

## **Industrial Heritage London Network Meeting**

**Museum of London Docklands – 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

### **Introduction**

Michael Nevell (MDN) introduced himself as the Industrial Heritage Support Officer for England. This was the first in-person meeting for the London region in c. five years and his first in-person network meeting for the network. The next meeting will be online. MDN has decided that going forward each region will have two meetings – one in-person and the other online. This is the sixth in-person network meeting MDN has held this year following the disruption caused by Covid, with two more due to take place in the coming weeks.

MDN said that he is interested in how the various museums and sites represented are faring given the current cost of living crisis as well as continuing issue of recruiting and retaining volunteers. These two matters will be discussed later in the meeting, though the discussion is not confined to these.

The attendees introduced themselves and the organisations they represent.

### **Industrial Heritage Support Officer Project Update – MDN**

The position of IHSO was extended in 2022 for three years, with funding coming from Historic England (HE) and the Association for Industrial Archaeology (AIA). Work is already taking place to get the project extended beyond March 2025 as there is still a need for the role. The role of IHSO is to provide a single place of support to those connected to industrial heritage sector via a range of formats (including the regional network meeting).

To enable the dissemination of news and information there are two websites run by the IHSO (<https://industrialheritagesupport.com/> and <https://industrialheritagenetworks.com/>), each one having a different role. One is predominantly used for publicising initiatives and guidance while the other features news and stories from network members. From these websites it is possible to sign-up to the newsletter. MDN, as IHSO, has a presence on various social media platforms including Twitter (X), Instagram, and Facebook. These platforms can be used to promote events for and by the various network members. Given that approximately half the industrial heritage sites are volunteer only (or at best have one or two staff) and/or are very small they do not necessarily have the resources or inclination to search for information. By MDN bringing the information into one place is part of the support given by the IHSO.

About six years ago England divided into regional networks for the IHSO project. London was one of the first to be established out of the ten that now exist. They provide the opportunity to have discussions, share advice and provide local support between the members. Part of this support is by having the regional network meetings. It has been decided that in future the meetings will either be in-person or online. Given the format of the meetings hybrid ones would not work – those people online would tend to be able to participate less and have a different experience than those at the venue and as not all venues would have the facilities or capabilities to provide a hybrid platform.

As part of his role as IHSO MDN helps provide strategic leadership and partnership by having links with various groups and organisations. These include the All Party-Parliamentary Group on

Industrial Heritage (APPG) and the European Route on Industrial Heritage (ERIH). Over the past few months MDN has been providing support to the APPG as they have been gathering evidence regarding the re-use of industrial buildings. They are currently preparing their report (though if an election is called before this is published all the APPGs are halted and the new government will re-institute them – with the possibility the process will have to start all over again). ERIH is a pan-European organisation (not confined to EU) providing a network for industrial heritage museums and tourist locations. MDN is the representative for England.

One recent development was the decision for three student internships in a partnership with Keele University and Ironbridge over the summer; it is part of a continuing research partnership being developed between the two organisations. One of the interns was overseen by MDN. This person was involved with stationary steam engines; researching which sites had stationary steam engines, whether they were working and, if so, what fuel they were using. Analysis of the responses to the questionnaires revealed that 44 were using traditional fuels (coal or diesel) and some 25+ were using alternatives, at least partially. Some sites are doing research on the different alternative fuels. MDN is encouraging them to share their knowledge to avoid the unnecessary work and expense of duplication. As the issue of eco-fuels are relevant to them, MDN has had talks with Association of British Transport and Engineering Museums (ABTEM) and the Heritage Railway Association. It has been found that eco-fuels that are suitable for stationary steam engines are not necessarily suitable for moving engine.

