

INDUSTRIAL PRESERVATION AS A KEY TO URBAN REGENERATION

Some Examples Over Forty Years and Many Countries

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Abstract. Having worked on the preservation of industrial sites for over 45 years, the author wishes to move from local projects to national projects and then to some of the international projects which are aiming to fill some of the gaps in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites.

Having been brought up near Manchester England in the 1940s, industry was not something to be admired. (Figure 1) My youth included seeing lorry loads of pigs' trotters being delivered to the tripe works, then passing numerous textile mills with weird advertisements for the requirements of ring spinners, doffers, and carders, and incessant noise of steam engines and the filth of smoke being emitted from over 70 mill chimneys (Figure 2). This meant an almost permanent smog over the town – the only escape physically was to travel to the Lake District or Peak District to get some fresh air, or in terms of a career to get to university, get qualified and make sure you never returned to your home town.

This is probably not a very good advertisement for someone who spent the next 45 years as a professional museum curator, conserving industrial sites and urging other countries to do the same and becoming involved in World Heritage Site applications for numerous industrial sites throughout the world.



Figure 1. Map of the UK



Figure 2. Rochdale, Lancashire. c.1965

Some of these industrial preservation attempts have been extremely successful in transforming the economy of the area around them and others have been less successful largely because of the attitudes of local people. Some people now believe that their heroic period of industrial preservation has now passed, and this is possibly because the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings for new purposes has now moved from being esoteric to mainstream.

I started my museum career in Sunderland in the north-east of England near Newcastle-upon-Tyne where in the 1960s and 1970s Local Authorities wished to obliterate any remnants of industrialisation. In fact, many villages which were formerly collieries were categorised as D villages where there would be a determined effort to prevent any further development and basically to obliterate them, which happened with most of the industrial sites in the region. Teams of volunteers were responsible for rescuing important artefacts from this region and transporting them to the Beamish Open Air Museum, whereas others looked to the preservation of important industrial monuments such as Ryhope Pumping Station (Figure 3). Despite the injections of vast amounts of Government money, the north east of England continues to be a depressed region, it has lost its identity.

Similarly in South Wales in the 1970s, one of the most iconoclastic landscapes of industrialisation – the Welsh valleys full of coal mines, chemical works, slag heaps, and industrial housing – was virtually eliminated by the Local Authorities and landscaped out of existence. What remains is only the World Heritage Site of Blaenavon which is merely a tiny fragment of what existed before (Figure 4). This continues to be a depressed region.

Ironbridge in Shropshire (Figure 5), where I worked from 1972 to 1992, was more fortunate as it was the birthplace of industry in the 18th century but had declined dramatically during the 20th century, and it also formed part of Telford New Town which sponsored the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, a voluntary charity, to create a world class industrial museum which first won both the Museum of Britain Award and the Museum of Europe Award. It also became a World Heritage Site in 1986. What had been a totally depressed area soon became a thriving hub of economic development and with its academic resources has stimulated similar development all over the world.



Figure 3. Ryhope Pumping Station Sunderland



Figure 4. Big Pit, Blaenavon
World Heritage Site South Wales



Figure 5. The cast iron bridge near Coalbrookdale,
painting by William Williams 1780
Collection Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust

In 1992 I moved to Cornwall which aspired to be a world heritage site because of its hard rock mining (Figure 6). The work in the county on industrial sites was uncoordinated and together with the County Archaeological Unit and The National Trust I developed The Trevithick Trust, named after Cornwall's most famous son, the inventor of the steam engine, to create a network of industrial sites which would become the focal points for a future world heritage site application. These sites included not only tin mines but also lighthouses, radio sites, a submarine telegraph station, and tin and china clay processing works, all of which raised the industrial profile of Cornwall. Inscription as a World Heritage Site took place in 2006 and there is huge popular support for the preservation of Cornish mining remains. Cornwall has continue to thrive, not only because of its world heritage site designation but because of the introduction of broadband communications, and although five hours by train from London it is still an attractive place to work with its beautiful surroundings and fast internet connections.

Since 1986 I have been the voluntary secretary of The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) which is affiliated to ICOMOS and provides advice on industrial sites. For the last ten years I have concentrated on developing sites in Asia, particularly Japan and Taiwan.

After early attempts to repel the foreigners, the Japanese realised in the 1860s that this was impossible and that they must adopt Western technology as rapidly as possible in order to create a strong nation. This they achieved in forty years, with considerable sacrifices, but by the turn of the 19th century they were recognised as a world power. We are currently working on a world heritage site application for these sites of early industrialisation (Figures 7 and 8) which not only transformed the economy of Japan itself but also the whole of Asia and subsequently the rest of the world. Due to the tragic consequences of the Second World War much of the recent history of Japan has been not discussed, and our work aims not only promote these sites as a world heritage site but also to re educate the Japanese people about their 19th century history. This has astonished some people who find it difficult to believe that coal mines, shipyards, steelworks and industrial housing could be of worldwide significance.



Figure 6. Wheal Coates Mine, St Agnes, Cornwall



Figure 7. Hagi Furnace, Yamaguchi, Japan



Figure 8. The pioneer factory complex at Shuseikan, next to the Shimadzu summer garden, in Kagoshima, Kyushu, Japan, 1872.
Copyright Shuseikan Museum

In Taiwan, although not recognised by UNESCO as a country, we are encouraging the development of world heritage sites which one day might be eligible for inscription (Figure 9). Whilst the development of technology on the island when still under Chinese control, was very limited, after the secession of the island to Japan in 1895 industrial development was rapid and still survives to a highly developed degree, even after the Second World War and the return of the island to Chinese control. Industrial monuments are incredibly well preserved due to the national government which is committed to industrial preservation as a promoter of tourism, job creation and national identity. Taiwan will be hosting the next international conference of TICCIH in November 2012.

Finally I would like to and conclude with one of the largest world heritage sites yet proposed, in Norway, including hydropower stations, electro chemical sites, their transport systems and hopefully the Hardangervidda the largest upland plateau in Europe which provided the internal power supply to all this industrial activity (Figure 10).

Norway emerged as a separate country only in 1905 after 400 years of subjection under the Danish and then Swedish governments, and whilst many may feel that the introduction of technology into Norway was detrimental as it spoiled the wonderful landscape of fjord, glacier and mountain, it actually gave the country a new vision of nationhood and prevented emigration on a vast scale. Norway is still in the process of refining its world heritage site application, which is on their tentative list, for the hydropower and electrochemical sites in Tyssedal, Odda, Vemork and Rjukan, all of which survive to a remarkable extent, together with the railway connection down from Rjukan to Notodden which included the ferryboat connection over the fjord which featured in the film 'The Heroes of Telemark' where the heavy water plant was destroyed. The process of this application is as much about the preservation of industrial remains as it is about the growing Nationhood of this newly emerged country in the 20th century. This is very similar to much of the work which TICCIH is doing in Asia, where countries are gradually emerging from colonialism and recognising their own unique identities.



Figure 9. Ecological Gold Park Dressing Floors, Taiwan



Figure 10. Tyssedal Hydropower Station, 1908, at the head of the Hardanger Fjord in Odda, Norway
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