

July 1984

RECEIVED 18 JUL 1984

## REVIEW OF THE 1967 DEVELOPMENT REPORT

### A New Initiative for a New Challenge

---

#### Speed and Credibility

The challenge facing the museum today is commercially based. It questions the museum's survival in a manner acceptable to all of us. A new development plan just proposing building work and other period effects will appear to break no new ground to members and will arouse little interest or support. The exercise will only be taken seriously by the society if the resulting plan is seen to be both attainable and an integral part of a wider, balanced, scheme soundly based on commercial considerations enabling the museum to retain its independence.

The commercial environment is not the only factor to have changed since 1967. The society has also gone through a learning curve and the members would very likely now accept a redeployment of resources in favour of items intended to increase the visitor appeal of the museum.

With this in mind it is suggested that to be credible our review of the 1967 Development Report should -

- a) define the objectives of the museum and the members, the desires of the public, and measure progress to date, particularly noting areas of major imbalance.

It is suggested to start the discussion that survival should be our main goal. After this, the next objective of the museum is not necessarily to achieve the highest visitor figures nor to keep on expanding at a vast rate, but is to preserve, maintain and demonstrate to the public firstly our collection of vehicles and secondly to bring together the other items necessary to appreciate the influences of the tramcar on the development of British towns, as well as its other effects such as economic and social ones.

As will be seen later an analysis of available resources since 1967 shows a bias away from items which the visitors will obviously appreciate.

On the positive side the museum managed to profit financially during the seventies and is still master of its own destiny, owning its freehold and having no overdraft or third party loans of any significance.

- b) estimate the likely resources available for investment over the next three years taking account of the anticipated commercial environment in which we must operate.

It is suggested that a view would be taken on the likely level of M.S.C. support but that major fund raising would be excluded.

There are boxes of dusty papers relating to not one but several fund raising exercises which have taken place over the last ten years and whilst it is always possible that someone may be fortunate in the future, if it is agreed that the immediate challenge is survival as an independent museum, then it is suggested that we should first see if an effective short term plan is within our existing capability rather than diverting a major portion of our efforts into what will almost certainly be a lengthy and fruitless fundraising exercise.

- c) endeavour to draw up a comprehensive and balanced three year development plan capable of producing a worthwhile commercial impact and within the resources likely to be available.

It is suggested that we examine whether the diversion of the society's efforts on site for a relatively short period of time could make a major transformation both in the standard of presentation and maintenance and in the coherence of the scene. Both these objectives would be economically very valuable as the first would save money in the future and both should materially assist in maintaining a reasonable flow of visitors.

The museum already has sufficient major jobs in hand to stretch all known resources for several years and we shall need a very credible case to justify the allocation of the required percentage of the museum's resources for additional work.

### A Question of Balance

There were two complimentary motives for producing the 1967 Development Report, one academic and one commercial. The academic motive was the need to put the British tramcar in its historically correct physical environment in order that it could be properly appreciated and enjoyed. The commercial motive was to produce an attraction based on creating an atmosphere which the public would pay to come and see. It is now recognised that this principal concept was ahead of its time and 17 years since the report was produced it is reasonable to ask -

How much progress has been made towards the conceptual goal of the 1967 report.

Whether the concept is still relevant as an academic and commercial proposition.

Whether the museum will still attract visitors in five years time if development at the museum is restricted to the sort of items indicated in the 1967 Development Report.

Whether the main proposals contained within the 1967 report are still valid for implementation.

When the 1967 report was produced the museum had only four years experience of tramway operation. In considering the success of the period street concept in attracting visitors to Crich it should be borne in mind that only in the last six years has any worthwhile sum of money been put into it. In the ten years to 1977, excluding the erection of the Assembly Rooms facade which was paid for by a specific grant, only £6000 was spent on creating the tramway environment. Of this over half is still lying in Field House field in the form of deteriorating building materials. It was only with the start of M.S.C. schemes in 1978 that any noticeable work was accomplished.

During the sixteen years from 1968 to 1983 £1M was invested in tramcar restoration, fixed assets, and working capital. Of this sum £372,000 came from grants.

The summary in Appendix 1 shows the gross investment made under each heading and, after deducting grants, its net cost to the museum.

It will be seen that investment flowing directly from the 1967 Development Report accounted for 15% of the funds available to the museum. After grants this was reduced to 8% of the net investment. Although inflation has distorted comparisons over a sixteen year period the comparable net investment for the last six years, when most of the work on the street and bridge was done, was still only 11%. So, by no yardstick can the amount be considered adequate to achieve the cumulative effect necessary to have effective visitor impact.

