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Ironbridge weekend • Australian notes • steam giants • Boulton's Soho
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COVER PICTURE

Lighthouse at Trinity Buoy Wharf, London (see page 9)

Photo: R. J. M. Carr

AIA Ironbridge Weekend

Margaret Tylee

The 1997 Ironbridge Weekend had the theme 'Problems Presented by the Preservation of Major Structures'. About 50 gathered at the Long Warehouse, Coalbrookdale, on 5-6 April to renew old acquaintances, make new friends and hear an interesting range of speakers. The very full and enjoyable programme was organised and introduced by Gordon Knowles, the AIA Affiliated Societies Officer.

The keynote address was given by Dr Anthony Streeton, Secretary to English Heritage's IA Advisory Panel, on 'Scale, Complexity and Viability: the Future of England's Major Structures'. His talk was an overview of the issues related to the future of major structures such as engineering structures and the buildings and sites associated with extractive, process and manufacturing industries. He discussed whether the listing of a building interfered with any future development and outlined some of the problems and issues which had to be considered, such as economic and social change, changes in technology and perceptions. For example, many people who had unpleasant memories of working in the coal industry were only too glad to see its remains swept away. There were options to be considered; should we try and maintain the building for its original purpose or adapt it for a different use; should it be preserved in its original form or in a later adaptation; should it be preserved as a monument or museum? Examples included the Waltham Abbey site, the Anderton Boat Lift, Battersea Power Station, Salts Mill and the GMex centre. Also, would any scheme be technically or financially viable. Anthony cited the example of railway viaducts now used as walking and cycle paths. He concluded that once all the economic, social, organisational and financial viability factors had been assessed, it was sometimes preferable to record a building rather than conserve or preserve it. This well illustrated talk raised a number of issues to stimulate our thoughts for the weekend.

Dr Peter Wakelin then spoke about the

Blaenavon Ironworks as a practical example of the problems faced when conserving and interpreting a large industrial site. The site dates from 1788-9 and was the first purpose-built multi-furnace ironworks in Wales. By 1796 it was the second largest in Wales, producing 5,400 tons of iron a year and continued in production until closure in 1904. In the 1960s, redevelopment plans were opposed by industrial historians and the site is now the responsibility of Cadw. Peter illustrated the many problems faced by the team, for example the structures were in poor condition and the site was very exposed. He then spoke about the work done over the past 25 years in repairing the furnaces, buildings and water balance tower. There is an ongoing problem of funding. Visitor levels are low and efforts have to be made to attract interest and investment in the site.

Mark Watson, an Inspector of Historic Buildings for Scotland, spoke on 'Listed Building Consent as a Negotiating Tool'. Industrial sites are increasingly threatened by redevelopment, but he argued that this should be seen as an opportunity for an imaginative re-use and re-adaptation of sites rather than a threat. He gave illustrations of listed buildings put to new uses and challenged the view that the best use of a listed building was that for which it was originally built - any use was better than demolition, but piecemeal development should be avoided. He also argued that changes to a building should be made deliberately modern and distinguishable from the original rather than a pastiche or copy. This was illustrated by the Luma Lightbulb factory in Glasgow, now converted into flats and listed in the 1980s. Only the lamp testing tower remains unaltered. Mark showed examples of conversions of flax and jute mills where he had negotiated with the developer over aspects of the work to ensure important features of the buildings remained. In Dundee, nine mills had been converted and three are in the process of being converted. This includes the famous Camperdown Works of Cox Bros, a 35-acre site now converted for leisure purposes, supermarket and housing.

