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*The jewel in British rail's crown: an account of the
closure at Shildon Wagon Works*

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"The Jewel in British Rail's Crown". An account of the Closure at
Shildon Wagon Works."

By John Sansick.

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Dept of Sociology,
University of Durham.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS.

In April 1982 British Rail Engineering Limited announced they were closing their Wagon Works in Shildon, County Durham. Prior to the closure Shildon was very much a single occupational community. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects of that closure, both as part of a specific instance, and as part of the general decline of primary industries in the north east of England.

The main body of the study examines the immediate consequences of the closure and how it affected those responsible for administering the community of Shildon. This was largely achieved through extensive interviewing of the people charged with that responsibility both in Shildon and in the surrounding Sedgefield District Council area.

Subsequent to the closure Shildon Town Council, in conjunction with Sedgefield District Council, set up a Development Agency (SASDA- Sedgefield and Shildon Development Agency) to try and attract employment to the area. An account of the political processes thus involved is the central point of the study. In examining how day-to-day events affected policy, both at local and national level, an attempt is made to compare the public rhetoric of apparent firm resolve with the more private sense of confusion felt by all concerned. As the pressure to accept British Rail's compensatory package grew so those faced with the responsibility of trying to alleviate the consequences of the closure found themselves unwilling partners in an elaborate game of bluff and counter-bluff. How this happened, and the subsequent developments, are examined in detail.

British Rail's decision to close the Works at Shildon was inevitably linked to wider issues: how British Rail operates is, for instance, largely dependent on the transport policy of successive governments; when a closure is announced the trade unions affected have to organise, often at short notice, an adequate response; and, finally, when a workforce is made redundant what can be done to retrain it for other work? It seemed appropriate therefore also to briefly assess how these considerations affected Shildon.

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Department of Sociology.

November 1990.

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his prior written consent and information derived
from it should be acknowledged.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

This study could not have been written without the co-operation and support of many people in Shildon and the Sedgfield District Council . Often this help and advice came, if not anonymously, in such a way as to make acknowledgement difficult. I would, however, like to particularly acknowledge the help given by Tom Toward, Town Clerk of Shildon Town Council, and Councillor Walter Nunn. Both men allowed me, without hesitation or qualification, complete access to their personal files on the closure of the Wagon Works.

I would also like to thank Shildon Town Council for the financial assistance given to the Work and Employment Research Unit (within the Dept. of Sociology and Social Policy) of the University of Durham.

I also thank Alan Roberts, Chief Executive of Sedgfield District Council, for his help and encouragement throughout the period this study was being prepared.

I commenced work under the supervision of Huw Beynon, then Reader in Sociology (University of Durham), but when, quite early on, Huw became Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester Professor Richard Brown, (Sociology Department, University of Durham) kindly agreed to add my supervision to his already full workload. Professor Brown's always tactful and perceptive guidance became an invaluable source of encouragement and support. I would, therefore, like to acknowledge that without his help I would have long since vanished forever under an evergrowing pile of notes- he helped bring order out chaos and I thank him.

Finally I would like to thank Pat Wilkinson and Audrey Sansick for helping with the transcription of tape recorded interviews. This work was long and, at times, very taxing, but both gave their help unstintingly.

CONTENTS:

Acknowledgments.....	Page 1
Contents.....	3
Preface.....	5
Introduction.....	11
Chapter One. Background.....	29
Chapter Two. Development of the BREL Works 1825-1984.....	46
Chapter Three. The Announcement of Closure.....	52
Chapter Four. The Campaign.....	93
Chapter Five. The Closure.....	135
Chapter Six. How 'SHILDA' became "SASDA".....	150
Chapter Seven: "If I'd been younger I'd have emigrated.".....	190
-Trade Unions.....	194.
- Govern ment Transport Policy.....	207
- "Training for the Future.".....	226
Chapter Eight: "So what! The North's finished anyhow.".....	245
Appendix.....	259
Bibliography.....	280

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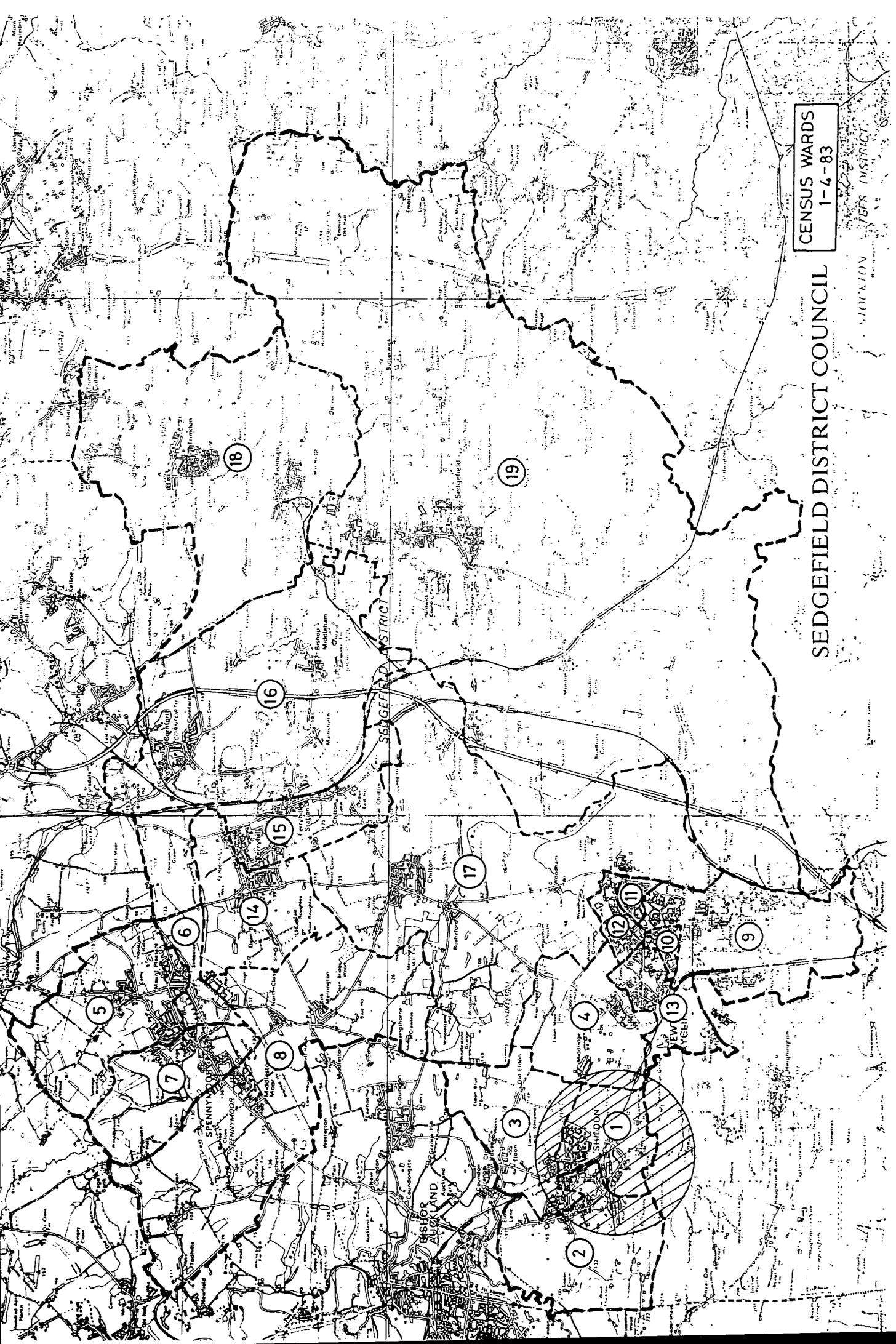


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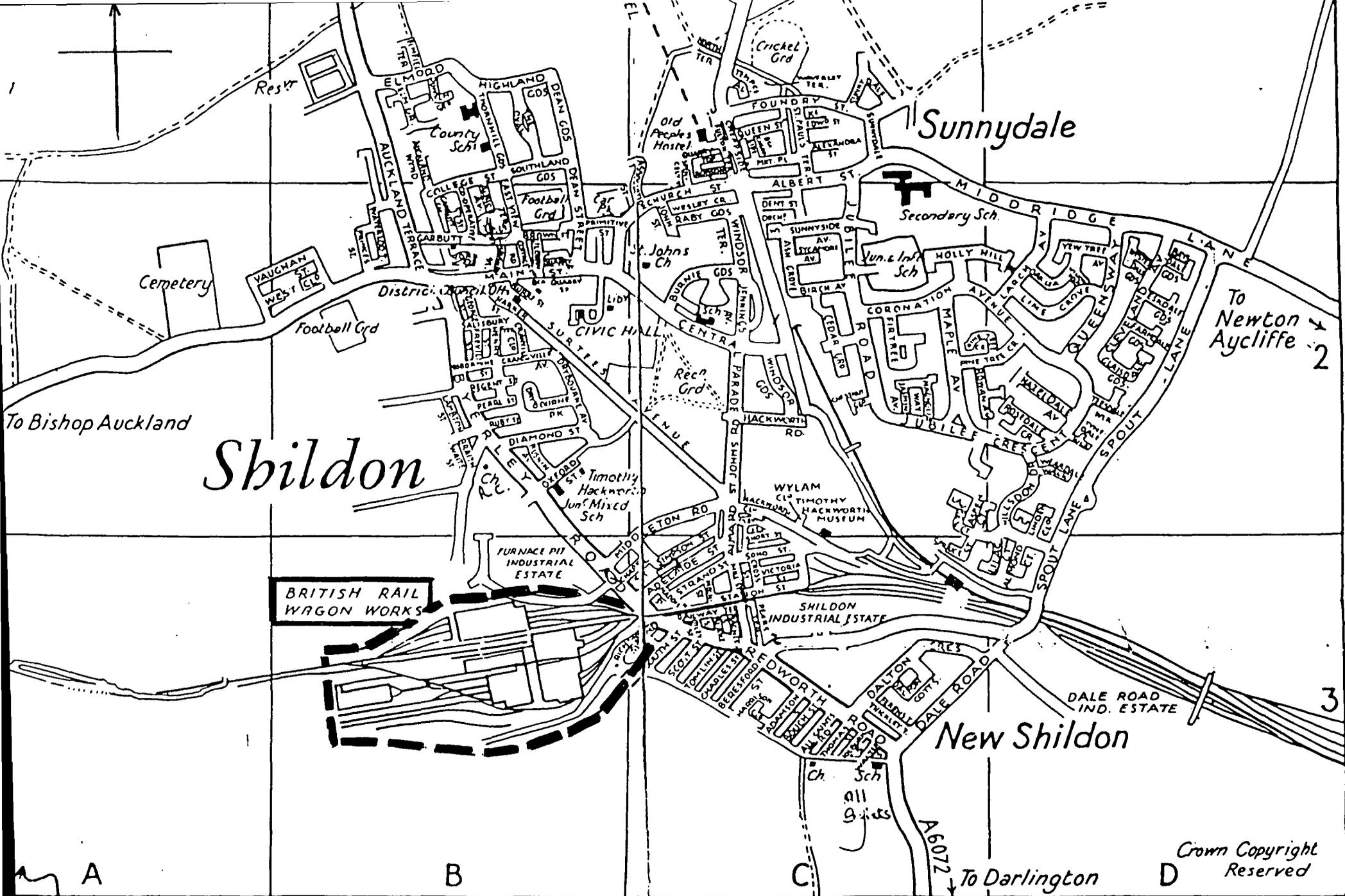


CENSUS WARDS
1-4-83

SEDFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL

VICTION

SEDFIELD DISTRICT



Sunnydale

Shildon

New Shildon

BRITISH RAIL
WAGON WORKS

To Newton
Aycliffe 2

To Bishop Auckland

DALE ROAD
IND. ESTATE

To Darlington

Crown Copyright
Reserved

A

B

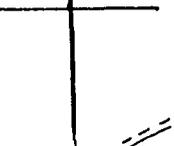
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D

1

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all girls

A6072

District: *Shildon*

Recn Grd

WYLAM
CL. TIMOTHY
HACKWORTH
MUSTUM

FURNACE PIT
INDUSTRIAL
ESTATE

SHILDON
INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

Cemetery

Football Grd

Cricket Grd

Old People's
Hostel

Secondary Sch.

Sun. & Inf.
Sch.

St. John's
Ch. Sch.

Timothy
Hackworth
Jun. Mixed
Sch.

Ch. Sch.

VAUGHAN
ST.
WEST I.C.

Country Sch.

Football
Grd

CIVIC HALL

CORONATION
AVENUE

QUEENSVILLE
LANE

DIAMOND ST

ETON RD

DALE ROAD

Country Sch.

HIGHLAND
GOS

SOUTHLAND
GOS

WINDSOR
JENNINGS

SUNNYSIDE
AV.

HOLLY HILL

VIEW TREE
AV.

LIBBY

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3391 46

5386
4'96

Furnace
Industrial
Estate

Allotment
Gardens 6579
2'50

Slag Heap

Rail Trail

Shed

Works

Dining
Hall
Building

CAR PARK

Offices

Friend's
Memorial
House

M. DOLETON ROAD
Scottie Street

SCOTT STREET

WINDYBANK ROAD

13

8, 9, 10, 11

6

5

3

2

1

Allotment Gardens
8748

ACTION PHASE

FURNACE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

access closed when new by-pass access is open from South

offices retained for small business/office type uses

provisional line of future service road

* new road access until by-pass access is open from South

possible future service road

sites for future industrial/commercial use

dining hall build retained for sm workshop or car sports hall use (subject to line of by-pass access)

* future access route

OWEN LL PARTNEE

ARCHIT PLANN

YOUNG

ROAD

* proposed access road

new SERVICE ROAD

12

13

FORGE
proposed for new

8-11

AMCO TIMBER LTD 1

2

5

6

7

3

future road

road

PREFACE: "Y'know, I often wonder what it was really all about?"

This chance comment in a Shildon pub, is, in a very real sense, why I wrote this study. It happened during a drink with a Shildon town councillor who worked in the town's British Rail Wagon Works- he had worked there since 1945, had been a foreman welder, a shop steward, and was then inspector of welding. On the 23rd of April 1982 it had been announced that the Works were scheduled for closure and we were discussing how the town was reacting to the news. The Consett steel works had recently been shut down and a similar fate was promised for a number of other industries in the north east. Our conversation turned on what this meant to the people who had lived and worked in these industries. Two years later, December 1985, I remembered this conversation and decided to try and discover a little of what it was "really all about."

I wanted to examine, in as much detail as possible, the events that led up to the closure at Shildon. No one can ever know what anything is "really all about" because no one has that kind of ability. Sociologists and historians interpret evidence by placing discovered facts into some kind of structure, but the interpretation always depends on just that- interpretation. Letting the "facts speak for themselves" doesn't help because someone somewhere will no doubt have selected which facts will act as spokesman. Such arguments can of course, lead, into a kind of cultural cul de sac. If, in the end, nothing can be known what is the point of asking questions etc? But there is a point. If we only begin to understand a part of how something like a closure happens it will, perhaps, help us understand what to do when the next one comes along. If

we listen carefully to the people suffering unemployment are we not then better equipped to help them? Before we can extrapolate a theoretical response from any circumstance we must first make sure we know as much as we can about that circumstance. This was the base point around which I constructed my study.

Wherever possible I have directly referred to primary sources. I have interviewed most of the people who were at the centre of the events described. Where I was unable to interview I have stated that my observations could not be confirmed. An example of this is in the reported conversations of Hector Macmillan- a crucial figure in the creation of the Sedgefield and Shildon Development Agency (SASDA). I refer not only to his letters, but to transcripts of telephone conversations, comments he made at meetings, etc, but the latter could only be confirmed by others, not BY HIM, for the simple reason that the unfortunate man died in 1985. In some cases I have interviewed individuals over a three year period to gauge any changes in their attitude.

In almost every case my interviews were tape-recorded. Some were transcribed, but occasionally I worked direct from the tape. I recorded the interviews for two reasons; one, to ensure I had a continuous record which could be either up-dated or referred to in subsequent interviews, and; two, to create a body of evidence that could, if necessary, be used to confirm the statements of those interviewed. As some of the comments could be regarded as being rather controversial I felt it was wise to have a record of what people had actually said. It is interesting to note that, given what sometimes emerged in these interviews, in almost every

instance the person interviewed agreed to being recorded.

It was obviously important that the "establishment" figures of the town were interviewed- Town Clerk, councillors, vicars, CAB advisors, Works management, District Council officers, etc.- and through them I was able to develop a workable network of contacts. In addition to these I interviewed many people who were unconnected with any established authority or held any kind of "position."

Interviewing people is not always the best way of discovering what they think. Many will tell the interviewer what they think the latter wants to hear. Some will even set out to distort their response in order to register a kind of protest. Most communities seem almost to treasure a suspicion of strangers and Shildon was no exception to this- in many ways the town seems to be the very personification of this attitude. I was quite definitely a stranger- I did not live in the town and had only lived in the north east for twenty four years and so was often regarded with some caution. At the same time I found many who were eager to "put their case" about the closure and all the events that surrounded it. Above all, considering that my questions could often seem impertinent, I was always met with great kindness and an understanding sympathy of what I was trying to do. The study could not have happened without that co-operation.

A further source, and, in many ways, perhaps the most crucial for the sections dealing with the post closure period, was my unlimited access to the archives of Shildon Town Council. This included access not only to minutes of meetings, but to the more personal correspondence between all concerned with the Council's response to the closure. In addition I had

access to the minutes of Sedgfield District Council meetings. I was never refused any request for access to documents. This co-operation from Tom Toward (Town Clerk to the Shildon Town Council) and Alan Roberts (Chief Executive of Sedgfield District Council) was unstinting and complete and, in many ways, reflected their joint concern that the study be as true a record as is possible. Their preparedness to allow such access was a refreshing recognition, by them, of the need for an open debate on all the issues raised. This kind of co-operation can, to the more cynical amongst us, indicate an indifference to what might be said, but considering what was under scrutiny I cannot believe those responsible were indifferent and, therefore, can only thank them for their frankness.

I was also given access to the more personal records of people living in the town. This occasionally enabled me to place the "personal" against the "official" version of events. I would, in particular, like to record my gratitude to Councillor Walter Nunn, a former inspector of welding in the Works, for the opportunity to use his very extensive files- especially for the details leading up to the closure. By juxtaposing this material alongside the reporting in the local and national newspapers I was able not only to describe the circumstances that surrounded events, but also to suggest that the "evidence" about those events was often open to many interpretations.

The main body of study is almost solely descriptive. It is designed that way because I wanted to explore the daily experiences of people having to endure the process we have come to call deindustrialisation. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to begin with a few brief observations on what

might be meant by that term. Similarly I felt that it was also appropriate to end with some comments on:- the role of trade unions in the changing industrial pattern; the way successive governments have tried to conduct an overall "transport policy"- perhaps NOT conducted one would be more accurate; and, finally, some examination of whether training, as present offered, will be of much use to the unemployed.

Others have described the same kinds of situations, but I would contend that there will always be a need for such descriptive work. If we are to construct any kind of useful theoretical addition to the unemployment debate we must constantly take account of the actual experiences of those suffering that unemployment.

I left school in 1949 and for the first fifteen years worked in circumstances very similar to those of the people I interviewed. I have been a trade unionist for over forty years. During my time as a fireman in the London Fire Brigade I helped organise two strikes- not an easy exercise given the job- and, as "trainee" shop steward in Surrey Commercial Docks, had been involved in a number of industrial disputes. It is impossible to say whether this trade union background helped me understand the events at Shildon more clearly. I do, however, feel that it did help me gain some insight into the personal problems that underlie so many industrial disputes. I strongly believe these private circumstances usually determine most of what we do despite our more public behaviour- that beneath it all we are as Checkov describes - "Going through life in a

permanent state of confusion." One translation of Checkov has it as "despair", but I think most people in Shildon would be quite happy to settle for "confusion."

INTRODUCTION: "You know what deindustrialisation means? It means that places like Spennymoor get called 'Enterprise City.' Nothing changes, except the name."

Factory closures often follow, or are part of, a process generally known as "deindustrialisation." But what does "deindustrialization" mean? It might be useful to first try to briefly define "industry." In recent times the word has become almost fashionable; film and television producers talk of "The Industry", fashion designers of "Our Industry"; even more curiously there is the notion of an "industry of care" as expressed by those who attempt to define medicine in market terms. Most, if not all, of these recent converts to working in an "industry" would, no doubt, run a mile if confronted by one of Blake's satanic mills, so what has changed? Has the word become so generalised as to rid it of any specific meaning, or is it simply part of the accompanying jargon of "market forces"?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "industry" in, as always, a number of different ways- "systematic work or labour: habitual employment in some specific work," etc. Perhaps the Dictionary's definition of "industrialism" is more useful- "a system of things arising from or involving the rise of great industries; the organisation of industrial occupations."

In the past "great industries" meant something that happened in a factory. It was an activity that involved dirt, noise, not a little danger, and usually took place in the north. People talked of the "industrial north", or "industrial towns" and everyone knew, or thought they did, what this meant: Lowryesque figures scuttling back and forth between smoking chimneys and streets of small back-to-back houses.

It is this type of industry that is generally reckoned to be suffering most from "deindustrialisation." It is difficult to determine when the term first came into common use. It is fairly certain that when Denis Healey (budget speech, April 1975)- said "we must reverse the process of deindustrialisation." the term had, by then, become familiar. In 1979 a Fabian Research document studied some of the economic circumstances that could be associated with deindustrialisation.

"One of the main reasons (for deindustrialisation) is that growth of output per head in manufacturing is higher than in most services, so that, over time, as economies grow, even if people demand industry's products and services in the same proportions, fewer people will be required to produce the industry's products compared with services. Therefore a pattern of demand which did not favour services will nevertheless lead over time to a services biased employment pattern."

"A Deindustrialised Britain?" pp 1. Tom Sheriff.

Sheriff also goes on to mention the tendency for "rich" countries to increasingly spend more on services "(education, travel, health, banking, etc)" and argues that "a move towards a 'service economy' is somehow inevitable in advanced countries". He then connects Britain's particular problems of deindustrialisation to a "general economic malaise of the British economy".

The Fabian document offers other definitions and in particular that made by the Cambridge school of economics. It quotes an article by Ajit Singh ("UK Industry and the World Economy: A case of deindustrialisation?") which appeared in the Cambridge Journal of Economics June, 1977. Singh is described as arguing that deindustrialisation refers to the:

"...absence of a manufacturing sector which 'currently as well as potentially, not only satisfied the demands of consumers at home, but is also able to sell enough of its products abroad to pay for the nation's import requirements.' He adds that these objectives need

to be achieved at 'socially acceptable levels of output, employment and exchange rate'."

Ibid. pp 3-4

It is generally accepted that a decline in manufacturing began to occur shortly after, if not before, the Second World War. To try and understand why this happened is not easy. Sheriff argues that the constant balance of payments crises of the 1950' and 1960's created the circumstances for the decline:

"The main source of this balance of payments problem is the uncompetitive nature of the manufacturing sector, particularly in the non price factors, poor design, poor quality, and bad delivery of shoddy goods, etc. This meant that neither foreigners nor UK residents have wanted British goods (even when they have wanted UK goods, supply has not always been forthcoming)...A manufacturing sector once inefficient has no chance to recover without a respite from continued competition from abroad. Other countries have increased their competitiveness relative to that of the UK as they have expanded faster, have been able to invest in research and innovation, attract top personnel and invest in the most up-to-date equipment simply because they were confident of an expanding market in the future."

Ibid pp 11-12

It is perhaps worth remembering here that this Fabian pamphlet was written before Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister which cannot help but bring to mind Al Jolson's comment in the "Jazz Singer"- "You ain't seen nothing yet".

The Fabian piece concludes with a further reference to the Cambridge Economic Policy Group's "Economic Policy Review". The Group suggests that in the coming decade (1980's) unemployment will approach "the 5 million mark" (pp 16-17). Sheriff felt this was too pessimistic, but unfortunately it was only too accurate. The final recommendations of the Fabian document seem now, knowing how the in-coming Government would view

its role in industrial change, almost quaint.

"Services cannot supplant manufacturing as our main exporter...Policy should be guided towards strengthening the manufacturing base in such a way that when the North Sea oil is gone, we are not faced with a massive balance of payments deficit and an un-competitive exporting sector...Devaluation or import controls are necessary to provide the impetus of faster growth to stimulate the investment..."

Ibid pp 22

The Conservative Government took office in the summer of 1979 and soon made clear how it intended to remedy Britain's "industrial malaise". It not only argued that it was wrong to help industry survive competition, but went further and suggested that such help did positive harm. Industry must be left to manage alone and without government interference. Only then would it become efficient and therefore successful.

Its economic strategy was based upon the economic theories of the New Right economists, the most distinguished of whom was F.A.Hayek. Hayek's arguments were that once "governments became involved, economic outcomes cease to reflect impersonal market forces and become politicized".

("Capitalism Since World War Two" Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison. pp 403-404). This economic approach suggested government's only function was to preserve law and order and ensure the country was defended, but few elective governments would be prepared to go that far.

The new Government saw inflation as the real enemy of economic stability and decided to control this two ways. One was MONETARISM; the control of money supply and credit through reducing government deficits, and the other SUPPLY SIDE economics; the drastic reducing of taxes which, it was hoped, would lead to greater work incentives and the growing investment of the

freed income (Armstrong et.al. pp 405). The only problem was how to deal with the people who would have to suffer the consequences of such a strategy.

"(The) theories systematically avoid any mention of classes. Thus the central fear of the New Right is not the politicisation of the decision-making itself, but politicized decisions in which the working class has a big say. The worry was not coalitions of any old interest groups, but the political power of the labour movement."

"Capitalism Since World War Two" pp 495 Armstrong, Glyn & Harrison. 1984

It soon became Government policy to introduce legislation that would restrict the power of the unions. At first sight this could have appeared electorally risky, but union practice had, in many ways, become discredited, not only for the general public, but amongst its members. That the Government was reasonably successful in diffusing union power is not in question, that it was able to do it so easily is, however, a much more important problem, but more of that later.

As the policies of the Government took hold so unemployment increased.

"Annual average unemployment rates 1971-1983

1971	1974	1977	1980	1983
3.00	2.52	5.70	7.40	13.10

OECD, Economic Outlooks (OECD standardised unemployment rates)"

Increases of this nature can often create dangerous psychological pressure on those most vulnerable to such changes- the people likely to be sacked. Trade unions depend, ultimately, on the solidarity of their members and if they are weakened by fear for their jobs then getting them to take action in defense of those jobs becomes difficult. This nervousness is perhaps one explanation of why so many often appear almost acquiescent when faced with a threat of a plant closure? People can become all too easily

accustomed to the notion that they are victims of a system which is unalterable, even unchallengable. It seems fair to say that most of us simply want a quiet life- taking industrial action always requires courage.

Whatever the causes for this rise in unemployment- and there is still no absolute consensus as to why world economies suffered so drastic a decline in 1970's, apart from blaming the oil crisis(es)- the net result for many people was that they saw their job, often of a lifetime, become threatened and then vanish. Any examination of the figures for regional unemployment makes clear that most of those job losses occurred in the north.

"Regional unemployment levels, 1983	Rates of unemployment %
South East England (including Greater London)	9.5
East Anglia	10.6
South West England	11.3
West Midlands	15.7
East Midlands	11.7
Yorkshire and Humberside	14.1
North West England	15.7
North England	17.3
Wales	16.1
Scotland	15.0
Northern Ireland	21.0

Source: Department of Employment Gazette, April 1984: S26-S29"

"Unemployment in the UK" pp 28 Jeremy Moon and J.J.Richardson. 1985
Statistics and descriptions abound as to which jobs were lost, where they were lost, and perhaps why. Massey and Meegan ("The Anatomy of Job Loss" 1982) describe the way changes in job practices and geographical redeployment of plant helped increase unemployment in the period. Moon and Richardson outline how successive government policies have tried to deal with the increasing numbers of workless. Sinfield and Showler ("The Workless State" 1981) attack the notion of the workshy- the idea that the unemployed are somehow partially responsible for their condition and argue

that lack of investment, not a departure from Keynesian principles, are the root cause of much unemployment. Sinfield in another book ("What Unemployment Means" 1981) examines the notion that high levels of unemployment will, perhaps, always be with us and discusses the implications of this and how public attitudes towards the jobless might have to change. Dennis Marsden ("Workless" revised edition 1982) describes, through the direct experiences of the unemployed themselves, what it means to be without work and goes on to ask for a "social contract" to assist greater worker involvement in the decisions affecting their work. Giles Merritt ("World out of Work") looks at the global implications of high unemployment and how this, in particular, affects the young. All these, and many more, recognise that for whatever causes high rates of unemployment are likely to remain with us well into the foreseeable future.

Since these were written the collapse of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe has created yet another problem. Government policy in these economies had often been used to heavily subsidize jobs. This was done partly because having people out of work appeared to contradict the underlying ideology, but also because, in a sense, having a regular job was one of the few perks available in an otherwise fairly deprived society. It seems certain that such policies will now become too expensive and the practice will end.

The notion that the right to a job is just that, a right, looks like disappearing from most economic strategies. Whether this is a good or bad thing is too large an issue to discuss here, but that it will very likely happen appears not in doubt. As more and more people everywhere become

either permanently unemployed, or subject to long periods of unemployment, so the problems of what to do with these people will become more and more pressing.

What should governments do to try and alter this seemingly intractable problem? In the past no elective government could ignore high unemployment levels for long, but has this changed? Perhaps unemployment has become so commonplace it has become just another part of an apparently unchanging fact of life? It is a fact, for instance, that the Conservative Government has survived the last two elections with high levels of unemployment- 1979: unemployment at 5.6% (first elected), and rising to 1983: at 12.9%, 1987: at 11.4%. Are we to assume from this that a significant number of people have become somehow unconcerned about unemployment, or at least unconcerned about someone else's unemployment? Even taking into account the recent constituency boundary changes, with its consequent bias in favour of the Conservatives, there were still enough people throughout the country who voted for an administration that appeared indifferent to the unemployment caused by its policies.

Can a government, any government, in the end do much to prevent job losses? Should it try? Two contrasting studies of deindustrialisation in America give some indication of the difficulties governments face when dealing with any kind of industrial decline. In "Plant Closings: Public or Private Choices?" (edited by Richard B. McKenzie) there is a fairly straightforward argument that any government interference in the "natural" process of industrial investment (and mobility) would simply lead to high levels of subsidy and eventual economic stagnation.

"Business mobility- the mirror image of the free play of economic forces- is a normal, indeed inevitable, feature of any dynamic and growing economy. Nonetheless, particular moves (plant closings, relocations, and the like) can and do evoke protests by the communities and the workers left behind. These people see themselves as somehow wronged, and among the political remedies they seek are restraints by government fiat on business mobility...In recent years Bills that would seriously restrict business mobility have been introduced in the US Congress...If such measure(s) become federal law (they) would substantially increase government intervention in business decision making, alter our national economic system in fundamental ways, and be, on balance, detrimental to the regional and local economies of the country in the bargain "

"Plant Closures: Public or Private Choices." pp 11-12 edited by Richard .B.McKenzie 1984

McKenzie argues that freedom of movement is as much in the interest of the workers as it is the employers- "the case AGAINST plant-closing restrictions is a case FOR workers and FOR the economic revitalisation of this country." (pp.309). He is particularly concerned about the way legislation might limit a company's financial freedom.

"Backers of the new restrictive legislation fervently contend that firms have a social responsibility to their workers and to the communities in which they exist, a responsibility that extends beyond the labor contract and the shutting of the plant's doors. They point to the social disruption caused by the plants closing (and ignore the good it has done): the loss of tax base, idle workers and plants, impairment of community services because of lower tax revenues, and higher taxes imposed on others, because of higher unemployment and social welfare expenditures...Admittedly, plant closings create hardships for some people. The important question to ask, however, is whether the remedy...is more damaging to the social and economic progress than the disease?"

Ibid. pp 207-208

His answer to that question is, somewhat predictably, that it is. He suggests that such legislation could, in fact, lead to lower wages through being "priced" out of the market.

"To operate in a financially sound manner under such a law over the long run, a company must prepare for the eventual expenditure associated with closing: It can establish its own contingency fund ...the cost will be recovered from wages that would otherwise be

paid...What advocates of restrictions seem to want is protection from competition and from the threat of pricing themselves out of the market. Consumers and taxpayers should be gravely concerned about plant-closing restrictions. As the bill is now written, it hands over to the unions the power to price labor out of the market- to turn a profitable concern into a losing proposition- and then gives them access to the coffers of the federal government for a 'bailout' or 'buyout'."

Ibid pp 210-15

Another contributor to the book ("Reindustrialization Policy: Atari Mercantilism?" James C. Miller 111) discuss government intervention in a more general way.

"Any discussion of industrial policy should begin with a recognition that we already have one. The issue is what type? For example, should the government be more or less involved? Should it be a 'planner' or a 'catalyst' for market forces? For reasons that will soon become clear I am skeptical about government programs to achieve industrial growth through special subsidies, protective regulations, and grants of monopoly privilege."

Ibid. pp 222

Considering the threat to American commercial interests posed by Japan- a country apparently determined to do all the things Miller abhors- it is not surprising that he finds it necessary to discuss this apparent contradiction.

"According to Brookings Senior Fellow Phillip Trezise, the Japanese are spending an 'almost trivial' amount of public funds on special subsidies for prospective high-growth industries...The idea that the leadership of US firms is about to be surpassed en masse by Japan is dubious at best."

Ibid. pp 226

We are not told what Miller, or his source, Phillip Trezise, regard as a "'trivial' amount" so therefore cannot judge whether their arguments are just, but to suggest that Japan is now not a major competitive threat to the US economy seems to be little more than wishful thinking.

In summary McKenzie (et al) argue that a prosperous economy depends on the

free movement of capital and that any restrictions on that movement will inevitably lead to an economic decline- "the proposed legislation (on severance pay, etc) imposes a disguised 'tax' on US firms...restrictions on plant closings, such as those in the proposed law, ultimately become restrictions on plant openings... plant closing laws will tend to have the unexpected consequence of closing some plants that could have remained open..." (pp 311-312)

He concludes:

"In summary, the imposition of plant-closing restrictions is an economic mistake that a country in the midst of economic distress can ill afford to make."

Ibid. pp 313.

McKenzie and his other contributors echo the "market forces" arguments of the British Government throughout the 1980's. As will be seen, these kinds of arguments were used to justify the closure at Shildon, were used to close Consett, to end shipbuilding on the Wear and Tyne (and elsewhere). They were used to decimate the mining industry, the docks of Liverpool and London, and to support the idea that industry can only survive if it is able to sell its services or goods and that if cannot do this it should go.

In many ways McKenzie's book (1984) seems to have been a counterblast to an earlier book on closures ("The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry." Barry Bluestone and Bennet Harrison. 1982). McKenzie often refers critically to the Bluestone and Harrison's idea that the economics of industry should somehow be made more responsible for what they do.

The opening chapter of Bluestone and Harrison's book ("Capital

vs. Community.") does, in many, ways state the inherent problems implicit in applying economic laws to social acts- "At the root of all is the fundamental struggle between capital and the community." (pp 19) They quote at length from an essay written by John Friedman ("Life Space and Economic Space" UCLA, Los Angeles 1981.) What Friedman wrote is, in many ways, central to much that was at stake in Shildon and is therefore worth quoting in detail.

"Two geographies together constitute a 'unity of opposites.' I shall call them LIFE SPACE and ECONOMIC SPACE. Although both are necessary for sustenance of modern societies they are inherently in conflict with each other. Life space is at once the theatre of life, understood in a convivial life, and an expression of it...Life spaces exist at different scales (and) are typically bounded, territorial spaces...Places have names. They constitute political communities. In contrast, economic space is abstract and discontinuous, consisting primarily of locations, (nodes) and linkages (flows of commodities, capital, labor, and information). As an abstract space, it undergoes continuous change and transformation. Economic space is open and unlimited...indeed its continuous expansion is vital to the reproduction of capitalist relations as a whole. Expansion occurs ruthlessly...A capitalist city has no reverence for life. It bulldozes over neighbourhoods to make way for business. It abandons entire regions because profits are greater somewhere else. Deprived of their life spaces, people's lives are reduced to a purely economic dimension as workers and consumers- so long, at least, as there is work."

"The Deindustrialization of America." pp 20. Bluestone and Harrison. Even allowing for the perhaps slightly romantic tone much that Friedman says is directly relevant to any discussion of the social effects on communities suffering large scale economic upheaval. It provides an interesting contrast to the slightly colder economic arguments of McKenzie (et al).

Bluestone and Harrison write at some length about the impact of closures on workers (Chapter Four- pp 49-81), and much that they describe is familiar to the events in Shildon. They also mention how closures can bring a

"strange silver lining...management".

