

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE, TOURISM AND OLD INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS: CHARTING THE DIFFICULT PATH FROM REDUNDANCY TO HERITAGE ATTRACTION

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Abstract

This exploratory paper considers the processes, problems and constraints involved in the transition of old industrial buildings, often those prone to vacancy, into heritage and tourism-linked uses. It discusses the heritage-property nexus with regard to industrial buildings, and builds an empirical picture of such relationships in a specific local property arena. The discussion is partly based on research projects completed in a number of localities within the British West Midlands. In particular, it draws on work on the evaluation of European Commission Community Initiatives in the West Midlands that have targetted tourism development, as well as on EPSRC funded research focused on vacant industrial buildings in Stoke-on-Trent. As such, in scene-setting style, a structure is developed for the evaluation of heritage-property links with the emphasis on the small number of specific local projects that have at least partly sought to bring buildings back into use with some, perhaps extensive, degree of heritage activity in mind.

1. Heritage and the property domain - some introductory comments

The background to this paper is the apparent reassertion of industrial heritage as a flavour of tourism in the late 1990s (Goodall, 1996), a process pursued with vigour in the quest for the renaissance of the urban industrial economy (see Ball and Stobart, 1996). This is partly linked to expectations of the value of industrial heritage as a tool for regeneration, and at least partly to available funding initiatives that have viewed tourism as such a potential force (Ball, 1997a). An excellent example is the case of RECHAR, the European Commission's coalfield community funding package. Coal heritage is seen as a lost opportunity in the past and untapped regeneration potential for the future. Beyond that, local authorities in old industrial areas are being drawn into heritage development via a number of pressures and mechanisms. Prominent amongst these influences is the drive for diversification in the face of a closing down of alternatives, a recognition of the importance of property issues in the old industrial area, and a wide recognition of the need for the local state to deal with its own economic problems.

In a general sense, it is clear that the idea of tapping industrial heritage is often closely linked to the problems and potentials of the built fabric and environment of places. Indeed, that is perhaps its most overt element. As such, there is real value in assessing the property dimension of industrial heritage - focusing questions on some of the central property issues connected to building transitions involving heritage uses or bases, the barriers to successful transition, and, in general, charting the experiences - successful or otherwise.

In this way, the paper reviews old industrial buildings and heritage issues, generating a view of the 'heritage-property nexus'. Much of the analysis seeks a prescriptive outcome, especially given the fact that overt heritage tourism use of former industrial buildings is a rare occurrence. It investigates factors in conversion/re-use potential, including issues such as the physical and organisational constraints involved, and micro-level factors in re-use potential for heritage purposes such as building location, nature, and historical significance. It also links to notions of 'institutional thickness', identifying and assessing the role of key decision-makers in the process. The analysis is particularly focused on and structured around detailed examples of heritage development involving redundant buildings, more precisely given the arguments in this paper, labelled as disused and underused industrial buildings, in the north Staffordshire coalfield area.

It is within this domain that major regeneration initiatives have been set up, and within which the relationships between heritage and old industrial buildings might be most usefully and effectively assessed. Any observations, implications and outcomes should have both resonance and applicability beyond that specific domain.

2. Heritage, urban regeneration and the property domain - some

3. Towards the heritage-property nexus - con

typology developed by Michael Stratton (Stratton, 1997), the pros and cons are neatly articulated and it is useful to briefly present a synthesised version at this point in the discussion. As Stratton notes, multi-storey mills and warehouses are enthusiastically lauded for their interesting architecture and innovative use of iron, and for their ability to accept a variety of internal treatments and to be easily sub-divided. There may well be too many of them, with problems of poor upper floor access and limited parking space, but they are attractive for their design, and there is much evidence to suggest that they have featured heavily in urban regeneration schemes (see Ball and

heritage tourism use always involves, as a necessary but not guaranteeing feature - effective organisation, an adequate management structure. In the domain of heritage tourism, the scale

not only was the 'landscape irrevocably altered but (despite whatever economic arguments can be made for or against what many would consider a short-sighted decision) a community's sense of being and the heritage of many individuals is lost.' (Hatfield, 1997). The demolition of the equally iconoclastic "A" frame at Hem Heath colliery in Trentham, despite the endeavours of aspirant heritage museum interests to acquire it, is a more recent example (Sentinel, 21/8/97). It

In the central urban core of the north Staffordshire economy there are a number of disused industrial buildings, some of which have been recognised via listing as valued in heritage terms. The former Dudson's pottery manufactory had been vacant since around 1990, and the buildings involved were gradually deteriorating. There were clearly major design challenges to be met. The premises were in poor structural condition, with major fabric renovation also required. That said, the complex of buildings had great potential as a location for regeneration. The site has excellent accessibility, and, most important, the complex lent itself to refurbishment and proposed reoccupation. In 1996, as part of a bid for Objective 2 funding, a scheme was developed involving the substantial refurbishment and partial rebuild of factory buildings around a grade 2 listed former potbank. The scheme envisages a small pottery museum and associated catering facilities, with the surrounding buildings housing local voluntary groups and related training facilities - the Dudson Resource Centre - in which the offices of various local agencies will be located.