Currently MDN is finalising the update of the database of 600+ industrial heritage sites, which had originally drawn-up in 1998, to ensure they still meet the criteria of being protected (either by being listed or scheduled), interpreted and open to the public. As part of this exercise there is the intention of resurveying the sites, which would involve hiring a consultant and HE has just agreed funding for this. The final report will be made available to the network. MDN was pleased to report that very few of the sites from the original 1998 list have been demolished. Unfortunately, this does mean that all of the identified sites remain on the list. The removal from the list tends to be where a site is no longer open to the public (such as windmills being converted into homes). From the list it is possible to extract and map various monument types. MDN showed slides indicating the national distribution of sites relating to textile mills, sewage & water pumping stations, the iron & steel industry, and brewing that are protected, interpreted and open to the public (there are of course many other sites that do not meet all three criteria). It is also possible that there are sites that do meet the criteria but as yet haven't been included.

MDN detailed the work he is / will be doing in 2023-24. Part of this is to continue working on the database to review the cornmills (wind and water). This has become topical as Kent County Council is considering selling the eight windmills it owns. Some of these sites are run by volunteer groups and have working machinery. One of the attendees mentioned that Brixton (Ashby's) Mill in Lambeth still grinds flour, though it now is powered by electricity rather than the wind.

The plans by Kent would continue a steady decline of council-owned industrial heritage sites since 1998. Last time ownership was reviewed there had been a reduction of about 20%, but it is thought to have decreased further. The matter of the current ownership of sites is being looked at by MDN when he does his review.

One point that MDN has mentioned about the database was that the sites had, amongst other things, to be protected. This can be achieved by having the building listed or scheduled. There are three gradings for listing

Grade 1 – internationally important sites, and is about 1-2% of the total listed buildings.

Grade 2\* - nationally important sites, about 5% of the listed buildings.

Grade 2 – regionally or locally important sites, and forms the bulk of listed buildings.

The higher the grade the more planning restrictions there are but it also gives greater access to funding. Any one can apply to have a building listed or to have the grading reviewed. The greatest level of protection is as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and this tends to provide protection to the surrounding area not just the building or site.

As indicated MDN is working with the steering group on getting the IHSO project extended beyond March 2025. At present it is thought that it would continue much as at present though slightly rejigged and to give a greater emphasis on providing support via training. It is also hoped that there will be an assistant position added, if sufficient funding can be found.

MDN was asked whether any consideration had been made to making the IHSO a UK-wide role. He explained that there were potential for it to be expanded but there were obstacles to this. Without a government Northern Ireland can't do anything and industrial heritage is a low priority of things that need to be done there. Scotland feels that it has an equivalent position but the support it gives is directed at professional museums only. Wales is the most interested in 'joining' but the problem is they do not have the funding at present. However, they do keep in contact to keep the possibility of expanding the IHSO remit into Wales.

MDN was asked about what consideration is being given to more recent industrial archaeology. Though there is no cut-off date there is a reluctance to see buildings from the late twentieth century onwards as 'heritage' and thereby consider them for protection. Buildings that are not demolished tend to be re-used either to make different products or converted into housing, as happened with the Siemens Building. It isn't only the buildings themselves that are at risk of being lost but the machinery as well; especially in industries that change rapidly (such as telecommunications). Once the machinery is no longer fit for purpose it is disposed of as obsolete with no thought of it being the industrial heritage of the future.

### **Helen O'Hara (HO) – Museum Development Officer for Central & East London**

As part of the Museum Development team for London (which is based at Museum of London Docklands) HO'H support to local museum in London. This excludes the national museums and those with Portfolio Organisation status. Their principle concern is the collection rather than archives and historic buildings – unless they are part of the collection. Having said this people can contact HO'H or her colleagues for advice – though they may not have the answer their contacts may be able to provide the relevant help. Much of the work is supporting museums who are accredited or are in the process of seeking accreditation. HO'H said that even if a museum/site does not qualify for accreditation it can provide a useful framework to adopt.

Arts Council England (ACE) provides the funding for all the museum development teams. ACE also decides on the objectives – currently they are the environment, collections review and training.

Covid led to the suspension of the accreditation process. This created a backlog – not only of organisations seeking accreditation but also of those who need it reviewed (this should take place every five years). The relevant teams are working their way through the backlog and notifications should soon be issued to the next batch of organisations on the list.