Harley Thomas, Conservation Officer with Shropshire County Council, spoke about the



A trough-full of delegates at the Longdon-upon-Terrin iron aqueduct

Photo: Peter Stanier

problems of preserving a very different type of structure – the Snailbeach Mining Complex. With such a large site it was important to look at the range of structures which made up the whole complex. He also pointed out that most problems could be solved with large amounts of money! The mine was most active in the 1850s when 3,500 tons of ore were mined annually. Lead production ceased in 1911, but mining for barytes continued until 1955. Since then the buildings decayed and were becoming a safety hazard. The County Council realised that something had to be done, initially to consolidate the structures for health and safety reasons and later to interpret the site for visitors. The award of a Department of the Environment Derelict Land Grant allowed for consolidation and preservation but the control of vegetation remains a continuing problem. An award from the National Lottery will now enable the site to be interpreted. To date, £500,000 has been spent on the site.

After lunch, we travelled to Longdon-upon-Tern to view the 62-yard cast-iron aqueduct that formerly carried the Shrewsbury Canal over the River Tern. The aqueduct was designed by Thomas Telford, cast at Ketley and was the first iron trough aqueduct when built in 1796. It now stands isolated in a field, with no sign of the canal which was abandoned in the 1960s. We spoke to the landowner who allowed us to walk across and underneath. He had not experienced any problems, indeed he was not even sure who had responsibility for its upkeep. The structure is listed and was maintained by the DoE, who painted it about 10 years ago.

After a very pleasant dinner at the New Inn in the Blists Hill Museum, Mark Sissons presented a humorous Patents Quiz in which most of us did very badly, but then how many people would recognise the patent for a tape worm extractor or a musical toilet roll holder!

Sunday morning saw us reassemble to hear Shane Gould from the Archaeology Advisory Group, Essex County Council speak on 'A Guide to PPG15 & 16'. These Planning Policy Guidance Notes are issued by government to give advice on planning matters covering archaeology and the historic environment. He described the methodology used in Essex for recording industrial structures which had been started in 1994 and covered sites and buildings from 1750 onwards. Illustrated examples showed where the guidance notes had been used to good effect, such as maltings, World War II airfields, hospitals, a sugar beet factory and the Waltham Abbey site. The ability to insist that developers record sites and buildings as part of the development agreement had proved very important and had added valuable information to the County SMR and the NMR. Shane summed up by saying that it was essential to record a site before development and PPG 15 & 16 can be used to secure adequate records.

'Conservation vs. Conservation – keeping the balance between the Industrial Archaeologist and the Naturalist' was the final presentation given by Alan Oakley, Countryside Manager for Surrey County Council. He proposed that conservation is about compromise and involves balancing the needs of heritage, wildlife and people. He gave three examples in Surrey where the balance was difficult, with strong



Chris Irwin knows an aqueduct when he sees one

Photo: Peter Stanier

feelings on all sides. The Basingstoke Canal was one that could be summed up as 'bats vs. boats'. The canal runs through Surrey and Hampshire and was purchased by the two councils in 1973 with the aim of restoration. The original terminus at Basingstoke is cut off by the Greywell Tunnel, restoration of which would disturb a rare bat colony but would allow boaters access to the whole canal. However, boat users only make up 3% of the canal's users and after travelling through the tunnel they would have to turn round and come back. The Council is in the middle of the debate! The Brockham Lime Works could be developed as a historic site, but public access is difficult and lots of people would disturb the bats (again!) and rare flora and reptiles existing in the microclimate of an inland cliff face. Norbury Park, originally a private estate, is now being opened up to be more accessible and this has destroyed its original

purpose as a private park. Alan had no magic solution for these problems, but stressed the importance of all parties working together and to prevent developers with no understanding of the problems coming in and destroying it all.

Time was allowed for members' contributions and at the end of the morning we heard Mike Clarke talking about canals in Germany, Roger Holden on Non-Conformist Chapels and Meeting Houses, Amber Patrick on her work as a consultant on Malthouses for the Ancient Monuments Society and Paul Sowen on investigating holes in the ground – another form of a large structure. Hilary Malaws, AIA President, summed up the weekend and there was general agreement that the topic was important, solutions were difficult without money and resources, but that we were now better informed about the problem.



Discussion beneath the aqueduct

Photo: Peter Stanier