Equally worrying is the low investment in visitor amenities, including the extension, (3%) and cash generating projects (11%). Less than 25% of the net investment has gone into these three inter-related items, including the street.

While it can be argued that tramcar restoration should be added to visitor related items the visitor is not conscious of the true scale of the expenditure. Although necessary for academic and safety reasons the power of expenditure on tramcar restoration to excite visitors is probably only a quarter of that for a similar sum invested elsewhere. If three tramcars were made ready for £10,000 each instead of £40,000 each the remaining £90,000 would build a first class restaurant and the only difference the public would be conscious of would be the existence of an extra facility for them.

The foregoing financial analysis shows that from a commercial point of view the concept cannot be said to have failed as it has hardly been tried. This is doubly sad as, as is well known, we have many competitors now who have taken the same concept much further towards completion, particularly Beamish and the Black Country Museum.

### The Changing Environment

Though the museum is well on the way to its three millionth visitor we have to accept a decline in the yearly total from over 200,000 as being the inevitable result of increased competition. Crich now has competition for its concept, its school parties and filming facilities from the Black Country Museum, Heaton Park and, further afield, from Beamish. We have also to accept that considerable investment is continuing to go into counter attractions. "The Times" for the 6th July 1984 lists projects at Alton Towers, Corby, Shipley Park, Thorpe Park and Battersea, into which £200M will be put in the next eighteen months. Indeed Alton Towers, which has just invested another £5M, expects to increase its visitors by 400,000 this year. Wonderworld at Corby hopes to get 4M visitors a year in 1987 and Shipley Park is, after several delays, due to open next Spring. In considering this competition one should also realise that the admission price we need to charge to maintain the museum is not that much lower than the price for, say, Alton Towers, where on a fine day the public can get eight hours concentrated entertainment.

It has been accepted that Crich cannot enter the 'Arms Race' and indeed the example of theme parks in the United States which competed against one another with massive new investment each year during the last decade has not proved to be financially rewarding for them. In the case of Crich it would undoubtedly prove disastrous. New technologies are also rising against which we must compete. For instance the manufacturers of aviation simulators are now looking at using their technologies for attractions at leisure complexes. In conjunction with developments such as British Telecom's central data base of high quality photographic images which it is intended will be accessible via high speed telephone lines on to standard personal computers, it is necessary for us to ask ourselves what, if any, unique attributes we have to enable us to survive commercially. In other words why with all the fast developing competition should visitors continue to come to Crich when we know that our ability to change is very limited.

It is assumed that the members would reject the option of going in with a large scale leisure operator, in the unlikely event that this option would be available, as the result would be to destroy what we are trying to achieve. If the option existed it could be acceptable to go into a concept such as that of the Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry. The seeds for such a development were contained in the 1967 report whereby it was suggested that the tramway should be extended to another flat area on which industrial archaeological exhibits could be brought together and which itself would have its own road access, so that there would in fact be two museums with a tramway transferring visitors from one to the other. Again for reasons of planning, land ownership and the basically undesirable location of Crich, no progress, other than the minor demonstration by the Peak District Mines Society, has been made.

Our review of the 1967 Development Report should also consider third party constraints upon our actions, in particular the attitude of the planners to further development and the question of the future operation of the quarry. However, no optimism can be expressed in the latter case as despite Mr. Teeman giving a very mild indication of a joint arrangement between ourselves and the quarry to develop some leisure interest when the quarry was worked out, Mr. Hyde's recent enquiries in this direction have drawn a blank and we must be aware that the worked out quarry will be extremely valuable as a refuse tip.

Change has also affected the members. The members who did the bulk of the work in 1967 are no longer young. Young members who join us now are not prepared to put up with the primitive conditions of recent years. The pioneering days with their inherent attractions are gone. The ability of individual members to see the contribution they make becomes more difficult as the input of paid labour increases and the bureaucracy grows. Also, youth does not relate to trams so easily, witness the growing number of successful appeals to preserve diesel locomotives despite mouldering lines of already 'preserved' but still unusable steam locomotives.

### The Market and the Product

The major leisure park operators agree in their published statements that the market they are seeking is the family market situated within one or two hours drive away. The ability to satisfy male and female, child, adolescent, adult and pensioner is crucial to attracting the family unit and encouraging repeat visits. We now live in an era where more and more married couples have never known trams in their daily lives and many were born after we came to Crich. Nostalgia is not enough. Neither is continued harping on our volunteer background useful. The wife will look at our toilets and cafe critically and without emotion for our volunteer effort. If 25 years is not long enough to get them clean and attractive how long do we want? The children will expect an adventure playground and things for them to participate in. Even if he is mechanically minded father will not come again when the rest of the family are bored in an hour. Alton Towers offers everything for all of them at little more cost and it is on our doorstep.

