



**SOCIETY FOR
INDUSTRIAL
ARCHEOLOGY**

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By Dianne Newell, President 1977-78

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It occurs to me that after all the people have been thanked, and the inventory of past activities has been held up for all of us to feel pretty good about, that something is missing. Something important is not getting much attention. We do not ever talk at our meetings about how to tackle a fundamental problem of our discipline: WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF OUR RESEARCH? WHAT CAN WE REALLY CONTRIBUTE TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PAST?

Many among us "cut our teeth" on the works of Kenneth Hudson, R.A. Buchanan, and others. Certainly these people attracted me to the field at a time of great frustration with my own attempts to examine the "material culture" of the brewing industry. An entirely new dimension was added to my work, as it was, I know, to the work of others. We found out from them how to identify, classify, and in general, appreciate industrial remains. Implicit in these early manuals was the promise that someday we would know what our inventories and our measured drawings actually explained. And somehow we continue to wait for "someone" to tell us what all the material we collect actually means.

Those of us who attended the first meeting of the SIA in 1972 will remember how excited we were to get together with "commrades" and leave our relative isolation. We were even somewhat controversial, what with the historical archeologists saying we'd never fly, but saying it less politely.

We have grown a lot since then; we have grown intellectually and have had a modest impact on a number of professional and preservation organizations. To a great extent, however, when we regard industrial archeology as a scholarly discipline, we usually do so only in terms of relating physical remains of historical industry to a general interpretation of the processes of industrialization.

P.T.O.

There is a growing concern now with putting People back into the Workplace, so to speak. In other words, to view industrial remains as a reflection, a manifestation, of human activity--social, political, economic, intellectual--and human decision-making, and not, as it is so easy to do, merely as objects in themselves. The recent works of Kenneth Hudson, formation of the open-air industrial museum at Le Creusot, France, large-scale studies of industrial communities being undertaken in Sweden and in Italy, and our own Marthas Vineyard Symposium [Industrial Archeology and the Human Sciences] clearly reflect that new concern. We have a serious problem; we've begun asking the questions, but so far we have no answers. Without a general behavioral approach to the study of the material culture of our industrial past we cannot arrive at answers. Moreover, I would suggest, we are going to have a problem justifying ourselves as a discipline. What business have we developing courses in industrial archeology? What can we learn from industrial remains that is unique?--that we cannot learn from other sources?

At this point I should make it clear that I'm *not* talking here about those who are involved in industrial archeology as a hobby, or for profit. These are important and clearly legitimate pursuits of many of those who join the Society. In fact, it is through these very members that historic industrial sites are coming to be permanently regarded as a significant aspect of our physical and cultural landscape. My concern now is with a neglected aspect of the field--industrial archeology as a scholarly discipline --with its ability to offer rich, potentially productive new sources with which to understand MORE about the past. Many in this Society and in Europe share that concern, of which a large part involves attempting a breakthrough in the area of methodology. More lessons in how to write up field notes or to take photographs simply will not do it. We need to discover ways in which to analyze and explain our data. We want to know what kinds of questions about the past can be asked of our material. It is not merely the mechanics of industrialization that we are thinking about. What about changing notions of work? What about the circulation of information or the diffusion of innovation in the past? What about the daily lives of those--the majority--the women and children as well as the men--who left no written records but whose lives were inextricably bound up in the very subject matter that we find so interesting?

Our investigations can offer to other social scientists a unique set of data. The humans responsible for the creation of these sites, or whose lives were affected by them, are gone. We study the sites that remain to learn more about what went on.

This, then, is a very important concern taking shape within industrial archeology. It is one that I know we will be hearing much more about in the future.

I want to tell you what a happy task it has been for me to serve as president of this Society. Thank you for the opportunity.