

Industrial Archaeology Review, 1978-79

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THIS SURVEY of industrial archaeological activity in London over the period from October 1978 is based on the work of GLIAS, the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society, but the known activities of other groups and organisations in this field are also included.

The general decline of London's industrial economy continues, for example, 1979 has seen the closure of the Vanden Plas coachworks at Kingsbury and the announcement of the impending closure of the Park Royal Coachworks, both as part of the BL rationalisation programme, and also the announcement that Bryant & May wish to dispose of their vast Fairfield Road, Bow, match factory (long used mostly for storage or leased out). However, the pattern of decline has changed and industrial archaeologists are now faced with the task of recording not only London's long declining port industries, but also the more complex industries of the twentieth century.

Notwithstanding the generally poor economic outlook, proposals for redevelopment continue to emerge, including a recent plan for the redevelopment of a riverside site at Butlers' Wharf, Bermondsey, close to Tower Bridge and affecting two Conservation Areas which have been designated as "Outstanding" (ie of national importance). The current form of this particular plan envisages the demolition of two ranges of late nineteenth century warehouses which rise to six and seven storeys, and between which lies Shad Thames, a "canyon" street criss-crossed by high level footbridges linking the riverside and landside buildings at various levels: an unparalleled vista which would be destroyed.

The process of attrition continues elsewhere on London's riverside: in November 1978 an intense fire destroyed Hibernia Wharf, a large warehouse complex which stood in a Conservation Area behind Southwark Cathedral. Now there are proposals to demolish the nearby St. Mary Overy's Wharf (1882) in order to allow the enlargement of St. Mary Overy Dock to accommodate HMS "Discovery", now in the care of the Maritime Trust.

The future of London's docklands continues to cause concern; it is to be hoped that the New Town-style Development Corporation which is to develop

the area will prove to be sympathetic to industrial archaeology.

In spite of the gloom that, at times, appears to be all enveloping, some progress has been made in the tasks of conserving, or recording London's industrial history and its remains. Thus, in Rotherhithe the engine house to Marc Brunel's pumping station above the world's first underwater tunnel (now used by tube trains) has been re-roofed and further work to landscape the southern area of the site is now progressing. The Brunel Project hope to open the engine house as a museum in 1980. The centre piece of the display will probably be an unusual steam engine built by the local firm of J & G Rennie in c 1882 for pumping duties at HM Dockyard at Chatham. Upstream, plans are now afoot to open Tower Bridge to the general public, as an exhibit in its own right and also as a museum for steam power.

To mark its 10th anniversary GLIAS, in conjunction with the Museum of London, staged a highly successful exhibition "Cogs, Crafts and Cast Iron" in December 1978-January 1979. Equally successful has been the publication of pamphlets describing "industrial archaeology walks", eg "Regents Canal—Little Venice to Camden" published in 1979 by Camden History Society and GLIAS.

"Large scale" industrial archaeology in the form of general surveys continues in many parts of London, usually organised on a borough level, whilst a gazetteer covering more than 400 sites/objects of industrial archaeological interest in south east London is currently being prepared for printing and should be available by mid-1980.

GLIAS has now agreed arrangements with the Department of the Environment for copies of photographs taken by GLIAS members to be added to the collection held by the National Monuments Record Office. Photographs will be cross-referenced by location and industry and will be supplemented by detailed site information on separate reference cards.

"Small scale" activity, involving library and site work with reference to specific sites continues to flourish and the remainder of this review attempts to describe what has been done in the past year:—



Fig. 1: Vanden Plas coach-building line at Kingsbury factory, showing limousine assembly. Note the trollies on which the car bodies are mounted during the early stages. These are guided by a wooden rail along the floor (not visible) — an early form of assembly line? Note also the leather protective covers draped over the wings whilst work is done on the engine compartment.
(photo: David Thompson)

Barnet

Hendon and District Archaeological Society have been studying the Cadbury-Schweppes soft drink bottling plant in West Hendon (now demolished). Production ceased some years ago and most of the bottling equipment was removed prior to the site visit.

Brent

GLIAS members were able to make two visits to the Vanden Plas factory in Kingsbury before its closure in November 1979. Housed mainly in converted aircraft hangars of c 1914-18 vintage, the factory's most important product, at least in terms of working space devoted to it, was the Daimler limousine, built up from a bare metal body brought in from the Midlands. Production was essentially a craft process with little mechanisation (see Fig. 1). A report is due to be published in 1980.

Croydon

In Croydon the water supply installation (operating from wells beneath the site) and engineering workshops at the Shirley Oaks Childrens Homes have received attention from GLIAS members. One feature is a horizontal steam pump, c 1895, which pumps the water from ground level to the top of a prominent water tower, although the actual wells are now operated by submersible electric pumps.

Also in Croydon, Cooper's Steam Boot Factory,

noted for its extensive use of decorative moulded bricks, and used as a furniture depository for many years, has been photographed. The building is now threatened with demolition.

