

AFTER 'THE LAST DROP': SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE S.H.I.E.R. AND THE BURTON CONFERENCE

MIKE BONE

On 12 March 2011 the Brewery History Society organised a day conference at the National Brewery Centre (formerly the Bass Museum) in Burton-upon-Trent to mark the successful completion of a project commissioned and funded by English Heritage as part of its Historic Environment Enabling Programme (H.E.E.P.). This special issue of *Brewery History* presents printed versions of the main contributions to the event. These brief reflections aim to provide a little more on the 'pre-history' of the S.H.I.E.R. and, more importantly, to summarise some of the ideas and suggestions from the conference as to how we might take things forward.

The project had its origins in the early years of the new century in the concerns of many of those interested in brewing heritage at the quickening rate of closures and subsequent loss of many of England's historic breweries. In particular, press rumours at the time concerning the redevelopment of Young's Ram Brewery on Wandsworth High Street in south London suggested that something should be done to prepare for a more orderly response or strategy to brewery closures than individual protests and objections that occur when a well-known site is threatened.

Subsequently, the Association for Industrial Archaeology, the Brewery History Society (B.H.S.) and English Heritage (E.H.) came together to organise a conference in June 2003 at STEAM: the Museum of the Great Western Railway in Swindon to review work already done on the recording and conservation of the buildings, artefacts and archives of the brewing industry and to identify ways in which we could work together in a more strategic way. The event 'From Grain to Glass' featured maltings, breweries, brewing processes and

plant, archives and pubs and was followed in 2004 by the publication of the successful E.H. book *Licensed to Sell* on the history and heritage of public houses and the issue of the first in a series of their Strategy for the Historic Industrial Environment Reports (S.H.I.E.R.s). The latter was based upon earlier work on maltings by Amber Patrick, who spoke at this conference. It was clear from discussion at the end of the conference that further action was needed on breweries, their plant and archives and that the expertise and commitment of B.H.S. was on hand to assist in the task.

For many good reasons, it then took some time to set up the project but progress was good and the 'Brewery' S.H.I.E.R. was duly completed and the public version of the three reports were launched and distributed on C.D. at the Burton conference. A more-detailed version was also produced for use within E.H. The event had two main aims in addition to this launch: to report to B.H.S. members and E.H. staff, many of whom had provided valuable inputs along the way, on the findings and recommendations and then to consider ways forward for the recording and conservation of brewery heritage. In the morning session Keith Falconer, then Head of Industrial Archaeology at E.H., first outlined the context and perspectives of the S.H.I.E.R.s initiative by way of introduction to Lynn Pearson's presentation of her reports. The Society was delighted that Dr Pearson, author of books on *The Northumbrian Pub* (1989), *The History of Robinson's Brewery* (1997) and the important *British Breweries: an architectural history* (1999) had accepted the challenging role of project consultant. The statistics in her paper are particularly important and emphasise the tremendous changes affecting the industry. Those dealing with listings - most are Grade II - also

indicate the need for vigilance by conservationists as E.H. staff are not currently able to deal with development applications relating to such sites. In our closing discussions Keith Falconer emphasised the unique value of this sort of data that so effectively demonstrated the magnitude of the loss of this type of building.

