

# HISTORIC TOTNES BRUNEL BUILDINGS UNDER THREAT – IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED

One of Totnes' most historic buildings is being made ready to be pulled apart in the next few days... and nothing, it seems, can be done about it. Heritage Champion, Town Councillor Pruw Boswell, was alerted late last night (13 Feb) that Brunel's Atmospheric Pumping House by the station on the old Dairy Crest site was being demolished. Contractors were seen removing the slate roof on both sides. TLC has sought to get to the bottom of this. Totnes Museum Administrator, Alan Langmaid, said that developers had to give



28 days' notice of a demolition, and that has not been done, so they are acting outside the normal procedures. When asked, the site staff said that they were 'repairing the roof' but it is common practice for developers to make holes in the roofs of buildings so that the rain gets in and the building becomes unsafe and this makes the argument to demolish much easier. There is no way they are repairing the roof, as there is no scaffolding up. Neither the Museum nor Cllr Boswell appear able to do anything to stop this scandal.

Brunel attempted to introduce a revolutionary new system to South Devon called the Atmospheric Railway in 1847. Instead of trains being pulled by locomotives, they were pushed by air pressure. Stationary engines, housed in sheds called Pumping Stations, were placed every 5 kilometres along the track. Air was pumped along a pipe laid between the railway tracks which moved the train forward when linked to the leading carriage. Trials took place between Exeter and Teignmouth, but the new system proved unreliable. The project had to be abandoned when rats chewed through leather valves along the line allowing air to escape. Brunel built pumping stations at several places including Exeter, Starcross, Dawlish, Teignmouth, Newton Abbot, Torquay and Totnes. The system was in many ways ahead of its time and was a mechanical method of how electricity is now carried by overhead cables on tramways or electrified railroads. The Pumping Stations of the Atmospheric Railway can be compared to modern day Power Stations. There are few buildings of the Victorian Period in Totnes, and this Pumping Station is of regional importance - so why did English Heritage not list the building, leaving us powerless to stop this disgraceful vandalism. The building is part of a unique experiment - it an asset and the way the contractors are trying to speed its demise is scandalous. Please join in the protest by phoning SHDC Planning Dept. and telling them to take action now before we lose a landmark building in the town.

See [www.totnesonline.com/brunel](http://www.totnesonline.com/brunel) for more photos