Crich is selling theatre, or atmosphere. The experience we offer is, or could be, real. Our buildings are full size not built with smaller bricks the higher you go up. The wood is wood, the iron is iron, not plastic imitations exposed by the first touch. Our trams are as original as George Washington's axe.

But as theatre Crich fails - it lacks presentation and coherence. Even where we get a finished look the bloom of youth soon turns to rusty poles, broken huts and closed exhibits, as at Wakebridge. How long before the bridge is scruffy?

Returning to the street proper, unusual juxtaposition and changes in texture are to be welcomed, but currently there is nothing charming in a scene dominated by permanently unfinished "old bookshop", an assortment of truly old huts, a stone building which looks as if it cannot make up its mind whether it is being refurbished or demolished and all dominated by a glaring expanse of 1960's asbestos.

Much of what appears, or is considered, finished is drab, unkept, and incoherent. Changes in texture and colour of the surface area are a valuable tool for creating a feeling of change in a small space and for creating areas devoted to different periods of time. However the patchwork of surface finishes from Town End to the member's hut is illogical and untidy and bears no relation to the building line or any proposed period changes.

Looking up the street from Town End the eye finds little to intrigue. The building line goes away from the track. The sense of enclosure necessary to create the feeling of hidden delights awaiting to be explored is absent. The sophisticated visitor who has gone to the Black Country Museum, Iron Bridge and Beamish can take it all in as he walks along the entrance path.

Visitors pay to be enticed.

But we offer buildings which pop up unrelated to any period scene and unrelated to the visitor. In our golden mile too much is considered as being not the visitors business e.g. stone workshop, the member's hut, engine shed, caravan, and the library.

There is also a perspective problem inherent in the location of the original buildings which diverge from the track and the need to retain visitor circulation areas and wide pavements. But, the use of short walls, hoardings, and arcade type covered walks could help break up the openness, entice the eye, and by linking useful features together provide a sense of coherence and raise the effect to a level where it breaks through the threshold of consciousness and impresses.

Contrast the kaleidoscope of colour and sound from inside the forge bookshop looking through the mullioned windows at a passing tram with the sterile scene inside the cafe.

We need to consider if it is possible cheaply and quickly to create a sense of enclosure in the street, probably by hoardings, coupled with more cover for the visitors, perhaps by arcades and verandahs, and more to hold their attention in the form of places to go in and concealed views - above all an atmosphere of theatre. The asbestos must go.

Visitor activities previously discussed include a viewing gallery in the side of the workshop, crafts at work, street entertainment, (organ, Punch & Judy) and the audio visual/cinema. Alton Towers cinema uses a depot-like construction with an Edwardian front made of plaster. Historically, this is very appropriate. An attraction for the park area could be a maze constructed of brick set into the ground. These have become relatively popular recently.

The 1967 report stressed the need for service areas screened from the public gaze. At the moment Poplar House is surrounded by building materials and junk creating a very bad impression to visitors who may also be potential sponsors, the Assembly Rooms is equally surrounded, the area by the engine shed and first aid hut being particularly awful. There is just no excuse for the associated merchandise left for the public to trip over on frequent occasions by the stone workshop.

#### The Framework of the Report

Although the 1967 Development Report appeared to concentrate on creating an illusion contained within the double main line, aided by the natural topography of the site supplemented by the bridge, the plan is wider than this and depends on four interrelated factors which are still valid -

1. Tramcar circulation
2. Visitor circulation
3. Income generation
4. Creation of the period environment

It is suggested we consider the improvement and extension of visitor facilities with changeing factors such as the car park and the method by which the public pays in the context of maintaining 90% of the period development within the double main line during the next three years. This development should be aimed at linking together the street into a coherent whole with visitor impact.

1968-<sup>83</sup>~~75~~

	Gross Investment		Net Investment after Grants		Percentage Grant Assisted
	£000	%	£000	%	%
Visitor Amenities					
Car Park, Toilets	45	5	18	3	60
Cash Generating					
Extension, Sales Points	117	12	69	11	41
Development Report Items					
A.R.Facade, Street, Bridge	147	15	52	8	65
	309	32	139	22	55
Tramcar Restoration	320	32	146	23	54
Depots	64	6	64	10	-
Library Building and Archives	82	8	54	9	34
Land and Houses	32	2	32	5	-
Site Work and Plant	45	5	45	7	-
Increase in Current Assets	148	15	148	24	-
	1000	100	628	100	37