

SAVE BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

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PRESS RELEASE

20th February 2008

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SAVE CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE LISTING OF IMPORTANT BRUNEL PUMPING STATION FACING DEMOLITION – ROOF BEING REMOVED

SAVE Britain's Heritage is calling for the immediate listing by Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport Andy Burnham of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Atmospheric Pumping House in Totnes, Devon. Its owner, Dairycrest, started the illegal demolition of the building. Last week contractors removed part of the roof without the use of scaffolding or protective clothing, claiming they were removing asbestos in preparation for repair. An application to demolish was lodged with the local authority, South Hams District Council, shortly after.

The 1840s Atmospheric Pumping House is a part of Brunel's attempt to introduce a radical form of locomotion, with trains being pushed by air pressure from a pipe between the railway tracks. Trials between Exeter and Teignmouth were abandoned after a year when rats chewed through the tallowed leather valves along the line. The system was far ahead of its time, pre-empting the basic concept behind electrification – that of taking power to the train rather than the train carrying its power source – and taking it further in taking the actual source of locomotion to the train. Only two other pumping houses on the route survive and are both listed, at Starcross and Torquay. It is arguably the most interesting and unique stretch of railway in the UK.

SAVE's Secretary, Adam Wilkinson said "This extraordinary relic must be listed now. It is an incredible reminder of an era of amazing innovation and inventiveness. One



could hardly imagine a railway company coming up with, and executing, an idea like this nowadays. It is hugely important both nationally and locally - Totnes is up in arms at the threat to the building - and to top it all it could easily find a new use. The Secretary of State must act fast to list the building, allowing the local authority to act to prevent demolition."

Totnes Museum Administrator Alan Langmaid said "The Atmospheric Pumping House is one of the very few heritage sites outside the main town and is a great landmark - it would be a tragedy to lose it. It isn't fair game. The heritage of the town spreads beyond its Saxon defences and mediaeval boundary– our history didn't stop in 1066 with the Normans."

ENDS

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Images: www.totnesonline.com/brunel

RELEASE 2008/02