

EDITORIAL; THE PROGRESS OF CONSERVATION

The cause of conservation has advanced by great strides in recent years, and the study of industrial archaeology has both promoted and benefited from this development. The first objective in the preservation of industrial monuments - apart from rescuing particular buildings and structures from destruction, which is likely to remain a primary area for local initiatives - has been that of securing for them the same kind of consideration that is now taken for granted in such cases as Neolithic burial mounds and Medieval castles. This has been largely achieved in Great Britain by extending the legislative protection already established for ancient monuments and historic buildings to include industrial structures. No new legislation has been necessary, as it has been possible, through the sympathetic co-operation of the Department of the Environment, to interpret the existing Ancient Monuments and Town and Country Planning Acts in order to encompass industrial monuments, so that a growing number of old bridges, windmills, obsolete blast furnaces, and such like, are being "scheduled" as ancient monuments, while many buildings of industrial significance are being "listed" under the procedures for the protection of historic buildings laid down in the Planning Acts.

Although both these legislative procedures are now administered by the DOE, they evolved separately and from the industrial archaeological point of view cater for different types of monument. Over the last decade, the Council for British Archaeology Research Committee on industrial Archaeology has worked out a method of recommending industrial monuments for legislative protection through its "panel" of experts, on which representatives of the DOE sit. The recommendations are submitted either by members of the panel or, more usually, by the CBA Survey Officer on Industrial Monuments, who is in close touch with field workers in all parts of the country and who himself makes systematic field surveys as a result of which he prepares his own recommendations to the Panel. The presence of DOE representatives at the Panel ensures the recommendations a very serious consideration, and a high proportion of them are eventually adopted.

The number of "scheduled" industrial monuments is increasing steadily, and a few, such as the Stott Park Bobbin Mill in the Lake District, have been taken into guardianship by the DOE, which is the highest possible level of state protection. Also, the proportion of industrial structures in the category of "listed" buildings has grown rapidly as a result of widening the date restriction on buildings in response to the mounting interest in industrial monuments. This is the course of action which has been devised for England and Wales, and with a few modifications it applies to Scotland as well.

Legislative protection of industrial monuments is a safety net which does not guarantee survival but which provides a warning when a scheduled or listed monument is threatened and sets standards of national values in discussions between local authorities, property owners, and amenity societies. The owner of a scheduled monument is required to give three months notice of any intention to demolish, remove, repair, or alter the monument, and this acts both as a disincentive to such action because of the official permission which has to be obtained, and as a means of registering the fact with the owner that he has in his possession an object of national significance. Nevertheless, a scheduled structure can collapse through neglect; it can in some cases be de-scheduled; and a determined owner can overcome the restrictions set upon his property. Similarly, with protection as historic buildings through the listing procedure, the elaborate legal obstacles to change may be subverted by a persistent owner. This is most difficult in the case of Grade I listed buildings, which are regarded as of "outstanding importance". Old Temple Meads Station comes into this category, and the known desire of British Rail to re develop the site demonstrates that this protection gives no ultimate security. But Grade II listed buildings, which are regarded as of "special interest" and given a star as Grade II* when they are deemed to be particularly important, are more vulnerable. Many Bristol warehouses and Bath Green Park Station come into this category. It may be considered a serious weakness of all this legislative protection that it relies on a partnership between the state and the owner to achieve security for a monument.

Other forms of state provision which have been adapted for the preservation of industrial structures or established specifically to secure it include the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments and the grants for Technological Preservation available through the Science Museum. There are separate Royal Commissions for England, Wales and Scotland. Their function is to record historical monuments, which they do to a high standard of professional excellence. Unfortunately, the task is enormous and the rate of progress exceedingly slow. The Commissioners for England have spent many years covering only a small part of the country, and have so far given very little attention to industrial monuments. Some valuable pioneering work has been done, however, by the Commissioners in Wales and Scotland, so that it has been possible to make a permanent record of a few industrial monuments in these countries. Whereas the Commissions have been in existence for many years, the Science Museum fund is still only in its second year of operation. In theory, anybody involved in an industrial preservation project can apply to it, but in practice the terms on which public money can be dispensed tend to be very restrictive: it is only available for moving,

re-constructing, or purchasing an artefact; it is only granted on a pound-for-pound basis; it can only be given to some form of trust or museum which will ensure adequate access; and it cannot be awarded for acquisitions before 1969. Despite such restrictions and early teething troubles, the grant is likely to become a very valuable instrument in the preservation of industrial structures.