The afternoon session focused on ways forward by way of three case-studies presented by colleagues who had recently undertaken research on the archaeology and conservation of breweries. The role of the naval dockyards as centres of large-scale industrial enterprise and innovation has been noted by historians of the Industrial Revolution and its contribution to brewery history is discussed by Peter Mathias in his classic account *The Brewing Industry in England 1700-1830* (1959). Dr Helen Moore, Senior Archaeologist at Gifford U.K., took us through the programme of research and excavation that was carried out on the Weevil Brewery site in Gosport which has provided significant evidence of the layout, technology and organisation of one of these early breweries. Her presentation prompted some interesting observations on fermentation practice and made the case for further work of this kind that provided information which could not be had from documents alone. Malcolm James of Character Conservation Ltd. of Cirencester then provided a searching evaluation of the fate of the brewery heritage in England's most significant brewery town, Burton-upon-Trent, concentrating on developments since 1984 when the Victorian Society published Julian Cooksey's assessment of the situation. Malcolm's findings give cause for concern for the future, especially in past failures to secure adequate conservation expertise when assessing the significance of this unique resource. In discussion, he also stressed the need for the ongoing vigilance of local conservation groups. The final case-study was also based upon a recently-completed dissertation. Rebecca Lamb, a conservation officer in Lewisham in 2011, assessed two schemes of adaptive reuse of brewery buildings - the fine breweries in Newark, Nottinghamshire, that feature in Alfred Barnard's *Noted Breweries* of 1889 - against a 'checklist' of conservation philosophies. There is much to be learned from her conclusions about the treatment of the historic fabric and internal spaces of these buildings and, in particular, the loss of meaning and context when a restored brewhouse is cut off from its supporting buildings by demolition to create car-parking space and/or room for new buildings. It will be difficult for

future generations to understand how these large industrial sites once functioned when only parts of them remain and there is little to echo what was once there.

These case-studies provided much food for thought as the final session turned to the need for future work. The S.H.I.E.R. had provided an important and timely assessment of England's brewing heritage at the end of the first decade of the 21st century and recommendations for future consideration of development applications such as the Young's site, where earlier rumours of closure had now become reality. Before attempting a brief summary of key points from the final session it is perhaps important to refer to the environment in which we will try to take things forward. In her paper Lynn Pearson notes that further change in the industry is inevitable and this is also true of the context in which heritage professionals and volunteers work. During the development of this project we have seen the reform of the planning system with the replacement of the much-respected P.P.G.'s (i.e. Planning Policy Guidelines) 15 and 16 by P.P.S. (i.e. Planning Policy Statement) 5 which has now been replaced by a much-condensed section in a new N.P.P.F. (National Planning Policy Framework). It is of some comfort to note that the practice guide to P.P.S. five is still extant. We also have the Localism Act and an extension of local listing, which provide both threats and opportunities for conservationists and a recent consultation on the Penfold Review which relates to works to listed buildings. One should also mention the debate and eventual demise of the Heritage Protection Bill and consequent changes within E.H. As regards E.H. personnel, Keith Falconer, architect of the S.H.I.E.R.s programme, has now retired after a distinguished career of 41 years here and in its predecessor bodies. On the positive side, we are now in the year of Industrial Heritage at Risk which has raised the profile of our sector and the maltings and brewery S.H.I.E.R.s have taken their place on the E.H. website as part of this initiative.

The following attempts a brief summary of reflections and recommendations from the conference, beginning with some general points:

- As a methodology the S.H.I.E.R. had proved an effective approach for the brewery industry and is capable of extension to other industries where there has been a similar pattern of technical change and business reorganisation.

- That partnership working and an interdisciplinary approach provides tremendous benefits - not only for the successful and cost-effective completion of projects but, in the case of the conference, in the sharing of the expertise of a diverse group of archaeologists, historians, brewers and brewing scientists, heritage professionals, I.T. specialists and managers who shared common interests and concerns.
- That the role of local activists and societies will be crucial in conserving the brewing heritage in the future and that the leadership and expertise of B.H.S. will be important in this respect.

As regards more specific points:

- The database compiled during the project is a valuable resource that, with I.T. support can be adapted and used in many ways, e.g. linked to maps and local Historic Environment Records. The database also

needs to be updated and enhanced by fresh research for which B.H.S. might provide some additional guidance.

- There is a need for some brief but cogent guidance from B.H.S. on brewery conversions.
- Work is required on the study and conservation of brewery plant and the work of the leading brewery engineering firms.
- Recent concentration of the industry suggests that the location and accessibility of brewery archives warrants further attention.

The Burton conference was playfully entitled 'The Last Drop'. On final reflection it might be said that, like all good ale, the ingredients were excellent, the brew was enjoyed in good company and congenial surroundings - and the after-effects were wholly beneficial. We hope that this permanent record of the day is of value to all who went to Burton and those who were not able to be there.