"The swelling ranks of the unemployed creates a reserve of malleable workers and even potential strikebreakers. The memory of such drastic dislocation can have what labor relations experts call a 'chilling' effect on future labor-management negotiations. Surviving firms in an area gain the advantage of being able to hire the most highly skilled of the discharges without having to bid them away from former jobs."

Ibid pp 79

They argue that the "chilling effect" is also often accompanied by a feeling in the community that the workforce had "brought the problem on themselves".

"researchers (investigating closures in New York state) reported that they repeatedly encountered an 'anti-union animus' related to a widespread belief in the community that it was 'the local union's exorbitant demands' and 'intransigent' position in negotiations before the shutdown that caused the closing...that 'the militant stance and strike by the union had caused the closing. In short they had got what they deserved.'"

Ibid pp 80

It would be difficult to describe the unions at Shildon as militant. If anything they were perhaps too accommodating and consequently vulnerable to a management desperately seeking ways to cut costs, but some, when seeking an explanation for the closure, did try to blame the unions involved. It was ^{as} if they needed to simplify the issues around a scapegoat in order to understand what had happened.

Bluestone and Harrison note that any "social contract", however vaguely framed, only seems to work during periods of economic growth. That once things start to go wrong the "contract" quickly collapses.

"It is crucial to recognize that whatever the interpretation, both the new social contract with organized labor in particular and the extension of the social wage in general were predicated on more or less continuous growth that in turn depend on the Pax Americana in global affairs. As the conditions underlying that growth fell apart in the late 1960's and early 1970's, it was inevitable that

both the willingness of capital to honor the social contract and the ability of the US economy to afford a large and growing social safety net would come to an end. And that, of course, is exactly what is occurring now."

Ibid pp 139

The notion that mobility brings growth (McKenzie, et al) is examined in their chapter on "Managerial Capitalism and Economic Crisis." (pp 140-193) Here they describe how capital operates when planning a move to another location. How it "bribes" the new community.

"The shifting of capital from inner cities to the suburbs (after World War Two) has been accompanied by often surprisingly up-front demands by corporate managers...Elected state and local government officials have at best felt helpless before these demands."

Ibid pp 182-185

The promising of new business "carrots" to beleaguered authorities in the UK is now a familiar pattern, but the author's description of the process in the USA is indeed "chilling".

"The relocation (1979) of the \$180m Goodyear plant from Ohio to Oklahoma provides a clear illustration of the power an enormous corporation can hold over a small town...At one point the management placed ads in newspapers in different communities to 'feel out' the availability of labor although there were no jobs being offered. Finally Goodyear solicited bids from six jurisdictions. The 'winner' made amazing concessions...the interstate highway was moved, access roads built, a schools jurisdiction annexed so that children of Goodyear managers could attend a school run by (their) local authority..."

Ibid pp 185

In Detroit General Motors wanted to move its plant into the centre of the city. The treasury of Detroit was nearly bankrupt and knew that if it disagreed the company would move elsewhere.

"In this highly uneven poker game the city had the poor hand... therefore the city met the demands of the company almost totally. Over four hundred acres were cleared, 3,200 people were forced from their homes in what had been one of Detroit's most integrated communities, churches were torn down, and 160 community business

closed. The city used its power to clear out families and small-time entrepreneurs and to give a twelve year tax abatement that may cost the city as much as \$240m in foregone revenues."

Ibid. 186-187

Could it happen here? Any study of the "deindustrialisation" in the north east will show that it can, and does. Given a different industrial history such practices are undertaken with perhaps more subtlety here, but the principle remains the same. As will be seen, the bargaining between Sedgefield District Council and British Rail Engineering Limited soon came to resemble a kind of extended "poker game".

One result of that "poker game" was the creation of the Sedgefield and Shildon Development Agency, (SASDA). Bluestone and Harrison, often using UK examples, examine the notion of such agencies and in particular their place in "enterprise zones". They do not seem much impressed with what they saw.

"The other 'quick-fix' policy now being trumpeted by conservatives (with surprising support from some liberal politicians) is the designation of urban 'enterprise zones': selected areas in which business would be encouraged to invest, under conditions of reduced incomes and property taxes."

Ibid. 225

They go on to outline how this practice has been "recently imported" into the USA. Their main criticism of these zones is that they appear to depend on a sort of suspension of disbelief as to the true intentions of business practice.

"The...proposals are extraordinarily naive about the relationship between the management of technological change in the capitalist firm, on the one hand, and hiring and plant location policies, on the other hand...As managers introduce new machinery they tend to alter work rules about who to hire to perform these jobs...Indeed there is good

reason to expect that the zones could become havens for a ^{ev} rival of old-fashioned sweatshops."

Ibid 228

Quoting labour costs in similar types of workplaces in the Third World, they argue that it will be impossible for the new enterprise zones to compete because much that they make can be manufactured more cheaply elsewhere. They believe that however much we subsidise wage levels in the USA, or UK, we cannot hope to match the wages in places like "Thailand, Mauritius, Phillipines, and Haiti".

This is, of course, true, but it does presuppose that we simply continue to manufacture the same types of goods. Bluestone and Harrison seem to be arguing that the only real solution is for government to exercise more control over large scale industrialisation. That it should regulate against the effects of closure rather than try and replace the industry altogether. There is much sense in this argument, but the balance between that regulation and having a proper understanding of whether what is being manufactured is still needed is a slightly more tricky one to achieve. Communities must be protected against the often quite arbitrary dictates of profit, but if that protection involves keeping a plant operating at an increasing loss then everyone, in the end, must suffer. If anyone doubts this they need only look to Eastern Europe to see what can happen if that balance goes wrong.

Whether we use the term "deindustrialisation" to explain closure(s) or not is unimportant, but that massive change in employment has occurred is not in doubt. What to do about them is less clear. The dilemma of what to

do with the communities suffering these changes seems, at times, almost intractable. If, in order to protect such communities, we simply subsidise uncompetitive industries who will pay for the subsidies?

Presumably some of the cost could be off-set against the social cost of allowing closures, but only some- where does the rest come from? If one part of the economy, the "efficient" part, is to be used to underpin those parts efficiency cannot reach could not the burden on the former simply curb its efficiency to the point where it joins the latter?

Eastern Europe has given us some idea of what happens when you have a totally planned economy. The reunification of Germany, in many ways, perfectly illustrates the problems faced throughout the developed world. In the FDR we appear to have an economy at its most successful, in the GDR an economy which, like its currency, was/is/ in a mess. The solution for those in the GDR seemed simple- join the FDR. But was this the intention of those in the GDR who first agitated for reform? Was everything in the GDR bad and everything in the FDR good? Maybe a BMW is more classy than a Trabant, but in the end they are both only cars and one costs a great deal more than the other. Is it possible that in the rush to join the FDR much that was good in the GDR could be lost?

"The GDR was an attempt to create an efficient welfare state which flawed itself by its political ineptitude and authoritarianism. On the pavement outside the old SED Central Committee building someone with gallows sense of humour has written in white paint... 'The Reds are guilty. That's now the fashion. What nonsense. I die laughing' The joker is right. The Reds were guilty, but they built something which partly worked. Now it is being swallowed up. Goodbye GDR."

Jonathan Steele "The end of a flawed dream". Weekly Guardian.
7th October, 1990.

Those from the old GDR now have access to the goodies of a flourishing capitalist society, but will they be able to afford them? What will happen to the "inefficient" industries in the east? How will the communities that worked in those industries feel when, in the name of efficiency, they are closed? In a couple of years these people will have the unique experience of seeing the two extreme ends of the argument about how to run an economy. What is fairly certain is that many in the old GDR are now going to become sadly familiar with the less attractive aspects of the "market economy"- things like deindustrialisation.

How this process will end is, to a large extent, unknown. It is possible that we are witnessing changes which will eventually totally transform our ideas of work? The early days of industrial revolution started quietly enough, but once underway it soon grew strong enough to utterly change our lives, our landscape, and alter forever our understanding of how society would continue. Maybe we are at the beginning of a similar period? In the meantime we can only try and understand what is directly before us and so perhaps gain some insights of how we might prepare for this worrying future. We can learn a little of what it is like for those suffering such changes- those, for instance, who were living in Shildon when British Rail closed the Wagon Works.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND.

"Should your home need toning down rather than living up, you might consider buying the very downbeat item which has just won a Johnson Wax award for furniture design. It is a low table with a laminate finish based on the colours and textures found in decaying industrial areas"

"The Times Diary" 3.1.84

The purpose of this study is to examine the social and economic effects of the closure of an industry which is part of a single occupational community.

The community is the town of Shildon. On the 23rd of April 1982 British Rail Engineering Limited (BREL) announced that as part of a reorganisation procedure they would be closing the Shildon Wagon Works in County Durham.

Shildon was already recognised by the County Council and District Councils as an area with serious long-term problems of economic and social decline and had been allocated special County financial incentives to try and attract new jobs.

When the closure was announced:-

-2,600 people were employed in the Works, accounting for over half the Town's workforce and 86% of male manufacturing jobs.

- unemployment in the Bishop Auckland and Shildon area was 19.5% (January 1983), and with the closure male unemployment within Shildon would rise to 44%.

-the closure would affect local suppliers and service industries with a consequent loss of a further 450 jobs.

-the costs of the closure to BREL and local government would be approximately £27.1m in the first year. The costs of the second and subsequent years would be around £10m if there was no recovery package. Cost of the recovery package was estimated at £21.5m.

The works closed on the 30th June 1984.

Many communities, towns, cities, and regions have experienced the rapid change brought about by the loss of a large industrial base. Steel, mining, docks, shipbuilding, all have suffered drastic, if not total, decline. Shildon's problems are a smaller version of that pattern and the direct experiences of the people there will form the main part of this study. They will directly describe what happened to them and so help to give expression to a process which has now come to involve millions- how to recover from the post-closure shock of losing secure employment.

Shildon, with a population of around 12,000, is not large. Situated in the south west corner of County Durham it sits between the larger towns of Bishop Auckland and Darlington, with the new town of Newton Aycliffe close by.

In many ways it is not typical of "decaying industrial areas" in that it has retained an appearance of normality. Like many Durham pit villages that have seen their mines close, the loss of Shildon's main employer has not much changed the look of the place.

Many towns and villages in the area have quickly reverted to an almost rural feel. Their "industry" was never large and often underground or tucked in a corner of the town. The sense of the countryside pervades and

it would be difficult to compare these people with what is usually understood as a highly industrialised workforce. There is more "peasant" here than "proletariat". It is this almost disguised quality of deprivation that can easily give a false impression of security.

Shildon grew alongside the development of the railway. It was almost inevitable that any man born there would work in the Wagon Works. There were pits, four at one time, but they came and went whilst the Wagon Works remained. Getting a job usually depended on a father to son relationship much as work in the docks, and market porters in London's East End operated. It was a kind of unofficial "closed shop" which naturally bred resentment amongst those not chosen. But for those successful in joining the "Works" once in "you were set, your problem's over".

This relatively secure pattern brought with it a degree of complacency. A kind of patronage developed as the unions involved determined who would, or, more importantly, who would not be employed. Sacking was rare and "slackers" were usually carried by their fellow workers; it would be resented, but was easier and avoided fuss.

Nearly all of the workforce lived locally and tended to use the "Works" as much as a social point of contact as place of work. Everyone knew each other, where they lived, who they had married and why. This is not unusual and a similar pattern can be seen in mill towns, pit villages, etc, but the peculiar nature of Shildon was that it was a railway town in an area that was predominately mining. The workforce did not share an occupation with the surrounding area and consequently became, in how it defined its working practices, somewhat separate from that area. There

was little shared experience with the working people of neighbouring towns. Darlington, some ten miles distant, had a railway workshop complex, but for the building of locomotives not wagons.

"It were always an inward looking town. Kept itself to itself like. You could walk to work in the morning and see everyone you knew, wave at them across the road. You knew all about each other. That were a good thing like, but it could be bad as well. Looking back you felt you knew where you were. Or thought you did."

Retired foreman in the Works

This suspicion of outsiders meant that innovation, if not generated internally, was resisted. When, in the 1970's, BREL laid off men from its Darlington works and they came to Shildon they were regarded as "interlopers, not good workers, pushy". This sense of separateness, almost small town self-satisfaction, was to create considerable problems when closure of the works became likely.

Insularity is not the peculiar reserve of Shildon. Most districts have their patterns, their commonly accepted "characters", participants in the routine of the place, but what makes Shildon so especially interesting is the almost perverse pride in being insular.

"People rarely leave, and if they do, they come back. I have baptism requests for children, or grandchildren who live in, say Doncaster (some townspeople went to the BREL works in Doncaster after the closure) and they'll say 'We're coming back to live in Shildon you see, in about eighteen months.' They have work there, but are PLANNING (my emphasis) to come back because they are unhappy being away from the town... This sense of community is, of course, a strength, but I feel here, in this town the degree of fear, or resentment of the outside is something that is a little worrying."

Vicar in Shildon

This distrust of anything outside the community has many causes. One is the dependency by the community on one employer. The collapse of the

inland mining industry in County Durham meant that the people affected were nearly all victims of many lifetimes of dependency on one employer. They had grumbled and protested against their working conditions, but they almost always remained. They rarely left the area they were born in and so had become trapped in an atmosphere of insularity. In many ways the miner was not dissimilar from the farmworker in that he was not only tied to his work by who owned his home, but also by a tradition of immobility. What is true of the mineworker is even more true for the workforce in Shildon. At least with mine work there was a degree of travel from pit to pit during slack periods, in Shildon this was not necessary.

The large urban working population has a style of its own. It "survives" because it is surrounded by change, it has grown through change. This is not to say that the closure of say, the steel works in Sheffield, or the collapse of the Port of London did not bring great hardship. But the capacity to "come back" in those communities is likely to be greater than would be found in the more rural areas of unemployment. The sheer scope for different employment in large cities means that people living there will usually adapt to changed circumstances faster. They may have to submit to many forms of exploitation- lower pay, worse working conditions, etc, but they will begin that process of adaption which is essential for their future. For communities like Shildon, this ability to manoeuvre, to read the bad signs and make plans, was- and for some in the town still is- lacking.

I've got lads on training schemes who have never been out of Shildon. In their twenties. They don't know how to use a telephone and these are men! Never been on a train.

Manager of a Training Agency in Shildon.

Whether Shildon was picked off by British Rail as an easy target for cost cutting is not sure. There seemed little commercial sense for its closure and it was one of the few BREL works making a profit. It had plenty of orders on its books and a skilled workforce to fulfill those orders. Perhaps it was selected for closure BECAUSE of its vulnerability? It could be trimmed more easily in a climate of cost saving exercises irrespective of whether that decision made economic sense or not.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TOWN. A disproportionate number of people interviewed for this study expressed an opinion that the people of Shildon seemed curiously "different" from other people in the area. This puzzling quality of "separateness" was referred to time and time again by those professionals whose job it is to advise, counsel, and administer the town and surrounding area. Whether these observations were fair or not is almost impossible to decide, but in trying to account for them it might be useful here to briefly outline how Shildon developed. (For much of the local detail that follows I am grateful to the various publications of the Shildon Local History group and to "Timothy Hackworth and the locomotive" by Robert Young

The town forms part of the valley of the river Wear. The river runs south west from Durham City until it reaches Bishop Auckland and then turns west. Shildon, two miles south of Bishop Auckland, is thus at the beginning of Weardale.

It is shielded from the valley to the west by a low ridge of hills, later known as the Brusselton/Etherley incline. These hills protected the town and probably gave it its first name- the Anglo Saxon combination

of 'sceld' (or 'scyld') and 'dun'; the former meaning shield, refuge, or protective place and the latter denoting a hill. There are various references to the town; 1214 "Sciluedon", 1291 Schilvedon", 1363 "Shylden" and allowing the vagaries of medieval spelling it seems fairly certain that Shildon was always known as such.

Bishop Auckland is the official residence of the Bishops of Durham and it is not therefore surprising to find that Shildon formed part of church land. During the Anglo-Saxon period Danish raiding parties occasionally used Shackleton Hill, just above the Town, as a base camp. The Bishops requested protection from these raiders from the Earls of Northumberland, but their lordships simply took the land themselves. It was returned to the Church by King Canute and remained its property until the Dissolution.

Farming and later coal mining formed the main economic base for the Town and area. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Town changed little and still only had a population of 101 in 1800. Some weaving of tammies, linen and cotton, was developed by women and children and sold in Darlington market.

The growth of industry in the mid eighteenth century put increasing pressure on the road system and schemes were suggested to make roads pay. One solution was road tolls and the avoidance of these became an art. Shildon formed part of one such diversion with mule trains carrying coal from the West Auckland coalfield using the Town to avoid Turnpike road.

In the 18th century transport costs meant that coal was expensive and ways were constantly sought to make the use of coal more economic. The

nationwide canal mania was one response and a number of projected canals in the north east were to include the Town. But despite numerous surveys, public subscriptions, and schemes the use of canals did not appeal. This was mainly because the hilly nature of the ground meant that the cost of a canal would be prohibitive. Yet there still remained the problem of how to efficiently transport coal from the west Durham Coalfields to the north east coast and thence to the industrial and commercial centres?

On the 18th of September 1810 a celebratory dinner was held in the Stockton Town Hall to mark the completion of a "cut" to reduce the distance of navigation on the Tees by two and half miles. The dinner developed into a public meeting and a committee was formed to study the practicability of building a canal, or railway, from Stockton, through Darlington to Winston. Yet another survey was done and to everyone's shock the cost was estimated at over £200,000. The idea was abandoned, but from it grew the idea of COMBINING a railway with a canal.

It was argued that the cost of constructing a railway would be a third that of a canal. Maintenance for a railway would cost less and consequently profits would be greater. A railway could also be built much more quickly than a canal. As the idea of a mixed system grew so subscriptions began to increase. On April 5th 1819, a Railway Bill was passed and the project moved closer to becoming a fact. After various setbacks and alterations, however, the idea of a combined canal/railway was dropped in favour of just a railway. On May 12th 1821 the Stockton and Darlington Railway Company was formed. The Company acquired two rooms at number 9 High Row in Darlington and planned their railway.

Railway systems at this time were horsedrawn and the idea of using a locomotive for power was not considered. This, however, was to change when the Stockton and Darlington Railway Company approached George Stephenson for advice. Stephenson had established a reputation of being an able surveyor and had constructed a number of stationary engines for Tyneside collieries.

In September 1821 Stephenson, assisted by John Dixon, was commissioned to survey the line. On January 18th 1822 he reported that the route was feasible and was appointed Engineer of the line at a fixed salary of £660.

Stephenson now needed to convince the directors of the Company that traction by locomotion was better than horse. After initial misgivings amongst the Board he finally persuaded them that the idea was at least worth exploring and they agreed to try his locomotive "Locomotion" in trials on the line.

After many set-backs and modifications the line was completed. The hill between Shildon and West Auckland, (the Brusselton /Etherley incline), was overcome by the installation of two stationary engines for hauling the wagons over the incline. "Locomotion" arrived from Stephenson's Newcastle works and all was ready for the opening celebrations. So it was that on 27th September the first locomotive drawn train left Shildon for Darlington and Stockton.

This first day was not without problems. The haulage up Brusselton was delayed when the rope kept snapping. The whole wagon train, preceded by a horseman, came to continual halts as various mechanical difficulties made

further progress dangerous- at one point the wagon carrying the surveyors and engineers developed axle trouble, left the rails and had to be uncoupled and left behind. But by the afternoon, speeding at times at fifteen miles per hour, the train had made its first journey.

Stephenson had proved his ideas, up to a point. His "Locomotion" had completed the journey, but only just. As the months went by more and more difficulties made the further use of locomotive power seem doubtful. One engine, nicknamed "The Maniac", was so unreliable that it would often start of its own accord and run amok- eventually it was thought to be too dangerous and was destroyed. Constant breakdowns began to eat into the profits of the Company and it began to seriously consider returning to horse drawn wagons. This it would undoubtedly have done, but for one man- Timothy Hackworth.

In many ways Timothy Hackworth can be seen as the founder of present day Shildon. He was a well-known Tyneside engineer and inventor when Stephenson persuaded him to come to Shildon and become Resident Engineer to the Company. He had been Guard on that first run of the railway and had gone on to complete most of the innovations and adaptations that kept the railway running. During this time he had, in his spare time, developed his own locomotive, "The George". This was an improvement of Stephenson's design having six wheels, better boiler system, and all-around greater reliability. Hackworth came to the beleaguered Stephenson and offered to use his "George" on the line. The offer was accepted and "The George" rapidly proved to the Company the viability of locomotive traction. Hackworth's invention had saved the project from failure and had thus

helped start what was rapidly to become the main transport of the nineteenth century- the locomotive.

The success of this initial project meant that the growth of similar systems would be rapid. The next big project was for a railway between Manchester and Liverpool and a trial was held to select the most suitable locomotive. These Rainhill Trials excited people's imagination and the competing engineers knew much depended on success before this national audience. Stephenson's "Rocket" won the trials, but Hackworth's "Sans Pareil" had been thought by many to be the better locomotive. During the Trials Hackworth's locomotive suffered a crucial boiler failure- a boiler made at Stephenson's works and cause for much speculation and rumour- and this meant that Hackworth had to drop out of the Trials. Stephenson's fame was assured and Hackworth left behind.

Hackworth returned to Shildon and remained an employee of the Stockton and Darlington railway whilst also developing and selling his own locomotives. Shortly after his return from Rainhill he received an order for a locomotive from the Russian Tzar. The order was straightforward enough, but how to get his machine there? Eventually he placed his sixteen year old son, John Wesley Hackworth, in charge and drivers and mechanics set out by ship, wagon, and sledge to make the journey. The Tzar had ordered a short railway line to be built which would connect one palace to its neighbour. On arrival the young Hackworth remembered watching as Orthodox priests "clinging periously to the engine blessed the whole enterprise as it trundled through the snow".

In 1835 Hackworth resigned from the Stockton and Darlington Company and

was soon exporting his own locomotives around the world. He had not achieved the fame of Stephenson, but his reputation for sound engineering enabled him to profit from much that followed as rail transport rapidly grew. His engineering skills, however, were not matched by a business sense and after his death in 1850 his company suffered a serious decline only to recover when it passed into other hands.

By 1845 a kind of railway "mania" had developed and railways were soon running through almost every small town in the country. As the railways grew so did Shildon. The "Works" BECAME the Town and much followed from that tight interdependency.

One important influence on the town's development arose from the fact that Hackworth's reputation as a Methodist lay-preacher was almost equal to his reputation as an engineer. He founded a number of chapels and made sure his workforce attended. Thus the chapel and the works became part of the twin controlling elements of Shildon. People came to identify work and community as something synonymous. They were, as it were, trapped, albeit in perhaps a relatively safe trap, but trapped nonetheless in a pattern of dependency quite different from those living elsewhere in the north east. This identification of town WITH work would literally create in them a belief that their town would be the determinant of everything they would know.

This particular form of religious based paternalism was not, of course, uncommon in 19th century Britain, but the dependency it engendered varied depending on the industry, the location, and how important each was in determining people's appreciation of their lives. A large industrial city

might have a more radical workforce, but this might not perhaps be because they are, in some way, more prone to question, but simply because their very numbers gave them some security. Similarly if many people share the experience of an industry, but are spread across the countryside (e.g. mining), this does not mean they will not be aware of some self-identification with the interests or problems of people not their neighbours- they have a common cause in the experiences of their work. For the people of Shildon much of this does not apply. They developed in a corner of County Durham in a manner that was, in many ways, quite removed from what was happening elsewhere in the County.

It is perhaps ironic that the very industry that was to "liberate" many working people should be Shildon's trap.

"Of the working men, at least in the more advanced countries of Europe, it may be pronounced certain, that the patriarchal or paternal system of government is one to which they will not be again subject...when railways enabled working men to shift from place to place and change their patrons and employers as easily as their coats; when they were encouraged to seek a share in the government by means of the electoral franchise. The working classes have taken their interests into their own hands, and are perpetually showing that they think the interests of their employers not identical with their own, but opposite to them."

"The Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes" from "The Principles of Political Economy" 1852 John Stuart Mill

There is much of what Mill says that is still to happen, but it does seem reasonable to suggest that some of what he prophesied came true. The changes wrought by greater industrialisation did mean that working people could begin to take their "interests into their own hands"- certainly, at least, there was some improvement on what had gone before. Yet as a gradual awareness of that potential strength coalesced around trade

unionism, the pursuit of direct political power, etc., so the working people of Shildon, it seems, took the interests of their EMPLOYER as the determinant of how they should live their lives. The paternalism that lay at the heart of Hackworth's works had, it appears, perhaps laid the seeds of the town's acquiescent nature- they identified their interests and those of their employers as being the same.

The growth of railways allowed an expansion of commerce on a scale never before experienced.

Cannot it be said that there is a limit, a ceiling which restricts all human life, containing it with a frontier of varying outline, one which is hard to reach and even harder to cross. This border, which in every age, even our own, separates the possible from the impossible, what can be done with little effort from what cannot be done at all. In the past the borderline was imposed by inadequate food supplies, a population that was too big or too small for its resources, low productivity of labour, and the as yet slow progress in controlling nature. Between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries, these constraints hardly changed at all. It is worth insisting on this slow progress, this inertia.

"The Structures of Everyday Life." pp 27 Fernand Braudel

Braudel goes on to suggest that these pre-industrial limitations only end "about 1830" with the development of improved roads and railways. He argues that it is "only when overland transport became commonplace...that the limits of the possible were actually achieved".

"And this is not the only area in which backwardness persisted. In the end, the only real change, innovation and revolution along the borderline between possible and the impossible came with the nineteenth century and the changed face of the world"

Ibid pp 27

The events that surrounded the opening of the Stockton and Darlington railway were part of that change and Shildon a point of contact between what had been "impossible" and had now been made "possible".

In the years that followed these momentous changes there were to be many Shildons as there were to be many Hackworths, but it was a fact that invention had been a reason for the town. Its growth would go side by side with extraordinary events.

It has been necessary to stress Shildon's industrial origins in order to try and establish an understanding of how the town sees its own history, its own development. There is always great debate as to which moment, which invention, which insight, will alter our lives. Towns and cities across the world spend much effort and money laying claim to various moments when they were special- when they mattered. It is part of human nature to desire prominence, to be in some way special, and this is never more noticeable than when the claimant(s) feels vulnerable- perhaps in some way inferior.

Whether a community can experience a kind of collective inferiority complex is unsure, but it does seem possible for a community to have a collective sense of its identity- why else fear outsiders if not because they are new to that identity?

This "collective identity" will often depend upon a number of myths and misunderstandings about its past. The past is constantly being subjected to the prejudiced interpretation of the present, but this does not necessarily invalidate the conclusions made. We all believe many kinds of things for all manner of reasons. So what may sustain a community might be its idea that it is "special"; whether it is or not is, to a large extent, irrelevant.

"Sociologically, then, a generation is that span of time within which identity is assembled on the basis of an unchanged system of meanings and possibilities. A sociological generation can thus encompass many biological generations. We are told there were fourteen generations from the time of King David to the Babylonian Captivity, but there was only a single sociological generation. The example is apt because it brings out the importance of great historical events and experiences in the making of sociological generations."

"Historical Sociology" pp 256 Philip Abrams

Shildon has experienced many generations since Hackworth built his workshops, but the sociological generation might be seen to extend from Hackworth to the post-war (1945), perhaps even to the time of the closure of the Works? Much changed in that one hundred and sixty years, but how much that change altered people's understanding of what Shildon was for is less sure. Many interviewed for this study felt the change to be almost minimal and that is why the closure proved so traumatic for all involved.

What is being claimed is that Shildon is "different" from communities it might otherwise resemble. Trying to account for that difference is one of the purposes of this study. In so doing caution will have to be exercised because what is being attempted is the placing of an historical framework against present day behaviour. The collective consciousness that might affect behaviour has to start somewhere and where better than in trying to understand (or forget) the past.

It is certainly desirable that we have a greater-

...understanding (of) historical change as a process embedded in the coming together of personal and social time, and conversely of understanding the typical identities of social generations as historical creations.

Of course, to get this far is only a beginning. All sorts of problems remain. For example, the translation of historical experience into new meanings and new patterns of identity does not have to be a dramatic response to single, momentous events. It can also be achieved gradually by way of a slow accretion of quite mundane experiences. In

such circumstances the cut-off points between generations tend to remain obscure; one can see that given time a new identity type has established, but cannot fix the point at which its establishment began"

Ibid pp 259-260.

There are many in Shildon who know nothing of its past. People often remain in the present because that is all they have time for; they are too busy with now to wonder, for long, about causes. They accept the present because it seems to make a kind of sense and to conceptualise "the past" is not interesting to them. It is possible, however, that they will place the restraints on their community within an historical context because, for them perhaps, that is where the "them" who alter and control their lives began and continue. They are aware that what happened in the past matters, but do not believe it important TO THEM to necessarily understand it. Whether this is a wise attitude or not is not the concern of this study, but it will argue that much of what happens in Shildon is rooted firmly in its past and that the understanding of why that is so might perhaps help understand its future.

"When they ripped up the railway lines to the Works it must have been a trauma for the Town. It was the cutting of their umbilical cord with the rest of the world."

Tom Toward, Shildon Town Clerk.

The BREL Shildon Wagon Works started with a small workforce.

"Only about 50 persons (were) employed in the works, and few of them skilled, with no tools except hand lathes.., no means of raising heavy parts, but the screwjack of old fashioned make. Boiler and cylinder, mine old friends tell me, were got from Newcastle"

Bishop Auckland Herald 3.9.1863

And the conditions hard.

"Many a night I was told Mr Hackworth was at work on an engine by the flickering light of a candle, in weather frosty enough to freeze the tallow as it began to run down the candle sides. So work was done in those days and its lasting character is no mean tribute to those who persevered in it with so few appliances and under so many discouragements."

In the same article John Dixon, the Company's engineer was reported describing what he remembered of the Work's beginnings.

"I have known Shildon for fifty years when there was not a house of any sort at New Shildon, much less a Mechanics Institute (the article was a report of a speech given at this Institute to celebrate the opening of the S & D railway). When I surveyed the lines of the projected railway in 1821, the site of this New Shildon Works was a wet, swampy field- a likely place to find a snipe, or a flock of peewits. Dan Adamson's was the nearest house. A part of Old Shildon existed, but 'Chapel Row', a row of miner's houses, was unbuilt or unthought of."

The Works were built simultaneously with the opening of the railway.

The buildings, described by a contemporary as "like narrow barns" were begun in the autumn of 1825. They comprised of a blacksmiths shop, a joiners shop, and an engine shed- the latter large enough to hold two small engines. The Committee, reluctant to risk capital, left the engine shed,

for its first few months at least, without a roof. Timothy Hackworth took possession of these somewhat primitive surroundings in the June of 1825. His salary was fixed at £550 per annum.

The eventual success of the railway line meant an inevitable expansion of the Works. The S & D rail line was doubled (1831) and in the following year extensive new building for the Works completed. In the same year twelve new engines were added to the rolling stock, all built at Shildon.

By 1833 Hackworth had virtually become manager of the Works and it seems probable that it was his very success that now prompted him to reassess his conditions of employment. He felt the need to expand even further and have the capacity to manufacture stock for other companies as well as the S & D. The Company agreed and following an evaluation of the Works Hackworth took over all responsibility for the plant and site with the Company retaining a 5% annual interest.

Hackworth was to provide and maintain in good condition all the necessary "locomotive power, to find all workmen and material, including fuel and lubrication for rolling stock, "while the Company undertook to take back all stock on conclusion of the contract following a second valuation. It was, in effect, a management "buyout" of a going concern. This new arrangement came into force towards the end of 1833 and gave Hackworth complete independence with regards his business.

By 1840 the old buildings, unsuitable for further use were abandoned and a new Works constructed nearby. In 1840 Hackworth resigned from the S & D Company and formed his own company- The Shildon Works Company. In 1848

a new running shed was proposed "for 6 to 8 engines, with proper coke depots, furnace and sand drying place, with water laid on" and a plan of the works (1849) shows these developments in place.

As the Works developed so houses were built for the workmen, the resulting township being known as New Shildon. The steady growth of the Town was to continue, like most other towns in the north, alongside the development of the industry that had given it its original purpose.

Hackworth died in 1850 and control of the Works passed to a Board of Management of the S & D. In 1857 the directors, feeling that Shildon was no longer convenient to the main rail network, decided to move their contract for locomotives to a new site in Darlington. From this time on the Shildon Works was to be responsible for the building of wagons; its days as a manufacturer of locomotives were over.

THE NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY.

In 1863 the S & D Company amalgamated with the North Eastern Railway Company. This effectively meant that the Shildon Works would have, if not a new employer at least a new contractor so powerful as to make any decision by the Company binding on its subsidiaries.

Whether this larger employer meant any deterioration of relationship between employer and employee is not sure, but it is a fact that the first dispute at the Works took place within two years of the amalgamation. On the 8th of June 1865 a petition for a 2s increase in wages was delivered to Mr Dixon, the works manager. If the Company failed to agree work would

cease on the 1st July. Although a rise was eventually agreed the conditions in the Works remained harsh.

Some felt that once locomotive building was moved to Darlington the Shildon Works would decline and probably eventually vanish, but work continued and by the 1880's as many as 700 men were repairing wagons on an average weekly wage of £1.6s.2 3/4p.

A description of the Works at this time appeared in the Bishop Auckland Herald (Mr John Dixon describing his early days at Works-3rd October 1863)

"There are traces of engines in the air, traces as distinct on the walls as the handwriting of old; traces in the smell of oil and grease, traces in the enginey-looking men of greasy jackets, with waste-bulged pockets. For Shildon is girt about with a gridiron of lines and the route to the works, stations and streets is by way around and over rails. Go into which street you will, all seem to converge to the line. The male adults seem all either enginememen, "works" men, or colliers. The engine penetrates everywhere. Pictures of its improvers are on the walls of the public buildings pictures of novel engines are the ornaments on office walls, and I doubt not that "Puffing Billy's" photograph hangs on the walls of many a cottage!"

...Many have grown old and grey in the service of the S & D which is to them the be-all and end-all of railways, and the directors and engineering officials of which have in Shildon the PATRIARCHIAL AUTHORITY OF FEUDAL CHIEFTAINS. (My emphasis) ...In the course of service so long they became, as it were, part of the system -and a parcel of "the section".

By the turn of the century Shildon works was flourishing and in 1897 the NER extended the Works site to incorporate a forge, sawmilllls, a new paint shop and larger offices for the staff. The site now employed over 500 men.

In 1923 a grouping of railway companies occurred and control of the NER went to the London and North Eastern Railway Company (LNER). The LNER remained in control of Shildon until nationalisation on the 1st January 1948.

In 1963 the British Railway Workshops Division was formed, with headquarters in Derby. During this re-organisation a certain degree of "rationalisation" took place, but Shildon escaped closure and was instead modernised at a cost of £800,000. This investment continued in 1965 when new machinery and plant were installed.

"The million pound reorganisation plans for the BREL workshops at Shildon, the largest employer in the area, are making excellent progress and many proposed innovations are now operating... Coinciding with this development, but not necessitating it, is the building of the a brand new 32-ton galvanised body full automatic coal wagon at the works."

The Northern Despatch 19.11.65

It seems to be a curious fact of life that whenever large scale modernisation takes place somewhere it is often shortly followed by threats of closure. So common is this practice that some people become quite fearful when they learn that their workplace is "to be improved". Shildon did not escape from this odd practice.

"200 RAILWAYMEN TO LOSE THEIR JOBS.

More than 200 railway workers in the the Darlington, Shildon and Northallerton area will lose their jobs if BR's plan to streamline its freight service goes through...

The possible cuts were this afternoon described as a 'slashing blow' by Mr Webster, secretary of the Bishop Auckland branch of the NUR... A BR spokesman at Newcastle said today that the scheme would close the marshalling yards and the footplatemen's depot at Shildon."

The Northern Despatch 20.6.1968

On the 1st of January 1970 British Rail Engineering Limited (BREL) was formed and Shildon Works, along with thirteen other works, became controlled by a subsidiary board of directors with its own managing director. New managements, like "improvements", can also bring their own peculiar anxieties and by 1972 Shildon's future was again being threatened.

"Shildon Wagon Works will not be closing- at least in the 'FORSEEABLE FUTURE' (my emphasis). This assurance was given to the Great

Aycliffe parish council last night by the Dept of Environment. The Council had heard of the possibility of a shutdown. While discussing a rail halt for Newton Aycliffe councillors said they wanted to make sure the Works would not be closing as most of the passengers using any halt would be travelling to the Shildon Works. The DOE said in reply that the two major works in the country were Ashford and Shildon. If either had to be closed, it would be the Ashford Works and Shildon kept going. Mr Richard Marsh (Chairman of BR), who was also asked about the future of Shildon Works, agreed that BR had no plans in moving out of Shildon."

