

## EDITORIAL

In *BIAS Journal 3* we drew attention to the industrial monuments most in need of preservation in the city of Bristol. The priorities which we distinguished then - the Floating Harbour, the s.s. *Great Britain*, and Old Temple Meads Station being the outstanding items - continue to give cause for concern, with the ultimate home of the *Great Britain* still being debated and uncertainty hanging over the future of Temple Meads. The problems of industrial archaeologists in the Bristol region, however, are not confined to the area of the city itself, and we intend in this supplementary manifesto to indicate some of the other monuments requiring imaginative policy decisions and sympathetic treatment. It is particularly appropriate to do this because in the projected reform of local government Bristol will become the centre of a Greater Bristol - Area 26 in the plan - coinciding with the region which is already the concern of BIAS.

Starting to the north of Bristol, the neighbouring stretches of Gloucestershire merging off into the woollen and engineering industrial districts around Dursley and Stroud have already undergone considerable industrial and residential development as a result of the aeroplane and aero-engine industries at Filton and the extension of the industrial estates to the north of Avonmouth. This growth has been further stimulated by the opening of the Severn Bridge and the completion of the Almondsbury motorway intersection, and the emergence of "Sevenside" as one of the major growth areas in Britain will ensure its future importance. But despite the existence of large brickworks at Cattybrook, quarries at Yate, and a distinguished bee-hive boiler at Westerleigh, the district cannot be said to have great industrial archaeological importance. The Severn Tunnel has lost its steam pumping engines and the Sharpness Railway Bridge has been demolished. Frampton Cotterell still has a windmill tower and a hat factory, but neither are very elegant buildings. No special case for industrial preservation need be made here.

Going up the River Avon towards Bath one is immediately in the heart of the Bristol coalfield, with its original base in the Forest of Kingswood and its southward extension into North Somerset. No coal has been won in Kingswood for a generation and the coalfield is being rapidly built over by suburban developers who often fail to take the precaution of an elementary industrial archaeological check on their land before building on it, to the cost of subsequent house-owners who lose parts of their property with alarming regularity down abandoned mine shafts, the covering of which has rotted or collapsed under the weight of new masonry. Such lack of planning is regrettable, but there can be no serious expectation of preserving any of these old mine workings. The industrial monument which is still worth protecting is the Avon & Gloucestershire Railway, the tramroad running south from Mangotsfield to the Avon near Keynsham to serve the needs of the South Gloucestershire coal mines. With its cuttings and embankments, sleeper-blocks, bridges and tunnels, large sections of this could be rescued and made into an exciting public footpath within a "linear park". A new urgency has been given to this proposal by the spread of Dutch elm disease in the area, threatening damage and upheaval when trees are felled.

South of the Avon, the Somerset coalfield is a somewhat different story. Here coal working has lingered longer, being not quite extinct, with the linked collieries of Kilmersdon and Writhlington still raising coal in the autumn of 1971, and suburban development does not present such an imminent threat as it does in Kingswood and the adjoining districts. BIAS played a part in the preservation of the Old Mills colliery engine, now in pieces in Bristol City Museum awaiting a decision about a site for the new museum so that it can, at last, be re-erected. But the other steam engines which survived only a few years ago have now disappeared, and the opportunities of preserving the pit-head apparatus of a coal mine are now limited to the two still operating, if anybody can arouse sufficient interest to take the necessary initiative before they, too, are closed.

The valley of the Avon between Bristol and Bath was the birth-place of the British brass industry in the eighteenth century, and remains of this important contribution to national prosperity and technological progress survive at Warmley, Kelston, Saltford, and Keynsham, the latter being the site of the industry when it finally expired in 1927. Not many of these relics warrant preservation, but it would be an enlightened and public-spirited decision if the responsible authorities could get together and choose one site on which to make a permanent memorial to the brass industry. The Kelston brass works is probably the best candidate, for although the site is at present heavily overgrown there are two annealing towers still standing and it could be developed as an excellent picnic area. The stump of the remarkable and little known statue of Neptune at Warmley Tower, made largely out of the distinctive black copper-slag blocks from the local brass works, should certainly be included in any preservation project for the brass industry. Another significant industrial monument of this district is Albert Mill, Keynsham, which was probably the last log-wood crushing mill in Britain. Two water-wheels survive and also some of the cutting and crushing machinery.

