

EDITORIAL A BIAS MANIFESTO

There has been a heavy wastage of Bristol's industrial monuments in recent years. Many parts of the city have been redeveloped or are now in course of renewal, and in the process the evidence of old industries and transport systems has been cleared away. The remains of these obsolete industries were generally messy and unedifying, so that it is unnecessary to lament their obliteration, although one could have hoped for a more systematic attempt to record them before they were destroyed. But a few of these industrial monuments were of real significance. It was a loss to the character of Bristol, for example, when Redcliff Shot Tower - the first place in the world where lead shot was made by pouring the molten metal from a height - was demolished. Similarly, the destruction of the Great Western Cotton Factory broke a long-standing link between Bristol and the cotton textile industry, as well as removing an impressive building from the city landscape.

Even with these two examples, however, it may be argued that the requirements of road-widening in Redcliff and of industrial redevelopment in Barton Hill made inevitable the removal of buildings which had become unsound with age and could no longer perform efficiently any useful function. It is never a simple matter to justify the preservation of an industrial building, machine, or other artefact which has outlived its original purpose and failed to fulfil a new one. A city with such a varied industrial history as Bristol has a large stock of such objects, and there can obviously be no question of anything more than a highly selective preservation of a few of the most distinguished industrial monuments. But conversely, a city with so many industrial and commercial associations should be extremely anxious to preserve as part of its permanent heritage such monuments of distinction, and it is a matter of great concern that so far the City Fathers have shown distressingly little imagination in this matter. The future of three industrial monuments of this quality is currently very much in the balance.

THREE OUTSTANDING MONUMENTS

1. *The Floating Harbour*

First is the Floating Harbour. This highly distinctive waterway, running its sinuous course through the heart of the city, has been intimately associated with the prosperity of Bristol since its completion in 1809

It is now obsolete as a harbour, and almost everybody is agreed that the future of Bristol as a great port lies at the mouth of the River Avon and no longer around the ancient wharves of the Frome, the Grove, and Welsh Back. The future of the Floating Harbour is involved in the Bristol Docks Bill which has been making its way through the Parliamentary procedures in 1970. The disturbing thing about this measure is that so little thought seems to have been given to the preservation of as much of the Harbour as possible for amenity and aesthetic reasons, which accounts for the unfriendly reception which it has received from amenity interests, including BIAS. It should not be necessary to spell out the case for preserving the Floating Harbour, because it is such an integral part of the city and one giving the City Centre a uniqueness which should not be lightly thrown aside. Yet the course of the City Docks controversy has demonstrated that there is a need for great vigilance if this priceless asset is to be maintained.

2. *S.S. Great Britain*

Closely associated with the future of the Floating Harbour is the steam ship Great Britain. Miraculously restored to her native city in 1970, returning to the dry dock in which she was built exactly 127 years after she was launched there on 19 July 1843, this magnificent rusting hulk of wrought iron, the first large screw-propelled iron ship in the world, and the brain-child of that adopted Bristol genius I.K. Brunel, was greeted with enthusiasm by thousands of citizens but by an ominous gloom on the part of the City Fathers. To these custodians of the city pence, unable to recognise an outstanding Bristol achievement when they see one, the great ship appeared as an embarrassment rather than as an opportunity of extraordinarily good fortune. It is much to be hoped that this attitude will mellow into a more encouraging support for the restoration project, and that Bristol will not look this gift horse in the mouth.

3. *Old Temple Meads*

The third industrial monument of which the future is at present in doubt is Old Temple Meads Station, another of Brunel's contributions to the heritage of Bristol. The station was the original western terminus of the Great Western Railway, and as it was completed in 1840 it has the distinction of being the oldest main line railway terminus to survive in anything like its complete condition anywhere in the world. This fact alone should surely guarantee sympathetic treatment. But this has not been the case. The station has long

been disused by British Railways except as a car park, and it is no secret that the railway authorities would like to develop the site of the elegant timber-roofed train shed. Not to be outdone, the City Fathers have made it clear that they hope to demolish the old station facade in order to permit the widening of Temple Gate. Between these two public bodies, this remarkable industrial monument seems likely to be sacrificed as soon as the redevelopment of the area can be started.