Northern Echo 24.2.72

In 1973 another modernisation and rationalisation took place when the Drop Forging facilities were improved at a cost of £280,000. Shildon was now the largest wagon works in BREL with extensive contracts from both home and abroad.

The above has briefly outlined the progress of the Works up to the period immediately before closure. Throughout that time, especially during the 1980's, there had been a decline, in real terms of subsidy for the railways and a large scale reduction of the work force and selling of rail assets. One prime target for cuts had been the closure of British Rail Engineering Limited's (BREL) various wagon works. Although Shildon was "the premier wagon works in Europe and the jewel in the crown of BREL" (Ian Gardiner- then Managing Director BREL) it seemed very probably that it too would eventually come under threat of closure.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE CLOSURE.

"If it had been just a matter of inefficiency we would never have closed."

Charge hand in wagon repair shop

On the 22nd April 1982 the six o'clock news bulletin announced that Shildon BREL works was to close.

Rumours that the Works were to close had been circulating for some time.

People in Durham had become almost acclimatised to talk of closures.

During the early 1980's there had been many in the region- Consett steel works, shipbuilding on the Wear and Tyne, Teesside steel works, and a number of pits. It was natural then to be anxious about who was to be next? This anxiety had been a natural breeding ground for rumour.

"Two years or more I kept getting, from outside, sometimes with no indication of who was phoning me, calls 'what are you doing about Shildon works?' I said what's wrong like? 'Well you ought to be getting something done before it's too late you know'. It was worrying and obviously somewhere along the line they knew and this was beginning to come out. Maybe two or three calls and towards the last month or two I was getting them more frequently. I noticed there's not been any five year contracts been given out, you know, then all of sudden, bump, it came down on 22nd April 1982."

Town and County Councillor employed in Works.

On the 23rd April the Town Clerk of Shildon (Tom Toward) wrote to the town councillors.

"I hereby summon you to attend a SPECIAL MEETING of the Council to be held in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, BURKE STREET, SHILDON, on WEDNESDAY 28TH APRIL 1982 at 6.30pm.

AGENDA

1. THREATENED CLOSURE OF SHILDON BR ENGINEERING WORKS:
To authorise the Chairman of the Town Council to call a public meeting."

In the House of Commons on the 26th April Derek Foster, MP for Bishop Auckland and Opposition Chief Whip, "moved for Adjournment of the House

under Standing order No 9" for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"The announced closure of the British Rail engineering works at Shildon Co. Durham, throwing 2,500 mostly skilled workers on to the dole in a town of only 14,000 in which the unemployment rate is already above the national average."

Forty six MP'S signed the motion. The Speaker replied

"On this occasion I must tell the House that I was in the locality of the Works at the weekend. Therefore it is all the more difficult for me to explain that it is not in my power to decide whether this matter is to be debated. I merely have the right to decide whether we must change our business tonight or tomorrow night for an emergency debate on the proposed action.

I hope the the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I listened to him with sympathetic concern. However I have to rule that his submission does not fall within the provisions of the Standing Order and, therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House."

On the same day the shop stewards at the Works decided to hold a raffle draw to raise funds for their "determined effort to keep alive the Works".

"Help in any way will be greatly appreciated, i.e. prizes for the draw or donations to the Fund. If you are interested in helping our fight we can possibly organise a voucher system for prizes."

Leaflet to workforce

Hardly a call to man the barricades, but a start. People were "invited" to take part in an organised march on the 29th April.

On the 27th April the Chief Executive of Sedgefield District Council (Alan Roberts) issued a confidential memo outlining his immediate strategy on the "Proposed Closure of the Shildon 'Shops'". His plan was to alert all those likely to be affected with "telex/telegram messages to be sent to notables". A meeting of "leading members" (of the Council) had met on Saturday 24th to discuss a possible campaign to oppose closure. He concluded that the District and County Council Planning Departments are co-operating in preparing a detailed report on the proposed closure which

should be available by Friday 7th May.

There were some who wondered whether all this activity was simply too little too late. Hindsight is an unfair way of judging people caught in circumstances not within their control. We can all see ways out of a fix afterwards, but at the time it is not so easy. However it does seem curious that more had not been done before. There appeared to have been no contingency plans despite the unsteady nature of employment in the County. It is as if each addition to the closure list came, somehow, as a surprise to those suffering it.

"I had this leaflet urging everybody, everybody, to stand and organise and help Consett. It said 'your turn could be next'. It had a list of those places that could be next and it included Shildon Works. I put one up on the welders screen. The union officials took it to the management. The manager went mad. But the union officials, NOT manager complained about it being brought into the the Works. The AEU convenor told the manager who'd put it up. The manager had me down and was threatening to sack me for subversive activity and the convenor said to my face ' If I had my way I'd sack you on the spot. I'll tell you what I'm going to do with them (leaflets) I'm lighting the fire with them'. That's absolutely true. The Works Manager didn't know what the hell to do when he got me. They thought it was some little mug who'd be easily frightened. They didn't know it was me. He didn't know what to do. I said you're not telling people in this Works what to read or not read. I had six and half years in bloody khaki helping fight a bugger that burned books and that. After he got over the shock of that- and this'll tell you about the attitude in the Works- he said 'what am I going to do then? I've promised the 'Big Six' (2 Boilermakers, 2 NUR, 2 AEU- Works convenors) that I'd sack the man who brought that in'. I said 'That's your fault isn't it'. He said 'But I promised.' Management! Eh?"

Foreman welder with 39 years service in the Works.

This reaction, and similar stories confirm that this was not uncommon, seems odd. That union officials should fear any unsettling of the smooth routine of the day almost suggests a kind of guilt.

"I don't think they were stupid. It was more that they were carrying on, I use the expression, playing along with management, in a way like

'We're all one big happy family and we'll keep the Works, nowt's going on, nobody's coming in, we're not going out, we're alright here.' That was the attitude."

Ibid.

Once the threat of closure became official scenes like that described above became less frequent. Management and shop floor workforce began to combine to save their jobs. Whether an earlier, and a perhaps more vigorous campaign, would have been more effective is, of course, unknown, but it is certainly true that some in the Works did feel let down by their union(s).

A Working Party of the Shildon "Shops" was formed and a meeting held on the 28th April in the Council Chamber of Sedgefield District Council, Green Lane, Spennymoor. The Chairman of the Council was appointed Chairman of the Working Party. It was arranged that a joint meeting of representatives of Durham County Council and Darlington, Sedgefield and Wear Valley District Councils be arranged to discuss the closure. A suggestion that Shildon Town Council be allowed to attend was rejected. Bureaucratic procedure- or political convenience?- thus ensured that those most affected were to be informed of what was being planned after it had been agreed. Whilst it is true that some Shildon Town Councillors were also District Councillors it still seems a curious decision to exclude those on the Town council with direct working experience in the Works.

A Trade Union march was arranged for the next day, 29th April. It was resolved that Sedgefield District Council be represented on the March by the Working Party and that "members' attendance at the march be classed as an approved duty". Council staff were also allowed time off with pay to participate. It would seem then that, for some, protest marches could

pay, but for the majority to have attended at all would be their only reward.

At seven o'clock on the evening of 28th the Shildon Town Council met to plan their strategy. Another "working party" was formed and the protest march was to assemble at 10.00 am the next day by the recreation ground near Sunnydale School. Later the same evening the Works NUR met to establish a "fighting fund" and was told that the AUEW was organising a draw with prizes from local traders. They also discussed what to do with those "who won't fight?" This early recognition that some would not fight was an indication of problems to come. It seemed that, as an immediate response to the news of closure, not much was going to be done beyond having a march and holding raffles.

Perhaps a more active response would have set a different mood for the coming months? Around that time French steel workers in Longwy heard their works were to close and they instantly blocked the main road into the town and effectively brought the area to a halt. The government, to avoid further disturbances, responded with large aid packages. If the French workers had merely raffled a few prizes it seems quite possible that they too would have been ignored.

It is not as if the announcement of closure had not been trailed in the days and even weeks before. On Wednesday the 14th April, eight days before the official notification, the local Evening despatch had carried an article about a possible closure.

"Shildon rail workers joined a national fight with BR today over the expected shutdown of vital rail works...This could mean the complete shutdown of one or more railway engineering plants...Worried union

leaders from Shildon and York joined a demonstration outside BR's London HQ"

People, at this stage, were openly discussing the possibility, "It'll be a serious blow to the community" (Wilf Edwards, Town councillor and clerk in the Works), "There have been rumours about the plant and jobs, especially over the last few weeks. If it comes to the crunch obviously we have to fight it because it would be devastating for the town" (Gary Norman, Transport and Salaried Staff Association representative), but by the 16th the Evening Despatch reporter, Jim Gilchrist, reported that when he attempted to contact NUR officials at the Works the "phone was slammed down." On the same day the "Northern Echo" reporter, Doug Meek, also reported that "union officials at Shildon refused to speak about their future". Why this sudden silence?

Obviously negotiations were at a crucial stage, but surely it would have been in the union's interest to keep some public pressure on management? They needed all the help they could get, given the determination of BR for cuts, and publicity about the possible effects of a closure would surely have been a useful component in presenting their case for a reprieve?

The press is often a dubious ally in such circumstance- its habit of simplifying issues can often create problems for negotiators in a dispute- but to exclude it completely at this stage seemed strange. Once BR made public its intention to close the Works then reversing that decision would be very difficult, but if a change could be obtained before it would have been easier for BR to avoid an apparent volte face.

All industrial negotiations, like negotiations anywhere, depend on a

solution where both sides can avoid a "loss of face." Once a situation develops beyond that point then intransigence soon becomes stalemate. It seems crucial that once closure at Shildon had been suggested everything possible should have been done to prevent that suggestion becoming fact. There is always the danger that too much pressure can itself create intransigence, but it seems fairly certain that BR had come to a decision and action was needed immediately if that decision was to be modified, even changed.

On the 17th Roy Jones, chairman of the NUR at the Works, collapsed on his way to work and was taken to hospital suffering from a stroke. He had been in London on the 13th, and 14th for talks about the closure. Many felt that the pressure of negotiation had caused the attack. "He would have taken all this very badly, and fought to do his utmost for the Town. I saw him a couple of day ago and I did not think he was looking well. I told him to start taking things easy". (Walter Nunn, NUR Staff Association at the Works.)

Roy Jones's NUR colleague in the Works, Phil Wigley, branch secretary, "refused to comment". The loss, even if temporary, of a crucial negotiator could not have eased matters, but it might have been sensible to have given the press more details, if only to show how distressed people at the Works were becoming.

Union officials, especially under pressure, often become nervous when dealing with the media. This is an important fault because if the officials of a union are unprepared- and being unable to present a quick lucid account of ANY union activity is being unprepared, then much is lost.

When Roy Jones became ill someone should have been ready to not only take his place, but comment on both his role and the anxiety his sudden illness had caused. Failure to do this seems to have been a mistake.

On Thursday 29th the march took place. Led by union officials, town and county councillors, Derek Foster MP, and Roland Boyes, MEP, it proceeded through the town to the football pitch.

"More than 5000 people poured through the doomed railway town yesterday in the biggest show of strength in its history. The protest line was a mile long...Shildon came to a sudden standstill as 2,500 wagon workers marched to save their jobs joined by women, children, and pensioners."

"Northern Echo" 30th. March, 1982

There were widespread pledges of support and speeches about determination not to give in. "A feeling of solidarity was in the air" and a sense that perhaps there was cause for optimism.

"This must be one of the most moving days in my, and your lifetime. Today walking through the streets seeing the looks on the people's faces reminded me of Consett...The highlight of the march was when we walked past the school and heard the children calling out- it brought tears to my eyes and I'm sure it did to you too." (Alex McFadden North Eastern NUR leader)

Ibid

Such days can be heady affairs, but they can also be deceptive. The physical sense of purpose in such a gathering can easily raise false expectations. At one with everyone around it is easy to believe all is possible. In the middle of a fight it is always necessary to have a boost to the morale providing everyone is realistic about what is happening. The community who marched that day must have felt their case was proved, but unfortunately to those outside the day passed like any other. As an expression of outrage it had been needed, but whether it affected decisions about the closure is more in doubt.

Within days of the announced closure BREL presented its case for the need for cuts in a "Railtalk Special".

Shildon was to go, with further cuts at Horwich, Swindon, and the Derby locomotive works. No alternative proposals that "would retain the works and improve the company's financial position and safeguard remaining jobs, have yet been put forward."

"BREL believes the closure proposals are the best business solution to the problem."

Using a question and answer format- a kind of Platonic commentary of our times- BREL took the readers through its argument.

"1. Q. What is our problem?

A. BREL no long has sufficient new construction maintenance and repair work to justify the retention of 12 main works...

2. Q How has this reduction in workload come about?

A. The continuing drive by BR for more competitive performance rests heavily on better utilisation of all aassets...The introduction of high speed trains and the more intensive use of other locomotives multiple units and carriages has resulted in a significant reduction in fleet sizes...

This continues with a resume of wagon, locomotive, and carriage statistics.

Then sets about discussing where the cuts are to fall:-

"7 Q. BREL has 12 main works. Why must the axe fall so heavily on Shildon, Horwich and Swindon?

A. In times of reducing workload, there are certain operating expenses at each Works which cannot be reduced to compensate for the lower level of sales. Unless the proposed action to close Shildon and to reduce staff elsewhere is taken, these so called 'Fixed Costs' will have the effect of increasing our product prices. These price increases, in the case of Rail business, have to be met by increased passenger and freight revenue. They also make BREL less competitive in export sales. The only way to reduce these costs is by disposing of the underutilised surplus workshop capacity. The measures now proposed will save an estimated £50m between 1983 and 1986 and £18m per annum thereafter.

"Why Shildon?"

Shildon is BREL principal wagon-building works and has a capacity to build some 1,200-1,500 wagons per year, and to repair in excess of 20,000 wagons per year. There are no new build orders in for 1983 and prospects for 1984 and 1985 indicate that future needs are insignificant in relation to the capacity available. Operating Shildon on the substantially reduced repairs workload only would not be viable and would lead to substantial losses in 1983, with no prospect of a return to profit in the future.

The reduced requirement for BR's wagon repairs is clearly illustrated in the following tables:-

Year	Repairs
1976	45,000
1981	19,000
1982	12,000
1986	8/9,000

In addition to Shildon, BR has capacity for wagon repairs at Temple Mills (in East London) and Doncaster. Although, in internal accountancy terms, Shildon made a net profit of about £730,000 in 1981, there will be a loss in 1982, and in 1983 a loss of 2.2m with no prospect of recovery."

That, in summary, was BR's case for closing Shildon. The "Jewel in BR's Crown", despite being profitable, had, it seemed suddenly turned into a worthless trinket. The document went on to ask itself about the "serious consequences for the communities concerned" and was there "no alternative?"

"A. As a responsible employer we are deeply aware and concerned about the effect the proposals will have on the areas in question. Certainly, other options were considered, but none would have tackled the overriding business problems of substantially reducing overheads and matching capacity to the much lower workload"

A rather long way around saying business interests must always come before workforce and community. BR's case, as set out in "Railtalk Special", is an almost triumphal paeon to "market forces". It is obviously sensible to run any business in a way that makes economic sense, but when that business employs a very large proportion of a community's workforce considerations

other than the simply economic should be, if not paramount, at least acknowledged. To employ people for, in many cases, a total working life, and then discard them because of "overriding business problems" is using market forces as a weapon rather than as an economic justification.

British Rail identified a problem and sought the "best business solution" by sacking large numbers of its workforce. If its figures for decline in wagon demand were accurate, and this claim will be examined in more detail later, then some scaled withdrawal with "natural wastage" of labour could surely have been considered?

On the 4th of May a meeting of the "joint committee fighting fund" agreed that a raffle draw be held on 29th May with 10,000 tickets at 10p each. British Rail had obviously picked their target with care.

In the evening of the 6th of May Derek Foster MP rose to address an adjournment debate in the House of Commons; he spoke about the Works closure.

"...Not more than 14 months ago it (the Works) was described as the most efficient wagon works in the whole of Europe- not by me, not by the workers at the plant, but by the managing director of BREL...Now British Rail is saying that it is obsolete. What has happened in the meantime to make BREL describe this works- which was so efficient, so profitable, so valuable to it- as obsolete? ...Why has BR decided to buy no wagons in 1983? Is it commercially prudent? Even though its fleet has diminished and will continue to diminish, surely BR will need to purchase wagons soon. It cannot go year after year without replenishing stock.

By quoting BR's figures for a more efficient use of a reduced wagon force he asked whether:-

"that means that each wagon must bear four times as much wear and tear. Indeed wear and tear will be greater because of the higher speeds and greater braking and the consequent load transference. If the wagons have been designed with greater intensity of use in

mind, it has been a secret to us. If that is the case, how long ago were those developments foreseen and why were they not planned? Why was it possible for the deputy chairman of the board and managing director of BREL in their headquarters in Euston to tell me not 14 months ago that no conceivable restructuring of BREL could possibly undermine the long-term future of Shildon?

May I press the Minister on the important trend of BR advising its clients to purchase their own trucks or to lease them? We suspect that most of those privately purchased or leased trucks are being bought from the private sector, not BREL. I have a paper from Mr Sanderson, the director of freight, who tells me that there are 16,000 such wagons. How many of them have been bought from private manufacturers? Those 16,000 wagons represent 16 years work for the people of Shildon. How many have been bought from the private sector? Does the fleet of 34,000 (BR's figures) in 1986 include those 16,000? If not, will the 16,000 also be severely slimmed down by greater efficiency?"

The question of what part "private sector" considerations played in BR's decision to close is a difficult one to unravel. It must be remembered that throughout the period of the closure the government was vigorously pursuing a privatisation policy. It was planned that British Rail would be eventually taken out of the public sector and it was, consequently, essential that it be made to appear "financially attractive" to investors. This would mean making the industry appear profitable. No rail system, certainly in Europe, nor even in the USA, was expected to be profitable. All attracted subsidies because the governments concerned wished to develop their rail systems as an integral part of an overall transport policy. As the rest of Europe continued to invest in their railways so the UK government seemed content to trim its system down to a size that was "marketable".

"As the Minister knows, less freight is carried in the United Kingdom than in any other European country, for the simple reason that we subsidise our railways much less than any other European country, despite the strong environmental arguments for carrying more freight by rail. There is less damage to roads and buildings, less pollution, noise and fumes. It is far safer than road carriage from the point of view of accidents- and the cost of accidents must also be borne in mind. There is also the fuel economy argument.

"It would be far cheaper to carry freight by rail, especially if the electrification work were allowed to go ahead. There is tremendous need for investment in rail. In summary of accounts, Sir Peter Parker (Chairman of BR) said that £500 million per year was needed to take care of essential renewals, which includes wagon renewals, but only £308 million was spent last year - far less than was needed."

The Under Secretary for Transport (Mr Reginald Eyre) replied on behalf of the government. He expressed the usual anxieties about Shildon's workforce and "fully understood" their cause for concern. He then explained that, as outlined in the BR "Railtalk Special", BR's demand for wagons had drastically declined, but he failed to address why. If government policy was to reduce, in real terms, railway subsidy then it was hardly surprising that BR would not be able to invest in rolling stock.

"For several years the BR Board has been pursuing a strategy intended to bring the freight business up to date."

A government announcement of a "strategy" for "bringing something up to date" usually means cuts. It seems reasonable to suggest that "modernisations", "improvements", or "renovations" are often signs that someone somewhere has either made a mistake and needs to cover it up, or wants to "prove" something, usually a combination of both.

The Undersecretary then went on to place the decision within the context of his government's industrial policy since coming to office in 1979.

"Following a reappraisal of freight business plans, the board (BR) has necessarily revised downwards its future requirements as originally foreseen. Indeed, I have to emphasise that because of the continuous pace of technical change the board's latest forecast is that its total fleet requirements will, by 1986, be only 34,000 wagons while still carrying the same or even higher levels of traffic as today. There are three main reasons for this...modern wagons have been developed in such a way as to have greater carrying capacity and higher operating speeds than their predecessors...Secondly the development of Total Operations Processing system means that it is now possible for BR to increase the utilisation of individual

"wagons much more efficiently...The third reason relates to forecast carryings. These forecasts have unfortunately had to be revised, downwards in recent time.

In 1979 the board carried 169 million tonnes of freight. In 1980, carryings were down by 10% to 153 million tonnes as a result of the steel strike. Despite some improvements in particular areas, including steel, carrying in 1981 stayed about the same at 154 million tonnes.

The amount of freight carried is inevitably affected by changes in the industrial structure generally in a world trade recession- I emphasise a world recession- and also by technical changes in industries that are predominately movers of bulk traffic. Present forecasts by BR now suggest that it will take until the end of the decade before rail freight can return to the position that it was in 1979"

The Undersecretary's emphasising of "world trade recession" is interesting. On coming to office his government presided over the biggest decline in primary industries this century. Naturally this was accompanied by high unemployment. Small wonder that BR's freight trade had declined, government policy had ensured that within a year of taking office almost everything had declined. The "TECHNICAL CHANGES (my emphasis) in industries that are predominately movers of bulk traffic" presumably meant "removal of".

The government argument that the closures were necessary centred around the idea that demand for their products had diminished. It seems clear that government policy had largely contributed to that reduction in demand and therefore was directly responsible for its consequences. To argue that the decision to close was largely BR's is to cloud the direct relationship between government policy and the running of state industries. It must have been government policy to "run down" rail freight traffic.

Railways, being heavily unionised, can always pose an economic threat to a government. History has shown that rail strikes, if in combination with

other industrial action, can even threaten the very existence of a government. In the summer of 1911 armed troops, cavalry, and even artillery were placed around railway stations when a national strike threatened. One way to meet such a threat would be to move as much freight as possible onto the roads. Road transport is not heavily unionised, and is mostly operated through small, sometimes owner driver, companies. Bringing such an industry out on strike is very difficult.

Whether such considerations were part of government thinking on the closures is very difficult to prove, but it is interesting to note that one of the reasons given for the defeat of the miner's strike of 1984/85 was the preparedness of enough road transporters to cross picket lines- the rail workers had declared support for the coal strike.

On the 5th of May Alan Roberts, Chief Executive of Sedgefield District Council, issued a joint report on the closure by the planning departments of Durham and Sedgefield Councils. They recommended that it be sent to the "Government, BR and other interested parties".

It noted that closure would mean the loss of 2,180 jobs, that one in four of the "insured population in the Bishop Auckland Employment Exchange area" would be unemployed. Male unemployment would therefore rise to over 30% and within the Shildon ward it could rise to 50%. A further 450 jobs would be lost by local suppliers to the Works. It estimated that

"when direct and indirect effects are considered with the likely growth in the labour force and temporary employment schemes there is need to create 6,500 jobs in the South West Durham travel to work area by 1986. The majority, 5,000, will be needed in the Bishop Auckland and Shildon and Aycliffe EEA.

The short term costs of closure to BR, Central and local government are approximately £10m in the first year. The costs in the second

"and subsequent years will be around £6m if there is no recovery package. The costs of a recovery package could be as much as £90m."

It argued that BR had three alternatives to closure; a) transfer all "new and expected construction work" to the Works, b) increase investment in rolling stock- including east coast electrification, and c) transfer work to Shildon from areas where unemployment is lower.

Whether these alternatives were realistic depended not only on BR, but also on central government. David Howell, Minister for Transport, had earlier that month made a cut of £15m (in real terms) from next year's BR external financing limit. BR had wanted £885 million, but had to settle for £804m.

Robert Taylor, writing in the Observer (Business Section) on 25th April, outlined the sorts of problems facing BR at this time.. BR had overshot its 1981/82 budget of "£920m by £39m". There had been an ASLEF (Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen) strike during the winter which "had cost, BR claimed, £60m from lost passengers, £20m lost freight, and £12m from parcels, with a further £3m from freightliners. It also estimated that further losses could be between £32m and £78m."

Taylor went on to report that a considerable part of these losses, and certainly their continuance, was due to customers moving from rail to road. There had been a "15% drop in Red Star parcel traffic" and, during the strike, "the Central Electricity Generating Board had moved 200,000 tons of coal by road".

A further problem for BR was what Lord McCarthy's tribunal inquiry into flexible rostering for drivers was still to report. This potentially explosive issue was helping to delay any Government decisions on the future

of BR. BR hoped to be able to phase in flexible rostering during 1982, but knew that this would not be an easy industrial exercise. If McCarthy's report ended by favouring the driver's case against flexible rostering then the Board would have to either impose the change or resign. This uncertainty made it easier for the Government to delay any discussion of long term plans for the railways.

A year previously Sir Peter Parker, Chairman of BR, had issued a Red Book on the future of railways in the 1980's. It was, in effect, a blueprint for a revival. A massive electrification of the system was proposed; a widespread expansion in rolling stock and track; a Channel tunnel link; a cross London link; and the development of an Advanced Passenger Train. The total package would, by 1990, cost an estimated £1bn.

After a four year campaign Sir Peter Parker had at last received approval from the Ministry of Transport for his electrification proposals. He had achieved this by creating an alliance of support stretching from the TUC, Confederation of British Industries, to both sides of the House of Commons. It was at this point that Professor Alan Walters, the Prime Minister's chief economic advisor, queried whether the expansion was commercially sound? This objection effectively delayed any decision and it was finally decided that each electrification project would be judged on strictly commercial terms.

It was during these considerations that the Centre for Policy Studies, an influential "think tank" for the Prime Minister, published a pamphlet advocating the conversion of railways into roads thus saving the taxpayer £1bn a year. Small wonder that the Treasury was delaying approval for the

various electification projects submitted by BR (London to Leeds and Newcastle, Bedford to Nottingham).

Seen against this background the Sedgefield and Durham "Case Against Closure" arguments seemed certain to fall on very stony ground.

It outlined its "Future Employment Prospects"

"Job losses have far outweighed job gains in recent years, most notably in the Bishop Auckland/Shildon area. This, together with the expected loss of Newton Aycliffe's New Town status in 1985 (which had been responsible for its relatively good performance in attracting new jobs) bodes ill for the future of the area's economy- even without the closure of the Wagon Works...

taking all factors into account, 6,500 new jobs will be needed in the South West Durham area if the Wagon Works closed.

New Job Opportunities required by 1986 in S.W. Durham Area	
Wagon Works job loss (numbers seeking work)	1,700
Indirect job losses	450
Net decline in other existing industries	1,200
Labour force increases	1,750
Replacement jobs for those on MSC schemes	1,400
	TOTAL
	6,500

It is estimated that the vast majority (5,000) of these jobs will be needed in the Bishop Auckland and Shildon and Aycliffe BEA"

These figures detail the actual numbers of people likely to be without a job, but the underlying costs are, in "market" terms, perhaps more important.

"Costs of Closure.

Four main costs will arise as a result of the closure of the Works. Firstly the costs to BR in redundancy payments and the written off value of plant, buildings and machinery. Secondly, the costs to central Government in the form of reduced revenue and increased payments to the unemployed. Thirdly, there will be the costs to Local Government, mainly in the form of reduced rate income. Finally, there will be the cost of providing new jobs to replace those lost in order to bring unemployment back to a reasonable level.

Short term costs.

The costs presented below are estimated for the first twelve months only, following the complete closure of the Works. In the absence

"of detailed knowledge of each individual's circumstances, a number of realistic and conservative estimates have been made.

"a)	Costs to British Rail	£
	i) Cost of redundancy payments	1,500,000
	ii) Write off building, plant and machinery	?
	TOTAL	1,500,000

b)	Costs to Central Government	
	i) Unemployment benefit *(assuming all workers receive single person's benefit)	2,542,410
	ii) Loss of National Insurance Contributions	
	a) Employer's Contribution	1,260,318
	b) Employee's Contribution	546,050
	iii) Loss of Income Tax **(assuming all workforce receive married man's allowance)	1,858,202
	iv) Rent and Rate Rebate ***(assuming 80% of workforce qualify and based on current average levels in Shildon)	447,151
	v) Redundancy Payments (estimated total cost of £2.5m Redundancy Fund contribution is 41% actual payments subject to negotiation)	1,000,000
	Total cost for Central Government	7,654,131

* This is the minimum amount payable. The majority of the workforce are married and hence entitled to higher benefits.

** Realistic income tax revenue losses are impossible to calculate without detailed knowledge of individuals' circumstances. In practice, tax losses for single persons will be higher and for persons with mortgages, lower.

c)	Costs to Local Government	
	i) Rent and Rate rebates (Local Government Contribution)	49,000
	ii) Loss of contribution in lieu of Rates (no allowance made for loss)	700,000
	Total	749,000

"Total direct costs of closure in first twelve months 9,903,814+

"Long term Costs

Estimates of the long-term costs arising from closure are extremely difficult to calculate....they will be affected by the ability of employees to find new employment. It is likely that the numbers receiving unemployment benefit would reduce over time, but this will be more than compensated by an increase in the number of people receiving social security payments. The following costs are expected to continue after the first 12 months; unemployment benefit, loss of national insurance contributions, loss of income tax, rent and rate rebates and loss of contribution in lieu of rates. The costs in second and subsequent years could be around £6m if there is no recovery package.

Costs of a 'Recovery Package'

Experience from other areas where there have been major plant closures indicates that the costs of funding recovery action are extremely high. In Consett, which is a roughly parallel situation and only 15 miles from Shildon, the initial estimate of such costs was in the order of £90m, in order to provide for a similar number of new jobs.

To date the following major items of expenditure have been agreed in relation to the Consett recovery strategy:-

	£m
EIEC factory building and estate development	12.5
Reclamation of steelworks site	10.0
Compensation for loss of rate income	4.0
Major new highway construction	19.8
Bus subsidies	0.3
Local authority factory building and estate development	2.3
Retraining	n.a.
Total	48.9

Despite this considerable level of investment the unemployment rate in Derwentside, which includes Consett, is still the highest in the country at 24.6%."

Following the closure of Consett's steelworks much was made of how recovery plans would prevent high levels of longterm unemployment. If, however, after having spent nearly £50m one in four Consett people were still unemployed how much would be needed to help Shildon? Where, for

instance, would the "market forces" come from who could provide these sorts of sums if not from central government? And yet if central government was following a proper policy of "market forces" then it would obviously eschew interfering in the natural development of that market. This was, presumably, the pivot upon which their policy operated and any deviation from this would make nonsense of their economic strategy. If "market forces" are to be the guiding force it would be absurd then to start tinkering with SELECTED bits because the whole basis of such an economic policy is to allow matters total freedom so that they can thus find their own level of efficiency.

The Sedgefield and Durham report goes on to discuss the "Social Costs" of the closure. It describes a familiar pattern; young people would move away from the area leaving the least able to help themselves in a majority; the environment, through lack of finance, would deteriorate; low levels of support would mean a penurious population and some would inevitably supplement their income from crime; the educational performance of schoolchildren would suffer from the consequent feeling of helplessness. In a sense, the list is endless. To throw most people in town out of work and then expect them to carry on as before would be ridiculous.

The report concludes with a detailed examination of BR's case for closure. It challenged BR's prediction of a decline in demand for wagons arguing that as this was mainly due to a lack of government investment it could change. It also criticised the predictions of a similar decline in export orders arguing that the export market was extremely volatile and therefore UNpredictable. It went on to point out that considerable recent

investment in Shildon had meant that it had equipment not found elsewhere in the UK which, together with a skilled workforce, meant it could do work more easily and more efficiently than elsewhere in BREL.

"The decision to transfer the Shildon works repair and maintenance workload to other centres appears to be even more arbitrary. It is claimed total closure will reduce the overheads which would arise from partial closure, but no figures are given at all to substantiate this. No attempt seems to have been made to see whether these overheads could be reduced by retaining some new production capacity for the purposes set out in paragraph 5.6 (the electrification of the railway system)...

In effect, no case at all is made for taking the grave step of transferring work from an area of very high unemployment within an organisation with branches in parts of the country where unemployment is much lower. This is particularly important when considered within the context of the currently high unemployment rates which prevail not just in Shildon and the surrounding area, but in the Northern Region as a whole."

To support this argument a list of relative unemployment rates affecting the areas where BREL operates is presented.

"BREL Workshops	Region	Regional unemployment Rate (March 1982)
Derby Litchurch Lane	East Midlands	10.9%
Derby Locomotive Works	"-	10.9%
Crewe	North West	15.0%
Horwich	"-	15.0%
Glasgow	Scotland	14.9%
Eastleigh	South East	9.22%
Temple Mills	"-	9.22%
Wolverton	"-	9.22%
Swindon	South West	11.0%
Worcester	West Midlands	15.1%
Doncaster	Yorkshire and Humberside	13.2%
York	"-	13.2%
SHILDON	North	16.0%

The Report's recommendations were predictably that BR reconsider and that should re-evaluation mean SOME job losses in Shildon then consultants would be appointed by the joint local authorities to see how this could be

effected with the minimum of distress. It also recommended that the recent downgrading of the Bishop Auckland and Shildon and Newton Aycliffe EEA's to Intermediate Area Status should be "immediately rescinded and the areas upgraded as a Special Development Area, so long as there is any prospect of job losses from the Works".

BR's "Railtalk", together with the Sedgfield District and Durham County Report, effectively summarised the two sides' main arguments and the coming campaign would come to revolve around the various points raised.

During the few days following the 7th May a series of meetings were held in County Durham to plan a common strategy against closure.

At 7.30 on the evening of the 7th a meeting was held in the staff canteen of the Works to enable the unions and staff to report on "progress so far". It was agreed that "if we didn't nip the closure in the bud there'd be no workshop left". The mood centred around the idea that it was time "the unions got together". The meeting was opened for discussion and it was reported that there was "some apathy" amongst the workforce. There had been talk of a strike by NUR, but "Derby were lukewarm, but Glasgow suggested an immediate strike because of fears that there would be a dwindling of workshops". A one day march to London was suggested as being "better than a one day strike". "Price for a charter train from Bishop Auckland to London was £6 90 for a 660 seater and £560 for a 350 seater." It was agreed that each supporter would "pay £5 a head and the rest from the fund".

The next day the Durham City Labour Party met and Item 5 discussed the

closure. A number of speakers commented on the failure of the Consett campaign and urged that the protest not "just go through the motions". It was agreed that a proper policy towards the ideas of profitability and public ownership be developed because it was felt that this was where most of the coming conflicts with government would occur. Not suprisingly the meeting felt that the campaign against closure should be a "political" one and that the social effects of the closure be stressed.

On the 10th a Shildon Works meeting was held in the City Hall. The City Planning Officer presented the Report "Case Against Closure" and the Reports's recommendations were discussed. Various speakers commented on the problems of combatting the government's stated intent of denationalisation. If an industry "was transferred from public to private ownership then a monopoly was inevitable" (from the notes of a member of the Shildon Town Council Working Party). It was also argued that it was "imprudent to propose alternatives" to BR., "We should fight to win!" There seemed a general feeling that the decision to close was part of a policy of "divide and rule" in that BR was "picking off" one workshop at a time and that other closures would follow. That by "deliberately cutting investment in the public sector the Government was being very crafty. By privatising the profitable bits and then letting the rest go." "The TUC should not trade jobs." The meeting ended with a request for a second report which would place greater stress on retaining Shildon Works as a complete entity and not as part of a "trade off" of some jobs in order to keep the Works.

On the same day (10th) the Shildon Town Clerk, Tom Toward, wrote to The Convenor, Works Shop Supervisory LDC, Shildon Works outlining the proposals for a

"Public Meeting to be held on Saturday the 29th May in the Hackworth Park, Shildon." Invitations had been extended to, Albert Booth, Shadow Minister of Transport, Sid Weighall, General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, Derek Foster, MP and Roland Boyes, MEP as principal speakers."

On the 13th May the Bishop Auckland Labour Party met and passed an emergency motion calling on the North Region Labour Party to "give its full and active support to those union and Labour Party members who are presently engaged in the campaign to prevent the proposed closure of Shildon Wagon Works".

At a meeting of the Joint Committee Fighting Fund, also on the 13th, an income of £2,603,04p was recorded with expenditure to date of £182.65p. It was also agreed that "each trade unionist contribute 50p per week starting on the 21st May and each week after until necessary funds had achieved our aims". The details of various raffles were also discussed. With a workforce of 2600 the weekly levy of 50p per person would raise, in one month, approximately £5,000. It might also perhaps create a greater sense of individual involvement. Even allowing for the non-payment of some these funds would be more than adequate for the immediate needs of the campaign.

A new "Case Against Closure" Report was drafted and presented to the Joint Committee on the 14th May. This version did not offer BR "alternatives", but simply insisted the Works be kept open. There was also a change in emphasis on what action would be taken if closure went ahead; a certain

toning down with the deleting of phrases like (that the closure would be opposed) "by every means possible". BR was urged to immediately increase its investment in new plant (electrification) and to have this plant built at Shildon.

