

Editorial

In our editorial to Journal 27 we wrote of the need for BIAS to strengthen its efforts on the conservation and research fronts and to formulate policy and strategy to guide the Society's efforts at a time of rapid change in the Bristol area.

The past year has seen some pleasing progress in conservation matters. Saltford Brass Mill was formally opened in July at an enjoyable and successful ceremony and a photograph of the site is prominent in English Heritage's recent policy statement on IA. Restoration work on the former Rowe Brothers Leadworks on Canons Marsh has continued and another of the region's monuments to lead manufacture which was under threat, the Sheldon Bush Shot Tower in Cheese Lane, Bristol, has now been included in the listing of 21 post-war industrial and commercial structures. The Saltford 'reopening' was a significant achievement for the Avon Industrial Buildings Trust whose work was generously supported by Avon County Council and its officers, Mary Stacey and Jessica Laurence.

On the research front, it is good to report that officers of the Brunel Society formally handed over their funds to BIAS at our 1995 AGM and we now await the first entries for the award of the BIAS Brunel Prize. It is expected that the prize will be awarded in 1997 and every two years thereafter for original archaeological and research work on IA of the Bristol region.

BIAS committee has not neglected the third or strategic dimension. The BIAS President's set of principles for the future of the floating harbour as published in Journal 27 has been adopted as 'policy' in discussions on the development of 'Harbourside'. However, the need to respond to two quite separate events has caused the Committee to undertake a significant reappraisal of BIAS's overall strategy and operation in conservation and research. The first, the demise of Avon County Council at the end of March 1996, was expected. The second, the unexpected and tragic death of Ron Fullagar, has added further urgency to our discussions.

Avon county came into existence after BIAS was formed but has provided a convenient geographical

and administrative focus for the Society's activities for most of its existence. We now need to adjust to new political arrangements. Ron Fullagar's untimely death has left a gap in our conservation activities that must be filled. Ron put a lot of effort into extending the Avon Sites and Monuments Record to include IA sites and drew on this extensive knowledge as the committee's Conservation officer in his work on English Heritage's Monuments Protection Programme.

The Committee is well aware of the need to respond to this new situation and is suggesting that we set up sub-groups for each of the four new unitary authorities (i.e. Bristol, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Bath & North East Somerset) that will take the place of Avon. Each Group would be represented on the main committee and would be expected to focus on research and conservation matters within the areas of the new councils. Groups would also be expected to liaise with officers and councillors on planning and development matters and with other local groups with an interest in IA matters.

Such a framework should enable BIAS to establish a clear position in post-Avon local government. BIAS would be able to focus effectively on planning matters and foster local interest in our industrial heritage, especially where its survival is threatened. Threats there certainly are, especially in the City of Bristol where there is no conservation officer and the development of 'Harbourside' currently threatens the Canons Marsh Goods Shed, some of the surviving transit steeds and the buildings of the former gas works. Plans to develop the Bristol Brewery site have already been commented upon in a recent BIAS Bulletin.

To end on a positive note, there are certainly grounds for optimism. BIAS membership is increasing and interest in local sites, such as the Somerset Coal Canal has revived. A new map of local government provides fresh opportunities for BIAS members to participate and to further our concerns. It is hoped that members will be able to set aside the extra time to support the new approaches that are required to sustain our work over the last years of this century.

Mike Bone