

TICCIH 2009 Freiberg

Plenary Session Monday 31 August 2009

PROSPECTS, PERCEPTIONS AND THE PUBLIC

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Minister, Vice-Rector, friends and colleagues, may I begin by saying what a great pleasure it is to be here in the ancient city of Freiberg and this historic seat of mining, engineering and industrial scholarship, at this Congress, and as one of your guests. And, may I add my thanks for the warmth and generosity of you welcome. Could I also, on behalf of us all gathered here today express our gratitude to Helmut Albrecht and his team for putting together such an outstanding agenda and thank them in anticipation for a programme that is rich in interest and challenge, on the theme of ecology and economy in the context of the industrial heritage.

It is thirty-six years since the First International Congress on the Conservation of Industrial Monuments (FICCIM as it was then called) took place at Ironbridge, in 1973ⁱ, and thirty-four since TICCIH, as it was to become, was last held in Germany – at Bochum in 1975ⁱⁱ. In the intervening period the world has

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undergone profound change. So too has our view of the industrial past and of its material evidence.

At Ironbridge in 1973 there were just 61 delegates, from 8 countries, who arrived, out of the blue so to speak, in response to a letter of invitation to speak at what was then an unknown congress on an unknown subject. Today we have here over 350 people from 38 countries, attending the triennial gathering of a major international organisation, respected and increasingly valued for its work. We can I believe look back on the last thirty years with a real sense of achievement.

But it is the nature of the fundamental changes that have taken place in the wider industrial world over that period that I want to address this morning, that and to offer some thoughts on prospects for the future. This turmoil has been cataclysmic in its scale, impact and consequences, such that the world in which we live now would have been unimaginable, even by the most far-sighted of futurologists, just thirty years ago. In 1973 daily supersonic passenger services across the North Atlantic were still three years awayⁱⁱⁱ, and there was no internet.^{iv} Today we no longer have the one but can't live without the other. Climate change was an unknown concept and I still had a head of hair. And, of course, there were no World Heritage Sites. The first global 'oil shock' hit in the October of 1973, taking crude prices for the first time above \$50 a barrel, to be followed by a stock market crash and rocketing inflation. If the age of industry has been, and to a great extent still is, the age of carbon, we might look back on 1973 as the year in which the first signs of a change in the

established world order were beginning to emerge. And, while it would be hyperbole to claim any divine prescience in anticipating the way that world order might evolve, looking back on the seventies in general we can see a decade in which the past was to become popular and heritage in general and the industrial heritage in particular, came of age.

It is worth reminding ourselves that it has been industrial and technological change that has been one of the primary causes, for good or ill, of these great global upheavals. As in the eighteenth century, industrialisation – and now of course de-industrialisation - have been the most significant of the various forces affecting societies and economies across the world. It is in this new and changed environment that we now contemplate the prospects for conservation of the industrial heritage and the changing perceptions of the public towards this crucially important aspect of their history.

When industrial archaeology emerged in the middle years of the twentieth century there were, broadly speaking, two worlds, the developed – or industrial – and the developing – or non-industrial. Today, we might add a third, the post-industrial. Within the then industrial world there was a growing recognition – for which there was then a surprising amount of popular public support - that the origins and subsequent evolution of industrialisation deserved recognition, that its material evidence was a legitimate and rewarding field of study, that some of that evidence was sufficiently emblematic of a vital and vivid past to justify retention, and that future generations might gain from it inspiration and

understanding. Industrial archaeology struck a chord with a public who, perhaps for the first time, could see their own history, places that reflected their own lives and their own values, being taken into care for the future. In this respect industrial archaeological conservation was if not unique certainly novel.

In today's world we cannot take those views for granted. The justifications are no longer self-evident. In the old industrial world consciousness of the importance of the social and economic changes wrought by industrialisation, first-hand knowledge and experience of industry and all it represented, is evaporating as generations change and the public experience of work, in the industrial sense of the term, fades. And with it has gone the powerful collective memories of those industrial communities. That is inevitable. If the years of industrial growth were characterised by rapid and fundamental change, so too the era of industrial decline has arrived with even greater speed and brought about equally cataclysmic social and economic change at a pace again unimaginable thirty years ago.