The meeting accepted the draft and then went on to discuss matters arising. Questions were asked on; "what BR would be doing about transferring work to other workshops?"; "What was BR intentions about the site 'after a closure?'" A report from Derek Foster on privatisation of rolling stock (or leasing) showed 12,370 owned and 4,473 leased- "was this subsidised by a Section grant?". Foster also reported that an "Early Bird Motion" (an emergency debate) was being sought in the House of Commons. It had got "over 120 names, one SDP and no Tories." Michael Foot was pressing the Government for time and if this was opposed then he would use a Supply Day. The Northern Group of Labour MP's had been given "full powers to conduct the campaign". 25th May was being lobbied as the date for the debate and it was suggested that the three workshops involved should lobby Parliament on that day.

The meeting then re-convened to include the Works BREL management. BREL management had requested that the meeting with the Council be through a small delegation and consequently the members of the Working Party who were not part of the Council's delegation had to be excluded, but they were to be given the opportunity of an informal meeting with BREL later. It was pointed out that BREL had a need for a "more productive system" and that this "hit wagon building the hardest". It was explained that greater productivity and more efficient use of existing wagons had meant over

capacity. The "business solution was to tackle where the problem arises. Better than sharing the agony." It was pointed out that the BREL "had not given up trying to get more business in exports- Korea, Japan, and S.America can build for less than our material costs which obviously creates difficulties." "We are engaging a job creation consultant (P.A. Creating Employment Consultants) over the next two months and will be talking with them soon about best ways of financing investment."

The meeting then discussed the points raised. The management were asked about "short term problem but where does long term lead?" Discussion followed on the relationship between the privately and BREL built wagons- "Where would private wagons be built?"

"The private fleet of wagons currently totalled 17,000 and it was estimated that by 1986, the size of that fleet would rise to 25,000. In the main, those wagons were manufactured by Procol of Wakefield and Standard Wagon of Stockport who each employed at most 200 employees. By 1986, British Rail's wagon fleet would reduce to 36,000 and, taking into account the private fleet of 25,000, a total of 61,000 wagons would be operating at that time. BREL was tendering for private fleet work but only expected to get a small proportion of that work because the smaller companies manufacturing private wagons sold their own design of wagons for specific puposes and BREL could not tool up to repair those wagons and at the same expect to compete with the private manufacturers because of the specialised design of those wagons."

Minutes from Sedgefield District Council report of Meeting

It was then asked if "work^{had} been deliberately taken from Shildon?" This query was answered by a "chorus of 'No's!", but then they were asked 'well why Shildon?' (from written notes taken by member of Shildon Working Party) A direct request was made by the Working Party "Could we get some info?" The management's answer was short and to the point "If we can answer, Yes!" Management was then asked when the final decision concerning the Works was to be made?

"In reply to a question of the preferred timetable for closure, BREL's representatives indicated that this was complicated by the Trade Unions' present stance. However, the Company would prefer cessation of all new building by 31st December 1982 (necessitating 1,000 redundancies) with balance being made redundant by the end of March 1983. There was negligible scope for redeployment within BREL of staff from Shildon although staff could apply for vacancies in other parts of British Rail. It was considered unlikely that any more than 150 persons would take advantage of redeployment."

Minutes from SDC report of meeting

The Working Party then made the point that "On that timetable the next two months were critical because July 1st is the date for six months redundancy notice." The management made no comment nor answered a query concerning the transfer of equipment.

The meeting ended with both sides realising that in the coming months both would face some long and difficult further meetings. The Works management were obviously acting on instructions from above. In theory they had some degree of local autonomy, but in reality were simply the front line troops of a dispute planned elsewhere.

After this initial flurry of activity, even excitement, a more realistic mood began to colour the campaign. The march in Shildon had undoubtedly been a moving experience, but it was very much Shildon telling ITSELF it had problems- throughout these early days the Falklands War occupied most newspaper headlines. Now after the "dust had settled" a slow erosion of support started to develop.

In a meeting of the Working Party (20th May) it was noted that "We could be held back by other authorities, Darlington is substantially interested." It was also acknowledged that "support in the trade union movement may not be as strong as it had first seemed. There could be a lot of words and

and a lot of deals being done which could do a lot of harm. " In answer to the question "'Where from here?' there was much shaking of heads and shrugging of shoulders." It was recognised that there was "difficulty in orchestrating" trade union support. (from written notes by member of Working Party)

It was agreed that "Communications!" were crucial, but how to use them? "Should we let the press in? BBC TV?" No one seemed able to respond to these fairly fundamental questions.

Perhaps an indication of how low morale had got could be seen in the discussion of whether the campaign should be fought as a "Joint" one with other trade unions or as a "Separate" , but "Joint" if needed. This confusion of aims, although understandable, was potentially very damaging because the longer the campaign remained stalled by indecision the stronger the management became.

Everyone agreed that something should be done to keep the momentum going, but beyond saying the same things over no one seemed sure what it was that should be done? Horwich, the other threatened workshop, seemed to have "given up" and it was recognised that this could lead to difficulties of "who talks to who from now on?" There had always been the problems of setting workshop against workshop and that this would be used by management to weaken a campaign.

"There's one thing that has always stuck in my mind. A big ponced up convenor from Derby with a purple suede, not suede, more like velvet, coat and a brocade waistcoat. We were battling for our jobs and he said, 'Well we're not so much concerned at Derby. I'm just down here holding a watching brief. If there's any rundown on the workshops we just walk across the road into Royces' (Rolls Royce). But you see Royces closed down! I thought of that many a time. I hope that

"buggers signing on. I'll never forget that. He weren't concerned because the Midlands had plenty of work. Did anyhow, till now."

NUR Shop Steward at Works talking of an earlier campaign against closures.

Unless a joint action could be agreed, and acted on, everyone knew the campaign would slowly come to accept the closure and that the fight would then become no more than a damage limitation exercise. In most campaigns early support is forthcoming because of the excitement engendered from seeing that very support develop. There is a kind of self-fulfilling quality that coalesces around an emotional response to someone else's problems, but this emotional commitment often fades unless something occurs to regenerate interest. Involvement takes time and energy and most people are too busy earning their living to take time out on behalf of others. The Shildon working party knew that unless they could mobilize outside support the closure would go ahead. They also knew that no matter what happened they would not be able to openly acknowledge the likelihood of defeat until it had become fact- this exercise in self-deception would probably be the most difficult part of the campaign.

1982 was proving to be a difficult year for the NUR, the largest union at the Works. There were many in the Union, from branch to head office level, who were convinced the Government would use the ASLEF strike (over flexible rostering) as an excuse to cut back investment and this would inevitably mean job losses. When negotiating with management any union as large as the NUR must think, quite naturally, of ALL of its members and the Shildon closure would have to be examined in relation to other threats to the railway workforce. Added to this was the rivalry between the railway unions.

"Bitter rivalry between rail unions ASLEF and NUR almost ended in a punch up at an explosive TUC meeting. ASLEF president, Derek Fullick threatened to 'put one on' NUR leader Sid Weighall. TUC General Secretary Len Murray called for order and Mr Fullick told him 'I'll pick you up by the braces and drop you down the lift shaft.'...Details of the clashes emerged last night...The unions (rail) are likely to fight together against a three per cent pay offer..."

"Daily Mirror" 14th May 1982

How a union negotiates is always difficult to uncover because if the dispute is large enough other elements enter the considerations.

Politicians will claim that management in a nationalised industry is autonomous, but everyone knows this to be more often fiction than fact.

No government would allow an appointed management to play with the affairs of the state without regard to national policy; if the railways strike the country comes to a halt, if power works strike we cease to produce anything, if the water industry were to strike some of us could die.

It would seem likely then that negotiations in such industries often involves much "behind the scenes" trading. It is easier to make this assumption than to prove it.

A number of those at the Works began to have a suspicion that "something was going on at head office (NUR)."

"The support from the railway unions was absolutely lacking. Other trade unions and the town's people rallied round, but from the railways it was absolutely shocking. It was a period when they were trying to get rid of Sid Weighall (General Secretary, NUR) and I think Sid was pledged to help us, but the present Secretary (Jimmy Knapp- this interview recorded in January 1986) was dragging his feet a bit. There were lots of stories going around that Glasgow was more likely for a closure, but that for political reasons, Scotland and all that, they daren't touch it. There was conniving between management and unions, no doubt about it. There was some at the NUR headquarters in London who I knew. I'd be in London for conference or something and I'd call in the NUR and have a bit crack to some of the people I knew. I spent a whole evening with a national executive member and he said 'Well you know, there's always

"something funny in Shildon. It's one of the biggest centres and we have less communication there than from any other branch secretary. You got the feeling they felt they could resolve everything with management themselves.' There was trading with jobs in the Works and the AEU had taken over a lot of the semi-skilled jobs from NUR and the NUR absolutely resented that. I think that's why NUR didn't put their backs into it the way they might have done. Other centres didn't help much either, they didn't rally round with that unity you'd expect. They thought, 'Well Shildon can go, we're alright.'"

"Shop steward at Works"

Once the fear of possible closure is upon a workforce it is inevitable that any sense of grievance will develop into a jealousy towards another workforce who is not threatened. Similarly the latter will often want to distance itself from the problems of the former in the hope that this will perhaps help keep their jobs; a collective notion that if you keep "your head down" it might go away- if the ostrich had really reacted this way it would, by now, have surely become extinct.

"People don't think. Take Doncaster. There was a lot of chortling here (Shildon) about the thought of Doncaster closing (an earlier closure) because they thought 'Bugger them we'll get the work.' They were overjoyed at the thought of Doncaster going. It were greed. People had brought it on themselves. Greed and fear. A lot of them had no thought of redundancy, couldn't imagine it, or wouldn't and they had mortgages now, and second mortgages, cars, foreign holidays, you name it they owned it. Like I say it were a mixture of fear and greed that did for them in the end."

Ibid.

In the afternoon of the 24th May a meeting took place in the Repair Shop of the Works. A "Mass Rally" was planned for Saturday 29th with "10,000 expected". "Widespread support" for the campaign was reported with a number of northern MP's, TUC, offering help. It was further reported that there were now "thirty prizes for the next raffle but that there had been objections to the 50p levy for campaign funds".

The next day a large "Works deputation" left for London. At 7.15 am six

hundred men, women, and children joined the eleven railway coaches at Darlington. They arrived at King Cross at 11.00 am. They marched to the British Rail headquarters in Euston Road where they delivered a bundle of 630 letters to Sir Peter Parker, Chairman of BR, and then went on to the House of Commons to lobby members of Parliament. Assuming a generous five hundred of the marchers to be employed at the Works there is no record of what the other 1900 did on the day; presumably they stayed to work their shifts? They left London at six o'clock to be back in Darlington 22.20.

The day before the mass rally a joint shop steward meeting was held in the morning to plan the day. Bob Howard of the regional TUC attended the meeting to make clear the TUC's attitude to the campaign. He re-affirmed the TUC'S support, but strongly urged that a clear strategy be developed. "TUC will only help a genuine and unified campaign." He warned against "personality clashes and inter-union rivalry". "A crisis can regenerate a community so essential the community support the campaign." Howard went on to suggest that the Consett closure had not been very well handled because there had been a reluctance to involve the "whole community in the democracy- persuasion is vital!" "We are reacting to events rather than BEFORE decisions are made and if we are to overcome these crises then attitudes will have to change. We need to pull together as a whole labour movement with people supporting each other...Shildon will be used to forefront the fight to protect regional economy." He went on to say that there was "no morality in parochialism, to steal someone else's work. Being selfish is the best way to lose public's support." Few at the meeting could quarrel with Howard's analysis, but all present knew that to "practise what one preaches" is never easy.

The Rally on Saturday the 29th started at 9.15 at the Civic Hall with an assembling of speakers. The Rally proper began at 10.30 when the march, lead by speakers, left the Works and proceeded to the park. En route Albert Booth, MP, Shadow Minister of Transport and Charles Turnock, Assistant General Secretary NUR, arrived in a taxi, having come from Darlington station.

At 11.15 the speeches began with the Chairman of the Town Council, A. Walker, welcoming speakers to the meeting. Apart from Albert Booth, other MP'S attending were Derek Foster, (constituency MP and Chief Opposition Whip), Jack Cunningham, (Chairman of the Northern Group of Labour MP's), Ted Fletcher, and Roland Boyes, (constituency MEP). Councillors from the County, District, and Town were also official guests.

Ken Sigginford, a veteran of the Consett campaign, also addressed the meeting.

"Defend your jobs like an alsation dog not fed for weeks would defend a piece of meat. The Consett campaign failed, frankly, because of the bickering and petty jealousies amongst the leaders of the unions at national level, unity was denied to us in the campaign. This rubbed off at local level and the rot set in. If you don't want to be routed there are some golden rules you must pay attention to; one, don't break ranks, remain united; two, you must not be tempted by redundancy money, and; three, don't let self interest destroy your cause. These rules are, to my mind, essential. How do I know? At Consett these rules were gradually broken. And the British Railways Board will exploit the slightest crack in your campaign. From my experience I can tell you that BREL planned how long its demoralising and softening period will last.."

"Evening Despatch" 2nd June, 1982.

The constant warnings about unions falling out over strategy were ominous. The Works had had a long history of inter-union rivalry. In a sense, this was not unusual, but it was not a good base from which to make a joint fight for survival.

"There was a nasty tie up with the AEU, Boilermakers, and NUR and the management and they wanted to keep everything between four walls sort of style, they claimed for greater efficiency. This was building up a very bad situation for the men, anyone could tell you and it was becoming a big cover up. Then a lot of NUR jobs were being sold out to the AEU with the officials all looking after themselves like and management turning a blind eye. It was really quite nauseating for the men. They even took the documentation of union out of the building so no one could see it and eventually the NUR, the biggest union, was becoming very unhappy about the way semi-skilled jobs were going to the craft union. Then there was friction between the boilermakes, the fitters and the welders. It went back to the shipbuilding days that. There used to be thirty nine different unions in shipbuilding and boilermakers and AEU were part of all that. And they could be called into a dispute over shipbuilding and it'd affect us in the railways. Then there'd be a dispute between AEU and the NUR and the Boilermakers would just sit on the fence. On another occasion it were only the boilermakers who were going into work and that definitely affected who got promoted because AEU and the NUR tended to work to rule more often so the management promoted boilermakers who didn't. Yes they definitely played that, one against the other, with wage grades as well. It was not a happy situation. It was a tragedy and I blame the management as much as anybody because in the end everyone suffered. You can buy off people for so long, they were buying peace with them and manipulating them at the expense of the workforce AND the men that were paying the union dues"

Shop Steward at Works

This pattern of behaviour between unions is not, unfortunately, all that unusual. It is not suprising, therefore, that many become suspicious, even contemptuous, of their trade union officials. Few can be bothered to actively involve themselves in their union anyway and if that lack of interest is reinforced by a suspicion that they are the victims of a cynical manipulation then problems will occur. To expect solidarity to evolve out of such circumstances is unrealistic and yet, come the inevitable crisis, that is what is asked for.

The mass rally had been attended by 10,000 and had again been a morale boosting day for the people of Shildon. What seemed more important, however, was the growing rumour that the Works might be saved. On the

same day as the rally (29th May) the Northern Echo carried a report (reporters, Doug Meek and Jon Herbert) about a meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Derek Foster MP that was to take place "to discuss the consequences of the shutdown".

"Yesterday's announcement that the Prime Minister was to involve herself with the proposals came as a surprise to the local union leaders. They said they were delighted with the news. 'It came out of the blue.' said John Priestly who, with the NUR and Boilermakers' Society convenors, had an hour long meeting with Transport Minister David Howell in London on Thursday... 'The Minister said he would look into our case and appeared to agree with us that more freight should go by rail instead of road. We were very impressed by his sympathetic attitude' said Mr Priestly."

Whether, given the Prime Minister's often declared scepticism about nationalised industries, the "local union leaders" were wise "to be delighted" is less easy to decide. It could, for instance, easily be a positive move in the WRONG direction. There were many in the town, and not all of them necessarily Conservative voters, who felt that if they had returned a Conservative MP they might have had any easier time with the present Government. They also recognised that this rather cynical "after the event" attitude was of little use, but that it did reflect a grudging nod in the direction of "realpolitick". These same people would no doubt recognise that a meeting between a Labour MP and the Prime Minister was not necessarily helpful. Obviously Derek Foster had a positive duty to argue his constituents' case with Mrs Thatcher, but whether this would alter much was more open to doubt.

The various claims that a "reprieve" was at hand rested on the assumption that BR was fearful of a nationwide strike over a number of its proposals. The day after the rally the "Sunday Times" commented on BR's dilemma. It is worth quoting in detail because it outlines the dangers for Shildon as

BR began its negotiations with its client unions; if ever there would be the time for "trade-offs" between management and unions this was it.

"Although BR still doubts whether the workshops are viable, it is prepared to see whether they can win an extra lease of life through export orders. BR is anxious not to be sidetracked into a squabble over workshops which could divert attention from its looming confrontation with the NUR and the train driver's union ASLEF over pay and productivity. On Friday, BR offered the unions five per cent rises from September 6 on the condition that they agree to a package of productivity measures, including flexible rostering by the end of July. The NUR has agreed to give up the industry's rigid eight-hour working shifts, but ASLEF refuses. BR plans to send out new rosters for train drivers to local depots this week. If, as expected, ASLEF rejects them there will be 14 days of consultation. After that, assuming there is still no agreement, BR will have to decide whether to implement flexible hours, although this will undoubtedly spark off a series of driver's strikes.

So far, BR has secured only one of its six productivity demands—that some stations be unmanned. Apart from flexible rosters, the main stumbling block is disposing of NUR guards on new rolling stock with automatic doors on the St Pancras-Bedford line (thus setting a precedent for the rest of the system).

Talks are still progressing on single manning of traction units, reducing the number of staff on freight trains, and introducing the a new employee category called 'trainmen' who would have the opportunity to be promoted to driver."

John Fryer, "Sunday Times" 30 May 1982

As already mentioned how BR would use the workshop issue in any "deal" it made with NUR will remain unknown, except to those who made it. It is certainly true that BR was preparing to re-think because on the 4th June, two days before a one-day threatened rail strike in support of the Works was to take place, BR announced it was "postponing" its decision on whether to close the Works. A decision on the Works future was "to be made in early 1983." The local union leaders were "delighted that our industrial strength has brought about a change of attitude.", but the NUR officials in London were more cautious and felt that "postponement" was not enough.

The local press carried a notice that the Works were:-

"Saved!". The six week battle to save Shildon was won on Friday night when British Rail management postponed controversial plans to axe the whole work force from April next year."

Jim Gilchrist, "Evening Despatch" 7th June 1982

This had the unfortunate effect of making the task of those campaigning for a PERMANENT future for the Works more difficult. A split soon started to develop between those in the Works who saw the "reprieve as a small battle in a longer war" and those who felt they had already won the war. It was perhaps time then to remember Ken Sissingford's words at the rally..."British Rail will exploit the slightest crack in your campaign. From my experience BREL planned how long its DEMORALISING AND SOFTENING PERIOD WILL LAST." (my emphasis)

On the 7th June it was confirmed that BREL was tendering in Nigeria for an export order of 900 freight wagons. If this tender was to be successful then the future of the Works would look hopeful providing, of course, the work came to Shildon. Three days previous to the Nigeria announcement NUR had started its own investigation into why wagons for repair had not arrived at Shildon.

Any management wanting to get rid of employees can always present arguments for the need to "trim back", reorganise, rationalise, "make more efficient" its workforce. It has many ways to make such a proposal appear logical, even in the "best interests" of the workforce. One very effective method is to manipulate the order books. If there appears to be no demand for the "product" then it must be sensible to get rid of the people who make it, until, so the argument continues, "demand picks up". The "market

place" may be where that elaborate dance between supply and demand happens, but the tune is more often than not developed elsewhere.

On the 4th of June the Evening Despatch carried a long article the "Missing Wagons?"

The unions say that thousands of wagons have failed to arrive at Shildon engineering shops and they want to know why? They claim wagons are being overworked as scheduled dates for routine repairs are delayed. It is claimed that thousands of wagons on British railways are a safety risk because they are not being repaired on time.

By the end of this year 3,053 wagons should have been re-bodied, but to the end of last year only 651 had actually been carried out. Shildon has done 1,672 fewer repairs than it should have done. John Priestly, chairman of the Shildon shop stewards action committee, said, 'Regarding general repairs and re-bodies we can assume there is a safety risk if wagons have not been in for repair. British Rail has forecast that 64 per cent will come to us this year - we are supposed to be the major wagon repair centre, and we want to know why we are not getting all the work?'

Jim Gilchrist "Evening Despatch" 4th June 1982

BR replied to this accusation by saying that they had estimated how much repair work would be needed when building the wagons and that not all wagons needed a major repair. As management they, obviously, had their statistical evidence for these decisions, but it is equally obvious that BR had "created" those statistics in the first place. British Rail could alter its strategy at any time and then justify that change by any creative process it wished. This is not to say that all long term planning is a nonsense, but within any strategy there will always be wide margins of error. What is not in doubt is that when decisions concerning the livelihood of thousands of people are made on purely economic terms then injustices will occur. They cannot wait "until things pick up" because, for them, that waiting will cause great distress. We can never know whether BR's policy towards the Works was economically justified or not,

but that it would be a social disaster for the town was never in doubt.

Despite BR's "postponement" of decision on the Works a slow run down of management started to occur. Senior management began to be transferred elsewhere, but when BR was asked to comment they simply denied staff transfers had anything to do with a possible closure. Wilf Edwards, Sedgefield District councillor and employee at the Works, addressed an emergency meeting to discuss these changes.

"Management and top people are being moved away to other works. It is a step to undermine the situation. They take away the management and skills and expertise from Shildon and then say 'Look we cannot keep the Works open because there isn't the management or the skill. Don't be fooled, British Rail means business.'"

It was not only BR who meant business. Norman Tebbit, then Employment Secretary, speaking about any industrial action the railway workers might take gave a clear warning of Government intent.

"If management and unions cannot arrive at a sensible means of operation, which provides commuters and taxpayers with a reasonable service for the vast amounts of money which have been invested, the time will come when they say enough is enough. Nowhere is it ordained that BR must continue to prosper, come what may, regardless of the behaviour of its staff. The threat of renewed disruption is ludicrous. It would undermine the achievements of other workers, but above all it could only hurt those who work on the railways. There was a limit on how much money could be made available to the rail system. If that money is to be squandered on wage increases without productivity gains or poured away through industrial disputes, there is bound to be less available for the future survival and prosperity of our railway system. And it will be no good anyone criticising the Government for this."

By-election speech in Beaconsfield. 14th May 1982

The style is familiar but effective. "Vast amounts of money" being "poured away" on "squandered wage increases". Disruption is "ludicrous" and will "only hurt those who work on the railways". And anyway it has nothing to do with the Government. This was an electioneering speech and

should be read as such, but it does, nonetheless, contain a fair summary of Government policy towards the railways; indeed towards nationalised industries in general.

If a government does not adequately fund its railways, does not, in other words, "pour" money in, then things will start to go wrong. The government, always quick to shift the blame, will then look for a scapegoat- this is invariably the railway worker. If this shifting of responsibility can be somehow tied to calls of patriotism so much the better. The Falklands War featured regularly in the electioneering at the Beaconsfield by-election and the candidate, Timothy Smith, decided it would be useful to link the enemy aboard with "the enemy within".

"I have not met Mr Buckton, ASLEF General Secretary, personally, but I suspect that he suffers from the same kind of intransigence as the Argentine junta."

Report in the "The Times" 14th May 1982.

This spurious attempt to link the ASLEF strike with a war taking place in the south Atlantic is blame shifting at its shabbiest. The worker in a nationalised industry is peculiarly vulnerable to this idea that they alone are responsible for the industry's problems. This curious notion that only one side of the equation between manager and the managed is at fault makes it easy for successive governments to appear innocent victims of policies they themselves created- a neat variation on the idea that the messenger is to blame for bringing bad news.

In June 1982 it seemed just possible that the Works might after all be saved. It had survived threats before so it was not suprising that there was a growing feeling that maybe it was time for a relaxing of pressure.

Unless the people involved are professionals campaigning can be an exhausting process. At the start everyone is "on a high", even excited. A sense of solidarity takes over from the usual routine of the workplace; a sense of purpose in an otherwise dull day. People in adversity often seek comradeship, if only to share their fears, and this can easily lead to a new sense of community amongst people who had not shared such feelings before.

But the struggle was definitely not over. On the 7th June Sir Peter Parker, BR Chairman, wrote to the Chief Executive of Durham County Council.

"Dear Mr Dawson, Thank you for your letter enclosing a pamphlet describing the first assessment of the effects of closing Shildon Wagon Works as seen by your County Council. You can be sure they have been studied carefully. You will now be aware we have decided, against the background of possible wagon export orders and the uncertainty surrounding the "Serpil Inquiry", (report on transport commissioned by the Government) to withdraw for the time being our proposal to close Shildon Works.

"The firm workload for 1983, however, remains as described by the BREL Managing Director when he met members of the Sedgefield District Council, and both the short and long term prospects REMAIN BLEAK. (my emphasis) However a meeting with the Staff representatives will be held tomorrow to consider how the problem might be tackled. In all circumstances, therefore, I suggest no useful purpose would be served in the meantime by the proposed meeting with representatives of your County Council and the three District Councils."

It was clear from this that closure was still a strong possibility.

A meeting of the Sedgefield District Council Shildon Shops Working Party was held on the 17th June, 1982 to:- i) discuss further strategy, ii) hear reports of progress so far, iii) meet with trade union representatives from the Works.

There was some discussion as to what options were available to the Local Authority "with respect to the handling and approach to the campaign against closure". Three were suggested.

- "(a) For the Local Authority solely to present the social consequences as highlighted in the Joint Report.
- (b) For the Local Authority and the Trade Unions to jointly present the social consequences of closure.
- (c) For Local Authorities to allow the Trade Unions to present the social consequences of closure."

Sedgefield District Council favoured (a) arguing that whilst it supported any Trade Union presentation it felt both campaigns would have different emphasis. Discussion followed on the relative merits of each approach. There was feeling among some present that the District Council wanted to "run their own show" and would be somewhat reluctant to "share" a strategy with others. It was finally agreed that:-

"The following elements of the campaign be dealt with by the Organisations specified:-

- a) The industrial aspects of the proposed closure to be dealt with and led by the Trade Unions
- b) The political aspects of the closure, ie questions of nationalisation/denationalisation/privatisation, at least initially to be Trade Union led.
- c) The social consequences to be dealt with and led by the Local Authority in association with other organisations as appropriate."

The trade union representatives were then allowed to join the meeting. The

joint report was discussed with the trade unionists suggesting some amendments.

"The knock on effect of any closure would, in the TU's opinion be substantially more than was revealed in the report and this could be seen when one considered that local traders within a 30 mile radius of the Works received business worth £5.6m per annum from the Works.

The TU's referring to the lack of orders from BR indicated that they understood that BR's orders for new build (wagons) for 1983 were being allocated to private companies and that orders for 8,000 wagons would be allocated to the private sector in the next 3 years. Repair of rolling stock is much more labour intensive than new build and the majority of men at Shildon were employed on repairs. Shildon had built approximately 12,000 merry-go-round wagons (large coal wagons, specially designed to empty on the move) and felt that many of those wagons would be in need of repair. Since those wagons had been built at Shildon it seemed appropriate for the repair work to be allocated to Shildon.

The TU representatives explained the book cost of the building and machinery etc, which would need to be written off was £6,688,000, made up as follows:-

	£
Land.....	132,000
Buildings.....	2,257,000
Plant.....	4,204,000
Office furniture.....	60,000
Road vehicles.....	35,000
TOTAL	6,688,000

Details were also given of investment expenditure in Shildon Works at October 1981 price levels as follows:-

	£
1971.....	500,000
1972.....	625,000
1973.....	1,375,000
1974.....	1,625,000
1975.....	1,950,000
1976.....	1,150,000
1977.....	1,100,000
1979.....	375,000
1980.....	850,000
1981..... (estimated).....	350,000

Reference was made to the unfair competition from continental workshops which, in order to ensure continuity of work, were substantially subsidised by their governments and particularly to the noises that the private wagon manufacturers such as Procor had started to make in respect of that competition.

"Since 1971 the Works had made a profit of £5.5m and in 1981 when BREL's total profit had been £1,3m Shildon was responsible for £800,000 of that profit.

A £24m order at least part of which would have been done at Shildon (ie the forging and draw bars) had been allocated to BREL Derby and the union raised the question of where the forging for that work was to be done. Shildon had the only forge in BREL and, therefore, it seemed that the forge work for Derby's order would have to be placed with an outside contractor. There was a forge, (not as large as Shildon's) at the Horwich works which before the proposed closure had a full order booked for foundry work. (Horwich was the other BREL works scheduled for closure) Both these points strengthened the union's belief that privatisation was a major factor in the proposed closures...

...The TU representative explained that a lobby of MP's had been organised for Tuesday 25th May and although Horwich/Swindon works had organised that lobby they had since withdrawn from it...

...Both the Trade Union and the District Council's representatives agreed that their actions in opposing the closure needed to be carefully co-ordinated and wherever possible the Local Authorities and the Trade Union should be working along the same lines. Consideration was given to the question of whether or not the Council should liaise with the Local Authorities affected by the Swindon/Horwich proposal (for closures) and it was felt that a joint approach, if it could be made, might be worthwhile.

There was general agreement at having regard to the need for the co-ordination and the representatives of the Council and the Trade Union should meet regularly."

Although occasionally obscured by bureaucrat speak this summary of the official minutes of the meeting effectively states how the official campaign was to continue.

At the Town level activity centred around maintaining morale. In the 1940's people were asked to donate saucepans to "build Spitfires", after the war it was revealed that this had simply been designed to make people feel involved- the saucepans were presumably discretely dumped elsewhere. So in Shildon much of the activity at the Works centred around fund raising raffles which, although obviously useful in raising cash, also gave people

a sense of being involved.

Save Shildon Shops.
MAMMOTH PRIZE DRAW
All prizes donated by
Tradespeople of Shildon Tickets 10P each

The list of prizes included many larger prizes such as, a "Portable Television" and the "Car Radio and Aerial", with a plentitude of smaller presents such as a "Knitted cardigan", a "Cuddly Toy Dog", "Two Tins of Car Polish and 2 Tubes Car Filler", a "Screwdriver Set", an "Autographed football from Middlesborough FC". These, and many more, indicated a touching willingness by the townspeople to support the fight.

Various groups were formed to express particular points of view. A Shildon Woman's Action Group spokeswoman, Margaret Walton, gave an interview to Mike Amos of the Northern Echo.

"We will be asking to meet her (Margaret Thatcher) face-to-face and hope she will agree. We are quite positive she cannot appreciate the effect on family life this closure will have on places like Shildon."

"Northern Echo" 15.5.82

Whether Ms Walton, in thinking the Prime Minister did "not appreciate" what her Government's policies would do to "places like Shildon", was being sincere or merely sarcastic is not clear. In the event Margaret Thatcher did not, unsurprisingly, find time to meet the Group.

Rev Vincent Ashwin, Chairman of Shildon Council of Churches also made clear his support for the campaign.

"I felt proud to join the 4,000 other men and women who marched through Shildon...Proud because the town showed itself united against the threat to close the works of its main employer and I could join in that unity...One side of the banner I carried said 'Don't kill this community'. We felt angry that the North was being punished again and having to take more than its fair share of the burden of the present recession...My other worry is that the divisions in our

"society will grow deeper. As new barriers may be set between those who are employed and the unemployed, who will look with envy at the luxuries we have."

News letter. St John's Church, Shildon. June 1982

"New Chief says 'I'm no executioner.'" On Monday, the 10th of May, Dennis Lees, acting Manager, arrived at the Works. He had replaced Derek Clarke who had been appointed acting manager at BREL's works in Doncaster.

"It has always been my aim to have a works of my own. I would hope not to be the last Works manager here because I'm conscious of the great history and it is a shame if a way of tradition has to die. It is a fluid situation at the moment and until I know exactly what is happening it would be ridiculous to MOVE HOUSE HERE (my emphasis) if the Works did close. It's a combination of a life's work in the railway industry. I can't comment on the decision taken on the closure plan. I'm here to do a job and will do that to best of my ability."

"Evening Despatch" 11.5.82

This statement was hardly a call to arms. It seems fair to assume that when "promoting" Mr Lees BREL would have fully briefed him on what was to eventually happen at the Works. It is interesting, however, that BREL made this change. There is always a danger that a manager of a plant will "go native". That he or she will begin to identify with the place and its workforce rather than to a distant, and a usually higher echelon of management. Whether this had happened with the out-going manager, Derek Clarke, would be difficult to determine, but obviously BREL were taking no chances.

By bringing in a new manager, especially one that did not intend to live in the area, (Mr Lees was from Derby), BREL had ensured that local considerations were unlikely to colour Mr Lee's judgement. If a manager has nothing in common with the workforce, except that they work in the same place at the same thing, it is unlikely he or she will be much

exercised by appeals to any concept of shared community interests. A manager who has perhaps a family living nearby is more likely to understand the daily concerns and thoughts of the community. Children may go to the local schools, wives or husbands work locally, shop locally, and so a network of influences will colour how that manager sees his or her duties. Remove that influence and it becomes much easier for the manager to become, in fact, the "executioner".

During the closing weeks of May 1982, a build up of support from trade unions other than the railways began slowly to develop. This took the form of pledges of support with claims like "We oppose any compulsory closures or compulsory redundancies." (Alex Ferry, Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions). At a meeting in London (May 5th) the Engineering and Electricians union also pledged support. The National Union of Mineworkers, a union which shared many of the problems in the North East, also agreed to give whatever support it could. Although these gestures of solidarity were welcome to the campaigners they could only, realistically, remain pledges rather than offers of direct action. In a sense, BREL's postponement of a decision had somewhat defused the situation and whilst everyone concerned knew there were still plenty of hard times to come it did create a lull, a kind of truce.

In any industrial dispute the period when both sides retrench after their initial skirmishes is the most dangerous. Management nearly always has the advantage of being able to pick the battleground, the commanding heights. If this has been done well all it need do then is wait for the union to tire whilst the latter must keep up the pressure come what may.

In the June of 1982 Sir Peter Parker, on behalf of the British Rail Board, wrote to all employees of BR.

"YOUR JOB AND YOUR FUTURE AT RISK

I am taking the unusual step of writing direct to you and to everyone employed by BRB, because the industry in which we all work is facing the most dangerous crisis in its history."

The title of Sir Peter's letter must have appeared ironic to the people of Shildon. For most of them the "future", unless BRB altered its plans, would consist of a weekly trip to the Jobcentre.

Sir Peter continued.

"We are going to lose about £165m in 1982, even after the government and local authorities have paid us over £800m. The latest estimate of the cost of the 17 days of ASLEF strikes is £80m. We can't afford to borrow the money we need to renew and repair the railway, and this is limiting the service we give the customers who are our bread and butter.

We're in deep trouble. You could say we're broke. This time the threat to jobs will affect you all. I want you to think seriously before you are drawn into industrial action and into a fight which nobody can win.

The real fight now is not between ourselves or with the government. It's for survival. Last January and February many of our customers found they could do without our services."

BRB was, undoubtedly in a difficult situation. It had to operate in the sure knowledge that its main source of finance, the Government, seemed to regard it as a client that was poorly adapted to the "market place" and therefore one to be sold off as quickly as possible. The BRB could not openly admit this because that would be political suicide, but everyone knew that this underlying tension existed.

"This is the background against which the Board, on 28th May, made the following offer: to increase rates of pay by 5% from 6 September, providing that negotiations on all the six items in the 1981 productivity agreement have been completed by 30th July 1982. If agreement on the productivity items is not reached by 30 July 1982, the pay offer will be withdrawn."

This linking of new working practices to a wage deal was the reason for the

letter. BRB knew that if it did not get a productivity agreement from the rail unions their chances of achieving much progress with central Government were slim. Of course they would also realise that if they were successful in getting a more compliant workforce it would make it easier for the Government to offer them for privatisation. They were, therefore, almost conniving at their own destruction and yet fated to continue doing so in order that they could counter Government criticism of inefficiency.

The next paragraph must have had a particularly bitter taste for the Shildon workforce.

"Perhaps you feel that you have been through a crisis like this before- and it will be all right in the end. But we can expect no help, whatever government is in power, unless we accept that we must change the way we do things. All around us, in other industries, some with long and honourable traditions of service like ours, people are facing up to the need for change and getting rid of restrictive practices. We will get no sympathy if we continue to resist change until it is forced on us, more painfully."