The development of this institutional machinery at national level for protecting industrial monuments is a substantial achievement for industrial archaeology, but nobody would suggest that it is all that matters. It does, however, promote a few reflections on the progress of industrial conservation. In the first place, it is worth remembering that the whole notion of conservation is a relatively new one. As recently as a hundred years ago, the farmers of Avebury were breaking up the stones of the Great Circle, and lesser monuments such as barrows and earthworks were still being ploughed out in the present century. The Ancient Monuments legislation, and that for Historic Buildings which followed it, was thus a tardy recognition of the importance of the physical aspects of the national heritage, and the fact that it has been extended in time and scope to cover all sorts of monuments and structures reflects the growing awareness of these heritage features.

Moreover, this recognition of the many-sided quality of the national heritage is itself part of a more generalised environmental consciousness which has become increasingly apparent and important in recent years. As we become more and more alert to the fact that we live in a crowded island on an over-populated planet, the need to maintain ecological balance in order to produce sufficient food and to conserve irreplaceable minerals has emerged as a matter of pressing urgency. As part of the ecological balance, the heritage of past artefacts and other physical achievements has come to assume significance as a factor helping to preserve the delicate equilibrium of modern societies. By giving depth and meaning to the environment, the heritage component serves to enrich life and make leisure more enjoyable, and so the conservation of a representative selection of heritage items has come to be adopted as an important planning policy.

This has not happened easily or accidentally. It has, indeed, involved a fundamental change of mind on the part of city planners, local government leaders, and others in authority, and the change is still far from complete. But its extent may be gauged clearly in Avon County by the example of the City of Bath, where the change has been accompanied by a blaze of publicity for the local planning problems. The situation, however, is by no means unique to Bath. Until recently, every town in the country saw its major planning objective as re-development, involving the destruction of so-called "slum" property, comprehensive clearance of sites, and brand new construction designed to take as much traffic as possible.

The result of this policy has been the perpetration of what are now widely recognised as ghastly planning mistakes such as Broadmead Shopping Centre in Bristol. But in order to extricate ourselves from the consequence of these mistakes, we are having to undergo a change of heart and mind: to recognise, in short, that conservation of the best of the past has a higher priority than "modernisation" and comprehensive redevelopment. The fact that the change is beginning to take place is due largely to the persistence of conservationists through such bodies as the Bath Preservation Trust and, on a more modest scale, our own Society.

We are bound to wonder if the change will last. Is the conservationist movement a passing fad, a flash in the pan which will soon be extinguished? Undoubtedly many speculators, developers, and city planners are hoping that it will be so, and that if they play things coolly for a year or two the pace of ruthless modernisation will be resumed without a public outcry. Or will it be a permanent change of policy - a sign that our society has come to maturity and achieved a harmony and understanding of its own resources which will enable it both to survive and advance to greater creativity in the future? The answer will depend largely upon the performance of the conservationists in the next decade. They have made their initial point and won an encouraging response. But if it is to be maintained they will need to be constantly vigilant, preparing careful and fully reasoned cases for the causes they adopt after a discreet selection of all the possibilities available to them, keeping up firm but courteous pressure on public authorities, and, perhaps most important of all, thinking ahead in order to anticipate the next conservation problems. In too many cases the preservationists arrive on the scene too late to arrest the vital planning decisions which open the way to a succession of consequential steps that are cumulatively disastrous. One such case in point is the devastation being wrought in the Mendip area by limestone quarrying: another has been the failure to take full advantage of abandoned canal and railway routes.

In BIAS, as in other preservation-orientated societies, there is thus much to be done which will keep us busy for a long time to come. Industrial archaeology is not concerned only with preservation. It is also heavily involved in recording industrial monuments, and in interpreting their significance in social and technological history. But the physical remains are of central importance to the study of industrial archaeology, and the sympathetic preservation of a selection of these is of vital importance to it. Just as the study has risen to public recognition on a wave of conservationist concern about the environment, it is imperative that it should continue to identify itself with conservationist priorities in planning matters and seek purposefully to protect the stock of significant industrial monuments for posterity.