Already we can see the age of industry as a defining epoch in our history, not only in the context of its origins and consequences but now, for the first time, in terms of its demise. Industrialisation is at once a distinctive and distinguishing historical phenomenon and at the same time the single most influential social and economic force affecting global societies today.

So if in this old world, the great age of industry has come and gone, it is to be expected that the values and meanings attaching

to its inheritance will disappear too. We must now consider the future for this particular past in the context of new public perceptions. For this new public the industrial past and all it represents will be as distant, as alien, as incomprehensible, and perhaps as irrelevant, as the remains of ancient Athens or Rome.

In 1953 the English author, L P Hartley (1896-1972), famously wrote: 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there'.^y In the case of the industrial past we can expect that sentiment increasingly to become a truism. We should not be surprised. In this new world managing public perception and public attitude will I suggest be at least as much of a challenge as managing the physical remains themselves. We shall need to re-articulate the value of the industrial heritage for those for whom it has no immediate or obvious meaning. It will be a task we neglect at our peril.

But that of course is in the old industrial world. Decline is a geographically relative term. Simultaneously, in other parts of the globe – in India, or China, or Brazil for example – industrialisation in its contemporary manifestation is being actively advanced as the path from rural poverty to some new form of prosperity. Here a new world of work is being defined. It is not unlike that which emerged two centuries and more ago.

The age of industry then has defined us – and continues to define us - in more ways than we care to think. What we do is what we are. Work, once considered a curse, lies at the heart of our being, our identity, our self-esteem, our financial security. Work, in the

sense that we understand it today, is a product of the industrial age. So is capitalism, and socialism, and communism; that all three are now seen as profoundly flawed is perhaps the surest sign yet that the age of industry – at least in the old industrial world - is now a thing of the past.

In an age where our prosperity derived from the output of mines, mills, factories and foundries, the value and meaning of work made some sort of sense. There was a simple clarity about what went in at one end, gained value as a result of work, and came out at the other. Profits were made, workers were paid. Today, men who once made steel now pump iron; people not only go out to work, they work out. Muscles are for decoration and magazine covers. In the modern post-industrial world we have to exercise our bodies because work no longer does that for us. But neither of course does it exhaust to the point of collapse, leave lungs destroyed by silicosis, or the lives of men and women terminated before their prime. That is a privilege reserved to those who are creating new industrial economies in the new industrial world. Bhopal and the events of 3 December 1984 may well be seen as its awful warning; urbanisation, increasing prosperity and material wellbeing, and a progressive shift of the epicentre of the world's economy as its inevitable destiny.

In Britain, as in much of Europe and North America, the symbolically most significant metaphor of change is the virtual extinction of deep-pit coal mining in some fifteen years during the 1980s and '90s. In 1913, when production peaked, there were 3,100 collieries in Britain, employing 1.2 million miners. By the

early 1980s there were 130 pits; today there are just six. Employment in mining now numbers 5,600. There are more members of the musicians union than of the mining unions. In almost every other area of traditional industrial activity similar change has taken place. Textiles, for 150 years the cornerstone of the nation's economy, have seen similar effects. In the 1980s mills in the Greater Manchester area were being destroyed at the rate of two a week. None of this is of course unique to Britain. It has characterised huge expanses of traditional industrial activity across Europe and North America. If we are contemplating the social and economic eco-systems of the old industrial world we need to recognise that a new international common denominator has been added to our lexicon. It links Flint, Michigan; Consett, County Durham; or Gunkanjima, Kyushu, to name just three. That common denominator is industrial extinction.

So, if the age of industry is now gone, what do we want of it its remains? Do its vestiges and its memories matter, and if so to whom? Is this a history we wish to take forward with us, that future generations might gain from it some understanding and meaning? Or, can we let it go, relieved that the problem has quietly slipped away? Was it all too much to handle and the loss of its departing of no real consequence? Indeed, is this a chapter of history we might wish to consign, consciously and even enthusiastically, to oblivion? I think not.