When Ian Gardiner, then Managing Director of BREL, had called Shildon the "premier wagon works in Europe and the jewel in the crown of BREL" he was primarily referring to the ability of the workforce to ADAPT TO NEW PRACTICES (my emphasis), not to resist curtailing old "restrictive practices." The workforce had accommodated every bout of BREL's modernizing zeal and were, consequently, to be closed down in the cause of "best business solution". The Chairman's letter would not have been an easy read in Shildon

The Chairman concluded.

"So what happens if your union calls you out on strike, or orders some form of industrial action which wrecks the railway? The answer, I am afraid, is no pay increase, no job to come back to for many, no prospect of investment in electrification.

"What can you do to help yourself in this crisis? You can speak up; let those who represent you and negotiate on your behalf know that you want this industry to survive. If we fight the competition instead of each other, we can still save many jobs that are already at risk."

Taking into account what was most likely to happen to the Works the only answer to Sir Peter's question "What can you do to help yourself?" was, for the people in Shildon at least, a simple one; put not your trust in BREL princes and fight like hell.

Most working people have only one strength; their labour. It is all they have to sell and they must therefore try and sell it as dearly as possible. It is, while their strength lasts, their only asset and once it has gone they are, to all intents and purposes, finished. This basic fact of life is learnt early and permeates every working day.

So if the workforce at Shildon were to follow Sir Peter's suggestion, ("You can speak up") to whom should they appeal? Their local union officials, who probably knew little more than they did? Their union executive, who would be beleaguered by considerations of "trade offs", regional rivalries, and inter-union battles? The BRB Chairman knew, as well as anyone, the limited options available to his workforce. If he could frighten enough people into refusing to strike he would have succeeded- that was the purpose of the letter. Behind the chatty concern the letter was a careful attempt at dividing the unions from their members.

By June 1982 everyone knew the Government had small regard for nationalised industries. Profitability was everything; if you worked in industry that was showing a loss you would soon, if not already, be out of a job. When Sir Peter Parker drafted his letter he was well aware his



audience had been well prepared for his arguments, they had been softened up by the awareness of what could happen if they did not do as they were told.

In the month of Sir Peter's letter an article on freight appeared in "Railnews" (a British Rail management sponsored newsheet). Written by Henry Sanderson, BRB Freight Director, it was a report on how "In such a tough year did Railfreight beat its target?" He answered his own question in the sub-heading "A truly modern and competitive Railfreight network is emerging from the ashes of the old uncompetitive Victorian system."

Every so often a word will seem to take on a special meaning, it will be incanted wherever possible as if to make what is being said matter. To say a "dialogue" is "meaningful" is meaningless, but for while "meaningful" was used- as if to somehow try and make something that was often trite appear important. Other examples abound, but if one word were to sum up the public utterances of BRB at this time it would have to be "competitive", with "productivity" a close runner-up. It was clear the Government had got one of its messages across.

Mr Henderson writes:

"In a year when many things went wrong for the country and for British rail it is pleasing to be able to report that Railfreight had an extremely good year and was able to reduce its loss even more than forecast, from £55 million to £14m."

What had "gone wrong for the country" had been a rapid decline in the manufacturing base of the country, partly caused by the cut-back in Government investment and development in those industries. This had affected BR along with everyone else.

"Despite the good results of 1981, the prospects for 1982 were- even before the ASLEF strike- at best, of maintaining rather than improving on 1981 results. This is despite continuing improvement in all areas of direct expenses- train and yard working and locomotive and wagon maintenance, and despite vigorous marketing efforts to maintain 1981's tonnage levels in the face of continuing recession.

Two major areas of concern are, again, admin costs and interest charges, both of which are still rising. The Chief Executive, railways, has launched a major attack on administration costs and there is every prospect that they will start to fall dramatically, but there is no prospect of interest rates falling for a year or two.

Under our PRESENT GOVERNMENT (my emphasis) remit any losses which we make have to be financed by borrowing at high interest rates, and our failure to break even since 1978 and, particularly, the high loss due to the steel strike in 1980, is now coming home to roost in rapidly escalating interest charges (£22m in 1980: £37 in 1982).

Those static prospects were before taking account of the ASLEF strikes. This had cost Railfreight over £20m, which, needless to say, has shattered our financial prospects for 1982 and will in addition, lead to still more borrowing and still more interest burden in the years ahead.

Despite this discouraging start to 1982 not all is gloom and much can be done to make this better. Our product is now getting good and competitive...In the area of expenses we must continue to improve productivity so that we get still more competitive with road hauliers."

The two problems that mostly concerned BRB were then, according to Mr Henderson, admin costs and high interest rates. The third, but emphasised more in the Chairman's letter, was the fear of another rail strike. If ASLEF had cost £80m what would a full strike of all members cost?

The problem was admin costs, not out of date workshops? And what might "admin costs" mean? It can mean many things. Was the administration of BR so costly that it had become necessary to close down profit making workshops in order to balance the books? Was this another case of the bureaucratic tail wagging the working dog?

Mr Henderson's difficulties with interest rates were being echoed throughout the private and public sector economy. The Government, by declining to grant more subsidy, was forcing BR to borrow at rates which

Government policy had caused to rise.

On the 21st May a letter from the prospective parliamentary candidate in Darlington, appeared in Shildon's local paper.

"SOME MIRACLE WORKER.

Most people would be amazed by your front page trumpeting of the reduction of the rate of inflation as if it were some kind of modern miracle achieved by Mrs Thatcher. The reality is that the figure has only just come down (May 17th) to the level she inherited three years ago.

I doubt if the workers at Shildon Rail Shop, when viewing their prospects would regard Mrs Thatcher as a miracle worker. Nor would the three million people officially registered as unemployed. Further total production is down, manufacturing output is down, investment is down and real take-home pay is down. Taxation, of course, is up.

As for the future, even the most optimistic forecasts see continuing high levels of unemployment and very little growth of output. Some miracle."

Oswald O'Brien Letters, "Northern Echo", 21st May 1982

Mr Henderson's article could not state the absolute connection between Government spending and BR's problems no more than Sir Peter Parker could warn, in his letter, that a strike MIGHT be in the Government's interest.

"Privatisation" was another of those words that had come to take on a special significance and a rail strike might be just what was needed to make the Government appear, reluctantly of course, forced to "sort out restrictive practices that continually hold the country to ransom, etc." .

The fiction that BR was totally its own master was reaffirmed in an article in another newspaper local to Shildon.

"Tory councillors today hit back at accusations that Shildon rail shops are being closed for political reasons. Coun Dave Warren said local Tories are fighting hard as anyone to save the Town's wagon works. His comments came after the North East Labour party said the region was being turned into a 'jobs desert to ruin their vote.' 'I'm sick and tired of reading this rubbish by people like Stan Haswell -it's pure nonsense' said Coun Warren of Great Aycliffe Council. 'The decision to close the works was made by British Rail and not by the Government. The Government is leaving the nationalised

"industries to sort out their own troubles and has not interfered in the slightest with BR. The Works would have been all right if it had not been for the ASLEF strike- that ruined BR and is forcing them to shut plants such as Shildon."

"Evening Despatch" 24th May 1982

If Councillor Warren really thought that by "leaving the nationalised industries to sort out their own troubles", whatever that might mean, the Government was truly uninvolved in the consequences then he was either worryingly naive or just plain dishonest. Whether naif or naff his position on Government responsibility was clear - whatever went wrong was someone else's fault.

Although the postponement of closure had, to a certain extent, eased the pressure on the Works there was still the lingering threat of a full strike by the NUR. Sid Weighall, General Secretary, had declared himself ready to call a strike over the closures, and it was still possible a strike might, eventually, be needed.

"I was about to fly off to a meeting in Amsterdam when someone came to Heathrow and paged me. I had this note thrust into my hand saying that there had been a postponement on the decision to close Shildon. Parker (Chairman of BRB) had agreed with me that maybe we could find another way out. When I had first heard about the closure, at one of the regular lunches Parker and I had started having, when he put this paper in front of me I said 'No way are you going to close Shildon, no way!' I was determined and he knew that. I had agreed, I had to realistically, that there would be cut-backs, but I was determined to try and keep Shildon going somehow. I knew that once you closed it down it'd never be re-opened. They never are. To close something is too easy and to start it up almost impossible. So he had backed down."

Sid Weighall, General Secretary NUR 1978-1984 (interviewed 7th May 1990)

Sid Weighall genuinely believed Sir Peter Parker was ready to negotiate over Shildon. Both men knew very well the pressures each was under. They had learnt early that they needed to co-operate with each other if their industry was to survive .

"I had a lot of respect for Parker. He was a passionate believer in a nationalised railway system. He had worked his way up. Had stood as a Labour candidate for Parliament. We were in sympathy. So much that shortly after my being made General Secretary he had suggested that when he went to Fowler (Norman Fowler, then Minister of Transport) we should go together. Presenting a joint team. It was the first time it had been done and was a good move. We both wanted the best for the railways. In both parties (Conservative and Labour) there was always a strong road lobby and Parker and I knew that we would have to pull together. It weren't only the Tories because under Labour we'd had just as much trouble. Take the Tunnel. I'd had a devil of a job with Conference (TUC Septemeber, 1982) over that. The Seaman's union, the Transport and General for the lorry drivers, they were all against the Tunnel because it threatened their jobs. You could see their point, but it was wrong. We had to change our transport system, we had to adapt to change. But they said I was using the environmental argument just to keep my members' jobs. In a sense they were right, but that didn't make the general point of the argument wrong."

Ibid

The fine balance between management and labour often swings on whether the leading personalities of each side can reach some kind of rapport. To reach a situation where neither side can tolerate the other is pointless. If there is a breakdown because of PERSONALITY clashes then it is the membership who will suffer, not those indulging in often useless posturing.

"Any daft bugger can call a strike. It doesn't take brains to do that, but you've got to think of your members when you do. Is it going to do more good than harm? Look at the miners. Who would have said that a powerful union like that, one any government would think twice about, could be destroyed like it was. And that was because of its leaders. Badly led and men's whole lives, their livelihood was wiped out."

Ibid

And yet unions were there to represent their members. The need to be cautious about entering into too close a relationship with management had to be balanced against the need to be able to see the other person's point of view, to understand what is possible and what is not.

Weighall knew Parker would have to make cuts somewhere. Government

policy would make that inevitable, but how those cuts were to be made, where they could be phased in so as to cause the least distress was his main consideration. Another was whether his membership would support him if he did call a strike.

"I feel very annoyed about it all. (The threatened NUR rail strike) I've had my share of being mucked about on the railways and have been made redundant many times. When we fought for our jobs, we got no support at all. I will be made redundant again this year, but I know I'll get no support. They'll do nothing and I'll have to go and find another job somewhere else. These people who were screaming their heads off now thought it would never happen to them, but when it comes to their doorstep they want everybody to support them. I feel very hostile towards them (Shildon workers) and there's no one around here (Northallerton) who has any sympathy for them. Why should they put their jobs in jeopardy? A strike will finish the railways and the road haulage firms will move in and we'll never get the traffic back. There are hundreds of signalmen who have lost their job in this region." (Ray Allan Signalman at Leyburn near Northallerton, North Yorks)

"The Northern Echo" May 25th 1982

Whenever a strike, in any industry, is threatened it is fairly easy for the press to find a member who is against taking action. For most people taking any sort of industrial action is a frightening step. It can very quickly isolate people from their otherwise normal routine. People, like perhaps a lone signalman, can soon become nervous and then their support begins to waver, however worthy the cause. The "Red Flag" always sounds better sung by a choir, the solitary picket, singing to the wind is less effective.

In addition to the action over the closures there was also the possibility of a rail strike over wage negotiations.

"Your Executive (NUR) changed every year. A third was always automatically up for re-election each year so you never had that continuity. And you never knew how the Executive would be made up. You might have a left wing period and then a right wing period, it depended on that third coming in. Now if they were all left wingers,

"and remember it only took one majority vote, you could easily have a vote for a strike. I might not agree with it, but that'd be how they voted so that'd be it."

Sid Weighall. NUR General Secretary 1978-82

Weighall was in a difficult position because he knew one of the reasons for BR's need for closures was because the ASLEF strike had caused much damage, both economically and politically.

"It had been a selfish action and it had resulted in an argument over what were really petty details being the cause of a whole Town losing its work, its very identity. A whole community of people were being sacrificed for a few selfish people. I was, to be frank, disgusted."

So it was that in the midst of concern over the workshop closures another rail strike threatened, one that, if it developed, could easily make the ASLEF strike of the winter 1981/82 look, by comparison, fairly insignificant.

"'Nothing moves' order is part of a national all-out strike by the NUR. The union is heading for a showdown with BR over its five per-cent pay offer. North East NUR official Alec McFadden (a member of the National Executive) said today 'The railways in the North East will close down completely- the strike will paralyse the rail network.' He was one of the National Executive who had voted to fight for an improvement in the pay offer which is described as 'an insult and derisory'. 'The pay deal would mean we are standing still for six months and we are not prepared as responsible workers hoping for a decent wage to stand for that. We never want to stop the system and we are hopeful that we can get a settlement before the strike starts.' The strike is planned to start at midnight on Sunday June 27th."

"Evening Despatch" 10 June 1982

The need for compromise between BR and its unions was becoming crucial and both sides knew that part of that compromise would have to involve acceptances, on both sides, that if there were going to be any victories there would have to be losers.

The threatened strike of the 27th June had other implications for Shildon, it would come just three weeks before the Works annual holiday. Anyone working for BR had a rail pass and a rail strike would, for many, mean a change in plans.

"Some were more worried about their blooming holidays than about the Works! Instead of being pleased with having the threat lifted they moaned on about how their holidays would have to go. Only a few like, but imagine."

Worker in paint shop

Whilst the negotiations on pay went on BREL and the NUR also tried to find a compromise on workshops closures. BR offered a scheme of voluntary redundancies which, it was hoped, would help reduce the workforce. Everyone knew that there would have to be some job losses and voluntary redundancies seemed a sensible way to start. The NUR response was cautious. At a local level there were some who felt such a scheme would be the "thin end of the wedge" whilst others, especially those looking for early retirement, thought it a good idea. The adrenalin of protest was slowly begining to ease into a quieter mood. There were still a few who wanted the fight to go at full pressure, but for many there was a slow acceptance that even if the Works survived its workforce would be drastically cut.

"An NUR spokseman said, 'We have got rid of the confrontation and we are now trying to keep the industry as viable as possible. The Working Party will deliver its results in the next few weeks after looking at the problems we have- it is too early to say what the recommendations will be, but there will be no COMPULSORY (my emphasis) job cuts."

"Evening Despatch" 17 June 1982

A workplace operating "voluntary redundancies" is where rumours flourish. As the pressure to leave is imposed so a gradual erosion of confidence develops among those trying to guess who might be next to go. The younger

members of the workforce start to see their promotion prospects improve and soon a feeling that each person is on their own erodes any sense of common purpose. Where does someone go for advice? In most workplaces asking advice of one's union official is akin to broadcasting the news every hour in the works canteen. If not one's union official who else? Management are hardly likely to give unbiased advice. Everyone becomes interested in who is leaving and slowly their own job comes to seem as something transitory. What had once been an optimistic workforce becomes one riven with anxiety.

On the 24th June there was a meeting of the the Works Working Party. A major topic was how the proposed Channel tunnel might affect the demand for wagons? The Government seemed determined that the Tunnel would be built, as much as was possible, by private capital and the meeting felt that a natural consequence of this would be a greater use of privately built rolling stock. The meeting was informed that private wagon builders were seeking government subsidies to off-set foreign competition, this irony was not lost on those present. Derek Foster, constituency MP, said that it was difficult to get accurate figures for private wagon building. One estimate argued that the private wagon fleet was 18,000 and that it carried 30% of all freight- this meant that the private sector had 10% of total wagons and yet carried nearly a third of freight. These figures were disputed by a number of people at the meeting. It was also reported that there was evidence that some private wagons were being leased back to BR and that this was being operated at "reduced rates". Derek Foster noted that this relationship between BR and private contractors was not helping BR, but in fact working against it-public money was being put

into private pockets. It was suggested that EEC funds be sought to help establish what the social consequences of the closure would be and the meeting was informed that Ivor Richard, (European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs) was to attend a meeting with Sedgfield District Council on the 14th July. The meeting ended with a comment from one union official that "Peter Parker had proved no friend of ours.", many present found it hard to disagree.

Meanwhile the day of the strike approached amidst reports that support in the north east was not very strong.

"Union bosses have denied reports that support for next week's national strike is crumbling. One report suggested that 2,000 north east railmen were set to defy the NUR strike call was dismissed as 'rubbish' by the union's regional organiser Alex McFadden. 'It's true no one wants the strike, but support will be 100% if sanity does not prevail.'"

"Evening Despatch" 21.6.82

The meeting with the EEC Commissioner began at 2.30 (14th July) at County Hall, Durham. The Shildon constituency MEP Roland Boyes opened with a resume of events to date. He then went on to suggest that BR's postponement of closure had been made because they were nervous of "fighting a war on three fronts at one and the same time?" (ASLEF dispute over flexible rostering; closure of works; and pay deal).

The Commissioner, Ivor Richards, had been unable to attend and had sent his advisor, Dennis Grennan, as his deputy. This sending of a "deputy", an "assistant", etc, was very much a feature of the campaign.

"BR, in event, couldn't attend (meeting to discuss post-closure strategy) because they had more important business elsewhere. As if the fate of a town was not sufficiently important!"

Tom Toward, Town Clerk to Shildon.

Grennan pointed out that that whilst it was perfectly proper for Roland Boyes to complain about BR's behaviour, he could not be seen to make adverse comments. "There is a need to be more discreet than perhaps Roland can be." (from notes of meeting taken by Tom Toward) He felt that it would be possible for EEC funds to be allocated for a survey on the social costs of the closure- a "pilot report on a one-industry town where unemployment had made the situation worse." He urged that the report be done by people local to the area rather than from some "outside experts."

The Chief Executive of Durham County Council, (Peter Dawson) then asked whether there was "a need for this kind of help and what level of funding could the County expect?" Others present took up the point that they had already completed their own survey and wondered whether a new survey would be any different? Stan Haswell, Sedgefield District Councillor, asked whether Durham University should be approached with a request for assistance?

It was pointed out that EEC funds could not be seen to be being used to help the workers in an industry where the "Government has said it has to close". The Study should aim at showing the dangers of being dependent on one industry, even if the Works were not to close. Mr Dawson felt that it was important that the survey be done in such a way as to be useful to other areas. Grennan again pointed out that any EEC funded report could not "be put forward as an anti-closure move".

It was obvious that an EEC Commission could not be seen to be interfering in the government policy of a member state. The European Commission for Employment and Social Affairs had to tread very warily indeed because

although almost all of its concerns would be the direct consequences of the government policies of member states, it would not be able to say so. It was, as it were, reacting to circumstances rather than helping prevent them. Its work might, through discussion supported by research, help to form opinion and perhaps thereby change some government's policies, but in doing this it would have to avoid being seen acting "politically".

It had to be seen evaluating the effects, but could make no comment on the causes. In this it was little different from the civil service of any member state and yet, because of its identification with the EEC as an entity whose concerns were for the whole EEC membership, it could easily appear to become an arbitrator between government and the governed. If it allowed this to happen it would then find itself compromised in the eyes of the government concerned.

The meeting then went on to discuss the "social costs" of rail and road freight. One councillor pointed out that during the recent winter it had cost "£31m to clear snow in the northern region, but this would not be considered as being part of the overheads for road freight and yet, if it were rail freight, it would". "It's nonsense to have one industry costed as having high overheads when the overheads of its direct competitors are not taken into account." This led to comments on the social costs of road freight. "The damage a thirty ton lorry does to the road has to be paid for by the taxpayer, the local council. That's apart from the noise and danger to people."

The meeting was then brought back to the main issue when Dennis Grennan pointed out that Shildon's problems were being replicated throughout

Europe. There were "steel closures in France and Germany, pit closures in Belgium, everywhere you can see the same problems." This prompted a discussion about the way various governments subsidised the authorities affected by the closures.

At 15.25 Dennis Greenan left the meeting which then continued with a discussion on what to do next? One councillor asked whether we "should await the results of the trade union's survey?" Another thought any survey should be done by the County Planning Office, but it was pointed out that they had already completed a survey. One councillor felt they had seen some "sense and some nonsense. Shildon is a matter of political philosophy- the rail road dispute will go on forever." Walter Nunn, a councillor for Durham County, Sedgfield District, and Shildon Town, (who also took notes of the meeting) felt that it was time to "cut out emotion and use all our resources to help each other. There are good socialists in the universities, let's use them if need be." The meeting ended with a general agreement that a survey would be useful and that the "EEC seemed sympathetic".

Obviously there were other unions involved in the closure and on the 28th July the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association wrote a letter to its members on the "BREL Workload and Manpower Requirements 1983." Its main concern was to publish the union's manpower figures and see how they might be affected by the BREL policy of staff cut-backs.

"It was emphasised at the meeting of the Informal Liaison Committee that the effects of the ASLEF strike together with the much reduced revenue and uncertainty as to investment can alter the figures. BR representatives, together with BREL management could not guarantee the 1983 workload. They had also indicated that since the Report had

been prepared there had been agreement between BREL and BRB to slow down the New Build Programme to cushion the situation."

"Cushion the situation" presumably meant a policy of "running down" the Works prior to closure. It must be remembered that this letter was sent seven weeks after BREL's announcement that it had postponed a decision on whether it would close the workshops. It would seem that almost everyone concerned felt the postponement to be a mere prelude to actual closure.

"It will be observed from the Report that the question of a supplementary redundancy settlement was considered by the Joint Working Party and I can advise you that at the Informal Liaison Committee meeting, agreement was reached on supplementation to Workshop Wages Grades on a formula which provides six months wages to be paid for staff aged 46-50 years inclusive with 15 more years service and for pro-rata tapering reducing payments to 51-64 years of age inclusive.

BREL will now be approaching the Workshop Wages Grades inviting them to register for Voluntary Severance and, we understand, counselling teams will be circulating around Works to answer any questions that may be related."

The situation regarding Salaried Staff has still to be discussed but there are aspects which need to be agreed prior to receiving the refined figures. Accordingly, a meeting has been arranged to take place on the 2nd August 1982 and if agreement can be reached on a number of aspects, the matter will be reported to the TSSA Executive Committee during that week and a further circular issued.

Yours fraternally,

Tom Jenkins." (General Secretary TSSA)

Attached to the letter was a report from the "Joint Working Party into BREL Workload Allocation from 1983". A meeting had taken place on the 23/24th June to discuss the proposed BREL manpower changes.

"Particular concern was expressed regarding Horwich and Shildon, but it was appreciated that not only would it be most difficult to transfer suitable and appropriate work in any volume to ease the situation at these two Works, if in fact any work had been available for re-allocation, and it would only have increased the problems at other works.

No shortage of labour is revealed on the basis of current information, however, such shortages might be revealed if volunteers for redundancy are sought.

Whilst it is appreciated it is not TUC policy to recommend voluntary redundancy, this is nevertheless recognised as the only alternative

"to short time working and we recommend accordingly that volunteers be sought.

In this respect it is apparent from an examination of the current age profiles, a traditional approach is unlikely to resolve the problem and consequently the need for some special supplementation of the current redundancy arrangements, with appropriate safeguards based upon limited duration and aimed at dealing specifically with the problem of staff surplus to requirements for the 1983 BREL workload is considered feasible and necessary."

The TSSA, like the NUR, was no doubt trying to be realistic when it argued that although it was not "TUC policy to recommend voluntary redundancy" it would recommend its membership to take voluntary redundancy. Any union must try and protect its members from all circumstances, but it always needs to avoid becoming the mere bearer of management's bad news. By creating a possible threat management can sometimes get the union to take a position which it will subsequently find difficult to defend. If the union does not respond it can be accused of being complacent yet if it does it might find itself manoeuvred into doing management's job.

The "possibility" of the workshop closures was forcing the unions concerned to plan for their actual closure. If they did otherwise they would be betraying their members.

The comment that it would "be most difficult to transfer (to Horwich and Shildon) suitable and appropriate work in any volume to ease the situation" is an interesting one. The argument is that even if there was sufficient appropriate work transferring it would simply increase the "problem at other works". It must be remembered that the meeting took place in Derby, a town with a long tradition of railway manufacture, but also a town, as yet, not threatened with any significant closures. It would be natural for all concerned to want to protect THEIR jobs and if this meant,

perhaps, sacrificing someone else's job then so be it. To transfer work to Shildon would obviously mean somewhere else would have to lose out, but where? Which other centre of railway manufacture would come forward and offer some of its contracts?

Much would depend on how the argument for transfer was presented. The situation would have to depend on establishing a set of priorities. Who should give what and why. Could Shildon argue its case with enough conviction against its own union colleagues who were, at the same time, its competitors? In a situation like this the personalities involved would inevitably play an important part. Shildon men and women would be arguing against colleagues perhaps more used to industrial dispute.

"Whenever you had a meeting of branches the people from Shildon always stood out. The others would be perhaps a bit pushy. Argumentative, but those from Shildon would be quieter. It was bit like they were not used to having to fight their corner. I know it may sound strange, but they were sometimes like country people, unused to meeting the sort of people you'd get at a general meeting. The Branch was a big one, one of the biggest, and yet it rarely seemed to have much clout. Bit subdued. Nice people though, but maybe a bit too accommodating."

Sid Weighall General Secretary of NUR 1978-84.

Comment on the approaching strike began to dominate the press. Although the Falklands war was reaching a crucial stage- by the end of the month the war was virtually over- its dominance over all over news began to recede- people were beginning to realise what a rail strike would mean.

On the 7th June The Times reported on a "summit meeting" between Len Murray (General Secretary of the TUC) and Albert Booth (Shadow Transport Minister). It also commented on the growing dissension between the unions involved. The feeling of some in the NUR was that ASLEF were

remaining too unyielding over the demands for flexible rostering. Each day saw the relationship between Sid Weighall (General Secretary NUR) and Derek Fullick (General Secretary of ASLEF) deteriorate further. (see page 81). Both men knew what was being decided would drastically affect their members' job prospects for the coming decade, even beyond. The pressures to get it right were considerable.

"The offer (BR's pay deal) was dependent on ASLEF's position. I didn't want my union's negotiations to be tied up with that of another union's. I strongly objected to this. We weren't going to the barricades every Monday morning. That's what some idiots wanted."

Sid Weighall

The Times (8th June) reported that Sid Weighall was prepared to "negotiate a separate deal for NUR. A move which is unprecedented in railway history." It is rare for a union to agree to separate negotiations during a multi-union dispute. Weighall, however, had threatened this before.

"I was in negotiations in Newcastle, with the Boilermakers. You know what the boildermakers were like- demarcation this, demarcation that every detail subject to this and that. Well I was sitting next to them and I had to sit through diatribe after diatribe. I couldn't put my point across. I didn't get a chance to speak. In the end I got that mad I stopped the meeting and said. 'Look I'm prepared to commit the NUR to negotiate separately on this because we'll not be involved with any more of this rubbish.' There was a shocked silence, it'd never been known. They never spoke to me for months afterwards. Eventually they did like, but for a long time I was shunned."

Ibid

This exasperation with his colleagues was to create many problems, not only with ASLEF, but in the NUR.

"Sid Weighall is prepared to negotiate a separate deal... There has been friction between Mr Weighall and his lay executive and last night's vote of 17-6 for an indefinite stoppage was carried against

"his advice. A vote of "No confidence" against Mr Weighall has been proposed."

"The Times" 16th June, 1982

On the 21st June the threatened strike was debated in the House of Commons. It is worth examining this debate in some detail because much of what was said was to have a direct bearing on subsequent Government transport policy.

"Albert Booth. Barrow in Furness: (Shadow Transport Minister)
I beg to move that this House deplores the Government's refusal to respond to the Opposition's proposals to intervene to avert a rail strike, and recognising the contribution of the rail unions to manpower savings and productivity increases in BR, regrets the Government's failure to match this with the increased investment urgently necessary to re-equip and modernise Britain's railways; and calls upon the Government to authorise a corporate plan for investment including mainline network electrification."

"Hansard" Volume 26. Session 1981-82. Period 21 June-2 July.

In March 1981 BR had presented the Government with a detailed set of proposals for modernising the system; it had been, in effect, a description of what was needed to carry the network into the next century.

Government's response to the proposals had been fairly lukewarm. Some trading had gone on, but a change of Ministers (Norman Fowler replaced by David Howell) had brought these small beginnings to nothing.

"I'd said to Fowler that I'd be prepared to accept driver only trains, productivity deals on hours and wages, where necessary a scheme of voluntary redundancies- the lot in return for investment. For a proper electrification of East Anglia, the Edinburgh Line, in fact a real investment in the whole system so that we could have a viable modern transport system. And he agreed. It was a joint approach between me and Parker (Chairman BR). Then he left and Howell came in and we had to start all over again."

Sid Weighall General Secretary NUR 1978-82

Whether the departure of Fowler made that much difference can never be known, but it cannot have made the relationship between BR and Government

any easier. The BR proposals were an attempt to make the Government commit itself to greater investment in order to avoid a drastic deterioration of the network.

"The rail policy document pointed out that the physical effect of continuing the level of investment that then existed would be that 3,000 track miles of BR would be taken out of operation within the decade, that there would be a fall in mainline locomotive availability of about 50% and that the availability of diesel multiple units, which cater for many of our feeder lines as well as some of our main lines, would fall to about 60%. In other words, there was no prospect of maintaining our existing post-Beeching rail network without an increase in the amount of investment expenditure in BR. The Government have yet to reply to that rail policy document submitted by BR last year...On one of the major investment propositions- electrification of the main lines- the Government expressed no willingness to adopt any of the five options that were unanimously agreed by the Department of Transport and BR. Instead BR has been subjected to a series of changes in Government policy on electrification, told that the bases of the five options were no longer acceptable, told to do its calculations again line by line and told to calculate on the basis that the proposals apply only to those parts of the mainline network that will be viable in 1985. It was told to do the calculations again because there had been an ASLEF strike. Some people at BR's headquarters must be sick of doing new calculations on investment proposals for electrification."

The proposals did not ask for something vastly ambitious... (Just that our) railways be brought up to the standard that the French attained in 1970, the Belgians in 1947 and the Italians in 1940. Our electrification is inadequate by any of the standards accepted by our European partners.

If we do not electrify our mainline network we must replace our diesel locomotives with engines that are heavier, less economic and more costly to maintain than the electric locomotives... Irrespective of whether we electrify, it is necessary for operational, safety and efficiency reasons to spend more on the railways. The Secretary of State knows that. Their response was not even to sustain the existing inadequate expenditure on investment, but to reduce it. Expenditure by the BRB on investment in 1979, at mid-1981 figures, was £379m. This year the Board forecasts investment at £265m, which is a drop of £100m in expenditure on what was held to be at a level inadequate to maintain our railways in their present state." (Albert Booth)

"Hansard" 1981-82 Volume 26. page 31

The interruption from the Government benches at this point was typical of many to follow and, given the circumstances, could appear to be fair comment.

"Mr David Madel, Bedfordshire, South. The right hon. Gentleman is chastising the Government for not getting on with electrification. Does he agree that it is difficult to press ahead with more spending if, for example when we have a brand new electrified line between Bedford and St Pancras, management and unions still cannot agree on manning and new expensive stock is unused because of the inability to reach agreement?"

Ibid

The reluctance of ASLEF to work new rosters was constantly used to undercut the arguments of those proposing greater investment.

This proposition that investment was held back because unions would not work any improved system circled around the counter argument that the unions, believing their industry to be under threat, were trying to use their influence to save it.

"Mr Booth: What determines how much BR can spend on investment, in so far as there is Government control, are the external financing limits and the number of investment schemes that the Government are prepared to approve...The amount spent is half what is needed for essential renewal...Against this background the trade unions are negotiating about pay, productivity and conditions in the clear knowledge that their industry is running rapidly into crisis. Those unions have a good record of working with management...Between 1970 and 1979 the number of staff required to run BR was reduced by 30,200, not at a time of negative productivity because of curtailed services, but when there was an investment programme that was making some headway. Such was the co-operation between trade unions and the BR Board that the board put forward a corporate plan for 1981 to 1985 in the belief that railway staff could be reduced by a further 38,000, if the investment programme was commensurate with that. The unions tried to formalise an understanding with the Board and there was an agreement known as the 'Balance Sheet of Change', between BR and the trade unions in November 1980."

Ibid

This "Balance Sheet of Change" had been an agreement that the unions would accept manpower changes, productivity deals, etc, in return for a proper

programme of investment. Both sides understood that given the present Government's attitude to nationalised industries it was essential that they work together.

"Those who suggested that the unions have not responded or are standing in the way of progress should look at what happened in the two financial years up to April 1982. A further 15,510 post were eliminated from the industry. How long can unions go on sacrificing jobs against a promise of investment to enable the industry to perform better with fewer men when that investment was not forthcoming?"

Ibid

The couple of questions that followed this detailed comment on the railway union shows, perhaps, how inadequate Parliamentary debates can sometimes be.

"Mr Tim Eggar, Enfield, North: So that the country may be in no doubt about where the right hon. Gentleman stands, will he tell us whether he supports the action being promised by the NUR and whether he supported the action of ASLEF?"

Mr Peter Snape, West Bromwich, East: What a silly boy the hon Gentleman is."

After this rather pointless piece of nonsense Booth continued.

"We should be anxious, not decide whether we will support disputes, but take steps to avoid them and improve the performance of BR...If the terrible worry that existed in the railway workshop plans as a result of the proposed workshop closures did nothing else, it at least caused the Secretary of State and myself to look carefully at what determined the work load of those workshops, particularly the one at Shildon. I am sure that the Secretary of State is as aware as I am that one reason for the closure proposal was that there is a much more efficient use of freight wagons following the introduction of modern technology. Wagon utilisation was improved by 25% last year. When we talk about improving productivity we are not only talking about putting people out of jobs. The bitter attitude among railway unions has been caused by their belief that the Government has reneged on their part of the balance sheet of change." (Albert Booth)

This attempt to open the debate on the threatened rail strike into a one on Government investment in railways was naturally resisted. Indeed the Shadow Minister's comments on Shildon, whilst, in one sense, pertinent,

could be seen as being positively harmful. If Shildon's increased productivity had helped to make the freight system more efficient then it would naturally follow there would be less need for more wagons; therefore less need for the Shildon workshops.

The response of David Howell, the Secretary of State for Transport, was naturally to claim that Government investment was adequate. It is interesting, however, that in answer to questions on investment in specific projects he constantly referred to them either "being before me." or "before me for approval", but not what he intended to do about them. He described that there were "vast resignalling projects (that) are going ahead" and that "new electric railway coaches (200) and sleeping cars (210) are being produced," but the really significant investment- large scale electrification- remained, as yet, only "before him" for consideration.

"Mr Howell: Of course it is recognised that a substantial increase in investment is needed. It is also recognised that the investment has to come not only from the taxpayer- from whom it does come in substantial amounts- but from resources generated in the railway system. The difficulty over shortage of investment funds arises not from the ceilings set by the Government, but from the amount of resources that the railway can generate...the Government have, of course, endorsed the rolling programme of electrification and believe, depending upon productivity and BUSINESS PERFORMANCE, (my emphasis) that it should go forward."

Ibid.

"Business performance", more usually described as "market forces" will, then, determine whether electrification will finally be allowed to go ahead. The Government Minister is saying nothing new in this, but if "market forces" are to be the sole criterion for investment then what the unions were planning, a strike to get an improved pay offer, was also a product of "market forces". If they believe the "market" for their

labour will stand better pay than they must, according to "market forces" take the appropriate action. This response might be simply compounding one foolishness with another, but as it is the government who usually makes the rules then it should not be suprising if its "clients" follow suit.

A more detailed examination of the present Government's transport policy- especially as outlined in this Debate- will follow later, but this re-statement of the Government's determination to see "market forces " dominate its transport thinking further indicates how difficult the campaign against closure would be.

Three days after the Debate an estimate on the likely cost of the strike appeared in the press, "An earlier rail strike cost £600,000 a day, but this dispute would cost even more given the lost trade that could result." (The Times, 24th June). A few days later there was a further report that Sid Weighall had,

"felt he had been penalised by both the BR and Government because having reached an agreement on productivity his union is being penalised for the lack of progress of ASLEF on the vexed issue of flexible rostering."

"The Times". 28th June

As the day of the strike grew near it became clear that divisions within the NUR executive were worsening. The fear that there would not be wholehearted support for the action overlay much of the activity in those last hours. Weighall had not wanted the strike but had been out-voted by a more militant executive in favour of action; he was now forced to defend a position not of his choosing.

The strike began at midnight on the 28th June. By the evening of the 29th

it had become clear to the NUR executive that it had failed. The figures for actual support were confused, but it was clear that a very significant number of NUR men and women had turned out for work and that consequently further action was pointless. The strike was officially ended by the NUR executive that same night. The fact that Weighall had opposed the action made little difference to the bitterness he felt. His assessment on the wisdom of having a strike had been proved right, but at a damaging cost.