The new company formed to complete the development constituted an Action Group - comprising a local solicitor; a partner in the project's architectural firm; a director of the CVS, and a representative from KPMG, plus representation by the City Council - to progress the project on a day-to-day basis. The funding for the £2m scheme has been generated through a partnership between the City Council, central government (via the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and National Lottery funds. A request for support from English Partnerships was rejected on additionality grounds.

There are, of course, potential problems. A high level of survey and related fees has been sanctioned given the difficulties attached to returning a derelict site to use; and there has been

improve the image of the place. The area was designated as a ceramic design quarter, with a formerly disused but later refurbished school refashioned as a Centre for Ceramic Design,

The complex itself contains a wide array of heritage buildings. These include winding houses and headgear dating from the early 1880s and from the 1914-15 period, a chimney stack from 1891, the main boiler plant constructed from the 1920s, a range of shafts and associated buildings dating to the early and mid 19th century period. In total, the complex of 25 structures contains 16 listed or scheduled buildings.

Not surprisingly, given their age and the conditions under which they have existed, the technical problems confronting the re-use of the buildings are wide-ranging and costly. Although there has been a recent claim that costs have been underestimated quite significantly, according to consultants, the total cost of bringing the complex back to use would be (at 1996 prices) capital/repair, maintenance and upgrade costs of ú7.95m for the listed/scheduled buildings and ú5.2m for the remaining buildings. These costs reflect the repair and refurbishment requirements of key structures on the site. For example:

Old Offices - two storey brick building of 800 sq.m with concrete floor and roof slabs. Windows are predominantly steel, with some timber. Asphalt finish to roof, cast iron rainwater goods. Plastered brickwork or blockwork internal partitions. There was minor tension cracking of brickwork, some movement, and some localised concrete spalling from rusting reinforcement. In terms of fabric, the roof membranes had failed, roof lights had broken panes, steel window frames were beginning to corrode, and there was evidence of water penetration causing paintwork deterioration, mould growth and the lifting of woodblock floors.

Boiler House and Chimney Stack (scheduled monument) - large single storey steel framed building with single skin brickwork infill panels. Contains ten Lancashire Boilers. Roof had been removed. Brick plenum chamber and chimney stack adjoin the building. Some 10% of the brick panels were found to be dangerous, window openings and doors were loose and affected the stability of adjacent brickwork, and the concrete floor had holes. There was also cracks in the brick walls of the plenum chamber and other parts of the building, and some severely corroded roof beams. The surviving fabric was saturated due to the removal of the roof.

Lamphouse - single storey grade II listed building of 488 sq.m with loadbearing brickwork external walls and internal steel columns supporting lightweight metal roof trusses, with a pitched asbestos sheet roof and glazed north lights. The building had minor structural defects, with some instances of rotting timber, and some lateral movement and cracking in brickwork. There was some leakage from the valley gutters and roof flashings had been distorted.

Ken Salt Building - this is one of the newer buildings. It is a single storey brick building of 1,050 sq.m with two internal spine walls, steel casement windows, lightweight lattice roof beams, and a pitched asbestos cement sheet roof. Whilst the building was thought to be in sound condition, there was severe cracking and lateral displacement of brickwork at each corner, and movement of brickwork at high level on the south gable. In terms of fabric defects, rainwater goods were damaged or missing, and there was dampness evidence in external walls. Recent, more detailed inspection, has revealed that the building is virtually beyond repair and refurbishment.

Hesketh Winding Engine and Power House (scheduled monument) - two storey building with solid loadbearing walls supporting lightweight roof trusses and a pitched asbestos cement sheet roof. Constructed in three phases, with a tall upper storey containing the Powerhouse, Central Hall and Winding Engine, and the ground floor containing mass brick and concrete supporting structures for machinery above, together with stables and storage areas. The building was generally sound with only minor structural defects. Some brickwork had fallen out, the north end parapet was cracked and spalling, and there were cracks in door arches. Widespread s0roded

frames, guttering etc., as well as redecorating and refitting the internal spaces. In a number of cases, there was a need to remove brickwork etc. to inspect for the causes of movement and other damage, and in this context, recent work has been constrained by the discovery of unseen subsidence and deterioration. In many cases however, the endeavours of the mining museum staff and volunteers, had kept the bulk of the buildings in reasonably good shape.

The heritage tourism development options depend on the style, level and organisation of presentation of key attractions (such as the Hesketh Power House). The strategic review suggested that the capital and operating costs would depend upon the level of presentation required in the heritage component. These were option A - low key interpretation (ú4.5m), option B - working heritage attraction (ú9.2m), and option C - incremental development with volunteer staff (ú5.8). Clearly, the quality of the presentation, and the facilities involved, would condition the success (and revenue) from the project. As a consequence, and given the conclusion that some parts of the site would not have great attraction as heritage features, a mixed-use development was set out, drawing heavily on various aspects of the heritage value of the site.

The present plans are, in effect, for an extensive mixed-use development around the heritage attractions of the site. The

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