More Worries

These are the major anxieties of industrial archaeologists in Bristol at the present time, but they are not the only ones. The future of the stump of one remaining glass cone on Redcliff Hill - an accidental survival of a once-important Bristol industry - is far from clear. The functional bulk of Bush's warehouse, at the end of Narrow Quay, is likely to be shattered by the city's plan to push a new road through it and across St. Augustine's Reach of the Floating Harbour. The area of Crews Hole on the east side of Bristol, one of sad industrial dereliction at present, seems likely to undergo the usual piecemeal redevelopment in the not too distant future, destroying the opportunity for a graceful preservation. The over-all situation is one of such anxiety and urgency that it is necessary for Bristol industrial archaeologists to define their priorities and to use whatever influence they can muster to persuade the citizens of Bristol of the merits of their case.

PRIORITIES FOR PRESERVATION

The Floating Harbour as an amenity

The first priority is to safeguard the Floating Harbour as a permanent feature of the city, providing a through waterway for small craft, a marina, and a general amenity with careful redevelopment around its edges. The association of Bristol with maritime activity can be preserved visually by berthing attractive ships in St. Augustine's Reach, and even by the construction of replicas of historic craft such as John Cabot's Matthew. In such a setting the Great Britain could be the most distinguished exhibit, although it may be more appropriate to keep her in her own dry dock. Wherever she is preserved, she is likely to become a major tourist attraction.

A traditional Bristol quay

Secondly, as part of the redevelopment around the edges of the Floating Harbour, the opportunity should be grasped of remodelling part of the Canon's Marsh frontage onto the Harbour as a historical reconstruction of a Bristol quay. Existing buildings could be moved to this site, and replicas of others constructed. A building such as the Hatchet Inn, which at present has been left forlornly in the middle

of overpowering new buildings, could well be moved in this way. Ideally, such a project should be on the Narrow Quay side of the Reach, terminating in Bush's warehouse, but new development has already taken place here and the Canon's Marsh side is the best substitute. The transit shed closest to the City Centre could usefully be preserved - possibly as a Museum store? - with the two remaining hydraulic cranes installed outside it.

Cumberland Basin

In the third place, and still as part of the Floating Harbour complex, the area around Cumberland Basin and the Underfall Yard provides a wonderful opportunity for positive action to preserve a group of significant industrial monuments. The new road works have harmonised remarkably well with the Cumberland Basin, and the Basin itself, the gateway to the City Docks, is retained in the proposals of the current Bill as a place to receive visiting ships within reasonable distance of the City Centre. What is required in order to take full advantage of this feature is the sympathetic development of the surrounding area, retaining the Brunel Lock and bridges, the splendid collection of old machines and the hydraulic power station in the Underfall Yard, and improving provision for the circulation and recreation of visitors.

A plan for Old Temple Meads

A fourth major proposal for imaginative preservation concerns Old Temple Meads. It is important that the authorities concerned should agree on the future of this building as soon as possible, so that an acceptable plan for its treatment can be laid down. Fundamental to such a plan should be the preservation of Brunel's train shed. Ideally, again, this would have made a superb railway museum, but it is probably too late to promote such a development, and it may be necessary to envisage its continued retention as a car park. In any event, the shell of the building requires preservation and careful maintenance. As for the Temple Gate frontage, it would be perfectly possible to dismantle this and to reassemble it against the end of the train shed, having cleared out the intervening 100 ft. of nondescript office and storage space, using the area so saved for road widening and for a circulation space inviting inspection of the station. Such schemes have been carried out very successfully elsewhere and would not be expensive in comparison with the road works which make it necessary.

Redcliff Glass Cone

Fifthly, the Redcliff Glass Cone requires sympathetic treatment. With some judicious restoration of the brickwork and clearance of adjacent ruins this could become a feature of interest to display either in a small park or in conjunction with the development of housing or other buildings.

A Crews Hole Park

Another practicable suggestion is that an area on Trooper's Hill overlooking the Crews Hole valley and the industrial landscape of East Bristol should be designated as a public park, with the curious chimney preserved as a feature in its centre and with a view-finder provided to indicate the points of interest in the panorama below. The hill-top itself has been worked for coal as part of the Kingswood Coalfield, and the whole area is one rich in industrial associations, a fragment of which is worth preserving.

A Brunel statue

Finally, why not a statue to I.K. Brunel? This great engineer who did so much to shape the landscape and

industrial prosperity of Bristol deserves this honour from the city which he served so well. A larger-than-life statue, representing Brunel looking over the Cumberland Basin towards the Clifton Bridge which he designed, or perhaps fitting into the redevelopment of the Canon's Marsh waterfront already recommended, would be a most appropriate public demonstration of a willingness and determination on the part of the people of Bristol to take their history as seriously as it deserves to be taken. This means that they will show their concern to make Bristol a colourful and lively place to live in.

A city with such a regard for its past may look forward with confidence to its future.