Any union executive which orders a strike must, naturally, think there is a chance its action will result in something positive. What is even more crucial, however, is that it be certain its membership is with it. If a strike is called and it fails because of lack of support from the membership the damage to that union's future negotiating position is incalculable. The collapse of the strike may or may not have been the straw that finally broke Shildon's back, but its failure certainly made the NUR appear weak, and therefore vulnerable; not a good base from which to argue a case.

Any hope that NUR would be able to force BR to change its policy on closures collapsed when the strike failed. It was obvious, both to the union and BR, that few people would strike to save someone else's job. By failing to support the NUR strike its membership had effectively given a vote of no confidence in the union's executive; if they would not strike over their own pay they would certainly not act on behalf of others.

Closure of Shildon now became a virtual certainty. The reluctant acceptance of that fact slowly altered the mood of those campaigning on the Works behalf. On the 3rd of August 1982 a meeting of the Joint Working

Party discussed redundancy payments. Terms were discussed; "supplementary benefit to be paid by BR and not the Government, men with over 15 years service or over 40 by 30th September to be offered terms. But that does not mean they have to go before or even at all."

The workforce no longer discussed how to avoid closure, but how to make that closure as painless as possible. It was suggested that maybe the Works could be saved, for some at least, if a shorter working week was introduced? This, combined with voluntary redundancies, might make the Works viable.

There were many who privately admitted that the Works was overmanned. The need to develop working practices which saved on manpower was not considered important during the years of low unemployment. In nationalised industries an attitude that jobs would always be subsidised helped forge a dangerously complacent attitude. Management and workforce grew slack believing that whatever happened in the private sector they would always be secure. Then, suddenly, the "market place" determined differently and they were caught unawares

"Look I'll be honest, the Works could've run on half the workforce. There were some lazy buggers who thought they'd got a job for life. Now all was changing. We should have done something about it years ago. It was management as much as the men. They just let things drift and consequently nothing changed. It just went on as before. Then suddenly we were faced with having to justify our jobs, argue which were needed and so forth."

Former shop steward in Works.

This justification was now having to decide not only who did what job, but who would have a job; voluntary redundancy had replaced the "job for life".

"We needed to get the balance right and to avoid compulsory redundancies. We thought that maybe another option would be a

"reduced working week. A reduction in night work so that the remaining work could be spread over more fairly. A roster to keep all going equally. There was some concern that the salaried staff hadn't been told anything, that maybe they would be protected. And as well as this there was the fact that jig and tool fitters were running out of work. Some fitters would soon have nothing to do."

NUR Shop Steward at Works

At a meeting two days later (5th Aug) one member of the Committee, responding to comments about the "lure of gold" in the redundancy payments, commented that "nine weeks ago we had unity, now we're a music hall joke." The early optimism was gradually turning to despondency.

Management and workforce began to talk of "natural wastage", "surplus to requirements", or, more directly, "deadwood". These sad descriptions of other people's lives made the earlier solidarity now seem foolish, even, for some, embarrassing.

An assessment of work vis a vis labour was issued (July 1982). The number of new constructions for 1983 was assessed at almost a quarter that of 1982 (907 for 1982 and 233 for 1983). Repairs, always a more reliable source of work, were similarly slightly down.

"Repairs- Classified	1982	1983
Wagons - Traffic	8122	7235
Wagons - Service	1248	1630
Total repairs	9370	8865"

Manpower requirements in the workshops showed a similar decline.

"Category 4 Staff	Staff on books 12.6.82	Requirements 1983	Surplus + Shortage -
Electrician	22	15	7+
Fitter	521	392	129+
Metal Machinist	96	48	48+
Metal Worker	125	105	20+
Vehicle Builder	59	37	22+

"Welder	254	128	125+
Other Cat 4 staff	94	50	44+
Total Cat 4 staff	1171	775	396+
Apprentices maturing by In excess of anticipated natural wastage	Dec. 1982		35+
	in 1983		34+
Net total (skilled)			465+
Other wages grades (Including Cat 1-3)	866	575	291+
Total wages staff			756+"

Management labour assessment. Shildon Works July 1982

Perhaps the saddest figures in this assessment were those of the apprentices. Just at the point when they had finished their training and were starting their working careers they had become part of that ever growing category; those deemed to be "natural wastage". Hardly an encouraging start to a working life.

On the 18th August the Acting Works Manager, Dennis Lees, wrote to all the staff.

"OUR FUTURE"

As you are aware we are currently facing serious workload shortages... It was agreed with the Special Working Party that we should first offer voluntary redundancy to all adult staff... In the event that sufficient volunteers do not come forward, the alternative at the present time can only be a shorter working week for everybody as THERE IS NO INTENTION TO ENFORCE REDUNDANCY. (writer's emphasis). If we are to survive, it's absolutely necessary for us reduce our present staffing and our overhead costs. Every effort is being made to seek new work and to find new ways of reducing our costs. It is, however, vital that we reduce the size of the workforce in keeping with the workload available, as a shorter working week will increase costs and therefore not attract work to this factory. For this reason I am again asking for staff to apply for voluntary redundancy."

There is no mistaking the purpose of this letter. A "shorter working week

will increase costs" and thus not solve the manpower problem, therefore, if there are insufficient "voluntary redundancies" enforced redundancies will have to begin. How else can the Works survive? Was this letter, in effect, trying to blame any subsequent closure on this reluctance of the workforce to take voluntary redundancy? Was the sub-text simply saying "If there aren't more of you prepared to give up your jobs then when we close it'll be your fault"? Whatever the purpose the message was clear; a large number of people in Shildon were soon to become unemployed.

A meeting of the Sedgefield District Working Party took place on 26th August. The problem of what to do about "voluntary redundancies" dominated the meeting. Some felt that "this carrot being dangled was helping to divide the workforce". Another member described how "the atmosphere in Shildon now is the same as that you find when there is a pit closure on the way. Next it'll be compulsory redundancies and everyone knows it." Yet another complained that the "danger of the golden handshake" would eventually undermine the campaign. The NUR came in for some blame for accepting voluntary redundancies so early, but when asked what else could the union do the speaker could offer little that was constructive.

Everyone present must have known their cause was hopeless. Yet another survey on the effects of the closure was proposed. A suggestion that "we send a deputation to Howell and Thatcher" was quickly rejected; all knew the chances of moving their Prime Minister to pity were nil.

These gatherings had begun to follow a familiar pattern. All present lamented the pending closure, but had little idea what could be done to

avert it. Beyond setting up another survey, bemoaning the state of the railways, and expressing a collective anger little happened. Meanwhile the workforce began to quietly weigh up how much redundancy money they could expect.

At a another meeting of the same committee (3rd September) a member noted that only "fifty per cent of the shop stewards bothered to turn up." This meeting decided to send a delegation to attend the Labour and Conservative conferences. It was also agreed to send a delegation to Brussels to lobby MEP's - they would fly with a total limit on fares and expenses being set at £1,600. This not inconsiderable sum worried some members of the committee. The workforce had given money to the fund, but there had been some complaint that there were some on the committee who did not have the full trust of the workforce. Whether this suspicion was fair or not is not important- there will always be some who will suspect everyone and everything- but what was important was that these suspicions were shared by a fairly large section of the workforce. The record of some of the people involved had not been one that would inspire confidence.

"You wouldn't believe this, but some buggers used the fund to fill their pockets. We had a boilermaker on the trip to Brussels and every time we'd have to change plane or train, whatever, he'd be in the bar. He was drunk for most of the trip, and there were others. There was another bloke, when we were going to London, he got off at York and claimed the full fare. Only a few did that mind, the rest were straight, but it don't take many do it? To tar everyone with the same brush."

Former shop steward at Works

Following the Labour Party Conference, the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee published their "Transport Policy" document. There was little in it that would give comfort to Shildon. It seemed to suggest that, in

1982, the Labour Party had not significantly moved from a previous emphasis on road haulage.

"We recognise that road transport for the future will be indispensable to the movement of people and goods. A simple anti-road position is counter productive to constructive policy formulation, but transport needs and environmental consideration have to come more into balance."

"Transport Policy" Section 1. para 1.4

Later, in its section on freight it stressed that:

"The efficiency of the freight transport industry, in which road haulage plays a major role, is vital to the country's economic prosperity."

Ibid Section 5. para 5.1.

The curious stressing of "road haulage" here seems to suggest that some special pleading had gone on. This opening statement did not have to specify a particular form of haulage yet the whole paragraph deals almost exclusively with the concerns about "costs involved in road haulage", that "Government must seek to ensure that the operating standards of the road haulage industry are kept at a high level", etc.

It continues:

"The mass of freight journeys will continue to be transported by road for the foreseeable future, but fair means must be used to get as much freight as possible on to the railway without sacrifices in costs and efficiency."

It is perhaps unfair to pick out these, perhaps innocent, constructions in an otherwise comprehensive document, but it is true that elsewhere the emphasis on moving freight was beginning to move back to rail.

A report on the Shildon delegation to Brussels contained the following observations:

"The main points arising from the general discussion was the European acceptance of the need for an efficient up-to-date railway system throughout Europe and even beyond...Next month the Chairmen of all

"Transport Committees in the European Parliaments would meet to discuss this problem. There was a general acceptance that railways should take priority over road transport... There were still strong lobbies supporting road transport as opposed to rail and each group was capable of blocking progress within the European set-up."

Durham County Council delegation to Brussels Report: 21st Sept. 1982

It would be foolish to make too much of this disparity of approach, but it would, perhaps, be fair to say that the environmental need for less road haulage was being recognised earlier in Europe than in the UK.

A further nail in the rail freight coffin occurred in December when the Association of District Councils stated that the BR wagons currently carrying scrap metal would be "life-expired and withdrawn from service by May 1984".

On the 13th of December a meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, (Sedgfield District Council), met to discuss the implications of the ADC circular. It was noted that if this withdrawal of service took place there would be a serious increase in heavy road haulage.

"The result of this is that there is a danger of not less than 750,000 tons of scrap being transferred to road haulage with all the adverse environmental effects that could have... The ADC refers to the need to alert all Authorities of the possible consequences... In the short term the scrap would probably be carried in 34 ton tipper lorries with an average 20 ton payload- however, it is pointed out that there may be an increase in the maximum permitted weight of lorries from 32 to 38 tons and clearly this could be relevant."

Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee, SDC. 13. Dec. 1982

It was clear from the ADC circular (Circular 92/171) that some Local Authorities would be applying for railway facilities under Section 8 of the Railways Act, 1974. This Act will be examined in more detail later, but in essence it allowed for a Government grant to be made to enable either private or public industries to build their own access sidings onto the

existing rail network. The implication for Shildon was that if there was to be a demand for new wagons, to replace those withdrawn from service, would those orders come to Shildon? The answer to this question came in the same report.

The Policy and Resource Committee reported that:-

"Forseeing the position which will arise in 1984, a Working Party of representatives from BR, British Steel Corporation, and the Scrap Federation plans to introduce a nationwide rail service in new purpose-built wagons for which a grant from the Government under Section 8 (Railway Act 1974) is required if the scheme is to be viable....The ADC points out that for such a grant to be forthcoming the support of local authorities whose road network would be affected by the lorry movement is required and Councils are asked to write to the Dept. of Transport supporting grant aid to the STANDARD RAILWAY WAGON COMPANY LTD which is PREPARED TO BUILD THE SPECIAL NEW BOX WAGONS." (my emphasis)

The new wagons were to be built by private contractors. The main argument for the closure at Shildon had been an economic one; there was no demand for what they made therefore they should go. Now private industry, seeing a demand for new wagons, was seeking support from local authorities to get a government grant to build railway wagons.

"I think there's something very devious going on at National level." said Coun. Stan Haswell. 'If we supported this grant application we would be cutting the throats of the people at Shildon Works.'"

"Evening Despatch" 14.12.82

1982 had proved a hard year for Shildon. On the 4th October the Daily Mirror ran a full two page feature on Shildon.

"Walter Nunn has been a railwayman since January 1938...standing beside a replica of the Hackworth's locomotive he said, 'The process has already begun. The community is already divided by the "offer" of redundancies. What does the older man say when the carrot of a pay-off is dangled? What does a man say if he is tired or ill and handicapped from an injury? It's a terrible dilemma, because we know when the redundancies are taken up, the workforce is weakened and fighting for survival then is much harder. No apprentices are to be taken on this year. This had not happened for 150 years. They're cutting the bloodline.'" (John Pilger, "Daily Mirror" October 4th 1982)

That the "bloodline" had been cut was not now in doubt, but the reasons for that surgery were less clear. Christmas 1982 saw a divided and disillusioned Shildon; a community which now knew the closure would go ahead, but still did not know why?

On the 18th February 1983 J. Palette, (Director of Personnel for the British Rail Board) wrote to the unions likely to be affected by BREL's planned closures. His letter was titled "BREL CAPACITY: The plan for closures." The preamble reiterated BR's need to cut costs and then announced that:-

"BREL's future must be committed to that of a commercial company that can successfully bid for coaching and rolling stock orders in the export market and also competitively bid for future BR new build requirements and to do so it must eliminate its excess capacity. There is, therefore, only one correct course for BREL to follow and that is to structure its organisation in line with its future needs and to do so must result in:-

- (a) The closure of Temple Mills Works by the end of 1983
- (b) The closure of Horwich Works (with the exception of the Foundry and Spring Shop) by the end of 1983.
- (c) To run down Shildon Works during 1983, with a view to total closure during 1984.

I think I must also caution that unless BREL succeeds in increasing its share of the world market for traction and rolling stock requirements, the probability of another medium sized Works closing in the 1986-87 timescale cannot be ruled out."

The letter accompanied a supporting outline on how the closures would be organised. This concluded with a description of how work would henceforth be distributed.

"It is, therefore, proposed that the following workload transfers take place:-

Activity	From	To
Freightliner Wagon Repairs	Horwich	Derby LL/ Wolverton
--	Temple Mills	--
EMU Repairs	Horwich	Bastleigh/ Wolverton
Wagon Repairs/ New Build	Shildon	Doncaster
LH Coach Repairs LMR/ER	Glasgow	York
DML Repairs (unclassified)	Derby Loco	Crewe

"DML Repairs (class 37)	Doncaster	Crewe
Service Wagon Repairs	Shildon/ Temple Mills	Derby LL/ Doncaster/ Wolverton
LH Non-Passenger Coach Repairs	Doncaster	York.

The workload transfers can be achieved without the need to recruit staff at the receiving locations."

There was no mistaking BR's intention now, Shildon Works would close in 1984.

How did the people of Shildon react to this re-affirmation of closure?

"Colin Russell, 42, had 21 years service at the Works and is the Vice-Chairman of the local NUR. He is also a born optimist. 'I still don't believe they'll close it. Why should they have bothered to re-prise it last year just to shut it again. In my opinion it's just a scare tactic to get more men to take voluntary redundancy.' Others were less sure. 'Any campaign will be a waste of time. The place is as good as shut. For anyone who reckons the place will stay open now it is just wishful thinking.' (John Humble, New Shildon Club President). 'This is a Town of dead men- Thatcher has decided to kill us. What sickened me tonight is how she said she'd do anything to help the Australians after the fires. I know Australia's in the Commonwealth but so is Shildon.' (John Harbron, labourer in Works)"

Martin Shipton "Northern Echo" 18th February, 1983

The day before Palette's letter the "The Financial Times" had commented on BR's proposals.

"The programme differs from that put 'forward' by the management of BREL last spring, which proposed that nearly 2,000 jobs would also go from Swindon and Derby locomotive works. This programme met intense opposition from the rail unions and particularly from the NUR to which about half the BREL workforce belongs. It was shelved by BR management in the hope of averting a NUR strike that was looming at the time.

The entire relationship between BR and BREL is examined in the report of the Serpell Committee into the future of BR, which, it suggests, it might be better if BR bought some equipment, including locomotives, FROM ABROAD." (my emphasis)

Hazel Duffy, Transport Correspondent. "Financial Times" 17th Feb. 1983

The Serpell Report was the work of Sir David Serpell, a former civil service head of the Ministry of Transport. It had been commissioned by

the Government in May 1982 to examine how BR could be run more cost effectively. A more detailed study of the Report will follow later, but it would be a fair to say that its recommendations were not going to be of much help to Shildon, nor, in fact, to BR in general. Its main recommendations were:-

- 1) that by 1986 British Rail should cut its costs by £220m
- 2) that BR should place BREL in the private sector
- 3) that there should be review of the fare structure to allow for substantial increases
- 4) that the present 11,000 route miles be reduced to 9,000

This response to the Report in one tabloid newspaper was fairly typical.

"The best thing the Government can do with the Serpell Report on the future of our railways is forget it. Fortunately, that is exactly what it looks like doing...There will be fewer trains travelling to fewer station. Fewer passengers would pay higher fares for lower standards."

Geoffrey Goodman "Daily Mirror" 21st January 1983

There were, to be sure, more measured comments, but the "Daily Mirror's" blunt style effectively summed up most of the comment on Sir David's deliberations. What the Government thought would become clearer later.

The response to the Report in Shildon was outlined to a special meeting of the Sedgefield District Development Committee on 2nd March. Sedgefield, like local authorities everywhere, saw that if the Report's recommendations were implemented some fairly drastic changes would occur. Their particular concern, however, centred on the sections discussing freight and the future of BREL. They noted that Serpell recommended that BRB:-

"avoid committing too many resources to the service (freight) unless there is reasonable certainty that traffic will be won. Serpell considers that £45m in costs can be saved by 1986 (without specifying how), that the freight business is extremely vulnerable

"to adverse trends and that the Board should promptly withdraw from unprofitable traffic."

Minutes of Development Committee (SDC) 2nd March 1983

Serpell's comments on BREL were less equivocal.

"We consider it unlikely that BREL can make any major inroads in the international wagon market.' Three options for BREL's future are proposed:- a) that BREL should be sold to the Government. b) BREL should be privatised 'The Government should encourage competition in rolling stock manufacture by dividing the relevant parts of BREL's business assets and employees between at least two groups of consortia of private sector manufacturing companies. (Para 7,.30)' c) BREL should be absorbed into BR providing i) no facilities should be retained in new building where purchase from external manufacturers is cost effective. ii) where profitable, maintenance and repairs should be contracted out. iii) all resources should be planned on conservative estimates of demand. If there is insufficient internal capacity then work should be placed externally. iv) no facilities should be retained for private work."

The Development Committee concentrated its summary on the local implications of Serpell.

"The Freight Business: Serpell's analysis for freight traffic (is) hampered by the absence of a clear national transport policy. The effect of Government action has been to increase road freight traffic (e.g. through the proposed increase in axle limits) and the difficulties of obtaining Section 8 Grant (to enable applicant to construct sidings that connect with the rail network) as a result of discretionary financial criteria

This latter aspect is particularly critical as Serpell sees the major source of new freight traffic being dependent on new freightline traffic and investment in sidings through the use of Section 8 grant."

Serpell's plans for BREL were obviously related to the Shildon's Wagon Works.

"Serpell implies that the repair costs for wagons will increase during the 1980's because investment in new wagons will not take place. No remedial action to overcome these problems is proposed. Similarly, Serpell does not look at BREL's ability to tender for new wagon business from the private sector or abroad and fails to examine the importance of leasing arrangements in attracting new business to BREL. The absence of these investigations tends to confirm the impression that Serpell is more concerned WITH PRIVATISING BREL (my emphasis) than with a thorough examination of its prospects. Indeed, Serpell

"gives maximum scope to the existing private wagon builders to take BREL's business. No doubt, this approach was strongly influenced by the Government's attitude to privatisation."

Ibid.

Whether the Government swallowed Serpell whole or only in bits would make little difference to the Shildon Works. With closure almost a certainty all that could be done now was to try and limit the damage to Town and community.

On the 4th of March the Works Joint Committee had a meeting. Its prime purpose was to discuss BR's recent announcement about closure, but for some it seemed to be more like a wake. Derek Foster (MP) felt that the campaign had been a "tremendous achievement", but there was no escaping the fact that it had made little difference to the eventual outcome. Some present wanted the campaign to be stepped up, but for others it was more a feeling that "we've been through it all before". One member asked "what are we going to do because up to now it's been like a seminar?"

It was becoming increasingly clear that a change in strategy was needed; that the campaign AGAINST closure would now have to become more concerned with planning FOR closure.

On the 7th April the Shildon Task Group of Sedgefield District Council met to discuss such plans. Much of the meeting concerned itself with how Shildon could be helped by Government.

"The attitude of Government, particularly to regional aid and other incentives, but also more subtly in 'steering' footloose industry in Shildon's direction, is critical to the implementation of the required package...It was also important for BREL to contribute significantly to secure an effective package."

Minutes of Shildon Task Force. SDC 7th April 1983

One obvious problem was the reluctance of Government to change Sedgfield's status as an Assisted Area. There had been considerable communication between Durham County Council and the Dept of Trade and Industry over the establishment of Assisted Area (AA's), and Special Development Areas (SDA's).

In June 1983 Norman Lamont, Minister for Dept. of Trade and Industry wrote to Councillor G.W. Terrans (Leader of the Labour Group- the governing political party in Durham County Council) on this very issue.

"Successive Governments have designated AA's with reference to TTWA's (Travel to Work Areas) since they are recognised as the smallest unit of self contained labour market for which employment rates are available. Any small unit would not be recognised as meaningful... With regard to the Shildon closures, the Government has shown its concern at the implication for local employment by setting up a committee of BR, Local Authority and Government officials to examine ways of maximising assistance. The redundancies will fall in the Durham and South West Darlington TTWA an IA (Intermediate Area) eligible for selective financial assistance. However, the Government considers that it would be premature to try and predict the full effect of redundancies which are not to be completed until December 1984. Five hundred redundancies have already taken place, but the current unemployment rate in the Durham and South West Darlington TTWA is, at 15.4%, just 0.6% above the corresponding IA coverage for Great Britain and is level with the IA rate in the Northern Region. At present therefore, I do not feel that there is a case for immediate upgrading to SDA (Special Development Aid) status as you request. I know this will be a disappointment to you, but I can assure you that the Government will continue to watch the situation in Durham closely."

Norman Lamont. Minister for Trade and Industry. 23rd June. 1983
Sedgfield District Council knew that it would be difficult to attract new industries to Shildon unless it could provide a package which included Government incentives in the form of grants and subsidies. The type of grant or subsidy would obviously depend on DTI area designation. It was crucial therefore, to continue the pressure on Government to change the area's status.

Under the title "Other Industrial Initiatives in Shildon" the Task Group document outlined three possible job creating alternatives.

"i) Opportunity Workshop. Sponsored by SDC and approved for Grant Aid under the Urban Programme, this development had the following aims:-

- a) to create and preserve long-term employment in new small enterprises.
- b) to generate economic activity through the production of goods and provision of services.
- c) to provide theoretical and practical advice and guidance to persons wishing to set up their own business.

The precise details of the project had still to be resolved.

ii) Shildon Development Trust. To assist new and established firms by the provision of new levels of skill training to provide professional support and advice on project research, design and development. Also to encourage business enterprise including small businesses in the South-West Durham area.

The Trust hoped to involve the Community and provide new jobs. Durham Business School was preparing an economic profile of the area and it was unlikely that the Trust would be able to do anything within the next 12 months although the economic profile should provide a lead as to how the Trust should operate.

iii) Short and Medium-Term Assistance. The average redundancy payment at Shildon would be £4,000 although in some instances payments will be as high as £12,000. Inevitably, some employees would want to use their redundancy payments to start their own businesses. In the short-term there was a need to ensure that there was advice and guidance available to those people and Durham Business School may be of some assistance in that regard. The short-term initiative needed to be available within the next six weeks and could not await the outcome of the studies on the longer-term job opportunities. However, there still remained a need to provide a medium-term initiative to meet the needs of the workforce."

The mention of a Shildon Development Trust is interesting. The original purpose of this Trust was to give specific help to Shildon, but this soon changed when the Trust was combined into a Shildon AND Sedgfield Project; the "SASDA Package" (Shildon and Sedgfield District Development Agency Limited).

A possible reason for this change was the realisation at District Council level that Shildon could be used to attract Government aid- via grants and subsidies- which could then be used to help unemployment, not just in

Shildon, but throughout the District. The argument would be that it was in Shildon's interest to use its status to help the District because in that way unemployment in a District would be helped. It might mean that work might be created elsewhere in the District and that consequently Shildon people would have to travel to work, but that this inconvenience would be outweighed by the benefits to the District as a whole.

Whether these arguments satisfied the people of Shildon will be dealt with later, but it cannot be denied that there was some logic in using Shildon's particular problems to help the District as a whole. How the "cake" was to be cut, and, more importantly, who was going to hold the knife, would have to be settled later.

The Shildon Development Trust, and its successor SASDA, was to be crucial to the subsequent development of Shildon. Most people involved in the campaign understood this, but there was still that residual feeling amongst some that maybe the closure could still be averted. This optimism, whether misplaced or not, was bound to create its own set of problems. Whilst one half of the Town began to think about redundancy payments and another job, the other half went on believing the Works would continue and their jobs with it. There were a few who, depending perhaps on whom they had talked to last, managed to believe in both.

In order to understand how this confusion could happen it is necessary to recall that a railway workshop had been in Shildon since railways had begun. Some families could trace a connection with the Works back through four generations. Even those not employed in the Works would feel this sense of continuity. It is not surprising, therefore, that

there were many in the Town who, despite a commonsense acceptance to the contrary, continued to believe everything would eventually carry on as before.

"We could lay in bed and listen to the rivetting house. Remember there were three shifts and it got that you knew what job was running and what shift it was. If the weather was fine the rivetting would be done outside and you could hear it, the sound carried all over the town, by the wind and so you'd know. You could even get that you would know who the rivetter was, knowing who was on shift. Then there was the big drop hammer, you'd hear that all over. You could hear the thump thump as it drew out the con rods. So you got used to the sound of the town. Clocking on time and when the shift changes. In the years coming up before the war there used to be a steam buzzer and it'd go off at quarter to seven to wake them up and half past seven for the shift starting. Then at twelve and so on. It was like them bugles in a battle. You'd see them coming off shift, big crowds of them going up and down, the same way at the same time. There would be bus loads picking up from Bishop (Bishop Auckland), Coronation, Eldon Lane, and Eldon. That's apart from them that came by train from West Auckland or Darlington."

Retired foreman welder in Works.

Shildon is not a large place. It would need no more than a fifteen minute walk to go from fields back to fields. In a town that size it was easy to know what nearly everyone else was doing and why. The place of work provided a social context as well as somewhere to earn the rent.

"There was a pattern. Going to the job, coming back. Thursday had been my pay day for the whole of my life. It's the day I got my pools in, all my dues, you know. And even though I've retired it still matters only it's marked now with nothing happening. Yet it feels the same. Like losing a limb, one minute you've got it and the next there's nothing there. What's funny though is there's some men I'd worked with all my life, seen them every day, and then quite suddenly you never see them again. Not seen or heard of them since and they were people you had contact with every day. You knew about their activities, maybe you'd not be that interested, their hobbies and that, but it kept you aware of what was happening to other people. Now there's an absolute void. I'm busy with being a councillor and plenty of other things. What must it be like for them that doesn't have that?"

Ibid.

By the middle of 1983 it was becoming clear that this "pattern" was finally coming to an end. There could be no formal declaration that the campaign against closure was over because this would cloud the coming negotiations, but all knew it was just a matter of time.

In the April of 1983 Durham County Council, with Sedgefield District Council, published an eleven page document "The Case Against Closure-Shildon Wagon Works". It presented the unemployment statistics for South-West Durham and outlined the consequences, social and economic, that were likely to follow an increase in unemployment. It did not, however, say much that was new. To be fair there was little the authors could say that would be different from what had been said many times before. In a sense the publication was more a summary of what had gone before rather than an argument of what could happen next.

By the autumn of 1983 most people in the Town were concentrating on what they could expect as severance money.

"Workers at Shildon Wagon Works are to receive drastically improved redundancy pay offers. In a surprise move BREL has offered to increase the maximum pay-off to over £5,000, an increase of £3,000. BREL are also sending a team of redundancy experts to the Works to give advice to the 1,000 men who face the dole if closure goes ahead. The increase will be seen as an incentive to the workers to accept BREL's offer. But the introduction is conditional on the unions agreeing to the closure of Shildon, Horwich, and Temple Mills. A BREL spokesman, Bernard Ault said, 'This extension of supplementary payments will increase the financial terms available to many employees not wishing to transfer to other areas.'"

"Evening Despatch" 12th August 1983

A bigger "carrot" was being dangled, but the end result would be the same; a job elsewhere for some, for others the dole.

Shildon's 1983 Christmas was inevitably a rather subdued affair.

"It was quiet, bit depressed really. There was this sense of, well sadness you'd call it. You missed the crack. You even missed getting annoyed, like you do at work. By then a lot were leaving and although it didn't register much at the time looking back you can see how it had affected you. Affected everyone. Mind there were some who were enjoying it. Them that hadn't worked at the Works and perhaps had wanted to. And some had been lazy buggers there and now they would have to get a different job. They'd never thought that day'd come and it brought them up a bit sharp. But for most it was an end of an era."

Paint shop worker

On the 30th April 1984 the local paper ran a piece about the imminent closure. Neil Kinnock had visited the Town and had met some of the workforce.

"Saturday's meeting, addressed by the Labour leader, was a lament to the Wagon Works earmarked for closure at the end of June. The redundant workers now face a new battle- to attract industries and jobs to the Town. Bishop Auckland MP, Derek Foster, pledged; 'The fight for the community goes on. We will show everyone that Shildon can do it.'"

Gary Horne "Evening Despatch" 30th April 1984

Kinnock's speech was indeed a lament.

"I wish I could come here with good news, or a change of view by the Government, but I cannot. Reminded every day of Shildon by Derek Foster, (later Chief Opposition Whip) my PPS, which, for Derek, stands for Preserve Production in Shildon I know what you have been through. Any other Government would have been impressed by the fight, the faith, trust and loyalty and would have changed their decision. The Prime Minister is constantly preaching 'Do it yourself', but what complete hypocrisy... You have had accolades from BREL, even by Thatcher's ideals you have done enough to exist, but no, you can't exist due to dogma. We have a run-down British Rail- she never uses it- and an ageing wagon stock... The Tories cannot adjust to the idea that unemployment is not free and it is growing more expensive every year. We shed jobs when we should be investing in a properly up-to-date system. Other Governments see the need of railway networks, good connections, why not this Government? Instead we have a Government which seems to have declared war on work. With work you get income, freedom and rights, without you have to fall in line..."

Transcribed excerpts of Neil Kinnock speech, Shildon. 28th April 84.

It was announced that the Works would officially close on Saturday, 30th of June. It was widely understood, not just in the North East, that the closure at Shildon had a wider, almost symbolic, significance. The end of a Works that had, in effect, created the railways seemed, for some, to be an occasion to reassess their thoughts on travel in general.

"'Shildon men should have been re-employed long ago,' says Lord de Lisle, vice-president of the Automobile Association. 'I know the people of Durham well and respect them. It just did not make economic sense to go on manufacturing railway wagons,' he said. There is a great deal of railway property- sidings, goods, sheds, and land- that should be put on the open market and the money used to improve the road network. It would serve the public better."

"Evening Despatch" 24th May 1984

The noble lord was, obviously, arguing his AA corner, but his suggestions only echoed what many in the Government felt to be commonsense. Running an efficient railway system costs money and, according to "market forces", this should come from the customer. What was clear was that "market forces" had done great damage to the people of Shildon.

What was also becoming clear was that the closures at Shildon, Horwich and Temple Mills, were only stages in a longer series of BREL cuts and closures.

"Staff at the doomed wagon works at Shildon have refused to back survival campaigns at similar plants. They say they won't help because their pleas for help were ignored 'I virtually went down on my knees and pleaded for help from other works last week. No other works has lifted a finger to help us.' said convenor John Priestly... Just last week BREL announced that 4,000 more jobs were to go in the industry. At Swindon 1,700 jobs will go plus 900 redundancies at Glasgow and 1,400 at Crewe, Doncaster, Derby, and Wolverton."

"Northern Echo" 7th May 1984

It was perhaps inevitable that scapegoats would be needed for the failure of the anti-closure campaign. While there had been hope that the Works would survive the underlying tensions of the campaign had remained hidden, but now those tensions were starting to surface.

"BITTERNESS AT SHILDON: Union leaders at doomed Shildon Wagon Works have accused council and BREL chiefs of doing too little too slowly to help the town. Kenny Stabler, boilermaker's union convenor, said they had been left to continue the fight for cash and new jobs themselves. Mr Stabler, a plater at the Works for 12 years said, 'The lads here are very disillusioned and bitter. We feel as if we have been left high and dry. Nobody wants to know us any more because we have nothing to give in return- the whole thing is pathetic.' But Tom Toward, Town Clerk, said the council was pressing for top level talks between council and BREL officials and Derek Foster MP to get talks off the ground."

"Evening Despatch" 8th May 1984

There were bound to be some at the Works who would now look back over the campaign and see mistakes. Most people take little notice of what their local politicians say, unless, that is, it is of direct concern to them. And it is true to say that during the campaign local and national politicians had poured a great deal of rhetoric over the people of Shildon. Some of it had been useful, but some less so.

"I remember being on the platform and watching the faces down there in the crowd. As the politicians and union leaders spoke you could see their faces changing. They'd been full of enthusiasm marching through the Town, full of hope. But as they listened to the tired old cliches coming out of their "leaders" you could see them losing heart. They started to leave before the end. On the fringes of the crowd, with the speakers still talking, you could see them going. Derek Foster, he knew what was happening, tried to rally them, to get them lifted again, but they'd heard enough."

Official at the Mass Meeting. May 1982

This disillusionment was now turning into bitter recriminations.

"We've heard nothing about it for months (SASDA). A lot of idle promises have been made to the employees and none have been fulfilled. It appears to have fallen flat and what can the agency do for us anyway- they can't pull rabbits out of hats. We are allowed to go

"along to the Job Centre every day, but there is nothing on offer. We are faced with the choice of moving to Milton Keynes or gardening for £1.50p an hour. Councillors have just been electioneering and we are sick of them gambling with our livelihoods" (Kenny Stabler)

"Evening Despatch" 8th May 1984.

BREL had offered Shildon a one year loan guarantee package of £300,000, but this was thought insufficient and there was considerable pressure to improve it. On the 7th June, just twenty one days before closure, David Mitchell, Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Dept of Transport, decided to set up a team within the Ministry to see if a better offer could not be agreed

"Mr Mitchell has intervend to try and persuade BREL to be more generous,' said MP Derek Foster, who had set up the talks. 'BREL have been dragging their feet. Ideally they should have set up an agency themselves like British Steel in Consett...' Chief Executive (Sedgefield District Council) said 'The cash BREL is prepared to give us is the key issue in getting the development agency off the ground.' Sedgefield councillors meet tomorrow (8th May) to discuss the latest situation"

"Northern Echo" 8th June 1984

These last minute meetings about meetings, whilst perfectly understandable to those concerned, must have been unsettling for the people in the town. Why had the Ministry of Transport left it so late before pressuring BREL about an improved offer to Shildon? Why had the Government not taken a more positive role in helping the town survive the results of its policies? Why were the details of the SASDA package still being discussed instead of being in operation?

"END OF THE LINES AT DOOMED WORKS.

The last rites have started as Shildon Wagon Works' proud 150-year history grinds slowly to a halt. The doomed works are now echoing to the sound of the mechanical digger as the old tracks (connecting the works to the lines at Shildon station) are ripped from the ground... The remnants of a once-mighty workforce looked solemnly on and knew there was no going back. Yard transport worker, Colin Russell, said.

"'They are cutting the head off before the body's died.
It's a sign of the end and it's now irretrievable- there's no going
back now ".

"Northern Echo" 25th June 1984

It is often difficult to decide the exact moment when some thing like the Works dies. This time, however, it was not difficult; when the first section of railway track left the ground the connection between town and railway manufacture ended.

The day before the Works closed the following letter appeared in the local paper.

"Tomorrow will be a sad, sad day; a day long to be remembered in Shildon, the historic railway town. A redundant force of workmen will, without doubt, be 'drowning their sorrows' in the pubs and clubs. Around these small groups of men having a 'last one for the road' will be some unseen 'lookers-on'. Will the ghosts of George and Robert Stephenson, of Timothy Hackworth, Daniel Adamson, Bouch and all the others, be gazing down on this the remnant of a loyal railways workforce?

My own grandfather's younger brother was the first man to blow the steam buzzer at the works being a member of the original works fire brigade. He was, in 1881, one of the artisan representatives of the N.E.R. Corps at the centenary celebrations of George Stephenson in Newcastle.