This Congress points a way ahead in its themes of ecology and economy. Just as industrialisation challenged so industrial conservation tests our ingenuity to find new and workable

solutions. We now recognise the importance of landscapes rather than just specific sites or buildings, and are beginning to tackle the issues of their conservation. Places are what people value and we need to understand and articulate the distinctive qualities of industrial places before we intervene in their regeneration. Understanding leads to valuing, valuing leads to informed conservation, informed conservation enables us to reconcile the voices of the past with the needs of today and tomorrow; to inform the processes of change in a conscious and rational way. Without that level and depth of understanding the future of precious places – however we may define that term – will fall into the hands of those who have other agendas which will, almost inevitably, erode distinctiveness, intimacy, and the very qualities and milieu that people cherish.

Adaptive re-use is a well-established genre seen as a logical and justifiable approach not simply for economic reasons but increasingly for social and environmental benefits; so too energy conservation and sustainability. The high thermal inertia of many old buildings makes them peculiarly suitable for recycling into new uses. And, perhaps paradoxically, heritage-led regeneration of industrial landscapes can bring economic and social diversification to areas that were once single industry mono-cultures.

Then, there is the issue of housing. When the workplaces have gone what often remain are the houses of those who worked in them. In many post-industrial landscapes they represent the most prolific evidence of former industrial activity. The future of this housing is of vital concern to the people who live there. The

understanding of these places, and the ability to debate the options for their future, has I believe to be central to our agenda.

Critical to the debate about industrial conservation are the views of the public. Without public understanding there will be no support for the retention – through conservation or preservation – of the physical evidence of the industrial world. There is I believe an important and achievable role here for TICCIH, to present exemplars of good practice; set out arguments for conservation based on sustainable solutions; and demonstrate that increasingly a conservation-led approach can transform what are often seen as liabilities into real social and economic assets.

I shall conclude with the words of the celebrated German architect, Fritz Schupp (1896-1974), architect with Martin Kremmer of the Zollverein pithead XII, a World Heritage Site since 2001. As long ago as 1929 he summed up many of these views, neatly and succinctly and with perhaps unconscious prescience. He wrote: “we must recognize that industry with its enormous buildings is no longer a disturbing link in our townscape and our landscape, but a symbol of work, a monument of the town, which every citizen should present to the foreigner with at least the same pride as his public buildings”.^{vi}

ⁱ See Trinder, B S 2000 <http://www.mnactec.com/TICCIH/imgenes/pdf/Trinder> for a summary of the First International Congress on the Conservation of Industrial Monuments (FICCIM) and subsequent events down to the TICCIH 2000 Congress. Neil Cossons, Director of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, and Barrie Trinder, the Museum’s Honorary Historian, ran the 1973 Congress.

ⁱⁱ Kroker, Werner (ed) 1978 *SICCIM Transactions* [Transactions of the Second International Congress on the Conservation of Industrial Monuments, 1975]

ⁱⁱⁱ Transatlantic *Concorde* services were initiated by British Airways and Air France in 1976 and ended in 2003 when continued maintenance of the aircraft was deemed impossible. No viable supersonic transport is currently in prospect. This is a rare example of a new and workable technology that did not lead to an improved successor.

^{iv} E-mail was adapted for ARPANET by Ray Tomlinson of BBN in 1972. He picked the @ symbol from the available symbols on his teletype to link the username and address. The telnet protocol, enabling logging on to a remote computer, was published as a Request for Comments (RFC) in 1972. The ftp protocol, enabling file transfers between internet sites, was published as an RFC in 1973, and from then on RFCs were available electronically to anyone who had use of the ftp protocol. The birth of the Internet is often traced back to these events in 1972 and 1973.

^v Hartley, L P 1953. The opening line in *The Go Between*.

^{vi} Quoted without source in <http://www.ihtourism.pl/index.php?lang=en> (website of the International Documentation and Research Centre on Industrial Heritage for Tourism)