HO'H recommended that people visit the website for Museum Development London (<https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/supporting-london-museums>). For this site people can register for the e-updates (go into the News section and there is a red box to click on). The e-updates provides a digest in recent information including vacancies for jobs or trustees, training, etc. On the website it is also possible to find details of the training programmes provided by Museum Development London (details of the upcoming courses is found by clicking on the Training and Skills tab). The training provision is aimed at museums that are accredited or are working towards accreditation. However, others can apply to participate but priority will be given to the target organisations. The training programme is decided upon using information from the annual museum survey and is therefore based on what museums say they want. It should be noted that the training is collections based. One issue that can be overlooked by museums is that of cyber security, as illustrated by the attack on the British Library. There is training specifically planned for non-national museums in early 2024 – details will be included on the website and included in the e-updates. There is useful information on the NCSC website (<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/collection/charity>).

As part of the museum development team's remit is to point people in the direction of possible funding. The National Lottery has simplified the guidance and application process. As a result of this, smaller grants (less than £35,000) can be processed within eight weeks of applying. There is an online information session planned – see the News section of the website.

The Annual Survey 2023 has revealed some changes and trends. Visitor numbers are increasing though are still not at the pre-Covid levels. For London the figures are still 11% down compared to 18% nationally. Financially the recovery has been slower. There are two main factors – the increasing costs of utilities, wages, etc combined with lower revenue as there are fewer visitors who are spending less. Volunteer levels are still depressed compared to pre-Covid levels. One positive note was the increasing digital interaction the public are having with museums. The full report can be accessed from the website.

In response to a question, HO'H stated that the museum accreditors were not industrial heritage specialists but they had a wide experience garnered over the working with many different types of museums. They also collaborate across regions and so can utilise the knowledge of colleagues responsible for other regions that may have greater relevant experience.

It was pointed out by an attendee that the National Lottery were not the only body that provides grants. AIA can provide a grant of up to £30,000 for restoration of an industrial building or object. Over the past six to seven years grants in the region on £1,000,000 have been distributed. It has been noticeable that London have been poor compared to other regions in making applications.

### **Group Conversation**

The representative from Kirkaldy Testing Museum said that their lease is up for renewal next year and while the landlord has indicated that he is prepared to renew it would be at a commercial rent. Given the current economic situation this is bad enough for a business to face but for a museum it is unsustainable. This prompted a discussion on the financial pressures faced by the museum sector – increasing rents, rates and utilities as well as the salaries of staff increasing and the amount contractors charge. MDN said that the grants made available during Covid had meant that site had not permanently closed but given the financial pressures some are reducing opening hours and taking other measures to try to reduce their costs. It is not always a simple matter for the museums / sites to increase revenue. While prices and subscriptions can be increased there is the

possibility that if visitors/members think the cost has become too much they will buy less as their finances are also under pressure.

It is not only the museums that are under financial stress but also their volunteers. This has resulted in some different reactions. Some volunteers have been looking to become more involved as it gets them out of their house to somewhere warm so they can reduce their heating costs (as well as having the mental health benefits of being with other people and doing something useful). Others have reduced or stopped their volunteering because of travel costs or trying to increase paid work. Brunel Museum received a grant from the council to be a Warm Space during the winter on 2022-23.

In the aftermath of Covid some volunteers have reluctant to be in crowded areas. This can include having to travel to the museum as well as in the building itself.

The Postal Museum has noticed a change in the visitor profile. No longer do they have non-school coach parties. They have also observed a reduction European students visiting since the changes to the visa rules following the UK's departure from the EU. The good news is that numbers of visitors are close to pre-pandemic levels.

How museums reacted to the challenges of Covid seems to have affected how they have been able to recover after restrictions lifted. Those museums who furloughed most/all of their staff were not able to adapt as quickly (one of the conditions of receiving the furlough payments from the government was that staff were not allowed to work) and are recovering more slowly. Those museums that used digital platforms to maintain connection with the public have fared much better. Some were also able to monetise at least some of these digital engagements – such as copyrighting photos or by enabling viewers to make a donation for talks being given. Some have even used YouTube Patron to make videos available behind a paywall.

After the end of the meeting the attendees were given the opportunity of a tour of one section of the museum to learn about the building itself and the activities that took place there. People also had the chance to explore the rest of the museum by themselves.