Would I be more than a trifle cynical if I thought that maybe, in the Boardrooms of the BREL and BRB a toast may also be drunk to the victory over one of the most hard-working 'fighting committees' in this railway struggle.

For the Government, the BRB, and the BREL have hammered home the toughest nail in the coffin. The sorrowful thing of it all is that inside the coffin lies 150 years of hard work and loyalty. Will the phoenix rise from the ashes?

Ralph Matthews, 19 Freville Street, Shildon."

"Evening Despatch" 28th June. 1984

A town that relies on one employer for most of its jobs is always vulnerable. If an employer is large enough to soak up most of the available labour in the locality then it is usually fair to assume that its economics will depend on factors outside that locality; it will need to sell its "products" elsewhere. The employer will usually market on a nationwide basis, perhaps also for export, and consequently will be constrained by considerations that are different from those who live next to the plant/factory/works- its employees. If this employer is part of a larger conglomerate then the dangers are even greater. In such a company decisions will be made on a scale of economy that will almost certainly show scant regard for local consequences of its deliberations. If asked its public relations office will claim otherwise, but when the distant crunch comes the local cookie will indeed, always crumble.

As has been shown, Shildon depended on British Rail for most of its jobs. As had also been seen this same employer, after praising the workforce, sacked them. Whilst this had come as a surprise to most of the town there were some who had been expecting such a move. The warning signs had been there. In the late 1960's and throughout the 1970's threat after threat had come only to fade, but it was reasonable to assume that one day it would not go away.

The difference between pessimism and scepticism is, perhaps, that whilst the former despairs the latter prepares. What is certain is that some in

Shildon had started to prepare for the day when BR would go. Something of that preparation was to result in the formation of the Shildon Development Trust.

Once the closure had been proposed these preparations moved with greater urgency. What had once been mere conjecture was now a reality. BR's time-scale for closure meant that anything that could be devised would be needed very quickly and yet the type of assistance required would take much time, AND MONEY , to develop.

Throughout the summer of 1982, as draft followed draft, the idea of a development trust for Shildon slowly took shape. The details changed, but the central intention remained the same.

"SHILDON DEVELOPMENT TRUST: A programme for the establishment of an Agency to develop and support community based enterprise in the creation of employment and new businesses in South West Durham...

This paper outlines a programme designed to provide for training (and vocational needs) of young people and adults in General Manufacture and Distribution trades and the higher level of skills and work training required in a post industrial society."

Draft on Development Trust Scheme. Shildon Town Council June 1982

It is worth looking at the "Introduction" in detail because it not only illustrates the writers' intentions, but also their guiding philosophy.

"INTRODUCTION:

- 1.1 Unemployment is the number one social problem of the country.
- 1.2 Technical and structural changes now taking place in industry nationally (and internationally) will inevitably result in large scale reduction in the demand for unskilled manpower resources.
- 1.3 At the same time the demands on industry to remain competitive will require an educated, highly skilled and motivated workforce trained to high standards.
- 1.4 The decline in heavy manufacturing industry including mining, shipbuilding and railways in the post war period has played a

fundamental and important role in the erosion of the industrial and economic base of the north east.

- 1.5 The recession in international trade and the introduction of new working methods, technological innovation and involvement of the Third World in heavy manufacturing industry has also undermined the labour market.
- 1.6 Communities which face large scale redundancies and long-term unemployment are seriously at risk and nowhere in the country is this more apparent than in the north east. The need for "alternative" employment and the creation of new businesses is of the utmost importance as is the support of the community in an organised approach to meet this most serious situation."

Ibid.

Whilst there is little here that is new it does show a ready appreciation that the changes needed would involve more than just tinkering. It is, in a sense, almost too all-embracing for its own good. To want to help create "an educated, highly skilled and motivated workforce trained to high standards." is perfectly proper, but to realise such an ideal would involve spending more than any post-war British government had ever spent.

This "Introduction" describes, not just the needs of Shildon, but what was becoming increasingly necessary for the whole country; a fundamental restructuring of education and training linked to a system of skill training which could respond to a growing demand for adaptable, skilled labour. But where to start? Perhaps the answer to that question is simpler than it seems; in places like Shildon.

Whether the authors of the document were being deliberate in setting their aims so high, or merely mischievous, is difficult to say, but such debates must start somewhere and where better than in small communities like Shildon? Unless such places are prepared to undertake the fundamental changes needed in a "post-industrial" society then all they will become is the victims of that society.

Shortly after BREL's announcement of closure (April, 1982) Tom Toward, the Town Clerk of Shildon, (and main author of the Shildon Development Trust document) wrote a letter to Hector Macmillan of ICI. Macmillan had been seconded to the Northern Region of CBI-SPU (Confederation of British Industries- Special Projects Unit) to help liaise between the MSC (Manpower Services Commission) and industry. Tom Toward realised that if new industries were to be persuaded into Shildon he would need the help of people like Macmillan. Macmillan agreed to visit Shildon and both men were soon involved in trying to get a "package" together that would involve industry, the MSC, and the Town.

On the 5th August 1982 Macmillan wrote to Toward agreeing that he would bring Colin Martin (Area Manager for MSC) to their next meeting (10th August). It was early days and all concerned were reluctant to commit themselves to anything that was not carefully prepared, "this matter is in confidence, and no commitment will be expected by you or by Mr Martin of the MSC." (Macmillan's letter to Toward- 5th August).

The meeting with Martin (MSC) obviously went well because on the 12th August Macmillan wrote to Toward suggesting that they "make, jointly, a positive contribution to alleviating unemployment in the Shildon area itself and also, perhaps, in so doing stimulate some new business/manufacturing projects." Macmillan closed his letter with a request for details of Shildon's existing employers and the numbers of skilled and unskilled labour- "both men and women". He also asked Toward for,

"Your ideas of the interested people whom we should consider grouping together to manage our project as and when, it begins to take shape and take off, ie a steering committee.

I have my own ideas on the sort of people who perhaps we should involve, but would very much value your obviously first hand and experienced views."

letter from H.A. Macmillan to Tom Toward 12th August, 1982

By late September Toward was able to write to Macmillan that the,

"Town Council, at a meeting held yesterday evening, agreed...to support the introduction of an Industrial Training Scheme and a local Enterprise Trust in Shildon...I should like to have the opportunity of meeting with you again to discuss the secondment of staff to prepare a short and long term feasibility report on employment prospects in Shildon..."

letter from Tom Toward to Hector Macmillan 21st September 1982

On the same day Toward also wrote to Martin (MSC) about the raising of funds for the project,

"In the meantime I have had informal talks with the 'Rowntree Trust' and it has been indicated that there is a possibility of upwards of £40,000 might be made available towards the Industrial Training Scheme and that an approach to the EEC might bear fruit with grant aid from the Social Fund for the local Enterprise Trust...The 'Rowntree Trust' also indicated that it would be willing to second staff to assist in the preparation of a feasibility report for the Industrial Training Scheme..."

letter from Tom Toward to C.E. Martin 21st September 1982

"Hector Macmillan was an interesting man. He lived in a large house in north Yorkshire and was a distant relative of Harold Macmillan. But what was more important was that he was a very close friend of Leon Brittan (then Home Secretary and constituency MP for Richmond, Yorks). Through Brittan he could get the ear of the Cabinet. He had members of the Cabinet up for weekends, that sort of thing. And he was quite passionate about Shildon's problems."

Tom Toward, Town Clerk to Shildon Town Council.

In November Toward wrote to local industrialists telling them about the proposed Trust. A letter to Glaxo Operations of Barnard Castle was typical; after a resume of why the Trust was needed the letter concluded with a request for support.

"The Town Council is prepared to make available up to £25,000 and other national and regional organisations have promised financial assistance. Nevertheless, in order to ensure the proper funding and continuation of the scheme, additional sponsorship is important and in this we would seek the support of Glaxo Operations either on a once and for all or a continuing basis- hopefully the latter."

letter from Tom Toward to Glaxo Productions 15th November 1982

In early November Toward had met Alan Roberts (Chief Executive of Sedgefield District Council) to discuss the Trust and how it might fit into the SDC's plans for employment creation in South West Durham. In a letter confirming their conversation Toward wrote;

"At the meeting you suggested that monies made available to the District Council by BREL might more usefully be put to work through the Shildon Development Trust and I promised to let you have a sight of the enclosed discussion documents (draft proposals on how Trust might operate)."

letter from Tom Toward to Alan Roberts 16th November 1982.

This letter touched on a subject that was to become an important factor in the relationship between Shildon Town Council and its "governing" authority, Sedgefield District Council; who would have control over "monies" the Trust might attract. For the moment it seemed SDC were content to allow funds to be channelled through Shildon, but the sums concerned were, as yet, fairly insignificant.

On the night of 13th December a meeting of all concerned took place at the Hardwick Hall Hotel, Sedgefield, Co Durham. In addition to those already involved Professor Charles Baker of the Durham University Business School also attended. This meeting, in effect, formally established that a Trust, or something closely resembling it, would happen. What is interesting is that three days after the meeting, in a letter to A.T.Ford of Barclays Bank bringing him up to date with the meeting's deliberations, Toward was to write;

"All of those present seemed to be most enthusiastic and they have either offered their support already or are to recommend accordingly. Sedgefield District Council who expressed a late interest in becoming involved particularly in the Shildon Development Trust was allowed to put a particular point of view which did not entirely coincide with the community concept. Towards the end of the meeting it was quite apparent that they were willing to consider taking part in the scheme(s) because of its importance to the area and because the use of the word "community" will be taken to have a wider significance than the older meaning of the word and will embrace an economic profile of South West Durham."

letter from Tom Toward to A.T.Ford. December 16th 1982

The relationship between Shildon and SDC now seemed to be causing slight concern to Hector Macmillan. In a letter to Toward he wrote,

"...having had time for reflection I think the meeting at Sedgefield was very successful. It is to be hoped that (Professor) Charles Baker will NOT BE PUT OFF (my emphasis)- in any way- by anything which he hears from the Sedgefield District Council during his preliminary survey!"

letter from Hector Macmillan to Tom Toward. 20th December 1982

SDC's relationship with Shildon was fairly straightforward and yet one fraught with possible complications. Shildon was only one of four comparable areas in the District (the others being Ferryhill, Spennymoor and Newton Aycliffe). All four, with perhaps the slight exception of Newton Aycliffe, suffered from high unemployment rates. In addition there were smaller communities, mostly former pit villages, where there were also not inconsiderable pockets of people without work (Trimdon, Trimdon Colliery, Fishburn, etc).

The District Council, when considering its strategy for attracting jobs to the area, had to think of the District as a whole, and not piecemeal. Shildon, on the other hand, saw its problems as being specific to itself. The campaign against closure had been subject to this kind of "doubling" of effort. As has been seen SDC had run a campaign through ITS own working

party whilst Shildon had operated through a separate working party. Both could quite easily justify their existence and yet the very existence of each could suggest that the separate groups preferred their own counsel. Now, as the campaign turned towards job creation, the groups still seemed determined to work, for the time being anyway, separately.

On the 31st January 1983 the Steering Committee of the Shildon Development Trust appointed its officers. Hector Macmillan became Chairman, Vice Chairman was Professor Baker, Honorary Treasurer was A.T.Ford of Barclays Bank, and Honorary Secretary Tom Toward. Another member of the Committee was Rex Hewitt, of the Community Projects Foundation- a group dedicated to helping self-help groups around the UK.

The early days of the Steering Committee were mostly focussed on identifying training needs, but it was becoming clear that unless the Trust could attract proper funding any plans for re-training would remain no more than just plans. One obvious source of funding would be BREL, but it wanted to channel its money through the District Council scheme(s) so, for the moment, its direct involvement remained uncertain.

On the 18th May BREL's local man, Dennis Lees (Works Manager) wrote to the Steering Committee regretting that he will "be taking early retirement after the 30th June and therefore (will) cease to be a member of your Trust." It is worth remembering that this is the same Mr Lees who discounted the role of "executioner" and had been appointed to Shildon to "do a job and will do it to the best of my ability". Now, with a year to closure still to go, he was getting out. Whether Mr Lees would have been much use in getting BREL funds for the Trust is unclear, but to take early

retirement whilst his former employees negotiated redundancy terms seems to indicate little concern for them, or, for that matter, what would happen to them. Mr Lees had only lasted one year so if not an "executioner" what else- perhaps caretaker?

On the 24th June 1983 the Steering Committee of SHILDA met to discuss the report by David Crewe, Managing Director of David Crewe Associates. Crewe had been appointed by BREL to examine the role of BREL in any subsequent developments in the area. It was soon clear that his recommendations would suggest that any funds from BREL would have to be managed on a wider basis than was, perhaps, presently intended.

"David Crewe put forward the opinion that despite other pressures sight must not be lost of the need, at a later date, to look at the wider geographical area for the role of the SHILDA, whilst recognising the short-term need to concentrate on the problems arising from the closure of the Shildon Wagon Works. He was of the opinion that the provision of alternative jobs for redundant Wagon Works employees might not be met only by concentrating on the Wagon Works site..."

Minutes of Steering Committee of SHILDA 24th June 1983

The Chairman of the Committee also noted;

"...whilst not precluding the possibility that SHILDA might not be located off the Town in the longer term, welcomed the decision of BREL to concentrate its (and SHILDA's) activities at Shildon Wagon Works."

It was becoming obvious that SHILDA had become, in a sense, a casualty of its own success. It was clearly being taken seriously by BREL and this could well mean eventual funding. Those with political and administrative interests in such developments were now concerned as to who would be in charge of those funds.? Crewe had recommended that a Director for the Trust be appointed and had suggested that BREL would accept the responsibility for such a post. It seemed fairly certain that

if SHILDA was to grow into something significant then SDC would want to be closely involved. Whilst this was perfectly proper it did cause some in Shildon to wonder if the project was not in danger of being taken out of their hands. What had been a Shildon project looked now like becoming a Sedgefield project.

The 1983 attendance figures of the SHILDA Steering Committee make interesting reading. After the initial meeting (24th January), when its officers were appointed, subsequent meetings took place every month. The early meetings discussed the role of the Agency, the need for proper re-training, how community projects might be funded, and the proposed study of job creation prospects by Durham University Business School. The Committee had a representative from both BREL and the trade unions at the Works.

As would be expected the main officers attended every meeting; these were Hector Macmillan (Chairman), Professor Charles Baker, (Vice Chairman and representative from DUBS), Tom Toward, (Honorary Secretary). But the attendance of others became, as the months rolled by, less regular. In some cases this was understandable given the pressures of other business on those involved, but what does seem a little odd is that the two people most in need of information had stopped attending; BREL's representative (Mr Lees, Works Manager) and the trade union representative (John Priestley, Works Trade Unions). As mentioned before, Mr Lees retired in the June 1983, but Mr Priestley was still at the Works.

With trade union representation at the meetings in 1983 consisting of only four out of the ten (two at the beginning of the year and two at the end-

these figures taken from "apologies" for not attending) the workforce was effectively reduced to relying on rumour for information on the Agency; an Agency set up primarily for its benefit. It is surely strange that from 28th February through to 7th November, a crucial time in the deciding of what was to happen following closure, no official trade union representative attended the SHILDA Steering Committee meetings?

Alan Roberts, (Chief Executive of SDC) was also, according to the minutes of the meetings, another early absentee. He stopped attending after April 28th to re-appear only once more on July 27th. For SDC to be poorly represented can only mean that either SDC did not care what SHILDA was up to, or, and perhaps more importantly, had decided that what the SHILDA decided did not matter. It seems reasonable to suppose that SDC DID CARE; it would have been an act of extraordinary administrative incompetence not to, so perhaps the latter was the case. If what SHILDA did was not now thought important to SDC then one can only suppose that the SDC had decided to prepare an alternative. Another curious development throughout the middle months of 1983 was the way Hector Macmillan constantly tried to set up meetings with BREL only to have his requests, at first ignored, and then only responded to in a most vague way. Macmillan wrote to Philip Norman (Managing Director of BREL) on the 11th April requesting an early meeting to discuss SHILDA. He wrote again on the 29th April.

"I wrote to you on the 11th April...Professor Charles Baker wrote to you a week before and his letter was dated 7th April. To date neither he, nor I, have had a reply from you. We fully realise the pressures on your time etc, and in particular we appreciate the delicate nature of the negotiations which you and your Board are conducting with the Trades Union Representatives in the BREL workshops ...However, I must tell you that the Development Trust (SHILDA) is

"making very good progress...but it is essential that (we) meet with you yourself and/or members of your Board at the very earliest opportunity. We have proposals, and requests, to put to BREL which need to be considered now."

This somewhat forthright letter finally brought a response. What was interesting about the Philip Norman's reply was his mentioning of a meeting that had taken place between BREL and SDC's Chief Executive, Alan Roberts.

"As you probably know, we have held some informal discussions with Alan Roberts concerning the establishment of an Enterprise Trust arrangement, probably based on the SEDGEFIELD DISTRICT. (my emphasis) An informal meeting has taken place (attended by Mr Toward) at which we communicated our policy for alternative employment at Shildon and indicated our willingness to participate in the actions required to set up some form of Enterprise Trust.

It seems to me that the first things we need to resolve is the relationship between Shildon and the District Development Trust and the Sedgefield Enterprise Trust- I would not have thought there was room for two organisations. Our view is that we would like to see a single organisation set up as quickly as possible so that when we are in a position to formally announce the Works Closure we have some organisation in place that can begin to work against an agreed plan."

Letter from Philip Norman (BREL) to Hector Macmillan (SHILDA) 5th May 1983

It was becoming increasingly clear to all at SHILDA that the SDC was now seeking to operate any proposed Enterprise initiative itself rather than let SHILDA operate separately; the non-attendance of Alan Roberts at SHILDA meetings starts at this time.

This is a perfectly understandable development given that SDC had, as mentioned earlier, wider responsibilities, but what is strange is the way it was being done. There is the curious sense that SHILDA was being slowly by-passed by SDC although this could not, of course, be openly acknowledged. This, inevitably, meant that many in SHILDA began to suspect SDC's motives. Whether this was fair or not is not in question, but that it had happened is not in doubt. Those at SHILDA who subscribed to the "cock-up" theory

of history, were now, for the moment, outnumbered by the "conspiracy" theorists.

Much, after all, was at stake. If BREL could be persuaded to make a large sum of money available then the control of that money would give considerable local powers of patronage. There were councillors who were on both the SDC and Shildon Town Council and these were quick to realise the implications involved in the controlling of BREL money. This is not to say that there was a "jobs for the boys" attitude developing, but it is a widely felt belief that human nature generally abhors a vacuum created by "unclaimed" money.

Apart from who controlled the money there was a developing crisis over who should actually run the future Enterprise Agency? Again this involved crucial decision of control, not only over the purse, but also over policy. The choosing of a Director for the coming Agency was not going to be very easy.

Hector Macmillan had already raised with BREL the need to move quickly on such an appointment. In a letter (29th June) to Robin Stables (BREL Technical Director) he had urged BREL to help bring about an early decision on who the Director should be.

"STRICTLY PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL: ...Both the CBI Directorate and the ICI Agricultural Division Board (Macmillan's employers) have been told, in the strictest confidence, by me personally, about the need to appoint a full time Director to SHILDA and that the appointment should be filled in the next two or three months. Both agencies were very interested and have promised, when the go ahead is given, to put up to you several candidates who could well fit the bill. In the event of the new authority wishing to employ an ICI man-either on secondment or on a permanent basis then, depending on the individual's circumstances, ICI would consider making up any difference of salary which may obtain for an appropriate period of time.

"It will be necessary to ask Alan Roberts of SDC if he has any candidates in mind and, no doubt, there will be candidates from BR."

Letter from Hector Macmillan to Robin Stables 29th June 1983.

The preparedness of ICI to underwrite some of the salary of the proposed director is an interesting development. Macmillan was, himself, not only the CBI's northern representative, but on secondment from ICI. This connection between Shildon and one of the biggest employers in the north east literally evolved around Macmillan's interest in Shildon.

"Macmillan had taken a fancy to Shildon. It's as simple as that. ICI had given him a secondment to investigate the changing employment situation in the north east and he came to us. He liked the town and we got on and everything went from that."

Tom Toward, Shildon Town Clerk.

It is perhaps also fair to note that Alan Roberts viewed this connection with a little caution,

"ICI obviously needed to trim its executives and being a responsible company tried to find a place for them elsewhere. It's not that they saw Shildon as a 'dumping ground' for unwanted people, but it did fit in with their plans to have someone in a place like SASDA and solve their manpower problems. Reasonable I suppose, but it needed watching."

From taped interview with Alan Roberts, 3rd July 1990

In the midst of deliberations about SHILDA and its possible Director, BREL sent a confidential memo to the Shildon Action Group. This was sent on Friday 13th of May- whether BREL were being ironic or not is not clear.

"the proposal concerning Shildon is for a substantial reduction of staff by 31st December 1983, with a small on-going presence managed from Doncaster continuing beyond 1984. A general notice to this effect would be posted in the Works on 1st July 1983 followed by the issue of personal notices to Salaried and Wages Staff on 1st August and 1st October respectively..."

Memo from J.R.Stables (BREL Technical Director) to Shildon Action Group.

This meant, of course, that the Works would be virtually closed from the end of 1983. The need to get SHILDA, or its alternative organised was

becoming even more urgent. In Macmillan's view, and one shared by most at SHILDA, this meant that the appointment of a suitable Director for the Agency was now crucial.

The SHILDA Steering Committee outlined what they wanted when they drafted a job description.

"The Director is chief executive of the Development Agency with overall responsibility for the planning, co-ordination and implementation of alternative employment initiatives in the Shildon area within the terms set out in the Authority's memorandum and articles of association. The Director is also responsible for the administration and financial and personnel control of the Authority."

"Role of the Director-Job Description" SHILDA Steering Committee July 1983

A fairly straightforward description although it should be noted that the stress was on "initiatives in the Shildon area", not the Sedgefield District Council area.

The most important matter next to decide is to whom would the Director be responsible and how much autonomy would he or she have? A Board of some sort would obviously have to be constituted, but could this then over-rule the Director? An attempt to resolve this came in the next part of the job description.

"REPORTING: The Director will be responsible to the Board of the Authority. He will chair the Authority's executive management committee."

It had been Tom Toward who had drafted the job description and it would be Toward who would also draft the articles of association. He was very clear about how he saw the relationship between Director and Board.

"I wanted the Director to have proper control so that he could work independently of outside pressure. I had a feeling that unless we did this he could perhaps be tied to decisions that were not his own. With this in mind I especially wrote that the 'executive committee' be spelt with a small 'e' and 'c'. I wanted the executive committee

to be advisory, one that could be convened as a sub-committee when necessary. This way whoever we appointed would have proper control of things. When it came to the combining with Sedgefield (SDC) and the creation of SASDA they wanted a capital 'E' and 'C'. They wanted control you see. I said I'd fight them on this and Alan Roberts (SDC) had a fit. He said 'If I go back without getting Executive powers they'll have my head.' I think they had put very heavy pressure on him at Green Lane." (SDC Head Office)

Tom Toward, Shildon Town Clerk.

This undeclared "war" between SDC and SHILDA over who would be Director and what he- the possibility that a woman might be appointed never seemed to have been considered- would be able to do was to prove a lengthy business. In many ways it rather neatly encapsulates the relationship between Town and District; great caution when dealing with each other and a marked reluctance to confer over what were often common problems.

One very important consideration, if not THE most important, in this tussle between SHILDA and SDC was what BREL thought of either, or both. BREL had always shown a greater willingness to work through the SDC than exclusively with Shildon.

In a sense this is perfectly understandable given the sums likely to be involved. BREL would need to justify its actions to BR's Board, and had, consequently, to make sure it appeared to be acting responsibly. In any dealings with a local authority there is an inevitable hierarchy involved and proper channels to be considered. BREL could hardly, when negotiating terms about the Works closure, be seen to be disregarding the Sedgefield District Council's authority in matters that concerned one of its constituent town councils. This problem of who to recognise as THE authority responsible for Shildon finally came to a kind of resolution at SDC's Shildon Action Group meeting on the 19th July 1983.

Item 6 on the Agenda dealt comprehensively with the "Shildon Development Agency."

"BREL believed that the Shildon Development Agency was something bigger than a group of individual organisations together and during the last six months have sought to weld the Shildon initiatives and Local Government areas together."

At the previous meeting of the Action Group (13th May) a Working Party, comprising of BREL, Dept of Industry, Shildon Initiative, SDC, and Durham County Council, had been established to discuss how the Action Group should proceed, but minutes of the 19th July meeting suggested that this Group "had not met" although there had been a number of discussions between representatives of BREL, Shildon initiative, and SDC.

"It is true to say that the Shildon initiative was prepared to work within the Development Agency and SDC had agreed to support the principal (sic) of the Agency. The next stage...was to formulate a detailed structure (on) how the Agency would work, including the appointment of a Director...BREL did not envisage the Development Agency's Board formally involving all those parties represented on the Action Group although they were at pains to ensure that the County Council, Manpower Services Commission, and Dept of Industry, who would not be represented on the Board, did not feel that they were not involved in the work of the Agency. It was likely that the Board would comprise (of) representatives from BREL and SDC both of whom had agreed to contribute financially towards the Agency together with representatives from a Shildon initiative and representatives of those three Groups would be need (sic) candidates for the Directorship. BREL were keen to have a local man as the Director and with a view to having someone appointed very quickly did not want to advertise in the national newspapers. Therefore, BREL would be interested in hearing from the various organisations represented on the Action Group of any person that could be considered suitable for the position.

BREL had prepared a draft job description for the Agency's Director which identified his main purpose as being the development, promotion, and implementation of employment and employment related initiatives within the area of Agency's operation with particular emphasis, at least initially, on people affected by the closure of the Shildon Wagon Works. It (sic) would be responsible for the financial and administrative activities of the Agency and would be required to establish effective and co-operative liaison with all relevant, central and local Government and other Agencies to assist the objectives of the Agency. It (sic) would also be required to

"provide a counselling service as well as advice and support for people wishing to set up in business on their own account. Part of the Director's responsibilities would include the preparation of detailed annual business plans for the Agency, monitoring and control budgets, staff and administration.

BREL hoped to be able to provide accommodation for the Development Agency within the Shildon Wagon Works and envisaged that the support staff would comprise an assistant to the Director with a clerk. BREL had suggested the Agency be called SHILDA, but the meeting was asked if anyone could suggest a better name for the Agency

The Chairman explained that whilst SDC in principle had agreed to support the Agency and recognised that BR's interest lay within Shildon, which had all the emotional connotations because of the proposed closure the Council would wish to include 'Sedgefield' somewhere in the Agency's name as the Council would intend that a successful Agency would take on a wider role in future years, for that reason Shildon and Sedgefield Development Agency (SASDA) appeared to be a sensible name."

Minutes of SDC' Shildon Action Group meeting on 4th October 1983

Although these Minutes have, at times, a rather wayward way of reporting events it seems fair to say that they do give an accurate account of how SHILDA became SASDA. They were, after all, subsequently approved at the next meeting and must, therefore, have satisfied those present at both meetings that this was what had been agreed.

This change of name had been important to SDC. By including "Sedgefield" in the name the SDC had effectively made sure that they were now identified as being more than a simple background of the Shildon initiative. While Shildon retained what seemed to be an exclusive responsibility for what happened after the closure the SDC could appear to have no more than an advisory role. With the inclusion of "Sedgefield" in the Agency's name the SDC now ensured that it would be formally identified as a partner in all the Agency did. The term "partnership" can mean many things; it is often used as an euphemism for what is in reality control by a strong

CONSTITUENT in a "partnership". Partnership between true equals is, perhaps unfortunately, rarer than most would like. SHILDA, when it became SASDA, had undoubtedly acquired more clout, but at a cost. Control over the Agency was now, it seemed, slipping away from its originators and could only be re-established through the appointment of an independent minded Director able to defend the Agency against outside pressure.

A few interesting points are raised by the Minutes of Action Group meeting. When discussing the formation of the Agency (SASDA) it clearly states that the MSC, the Durham County Council, and the Dept of Trade and Industry were not to be involved at Board level. It then goes on to say "the Board will comprise of representatives from BREL and SDC and...the Shildon initiative." This seems perfectly reasonable, but how that representation was to be weighted could, in the view of some, be less acceptable. If, for instance, there were two representatives from SDC, two from BREL and one from the Shildon initiative then control would effectively be with SDC unless BREL joined with the Shildon representative.

It should be remembered that the Minutes noted that there had been no formal meeting of the Working Party- set up to discuss the formation of the Agency- "although there had been a number of discussions between representatives of BREL, the Shildon initiative and SDC." This meant that arrangements had been made without proper accountability. An informal meeting can arrange anything, but without the meeting being minuted and reported the practice can become abused. This is not to say that that was the intention of those concerned, but it is hard not to wonder who said what to whom in these informal meetings?

"We had a meeting upstairs (Council Chamber of Shildon Town Council) between Hector (Macmillan, Shilda), Alan (Roberts of SDC), David (Crewe of BREL), and Professor Baker (DUBS) and myself to try and get agreement on what SASDA should be. We gave a bit, made concessions but Alan Roberts said there should be executive control. This Executive Committee idea. I said that no way was SASDA going to be run by an executive committee. It would have to be run by a Board of Directors. We wanted Alan Roberts, one of his council, a chairman someone from BREL, and ourselves. We got Crewe to agree, but Roberts got into a bit of a state. 'I've been told to demand executive powers he said'. I told him he was here to negotiate not demand. If he didn't like it he could bugger off. It got quite hectic. We argued that SASDA should not be controlled by any local authority, but by an independent Board of Directors. They wanted the Board, as I've said before, to be no more than a rubber stamp. In the weeks that followed I waited for them to write the formal documentation and nothing happened so I wrote to them and forwarded them to the suggested members of the Board, but when they turned up they'd written their own version and, sure enough, they had given themselves executive powers. And there it was being passed around for signature. I couldn't say anything, it was the inaugural meeting and they would have said I was 'playing politics'. I wrote to Crewe afterwards to complain and he said he hadn't noticed that they had inserted a capital "E" and "C". I wrote to Roberts but he didn't reply to any of my letters. So what happened? Alan Roberts, one of his council and a member from BREL became the Executive Committee and ran SASDA. That way we lost everything, in particular the training element we had thought so important. We had wanted something that combined enterprise, with training, with development. All working together, it had not been tried before, we felt that then whatever happened would make sense. But we were stitched up"

Tom Toward. Shildon Town Clerk.

So control of SASDA did, in effect, pass to the SDC. Whether SASDA would have been any different run by an independent Board is impossible to say. As mentioned earlier the original intentions of SHILDA, although exciting, were very ambitious; perhaps too ambitious. Who knows what might have been achieved had control remained in the hands of those with perhaps more radical intentions? It is fairly clear that those who had helped SHILDA come into being had intended it to be very innovatory. The combination of a local government officer with vision (Toward), an active and enthusiastic executive from the CBI (Macmillan), and a supportive Town Council might

have allowed Shildon to become a test-bed for a whole host of new ideas about what to do when a Town's main employer ups and leaves. It is also true, of course, that being in opposition is easier than actually having to implement policy.

SHILDA, having lost control of SASDA, or at least some say in that control, would now have to "battle" over who would be appointed as SASDA's Director. The Minutes of the 19th July SDC Action Group meeting had observed that "BREL were keen to have a local man as Director and with a view to having someone appointed very quickly did not want to advertise in the national newspapers." This desire to appoint locally, and "very quickly" would suggest that BREL, perhaps in agreement with SDC?, regarded SASDA as being an organisation of fairly limited importance.

To go through the detailed business of setting up a Development Agency and then appoint its Director "quickly" seems strange. This haste seems to suggest that BREL could not make up its mind whether the Agency was to be an important contributor towards creating job opportunities in south-west Durham or be yet another piece of enterprise cosmetic? Or, perhaps, like so many similar "enterprise" ventures, a bit of both.

Most local authorities need some kind of "agency" in place through which they can "launder" central government and EEC funding. This does not mean the local authority concerned is up to mischief, but simply that these kind of funding bodies prefer agreed channels and it is easier to approach them on behalf of something with "enterprise", or one of its variations, in its title; everyone then feels they know what is happening.

In the midst of this jockeying for control of SASDA the long-expected, but much dreaded, dismissal notices were posted by BREL. There had been many at the Works who had felt, sometimes secretly, that BREL would eventually back down and retain some kind of engineering presence in the town. These "notices" ended those hopes. However much expected, to receive written confirmation that your job is no more is almost always upsetting, especially if that job has occupied most of your working life. The format of such letter is usually fairly typical, but their message always comes as a kind of shock.

"Dear.....

Date: 1. Aug. 83.

With the rundown of the new construction and wagon repair activity at Shildon Works, I regret to inform you that your services will no longer be required after 31 December 1983 and you are, therefore, given five months notice of dismissal from today."

The letter goes on to outline redundancy arrangements then concludes with the usual pay-off.

"I would like to take this opportunity of thanking you for your services to Shildon Works and wish you every success in the future."

Thus ended, for some, over forty years of labour. Whatever SASDA did it could never alter the sense of betrayal felt by many opening their letters that day.

"When you see it there. You know somehow that this is it. You could pretend it wouldn't happen, but when they write to you then you know they're not going to change their bloody mind are they. Some of them got very inward looking and they aged, they became old men, the shoulders came down. You saw them walking around the back lanes, odd ones on their own, just walking around. In a way some of them sort of hid. They didn't want to be seen hanging around."

Fitter in the Works.

The gloom that now fell over Shildon only served as an added stimulus to those trying to make SASDA work. The people in the town knew they were

going to experience increasing hardship and wanted to know what could be done to help? Those responsible for the town's welfare meanwhile had to try and maintain some control over whatever help might be forthcoming from either BREL, SDC, or wherever.

On August 26th Hector Macmillan wrote to Robin Stables (BREL Technical Manager) about the recruitment of a Director for SASDA. He mentioned that there would almost certainly be candidates from within ICI, but agreed that the timescale meant a decision had to be made before October. He then continued:-

"My final point...is the need to find a place for Tom Toward, who together with myself, was responsible for the Shildon initiative right from the start. Tom is an extremely able chap with a great deal of understanding and experience of both political and community affairs in Shildon, and indeed SDC. He is also a qualified FCIS and is, therefore, a proper person to act as Secretary to the Board (SASDA) within the terms of the existing Companies Act. Alan Roberts differs from me in the sense that he feels that there is no need to have a formally appointed Secretary to the Development Board and, for example, the Director could also act as Secretary. I am afraid that I do not accept this proposition and feel strongly that the Board should have a qualified, competent, and independent Secretary- Tom Toward, in my view, has all these attributes."

Assuming Macmillan was reporting Alan Robert's objections correctly the idea that SASDA should be run almost as a one-man band seems to suggest that the SDC was, like BREL, thinking of a much more reduced Agency than had been hoped for by those from the Shildon initiative. Combining the jobs of Director and Secretary could easily lead to neither job being done properly.

On the 12th October Macmillan telephoned Toward expressing his "concern over the delay in implementing SASDA". He also mentioned that "the interview for Director (shortlist) was a shambles and I was embarrassed to

be involved. How did 'Smith' become involved, I would not have appointed him. David Crewe (BREL) said they wouldn't appoint him under any circumstances?"

"Macmillan favoured Dr Ray Whittaker as a possible candidate for the Director's job. He was, like Macmillan, seconded from ICI only Whittaker was seconded to DUBS. A most able man who had a splendid record as an engineer, built the latest coal-fired power station. He was respected in academic circles and had written numerous papers and so forth. And his contacts with ICI were very useful. ICI had been told by the EEC that it had to upgrade its wagon fleet. They were to be checked and maintained once a year. And there were new wagons to be built. These new wagons would have to conform to EEC regs. It was obvious that ICI would allow Whittaker to remain on secondment, perhaps permanently, and that he could use the wagon works as a company tendering for ICI's wagaons. I mean we're talking of 6000 wagons A YEAR! Enough for a sizable workforce. And then when they saw the shortlist! There was one candidate, and Macmillan, during the interviews for shortlist, stopped the meeting and described this man's record. It was atrocious. He was a crook! Macmillan said 'if you appoint this man I will resign' and we would have all followed him."

Tom Toward Shildon Town Clerk

BREL continued to delay matters and on the 17th October Macmillan reported to Toward (transcript of telephone message 11.10 am 17th October 1983).

"Met with Stables (BREL) on 2 p.m Friday 14th and advised him that all local bodies concerned over the lack of response by BREL and SDC. and that this could not go on indefinitely. Three points. 1) the shambles of the appointment of a Director; 2) the attitude of SDC; and 3) can see no reason why SASDA should not be taking early action. I'm concerned that we look like having to wait till next year (1984) for appointment of Director. DUBS concerned at treatment of their candidates. Why was Whittaker thought not suitable? Stables said that main responsibilities of Director were 'support services' and not job creation."