Newham and Tower Hamlets

A number of visits have been made to the ship repair yards of River Thames Ship Repairs Ltd., at the Royal Albert Dock, Blackwall Yard and Preston's Road and a brief inventory of machinery made. In the machine shop at Royal Albert Dock a Pratt and Whitney bandsaw dated 1881, in use for cutting brass, was noted (Fig. 2). It is hoped that this item may go for preservation at the Dolphin Sailing Barge Museum, Sittingbourne, Kent. John Bowditch of the Henry Ford Museum was taken to inspect this machine and regards it as being of considerable interest. Another project it is hoped to instigate shortly is an investigation of the London Lead Company and Burrell Wharf area at the southern end of the Isle of Dogs.

A Docklands History Survey has been set up with a full time Survey officer. It is intended to publish a guide in about a year's time. For more information please contact the Docklands History Survey Officer, Dr. R. J. M. Carr, North East London Polytechnic, Faculty of Environmental Studies, Department of Civil Engineering, Forest Road, London E17 4JB.

Sun Flour Mills, Bromley-by-Bow, received "emergency" recording treatment whilst in the course of demolition in May-July 1979. The mill, apparently

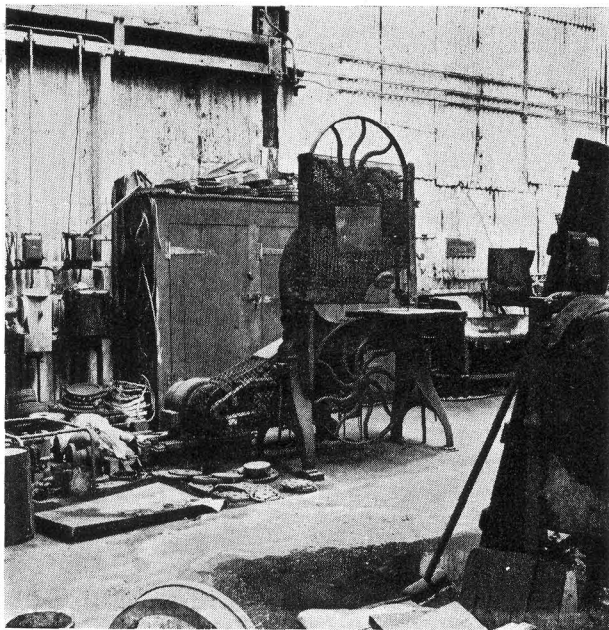


Fig. 2: Pratt & Witney bandsaw 1881; River Thames Ship Repair Ltd, Royal Albert Dock. Regarded as "being of considerable interest", it is hoped that the machine will be preserved, possibly at Sittingbourne. (photo: R. J. M. Carr)

of reinforced concrete construction with a brick cladding in fact turned out to be brick built with a concrete lining. The buildings demolished in 1979 probably dated from 1910-1930 but there were at least two previous mills on the same site. A short report was published in GLIAS Newsletter 63.

Also in Tower Hamlets, GLIAS has been working on the Spratts Dog Biscuit Factory at Morn's Road, Poplar. Publicised as "The Biggest Dog Biscuit Factory in the World" and erected in 1897-1904, the factory is now multi-occupied as a small trading estate. Almost nothing remains of the original factory equipment, other than ruinous ovens in the basements. A short GLIAS report on the site is to be published in 1980.

Southwark

GLIAS' 1979 site recording training sessions were again conducted in warehouse premises in the borough, these being 33 Bermondsey Wall, built in the 1860's and used for a time as a grist mill, and St. Mary Overy Wharf (see above). These provided an interesting contrast, not only in size, but also in style — St. Mary Overy Wharf being architect designed with attractive rooftop decorations akin to balustrades, whilst 33 Bermondsey Wall is construc-

ted of plain brick and timber. As mentioned above, St. Mary Overy and surrounding buildings in Clink Street are the subject of redevelopment proposals. Accordingly an attempt is being made to record the main features of the buildings affected, all of which are in a Conservation Area. However, GLIAS has decided that, in spite of the historic and visual importance of the area, the present condition of the buildings and the difficulties in realistically adapting them to alternative use are such that it is not realistic to campaign for their retention whilst more deserving cases, eg Shad Thames, are also subject to possible redevelopment.

As in intended comparative study to the Spratts Dog Biscuit Factory in Poplar referred to above, GLIAS members visited the Spillers dog biscuit factory in Jacob Street, Bermondsey, where a modern biscuit plant is "concealed" within premises dating from c 1905. Also in Bermondsey GLIAS looked at some unusual stables in Long Lane where the horses were housed on an upper floor and carts were kept below and at a former glue works in Newhams Row, distinguished by large rectangular wooden slatted ports in the walls to allow maximum ventilation.

In October 1979 GLIAS started the task of recording the works of Brome & Schimmer, situated just off the Walworth Road. This firm used these premises until recently to prepare herbs and spices for the wholesale herbal, pharmaceutical and confectionery trades. The complex of small buildings contains eight sets of large granite edge-runners for crushing such commodities as slippery elm bark and juniper berries as well as a number of other related machines. Although the firm has now moved its manufacturing facilities out of London, the building housing the edge-runners is still used for packing and storage.

Wandsworth

The Victoria Station resignalling scheme will involve the disappearance of all the existing railway signal boxes serving the approaches to the station and GLIAS has been surveying the signalboxes.

Finally, mention should be made of a new publication, the GLIAS Journal, *London's Industrial Archaeology*, the first issue of which was published in 1979. The second issue will appear in mid 1980.

Contacts in GLIAS

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