

BRISTOL INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

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Since the early 1960 s, the City Council has invested over £150,000 in building up the City Museum's Technology collections. You could be forgiven for asking what there was to show for that investment because all the money has had to be spent on those aspects of museum work which the public does not generally see - storage facilities, workshops and staff to catalogue and document the collection. Until now, apart from minor changes over the years the only items from the collections on public display have been the few horse drawn vehicles, ship models and items of machinery exhibited in a small part of the main museum and art gallery building in Queens Road. Many of the larger exhibits acquired during the 60 s and early 70 s have never been on public display because they were simply too big and heavy for existing galleries.

The idea of using a warehouse or transit shed in the City Docks to house the museum's transport and industry collection had been suggested on many occasions. However, it was not until the financial crisis hit the building industry in the mid 70 s that serious consideration was given to the idea of adopting one of them for use by the museum.

'M' Shed on Princes Wharf is not the most attractive of the dockside buildings but it offers plenty of space (about 20,000 sq ft), with excellent access and the bonus of existing railway lines still connected to the main line via the route over Ashton Swing bridge. A project to convert part of the building to display exhibits from the museum's technology collection was quickly costed out in the autumn of 1976 and to many people's surprise including the museum staff, the project was included by the City Council in its capital programme for 1977.

The scheme is a simple one: about 50 of the biggest and best of the exhibits from the collection have been selected for a quick 'wash and brush-up' and these will go on display to the public on 18th March on the ground floor of the newly converted 'M' Shed. The second floor of the building will be brought into use as a display area as more exhibits are restored and funds become available. Local industry will be asked to sponsor restoration work and display projects for the second phase of the project, but in the short term the City Council is paying the lions'-share of the bill in order to get this important collection on show to the public as quickly as possible.

The conversion work and initial display of 50 items will cost £54,000. Bristol City Council is paying £45,000 and the Area Museum Service for the South West is paying the balance. Two separate Job Creation Schemes employing a total of 16 unemployed tradesmen and school leavers have also contributed a great deal to the project both in terms of basic cleaning and restoration of exhibits and painting 'M' Shed itself. As one might expect in times of economic stringency less than 10% of the money available is being spent on the museum display as such, so early visitors to the museum after

it opens must not expect too much by way of lavish presentation, that will have to come later!

The exhibits will be displayed in seven main groups - maritime, horse-drawn vehicles, self-propelled road vehicles, railways, aircraft, local machinery and power technology (steam engines etc). The local enthusiast might be surprised by what is not exhibited. There are some surprisingly large gaps in the collections particularly of local industrial machinery. Unfortunately the museum was not actively collecting industrial material to any great extent before 1960 by which time many once-important industries had either changed their machinery and methods of production or gone out of business altogether. Nevertheless, there are some really fine exhibits which illustrate many aspects of local trade, industry and transport. For example there is the Wanderer caravan, built by Bristol Wagon and Carriage Works in 1880 for Gordon-Stables, the first president of the Caravan Club. A full size Bristol Sycamore helicopter will be displayed alongside examples of Bristol-built aero engines, the Pegasus, Hercules, and Proteus. Local engineering will be represented by a variety of exhibits and illustrations including the neat little 2 cylinder horizontal steam engine built by the Armside Engine Co. to power the bascule bridge which carried the 1872 Bristol Harbour Railway line across Bathurst Basin junction lock. There are pin-making machines from a factory in Staple Hill and products from another well known engineering firm George Adlam and Sons of Fishponds.

Opening the first display in the Bristol Industrial Museum in 'M' Shed is just a beginning. The local authority continues to be under severe financial pressure and finding the staff and resources to develop the full potential of the Bristol Industrial Museum is not going to be easy. A new organisation the Bristol 'Magpies' has been set up to help finance and develop many aspects of work of the Museum and Art Gallery. One of the first projects which the 'Magpies' will be co-ordinating is the operation of a museum steam locomotive along the tracks on Prince's Wharf. Operations will be started as soon as possible after the museum opens, probably on Sundays to begin with. The Department of Transport Railway Inspectorate have already approved the proposal to give passengers a ride in a GWR *Toad* brake van coupled to the museum's 1934 Peckett locomotive *Henbury*.

This locomotive should be quite at home puffing up and down Wapping Wharf sidings - it was used throughout its working life by the Port of Bristol authority as a docks shunting engine. The engine has been restored to working order by the Somerset and Dorset Railway Group and is at present at Washford on the West Somerset line. She will be coming to BIM quite soon in the spring. Any BIAS members interested in lending a hand to get *Henbury* ready for the road should contact Paul Elkin or David Martin, c/o the City Museum or 3 Christchurch Road, Clifton