Bath in many respects a twin-city to Bristol, though very different in physical character and collective temperament. Like Bristol, Bath has acute planning problems, and there the emphasis has understandably been on the preservation of the uniquely coherent Georgian character of the city. Bath also, however, has its industrial monuments, and these require sympathetic attention along with the elegant terraces and streets. Three of these are of national interest. First, the Victoria Bridge, designed by the Westcountry engineer James Dredge with a patent technique of suspension construction. The bridge, over the River Avon, is dominated by neighbouring factories and sadly neglected, but it is still sound and well worth careful restoration. Secondly, Green Park Station, one-time terminus of the Midland Railway branch from Mangotsfield and of the Somerset and Dorset Junction Railway from the south, stands badly dilapidated as the planners procrastinate about its fate. With its distinguished arched train shed and classical facade this station ranks second in the region, next to Old Temple Meads, as a railway building worth preservation. Incidentally, parts of the Somerset & Dorset alignment within the city are being preserved as a footpath and nature walk, and further south the Somerset & Dorset Railway Society is restoring steam locomotives in an engine shed at Radstock. Thirdly, the Kennet & Avon Canal comes to its conjunction with the River Avon in Bath, after descending the Widcombe flight of seven locks. Five of these locks are now either restored or in process of restoration: the other two will be replaced by a single lock in order to clear the way for a new road. The city is interested in the preservation of the whole stretch of the canal within its boundaries, which is doubtless a help to the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust in its ambitious plan to get the whole canal into working order again. A further and quite different item of industrial archaeological interest in Bath is the unique collection of workshop machinery and assorted fittings in Bowler's metal and mineral water factory. It is important that at least a selection of this should be preserved if it proves impossible to keep the collection on its present site.

Beyond Bath, the Kennet & Avon Canal proceeds at one level to Bradford-on-Avon, and this stretch along the beautiful Limpley Stoke valley already provides many of the amenities of a linear park. It also has several important industrial monuments, with the two aqueducts at Dundas and Avoncliffe, and the water-powered beam engines at Claverton being of outstanding interest. The future prospects of all these monuments are good, thanks to the enthusiasm of the canal preservationists and the co-operation of various official bodies, including British Waterways Board. Engineering students from the University of Bath are at present engaged on the restoration of the Claverton engines.

At Dundas Aqueduct the main canal was joined by the Somersetshire Coal Canal, running almost due west up the valleys of the Midford and Cam Brooks to serve the transport needs of the local coalfield.

The canal was replaced by a railway in 1910, although this also has since disappeared and not much now remains except an occasional stretch of earthworks, a few bridges, and an aqueduct at Dunkerton. The most remarkable feature of the canal, however, was the linking of the two levels at Combe Hay, and remains of most of the 22 locks by which this junction was eventually achieved may still be found, overgrown in the woods, and are certainly worthy of preservation. But the weird "caisson lock" by which the link was originally made has gone, and so far BIAS expeditions and other excavations have failed to locate it precisely.

South of the Somerset coalfield the Bristol region is bounded by the Mendip Hills, home of the once flourishing lead and calamine mining industries. The working of lead in particular has long and romantic associations with the district, but there are now few remains other than the "gruffy" ground and fragments of buddies, condensing flues, and other buildings at Charterhouse, Priddy, and Smitham Hill. The preservation of the few last relics as part of a general scheme for conserving and developing Mendip as an area of outstanding natural beauty has become urgent, because the pressure of other users (farming, camping facilities, etc.) is eroding them rapidly. On the fringes of Mendip, the Bristol Waterworks reservoir at Blagdon was equipped with two pairs of steam beam engines, one pair of which has been thoughtfully preserved and maintained in good condition.

From Mendip to the sea, and so to one of the important modern industries in the shape of the leisure amenities of Weston, Clevedon and Portishead. Few of these provide candidates for industrial monuments, but there is one of exceptional interest - Clevedon Pier. The distinguished and graceful structure was a hundred years old in 1969: the centenary was duly observed in the pages of *BIAS Journal 2*. But in the autumn of 1970 disaster struck, two of the wrought-iron arches collapsing during a test which put an unintentionally heavy load upon them. <sup>1</sup> Despite some local controversy; an appeal for £75,000 has been launched to restore the pier, and it is certain that it should rank high amongst

the industrial monuments of the region.

In summary, the Bristol region has a group of industrial monuments which require careful treatment, and it is up to industrial archaeologists to ensure that they receive it by putting the case for them to the responsible owners and planning authorities. We recommend that:

1. As much of the route of the Avon & Gloucestershire Railway as practicable should be acquired
2. Kilmersdon or Writhlington colliery should be adopted for development as a permanent monument to the coal mining industry, possibly in conjunction with the preservation of a length of railway track under the auspices of the Somerset & Dorset Railway Society.
3. Kelston brass works should be developed as a memorial to the Bristol brass industry.
4. Albert Mill, Keynsham, with its external water wheel, should be preserved.
5. Victoria Bridge, Bath, should be restored to and maintained in good condition.
6. Green Park Station, Bath, should be preserved, possibly as a museum-exhibition hall complex.
7. Every effort should be made to assist the Kennet
8. A selection, at least, of Bowler's equipment should be preserved in Bath.
9. The surviving relics of the Somersetshire Coal Canal, and especially the flight of locks at Combe Hay, should be preserved.
10. The relics of the Mendip lead industry should be protected from further decay and fitted into a scheme for a comprehensive "Mendip Park".
11. Bristol Waterworks should be praised for preserving the fine pair of beam engines at Blagdon and encouraged to continue to do so.
12. The appeal to restore and preserve Clevedon Pier should be wholeheartedly supported by industrial archaeologists.