



Professor Angus Buchanan

Royal Commissioner par excellence - A personal appreciation of Angus Buchanan's term as a RCHME Commissioner.

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This note marks the end of Professor R.A. Buchanan's 14 years of service as a Royal Commissioner on the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England. Appropriately this also coincides with the 25th anniversary of the founding of BIAS itself and the 21st anniversary of his close involvement with the Industrial Monuments Survey. The note is written from the standpoint of a friend and erstwhile colleague and thus does not attempt to be an objective assessment nor do the opinions expressed necessarily represent those of the RCHME. Angus took up his appointment as Royal Commissioner with responsibility for industrial archaeology in January 1979 but the circumstances that led to that appointment had their origins some 15 years before. In the mid-1960s, as well as organising the extra mural classes that led to the formation of BIAS, Angus had assumed responsibility for the National Record of Industrial Monuments. The NRIM was the formalisation of the CBA survey cards that had been introduced in 1963 by the Industrial Archaeology Research Committee as an aid to the Industrial Monuments Survey being undertaken by Rex Wailes. When Rex retired in 1971 the CBA appointed a full-time Survey Officer and the Centre for the Study of the History of Technology at the University of Bath generously offered a base for the Survey. Thus, when I took up my post of Survey Officer later that year, I was able to benefit from the experience of the Centre's advisers such as Tom Rolt, Sir Arthur Elton, Professor Rupert Hall and Neil Cossons and was in daily contact with Angus, George Watkins, Owen Ward and Eric Delony, the visiting Fulbright Scholar who is now Head of HAER.

The rather informal guest relationship between the Survey and the Centre was regularised in 1977 when responsibility for the Survey's funding was assumed by the DoE's Directorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings and the Survey Officer became a member of the University staff nominally supervised by Angus. Throughout this period the Survey had built-in contact with the RCHME though the former's management committee - the Advisory Panel for Industrial Monuments - which had been created in 1967 to monitor the work of the Survey and to recommend, when appropriate, statutory protection for industrial sites. In the late 1970s the Royal Commission itself had been edging, albeit warily, towards greater involvement with industrial recording. One such early essay was the commissioning of survey work on the railway structures on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in preparation for a small book to commemorate the 150th anniversary of that railway in 1980. The appointment of a new RCHME Secretary gave much needed impetus to this fledgling commitment as Dr Fowler had a personal interest in industrial archaeology. Discussions were taking place between Dr Fowler and Peter White of the Directorate on the future of the Industrial Monuments Survey at this time and it was recognised that it

suited both parties to transfer the Survey to RCHME. To facilitate this, and to strengthen the industrial archaeological interest in the Commission, it was decided to appoint a Royal Commissioner with specific responsibility for industrial archaeology. Angus was approached as the obvious choice and subsequently took up his appointment in January 1979.

One of Angus's first tasks was to comment on the draft manuscript of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway publication. The role of reading and approving texts of books on a variety of industrial subjects was to be a staple chore over the next 14 years. His work went far beyond the passive commenting on texts. He was involved in the initial advisory, planning and monitoring stages of work of the Commission's industrial projects and especially the joint projects. It is particularly gratifying that all these latter projects including Liverpool Docks, Stoke-on-Trent Potworks, Greater Manchester Cotton Mills and East Cheshire Textile Mills should have come to successful fruition with the publication of volumes.

It has, however, been the quiet, behind the scenes, support, encouragement and, when necessary, lobbying on behalf of industrial archaeology that to my mind has been Angus's most significant contribution. The simple statistic of the increase in the number of staff within the Commission dedicated to industrial subjects bears witness to this advocacy. In 1981 when the Survey was finally absorbed into the Commission, I was a lone voice for industrial archaeology surrounded by traditional architectural historians and field archaeologists. Now there are three other field staff in the Threatened Buildings Section recruited for their industrial archaeological experience. In the National Monuments Record a further three staff have been recruited on a similar basis and at least two other senior staff have industrial subjects as a major component of their work. Furthermore all the local archaeological field offices routinely undertake the survey of industrial sites whether it be mining landscapes in Devon, Derbyshire, Cumbria or the North Pennines or gunpowder mills on Dartmoor, at Faversham or in London. The Commission is therefore now equipped to deal with the industrial tasks as diverse as emergency recording of mill complexes about to be altered or demolished, the recording of, and archiving of material on, coal mines facing closure, the drawing up of guide lines on the compilation of registers of contaminated land, and the enhancement of sites and monuments records with industrial material.

Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of the change in attitude with the Commission has been the decision to relocate the headquarters and archive to the former GWR General Office at Swindon. Whenever BIAS members travel by train to London they will pass the RCHME office with its prominent bas-reliefs of GWR engines and perhaps be reminded of the contribution their first chairman made during his term as Royal Commissioner.