Cadw or Historic Scotland, plus some of the services of Unified Councils. Then we have the additional duties equivalent to English Nature and part of a National Rivers Authority, etc.

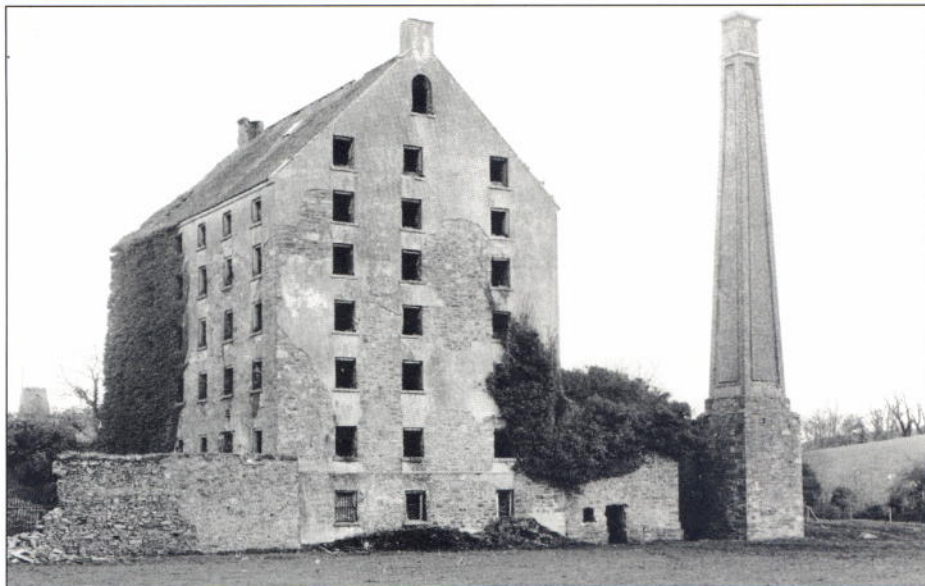
I am responsible for recording the Architectural and the Industrial Heritage (IH) throughout the six counties, and the management of the Monuments and Buildings Record. In practice, my duties are rather more widespread, beyond recording, into preservation. My professional background is in architecture, architectural conservation, and recording. I am not a qualified Industrial Archaeologist, nor is any member of my very small team – but we do enjoy the IH work.

The immediate fore-runner of the EHS was the Environment Service, created in the early 1990s. The built heritage section of these organisations had as their fore-runner the Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch of the DOENI, which in turn stemmed from the Listed Buildings section of the DOE, established in the late 1960s (in anticipation of the Planning Order and associated listing legislation), and the Archaeological Survey (Ancient Monuments) dating from the 1950s. Prior to that, the Government of Northern Ireland was guided by an Ancient Monuments Advisory Council established in 1926, shortly after the partition of Ireland. Back in the 1930s, they took the enlightened step of taking the Ballycopeland Windmill into state care.

The original Archaeological Survey team, consisting of two professionals, was responsible for the upkeep of monuments plus the survey of sites and structures throughout NI. They maintained an admirable balance of archaeological and architectural recording but when preparations were being made for the publishing in 1966 of *An Archaeological Survey of Co. Down*, it was recognised that the industrial heritage was losing out, and so a separate study was initiated. This work was undertaken under contract as has the majority of our IH recording since that time.

E.R.R. Green's *The Industrial Archaeology of County Down* (1963) was a pioneering work in the field of industrial archaeology. Focused on a limited number of industries, it omitted some of the sites even in those industries which were covered. Today, this and the associated archaeological survey of Co. Down remain the only county survey volumes produced for NI. From a position of early leaders in the field, NI has now slipped back a long way.

In the mid to late 1960s, a further survey was undertaken (by W.A. McCutcheon) across all six



Currently under restoration is this flour mill of 1792 at Ballydugan, Co. Down Photo: N.I. Environment and Heritage Service

counties. McCutcheon combined documentary research and field recording. The latter was carried out at a particularly important time, when most of the major and traditional industries were still operational, and before 'The Troubles'. About 20,000 black and white photographs form a valuable historical record/resource for research, and the impressive resulting publication, *The Industrial Archaeology of Northern Ireland*, has been of considerable benefit to the work of the Service. Unfortunately, the collection lacks an inventory and many of the record photographs are not fully identified and are awkward to retrieve from storage. We plan to remedy this situation in time.

The next major phase of contract work, in the mid-1980s, involved the establishment of a sites inventory – the Industrial Archaeological Record (IAR). This map-based record was derived from information on industrial sites marked on the various editions of the O.S. six-inch maps of the six counties, but excluding Belfast. Certain features, e.g. roads, were omitted from the outset, and the inclusion of limekilns was abandoned at an early stage, because they were absorbing too much of the available resources. Nevertheless, some 7,500 sites have been identified, and the Record is capable of expansion. A system of sub-numbering identifies related features, so that we

estimate there are about 13,000 individual sites and features listed in total. Additional information, such as sites reports, record photographs and drawings, is also stored.

The Greater Belfast Industrial Archaeology Survey (GBIAS) followed a short time later and went one step further than the IAR by including a rapid field survey to establish the presence or absence of the mapped features. The file on extant features includes a brief description and at least one photograph of the site. There are approximately 1,100 sites identified on the maps, and about 450 of these have remains.

The IAR and GBIAS are now combined under the Industrial Heritage Record (IHR). This in turn forms part of the Monuments and Buildings Record (or MBR), which is held by EHS. The MBR is a publicly accessible record which is divided into Archaeology (the SMR), Buildings (including Listed Buildings), Industry, Historic Gardens and Maritime (including the Inter-Tidal Zone). Although there are various subjects and titles involved, the medium to long-term plan, and a fundamental part of our strategy for computerisation, is to produce a 'seamless' record of the built heritage of the six counties.

Some aspects of the SMR have already been computerised, and the sites are loaded into 'Maps In Action', a computer package which superimposes their location over background O.S. maps at a variety of scales. The well-structured IHR is ideal for computerisation, but the Buildings Record is a different matter. This has much more information than the IHR, but is less well organised and will require considerably more work before it can be computerised. The MBR is located within the offices of EHS: Built Heritage, at 5-33 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LA. It is open on week-days (except public holidays). ☎ 01232 543004.

Field survey, mostly pre-ceasefire, saw a systematic field survey on Rathlin Island (in-house), plus large sections of the Co. Antrim coast and glens (contract), adding considerably to the holding of field information within the IHR. Other areas with less extensive field coverage are located in parts of Counties Armagh and Down, and Belfast City.



Ballycopeland Windmill, built in 1784, is the only working windmill in Northern Ireland

Photo: N.I. Environment and Heritage Service