Robin Stables wrote to Macmillan the day after having this conversation confirming that he now did:-

"want to seek on a rather wider net a list of possible applicants. I have not ruled out Roy Whittaker. I would like to meet with you Alan Roberts, and David Crewe when the shortlist is available to decide whether Roy Whittaker should be appointed or whether there are other people of promise who should be seen. I would like an

"informal meeting of SASDA Board of Directors to take place whether or not we have come to any conclusion on the appointment of the Director."

Letter to Hector Macmillan (CBI) from Robin Stables (BREL Technical Manager) 18th October 1983

The first meeting of SASDA took place on 26th January 1984. At this meeting a Memorandum of Agreement was put before the Board for signature. It was signed by A. Dunkley (Personnel Manager of BREL), Councillor T. Ward for SDC, and Councillor P.E. Thompson for Shildon Town Council.

This Memorandum had gone through many drafts. Objective 1 now read "The generation of alternative employment opportunities following the closure or substantial job reductions at BREL's Shildon Wagon Works." thus dropping Toward's (STC) version which had also stressed re-training and sponsorship.

"We felt that the re-training element was crucial. The Works had been turning out men who were not trained for the new circumstances. They were not up to required standard that was being found in modern industries and we wanted SASDA to be involved in altering that, but SDC was not that interested. They seemed to want new industries, but did not see the retraining as being as important as we did. I wanted the retraining to be uppermost because if we didn't get the workforce prepared for what was coming we'd be back to where we started with a workforce vulnerable to any changes."

Tom Toward STC Town Clerk

However "Objective 4" had been significantly lengthened from the earlier intention "To assist SDC to extend its support activities in the field of job creation" into an acknowledgement that retraining would be needed:-

"SASDA will a) foster and facilitate the creation and/or expansion of appropriate economic activities in Sedgfield District as a whole;
b) improve the work and employment opportunities of those entering or already in the employment market;
c) facilitate the training and retraining of those in employment pool to better fit them for opportunities so created."

Memorandum of Agreement for SASDA 26th January 1984

As mentioned earlier the final version changed the role of the executive from "an executive who will be appointed by and be responsible to the Board." to an "Executive Management Committee WITH DELEGATED POWERS (my emphasis) to support the Director in his day-to-day management role."

There was bound to have been an element of nit-picking between the various interested parties. People from the Shildon Initiative felt that they had been "taken over" by SDC whilst some in SDC felt that the Shildon Initiative approach had been a little parochial.

"We had always felt that whatever was to be done would have to involve Sedgefield (SDC), that was always our intention and it would have been stupid to have thought otherwise, but what irritated most was the way they operated. There was the distinct sense of our being kept in the dark about something WE had originated. That was wrong of them. Silly really. They put people's backs up unnecessarily."

Tom Toward.

The appointment of a Director was again delayed whilst everyone conferred as to who and what he or she should do. The other pressing problem was finance and then on the 7th March, Toward received a telephone call from Macmillan. He reported that BR had seemed to have finally agreed to fund SASDA sufficiently to ensure that, in the short term at least, it would be financially secure.

"The main details are : 1. £125,000 cash to be matched by the SDC together with £25,000 contribution from STC.

2. BREL to meet full costs of providing secretarial staff and back up together with office accommodation, heating, lighting, rent, rates, etc, of office accommodation over 3 years.

3. £300,000 soft loan guarantees during the 1st year- same figures each of the following 2 years making £900,000 in total. p.s. soft loan guarantees will only be available where there are particular cases supported by SASDA following discussions with Banks and Dept. of Industry.

4. BREL will secure, maintain buildings and all existing plant and equipment by employment of technical

staff for one year certain, to be reviewed at the end of the first year. Person appointed to work directly and to be seconded to SASDA.

5. BREL to be responsible for payment of all outgoings including rates at Shildon Wagon Works subject to lettings and freehold sales etc."

Transcript of telephone message from Hector Macmillan to Tom Toward.

Wednesday 7th March 1984

Whilst this indicated, if accurate, that SASDA was now to be financially viable, other problems still existed.

There were, for instance, many in the STC who felt that the constant delays in getting "SASDA off the ground" were the fault of the SDC. At a meeting of the STC Finance Committee in April various councillors were very forthcoming in their condemnation of SASDA's progress, or, to be more accurate, lack of it. Apart from the lack of representation on SASDA there was a feeling that not much was happening. Councillor Walter Nunn commented that the:-

"...history of action taken over the preceding 16 months since the meeting at Hardwick Hall had shown a need for immediate action to protect the community. Delays had occurred (whether in good faith or not) by actions of SDC in attempting to promote additional funds from BREL at a late date even allowing for the appointment of a Director of SASDA in September 1983, some 7 months previous... Cash should not be diverted away from Shildon to Newton Aycliffe or elsewhere within the district area. Central Government funds are not normally available to local authorities (particularly those labour controlled) but would (it is believed) be available to community based schemes."

Minutes of STC Finance Committee 2nd April 1984

Other comments- "There are too many personalities and this is a problem we must overcome", "...present indications are that any further delays will create real problems for the town and its people." - gives an indication of the meeting's mood.

The BREL financial offer, reported by Macmillan (7th March), now appeared to have been a little too optimistic. Alan Dunkley (Personal Director of BREL) had taken over negotiations from Robin Stables and he reported that the cash offer was not £150,000 but £125,000. This brought a quick response from Alan Roberts (SDC). He outlined the correspondence to date and then went on to comment on SDC's feelings about BREL.

"The outcome of the discussions over the last year or more have led my Council to believe that there is no substantial commitment by BREL to job creation to help solve the problems caused by the closure of the Shildon Wagon Works- BREL being motivated by the simple desire to get out of Shildon as cheaply and with as little aggravation from whatever quarter as is possible."

Letter to Alan Dunkley (BREL) from Alan Roberts (Chief Executive SDC)
1st May 1984

The following day Dunkley telephoned Toward at STC. This call seemed to suggest that BREL were tiring of SDC and were now hoping to resurrect SHILDA in preference to SASDA. Dunkley reported that funding from BREL would largely depend on how successful SASDA (or an alternative) would be in its first year.

"Bob Reid (Chairman, British Rail) and the Secretary of State were concerned that the scheme show results and that if it did then further support should be forthcoming...These points were put to Alan Roberts at the meeting on Thursday 26th April at Spennymoor (SDC main offices) but the reaction was unfavourable to the extent that he expressed the opinion that members of the DC were looking for £1m minimum...Dunkley was scathing at the mis-reporting and mis-representation of the decision of BREL and that this was acting against the interests of the Council (SDC)...He welcomed the support given by the Town Council and the other members of (SHILDA) ie DUBS and Community Project Foundation. He gladly confirmed that should the District Council (SDC) not be willing to proceed or put insuperable difficulties in the way, he would more than willing to make the offer to SHILDA that he put to Alan Roberts at their last meeting. The stated aims of BREL are to help their ex-employees particularly in the Shildon connection and he will do all he can to assist with, OR WITHOUT, (my emphasis) SDC. In fact, the comment

was made that perhaps the matter should be settled one way or another in a matter of days and he personally would be delighted to join up with SHILDA and could arrange accordingly.

Transcript of telephone message from Alan Dunkley (BREL) to Tom Toward (STC) 2nd May 1984.

Toward wrote to Derek Foster (Constituency MP) outlining the gist of the above conversation and his concern that the differences between BREL and SDC could damage the prospects of help for Shildon.

"We are, of course, all aware of some of the discussions which are taking place between the SDC and BREL on additional funding and whatever one's thoughts are on the rights and wrongs of the position adopted by either party, the end result is that any further delay can only have the most serious consequence for the people of the town...By now you will also have received a letter dated 1st May from Alan Roberts to Alan Dunkley which does not improve matters."

Letter to Derek Foster (MP) from Tom Toward (STC) 3rd May 1984

An element of bluff is always part of any negotiations concerning money. As one side pleads penury the other weighs up the "going rate" for being rid of such pleading; it were ever thus. It was obvious that SDC were taking risks in their insistence on more funding from BREL. Those in Shildon who were involved in the negotiations were in a difficult position. They were rather like the impoverished wife of a gambler who has pawned the family treasures for one last fling- they were reduced to being mere onlookers as someone else risked THEIR future.

SDC clearly felt there was more BREL finance to be had if only everyone would keep their nerve and hold out just that little bit longer. BREL, meanwhile, played one side off against the other. They knew there had been differences between SDC and STC and were now capitalising on the situation that had been created.

On the 3rd May Toward wrote two more letters; one to Dunkley and one to Roberts. To Dunkley he confirmed their telephone conversation and again expressed the need for an early implementation of SASDA with the funding agreed on the telephone. He concluded his letter with a reiteration of his fears about any delay.

"In the event of a failure to reach agreement between the parties this will leave the people of Shildon in a very difficult position and members of SASDA sub-committee (STC'S own committee with a 'watching brief' on SASDA) are concerned that should that likelihood arise, they must reserve their position on what further action is necessary in the circumstances and I would hope to return to you on that matter, should it become necessary."

Letter to Alan Dunkley (BREL) from Tom Toward (STC) 3rd May 1984

In his letter to Alan Roberts Toward expressed the concern of the STC sub-committee (on SASDA) that the negotiations between SDC and BREL were not proceeding very satisfactorily and suggested an urgent meeting of all interested parties. Dunkley had discussed with Toward the possibility that the £300,000 loan guarantee might be converted into a "hard cash grant" and Toward argued that this was a "move in the right direction." He obviously felt that the hopes for "£1m" plus from BREL was unrealistic and that £300,000 would be enough as starting capital. He concluded his letter with a repeat of earlier fears that:-

"...the scheme which is hopefully to be of real benefit and support to the community is not lost in its present form- it would be tragic indeed if a consensus position could not be reached between the parties within the next few days."

Letter to Alan Roberts (SDC) from Tom Toward (STC) 3rd May 1984

Roberts replied the following day. He reported that the Members of the District Council had discussed Toward's letter and that they:-

"... expressed grave concern" that any meeting along the lines you suggest...will prejudice my Council's final attempt to secure an

"adequate support package from BREL. Clearly BREL will endeavour to exploit local differences in order to minimise their commitment. You will be aware that Derek Foster (MP) is in touch with David Mitchell, Minister with responsibility for Transport, in a last effort to see whether BREL's position can be moved."

Letter from Alan Roberts (SDC) to Tom Toward (STC) 4th May 1984

On the 10th of May Dunkley wrote to Roberts. It was a formal attempt to clarify BREL's position and, as such, was a clear warning that BREL was not going to be rushed into an agreement.

"...BREL as a business had no authority from the BR Board for use of corporate funds in either loan guarantees or grants to new business ventures. It was the view of the Main Board Members that clarification on the legality of using corporate funds for such purposes needed confirmation from the Secretary of State for Transport. Until this confirmation had been obtained no formal offer to you should have been made. It is recognised that to some degree you may have been misled."

He then goes on to repeat the offers, including the £300,000 in a loan guarantee for one year to SASDA. He then continued:-

"I regret that this is the most that can be offered at this stage. I understand that the STC, from their point of view consider that this approach is sufficient to get SASDA off the ground and this is certainly my view."

Letter from Alan Dunkley (BREL) to Alan Roberts (SDC) 10th May 1984.

BREL now seemed to ^{be} passing the responsibility of any increased package "deal" on to central government. With the inclusion of central government as a participant in negotiations BREL had, effectively, "passed the buck". It was becoming increasingly clear that as SDC continued to play for high stakes, so BREL was itself using the situation to involve the Government in spending, perhaps for political reasons, ITS money on Shildon. Whether BREL had calculated that the Government would welcome a chance to be seen as "benefactor" to a "threatened community" or not is not clear, but if it had gambled thus it seemed to be paying off. The irony

of seeing a Government first cause a "threat" then appear to be averting it was not lost on many in Shildon.

On the 25th May Dunkley telephoned Toward to report on a meeting that had been held between himself, Derek Foster, David Mitchell (Ministry of Transport) and Bob Reid (BR). He told Toward that Mitchell was very sympathetic to SASDA and that following a report from BREL would make a decision quickly as to whether Government money could be made available. He had suggested that Government funds might be channelled through the PSO (Public Service Obligation) grant system.

"This would call for a large input of funds to SASDA without being a charge or call on the resources of BR but could, to avoid confusion with other authorities and funding arrangements, be made as part of the PSO system."...Apparently David Mitchell is keen to take a political initiative in Shildon and for it to be seen that this is a central Government move and not otherwise."

Telephone message from Alan Dunkley (BREL) to Tom Toward (STC) 25th May 1984

The problem of selecting a Director for SASDA had, meanwhile, been temporarily solved when SDC announced that their Industrial Projects Manager, John Robson, was to take on the duties of SASDA's Director. This "in-house" appointment by SDC meant that the District Council were effectively in charge of SASDA.

"When they appointed John Robson they had more or less 'stitched us up'. Not that I've got anything against John Robson. He did a good job, as far as I can tell. But it wasn't done in a very nice way and there were plenty who felt it had been underhand. What it did mean was that from now on we would have to do without Roy Whittaker, who promptly took off. And who could blame him really? I think also that from then on Macmillan cooled off considerably as well."

Tom Toward STC Town Clerk

Now that SASDA had a Director, albeit one that shared his responsibilities with other work, the organisation could begin to function as something with

a recognisable purpose. The problem of how it would be financed was still being decided, but, for the moment there was enough funding from the SDC and STC to enable Robson to start planning SASDA's future.

Once a Director had been appointed SASDA soon encountered the inevitable variables that govern any similar type of agency; the constant seeking of funding, the regular reviewing of purpose, the establishment of means to evaluate success- or failure. Apart from these eternal considerations SASDA's role as the exclusive agency which would, to a large extent, determine Shildon's future became established.

Now the Agency existed what it did depended, certainly in Shildon, on what would now happen to the Wagon Works. If there was to be a development of new industries then there would have to be a site where this could happen. The now-defunct Works seemed the most logical place and those concerned soon began to debate how the site could be used. One thing was certain, whatever happened there would critically depend on the owners of the site- BREL.

One very important consideration was the rail-link between the Works and the Bishop Auckland/Darlington branch line. There was a considerable lobby within SASDA and STC who considered the retention of these rail-lines as being a crucial "selling point" in attracting new industry to the Works site. This would obviously be the case if the Works was to continue with any kind of railway work. As mentioned before there was the ICI connection to be considered- the manufacture and maintenance of an ICI wagon fleet- plus any other work which would match the existing skills on the site.

The SASDA sub-committee (STC) raised this point in their meeting in November.

"(iii) That BREL be asked to confirm or deny the possibility of the removal of the railway lines into the Shildon Wagon Works bearing in mind the assurances previously given and to provide a copy of the Consultant's report in which this recommendation is alleged to appear."

Minutes of SASDA Sub-committee. 12th November 1984

The "Consultant's report" referred to was the Owen Luder Plan. In May 1984 BREL and SDC had commissioned the Owen Luder Partnership, (a company which combined architects, planners and landscape architects) to make a study of what might be done with the Works once BREL halted production there. The Report was a very comprehensive document (85 pages) and, although it later became one of many, did present a reasonably accurate assessment of the potential of the site after closure.

It began with a summary of recommendations which concerned themselves primarily with; what buildings should be removed or retained; suitability of road access; how to market the site; how it should be managed; and how the new development should be phased in.

In Section 5 it discussed:-

"ACCESSIBILITY -RAIL. Due to the cost of maintaining the rail link into the site, and its adverse environmental impact, it is recommended that the rail link be discontinued and all rails removed."

Owen Luder Report. Recommendations. para. 5

This recommendation had been "leaked" before the Report was officially published and Toward had alerted his Council to the possibility of the lines being removed, hence the minuted request, seen earlier, for sight of the Report.

"BREL had previously agreed that the railway lines from the Works would be retained, for at least two years. They had agreed this in writing and so it came a quite a surprise when the Owen Luder Report recommended that they be removed."

Tom Toward. STC Town Clerk

The Report argued that "Shildon is not particularly well served by road communications." and went on to urge that "Greatly improved road access must be an essential feature of any successful development plan". In discussing rail access it noted that:-

"This was the prime access to the Wagon Works. The rail link crosses Redworth Road by means of a level crossing. While this does cause inconvenience to local traffic...it does not appear to be a major problem. Construction of the new bypass (proposed for 1988/89) will, however, allow through traffic to avoid this level crossing. The main...line is approximately ½ mile away, so this length of line is maintained solely to serve the Works. There are large areas of existing track serving the...buildings. Tracks previously serving the Forge...are not required and have been removed. If the rail link were to remain the level crossing will have to be retained which will restrict development opportunities and detract from the efforts to substantially change the environment of the area, particularly the present railway siding image."

Owen Luder Report. Chapter 6 para.2

In a sense, the final sentence summed up one of the Reports main concerns; the rather "dilapidated" appearance of the site. The Report was, in effect, recommending a total break with Shildon's past. It is as if that past had become an embarrassment and that in order to attract new industry all connections with it should be banished from sight.

"The image of Shildon as a dilapidated and deteriorating railway town is widespread- even if not completely correct., Anything that can be done to change that image to one of a progressive attractive place to live and work will be helpful to Shildon and to the Wagon Works site proposals."

Ibid. Chapter 7. Section 7. para 7

In any town like Shildon there will always be a certain degree of tension between what the town was and what it must become. Change, for most people, represents an unknown future. There is security in familiarity and when that which is familiar is removed it can sometimes cause great anxiety, even illness.

This process of change is further complicated when we discuss what has become known as our "heritage". The point at which some run-down old heap of stones becomes part of "Britain's Heritage" usually depends on a number of considerations; many of which are often, despite claims to the contrary, purely subjective. What is one person's eyesore is another's treasured link with the past.

In 1981 the building of a supermarket in Shildon meant that the first railway ticket office in the world, the Daniel Adamson Coach House, had to be demolished. When enough people in the town, and outside it, learned of the plans they fought the decision and the Coach House was saved. An important participator in this fight remembers, during a visit to the building, being approached by a woman in the street.

"She wondered what we were doing and when I told her we were trying to stop it being pulled down she said she was glad because she felt they trying to destroy what the town stood for. 'It'll look like everywhere else if we don't stop them won't it. Bloody boring and it'll have no soul.'"

Audrey Sansick. Secretary to Daniel Adamson Trust. 1981-83

In the 1960's much of our "Heritage" was destroyed by architects and planners who wanted to make our environment a more "progressive attractive place to live and work" (Owen Luder Report). It was not fashionable then to keep old mills, factories, in fact anything that was not already stamped

with the previous generation's taste for what it regarded as ITS "heritage". Then fashion changed and now mills, mines, and almost anything with an "interesting" industrial past is saved for "conversion". This impulse to remove the encumbrance of the past before building for the future is perfectly natural, but what should stay and what should go is never an easy question to answer. If it is left to the "experts" then we must reconise that these might well have ^{had} their taste formed by criteria which could be very different from the those within the community they are serving.

"The environment of the Wagon Works Site and its immediate surroundings are generally poor and require considerable upgrading. The site resembles an untidy rail siding and is unattractive. The main buildings have no aesthetic qualities and in many cases cladding is dilapidated and unattractive in appearance. Much can be done to improve the visual environment by removing large areas of rail lines, replacing these with an orderly road layout, good landscaping and the introduction of bright colours in appropriate places."

Owen Luder Report Chapter 7 Section 7 para 1.

Most people in Shildon would probably agree with the earlier part of this description, but would disagree with the suggested "improvements."

Whether a building is "aesthetic" or not often depends on its function. When, for instance, a building is being used as a railway station, or a powerstation, then it will inevitably become grimy. Remove the grime and change the function to that of a community centre, an art gallery, a museum, or even a new type industrial complex and then what had perhaps been aesthetically unappealing becomes an attractive asset which might, at the same time, retain a cultural link with its past.

Some in Shildon suspected that the real issue was not whether the rail lines were "aesthetic" or not, but whether their retention would pose any future threat to BREL. It has to be remembered that by the time of the closure it had become clear Government policy to "Sectionalise" BR- perhaps prior to privatisation? This would mean that each "Section" would have to compete in the "open market." Any complex of buildings with an existing rail link and facilities for rolling stock construction could thus pose a considerable threat to BREL's commercial future.

Toward wrote to Dunkley about his concerns over the rail link. Dunkley's reply was very much to the point.

"So far as the comments on the removal of the rail line are concerned, this was discussed at the last Board meeting of SASDA and a decision has been taken to remove the rail lines which come within the boundaries belonging to BREL. This is necessary if we are to have any alternative employment in Shildon Works and again it is a decision taken by BREL in association with SASDA in order to implement the package offered to SASDA as an inducement to alternative employment for the development of the site in accordance with the Owen Luder Plan.

The Owen Luder Plan, I might add, is available in the SASDA offices for you and any of your committee to view at any time and no doubt if you wish to view this report, you can make arrangements with John Robson to see it."

Letter to Tom Toward (STC) from Alan Dunkley (BREL) 21st November 1984

A number of things are interesting about this particular letter. Toward, as well as discussing the rail link, had passed on a request from the STC SASDA Sub-committee that SASDA have some trade union representation from the Works. Dunkley's response was really quite blunt, even a little shrill.

"I should point out that there is no prescriptive right for trade union representation on the body (SASDA)...I believe that the right of choice is mine and I certainly do not consider this is a matter for consultation with anyone."

Ibid.

In the event he appointed, as one of his nominees, John Priestly, the former Trade Union representative on the SASDA Steering Committee.

Another interesting factor in Dunkley's letter is that strange change of mood. In early letters to Toward he had expressed warm concern about SHILDA, had even contemplated abandoning SDC's SASDA in preference to return to SHILDA. Now his letter seemed to suggest a sense of almost outrage that Toward, who after all did represent the people most affected by BREL's decision to close the Works, should presume to dictate any conditions on what BREL should or should not do. He had not even bothered to send a copy of the Owen Luder Report to the STC; the town about which the Report had been written. It was as if Shildon and its concerns had suddenly become a nuisance to the deliberations of those acting on its behalf.

To be fair Dunkley did relent and offer to let Toward see the Report.

"If you as an Officer would like a site (sic) of the draft copy, on the firm understanding that this is not for discussion or circulation to Council Members, then I would be only too pleased to let you have a copy on a personal basis and I await your further observations on this point."

Letter to Tom Toward (STC) from Alan Dunkley (BREL) 28th November 1984.

One must only hope that it was the secretary of BREL's Personnel Director who had spelling problems and not the Director? But why not let the Report be circulated to the "Council Members" of the very Town concerned in the Report? This attitude seemed to suggest that some in the BREL management were almost contemptuous of those people who were directly responsible for Shildon's welfare.

It is not suprising that the next STC's SASDA Sub-committee meeting should
minute that:-

"Strong concern was expressed by Members at the tone of the letters
and their contents... (and) that the strongest exception be taken to
the views as expressed by BREL."

Minutes of STC'S SASDA Sub-committee 3rd December 1984

It is difficult to discover what it was that had caused this sudden
defensiveness. Something seemed to have happened because from this time on
some on the STC felt that, despite being the elected representatives of the
townspeople, they were being by-passed whenever crucial decisions about
THEIR community were being made. The curious fact remains that MOST of
those decisions would have been welcomed by the STC, but by seeming to
exclude them from the decision making process SASDA created unnecessary
resentment. Shildon is a relatively small community and like all such
places has its fair share of people ready to see slights where none perhaps
exist. People tend to enjoy rumour because it's often more exciting, and
less trouble, than trying to unravel the mixture of half-truth, truth, and
confusion that perhaps more accurately reflects what really "happened".

But where to? To make iron it was once necessary to first make charcoal; consequently hundreds, perhaps thousands, of charcoal burners eked out a precarious and smokey existence in the forests of Europe. Then someone thought up a better way of forging metal and the charcoal burners were left with a few embers and no job. It was ever thus.

The difficulties facing Shildon are familiar ones. Almost every country with a history of large scale industrialisation has seen the collapse of that industrial base. The question of whether such a rapid collapse of the heavy industries of Europe, and beyond, could have been avoided is much too complicated to be dealt with adequately here. Great industries come into being because there is demand for what they produce, if that demand ceases they become redundant. How that demand ceases, or is changed, is subject to constant debate. At one point in the nineteenth century the north eastern port of Hartlepool was the second largest in Britain, now most of the port is closed and the land used by Sunday yachtsman.

Sunderland was once the world's largest shipbuilding town, now urban trails are landscaped into the dereliction that is all that remains of that great industry. Hartlepool declined first, but the pattern is always the same - the industry either goes where it can operate more cheaply or simply goes because no one needs it any more.

The speed, and scale, of the present collapse of heavy industry is, however, a relatively new phenomenon. Since the mid-1960's the

industrial base of Europe, USA, USSR, has changed beyond recognition. Cities that were once great industrial giants, are now reduced to dreaming up "heritage packs" in order to attract tourists interested in their industrial "inheritance"; their past becoming part of a vast wax-work of nostalgia. These rapid changes brought much social distress to those unable to either move to where the jobs had gone or scrounge a job showing people around their now-defunct factory.

This social distress was closely linked to an economic one, or, to put it more bluntly, to the fact that if you have no job you find it difficult to pay the rent; much that passes for "stress" in the modern world can often be located to not being in funds.

The alleviation of that distress is often seen as the job of central government, usually operating through local government. The degree to which central government will aid distressed areas will depend on its proper understanding of that distress. At one level it can advise people how to find work, perhaps by moving or travelling from home via bus and bike. If this recommendation is recognised as being unrealistic it can then perhaps try to bring work to an area. Whatever the measures adopted part of their function will be to justify the government's previous decisions to allow the changes to have occurred in the first place. One of the functions of any government is to at least appear in control of its economies- the very speed in which industrial change has occurred has made this very difficult.

Central government is not alone in having to adapt to a rapidly changing economy; the trade unions are also having to understand that what was good

industrial practice once is now useless, often because there is not much industry left.

This rather simple observation conceals, like most simple observations, much more than it reveals. The circumstances surrounding the Shildon closure are, in one sense familiar, and in another especial to its particular set of problems. A brief resume of both could perhaps help in the consideration of other such closures, campaigns, instances of industrial decline.

A number of issues seem to be worth further examination :-.

i) the position of trade unions in an increasingly "deindustrialised" economy. Modern trade unions are having to face drastic changes in how they operate. In a sense the competition for membership, always a divisive issue, has been further exacerbated by the changing patterns of employment. Is what Shildon trade unionists experienced typical or merely the product of that Works' peculiar "isolation"? Does how a trade union react to a crisis depend on the personalities involved, from General Secretary to local shop steward level, or on how the membership defines its interest(s)? If the latter then how can unionists prevent self-interest from destroying any idea of "solidarity"? As membership, and potential membership, shrinks how can the trade union movement avoid becoming no more than a defused irrelevance?

ii) the business of any trade union depends on the business of its employer. We have seen that the Shildon closure was part of BR policy. BR's fortunes were, and are, closely linked to whatever passes for the ⁵Transport Policy of Central Government and consequently are as much affected

by political as by economic/business considerations. Was the closure, in strictly economic terms, avoidable? Did the Government want rid of it to make privatisation more attractive? Or was what happened in Shildon simply part of an inevitable decline in the demand for its goods? If the latter could this decline have been avoided?

iii) the relatively rapid collapse of the UK's manufacturing industries has inevitably created high levels of unemployment. Following the closure unemployment in Shildon reached over 40% and, where similar closures have occurred, this kind of increase has been replicated throughout Europe. Assuming that some industrial change will always happen how can governments help those affected by such changes? Should government be involved at all? How much is it a local government problem and how much a national one? How can one help the other? What is the responsibility of the industry(s) involved? Should the latter be statutorily required to assist, perhaps through funding, in the re-training of its former workforce? And if a workforce is to ^{be} re-trained, what should it be re-trained for?

These kinds of questions are part of a continuing debate about the future of work. Any "answers" will almost always pose as many further questions, but by tracing the details of one particular closure in RELATION to that debate it might be possible perhaps to put a "face" onto the statistics of what is meant by "de-industrialisation".

What follows is a short account of some of the issues raised above alongside a re-evaluation of how they affected the events in Shildon.

i) TRADE UNIONS:

During the period studied the trade union movement began to see the inevitable consequences of a rapidly changing industrial economy.

"The all-time peak membership of trade unions in Britain was reached in 1979 when 13.289 million people belonged to 453 distinct trade unions...Between 1979 and the end of 1983 the number of trade unions had shrunk (from 453) to 393...The actual membership of these 393 was down to 11,338 million, a reduction of 15 percent since 1979... Employment had been reduced by 8 per cent, so that trade unions had been shrinking faster than the workforce. Of course the virtual collapse of manufacturing industry in a number of sectors implied a sharp reduction in union membership, while the extension of new employment opportunities took place, to a considerable extent, in the service sector where it generated a large number of part time jobs for women workers. These people are much more difficult to organize than their full time colleagues."

"Trade Unions and Politics" pp 7-12 Coates and Topham. 1986

This degree of decline in full-time union membership would naturally create tensions, not only among members, but among separate, and often competing unions. In the Shildon Works there had always been an element of competition, where possible, for membership between the NUR and the other unions. Linked to this was the familiar pattern of wanting things to "remain the same", to follow familiar practices. Unfortunately this tendency to cherish the routine as being an end in itself does not help prepare people for when something goes wrong. Whenever an organisation at shop floor level, especially one that is old and somewhat set in its way, faces bad times it often tends wait too long before acting- as if hoping that whatever threatens will perhaps go away. Many trade unionists at Shildon, whilst in the main satisfied with the campaign against closure, felt that their respective branches should have acted earlier. There was also the feeling that the unions, at all levels, had not been sufficiently aware of the political background to the closure.

One reason for this is perhaps, especially in the UK, the way trade unionists see the relationship between their trade union- as something to do with their workplace- and politics. It is not unusual to find trade unionists at branch level often arguing that their considerations should keep "out of politics." Trotsky's observation that "You may not be interested in war, but be assured that one day it will most certainly be interested in you." could equally be said of politics, but for many trade unionists this perhaps sad fact of life is one they prefer to ignore. The obvious contradiction implied by such an attitude, even its absurdity, is the problem that will always face the trade union movement; that of getting the workforce to see beyond the factory gates.

The average trade union member joins because he or she thinks it will help improve their work conditions and perhaps their job- they may have to join in order to keep the job. The POLITICAL role of their union, unless it directly impinges on the job, is invariably ignored. And why not? Most people have little understanding or interest in politics and if they take any notice at all it is only to comment that there are "just as many adventurers in trade unions as there are in politics." Whether this is the fault of politicians, trade unions, or the people concerned is too vast a consideration, but political apathy must start somewhere and it is true that the PRACTICE of branch level trade unionism is rarely a politicising process- usually the reverse.

Clarion calls for united worker action have rung long and loud, but the indifference of the worker will always frustrate those urging action. Why people submit to what is often indifferent and poorly paying management is

not difficult to understand. The every day experience of all but the very rich is saturated with an anxiety about a whole myriad of seemingly threatening problems. Very few people have much control over their lives and the poorer the person the less control. Being constantly subject to the vagaries of someone else's decision is a degrading process. It brings a sure knowledge of how injustices operate and the dangers when confronting them. To spend one's working life in any industry is to know first hand how vulnerable that life is. Most people spend most of their time worrying about whether the people they work with, live with, see in the streets, know something they don't and if they do how they might use it against them. The greater the experience of defeat the greater the fear; and if there is one area that has suffered many defeats it is the north east of England.

The founding impulse behind trade unionism was, perhaps, more political.

"Unions and their members quickly found that they could not confine their activities to the immediate workplace: workplace issues had an inherent tendency to become political issues. There were two reasons for this. First, unions were regarded by the economic and political elites as a threat, possibly a revolutionary threat, to the status quo. Unions were inevitably drawn into politics both to convince these elites that they were legitimate organisations and to secure the removal of legal restrictions on their activities. Second, though unions were founded to protect pay and conditions these could not be divorced from wider considerations such as living conditions."

"Trade Unions and Politics" pp 2-17 Andrew J Taylor 1989

The degree to which an understanding of one's union would coalesce around an understanding that was political, political in the sense that it conformed to some kind of, however vague, abstract set of aims and purposes is less easy to discover. Much depended on what kind of leadership was offered. If it was seen to be weak, or at least incoherent in its aims,

then the membership would naturally suspect its judgement. This meant the leaders and membership would often be at odds with each other. Both would have the same general aim, but might differ on how it might be achieved. This could easily lead to a narrowing of purpose; a sectional approach rather than an overall strategy.

"Sectional bargaining was a direct consequence of two factors. There were the pressing grievances of daily life in the factory, pit, or wherever. These could often be resolved by quick decisive action... There was also the failure of the trade union movement to hold out to its members a longer-term prospect of a radically transformed society. Without that prospect the movement was less a movement and more a collection of separate organisations looking towards the interests of particular groups of people. Without that prospect the unions could offer nothing to unite its people regardless of income, occupation, skill, etc."

"The Union Makes Us Strong" pp 166 Tony Lane. 1974

This gap of misunderstanding, even distrust, between leaders and the membership often gives an employer, or government, the means of controlling a dispute. When Sid Weighall (NUR) called, against his better judgement, a rail strike (1983) to protest about the workshop closures (and for a better pay offer) the membership refused to strike and his position became impossible. This collapse between leadership and members had effectively given the Government the go-ahead to do whatever it thought was best in ITS interests.

"Sectionalism had the effect of making the union leaders appear as if they had no clothes when negotiating with governments. They could never make hard promises because they had no ultimate control over their members."

pp 167 Ibid.

Since this description was written (1974) the relationship between the trade union leadership and its members has, if anything, become even more confused. The decline of the great industrial unions; the steel, mining,

dock unions, and the sectionalising of the railways, has drastically diminished any threat from a "united" trade union movement. Unions are now generally regarded as being no more than a shadow of their former selves. Whether this is an accurate judgement or not is not important, that it is held by enough people, including many trade unionists, is enough to seriously affect the morale of those arguing for a better deal for their workmates.

One of the great problems of trade unions was their tendency to become bureaucratised replicas of their opponents. To function properly any union has need of a bureaucracy and it is in the nature of the latter to begin to operate as an end in itself. It would begin to make demands that were, although never acknowledged, primarily to satisfy the bureaucracy first, then the membership. This process began very early.

"Government has always suspected unions, so from their earliest days they have sought to persuade governments that unions were part of society, not its enemy. Throughout the last century unions strove to secure access to the political process; by the end of the century unionists had become significant political actors with their own lobby, the TUC (founded in 1868), considerable electoral experience, (60 trade unionists served as MPs between 1874 and 1910) and several were interested in creating their own party...Union political attitudes and behaviour were a complex contradictory amalgam of sectional-occupational and class consciousness, but its rationale was to remedy the defects of collective bargaining. Legislation offered permanence and general applicability, so circumventing the employers' economic power, but the unions were (and for good reasons) ambivalent towards the law. They welcomed legal intervention which extended their rights and immunities, but resented attempts to restrict and control their activities."

"Trade Union and Politics." pp 3-5 Andrew J Taylor. 1989

This desire to be at the centre of the political process is a natural one. To be without access to that process is to be vulnerable. A trade union must concern itself with how large numbers of people are treated, to do

this it must have access to the power to change things. The problems begin to occur when the process of political power becomes as important as the exercising of that power. It is easy to believe in the illusion of power, especially if the beguiled are at all susceptible to its trappings; there is no more amusing sight than to see some one-time trade union firebrand tuck his flowing robes around a new seat in the House of Lords. The desire to be respectable is always a two-sided impulse; on the one side it can bring the respectful acknowledgment that the person, or institution, is something to be reckoned with, but on the other hand it can also bring a dangerous sense of self-importance.

The danger of becoming part of the political process is that it can become all too easy to start identifying with that process rather than criticise its very purpose.

"It's a club (House of Commons). But you see it's designed that way. That way you begin to identify with everyone there. You lose touch with why you're there, that doesn't seem to matter. You go on a Committee, say on child care, and there'll be two Tories, a Liberal, and maybe two Labour. Well you get to identify with the bloody Committee rather than with your party. You end up identifying with two of the buggers, the Tories, whose policies are causing the trouble for the kids, in the first place. It's an insidious process. Same with visits abroad. You go as a group and after a time you think, 'Well he's not such a bad bloke.' and you end up being all mates together. That's not what I'm here for? To be mates with a load of bloody Tories."

From a transcript of an interview with Denis Skinner. MP for Bolsover

The balance between being where political decisions are made and being party to making the decisions is a fine one. Often the one naturally follows the other, but if the reason for being part of the process is to check that it is acting in the interests of others, say the membership of a union, then some distancing from that process is advisable. Otherwise a

slow erosion between doing what is expedient rather than what is right can often begin to blur the original purpose of being there.

In one sense the growing crisis in the trade union movement can have a positive effect. If trade unions did, in the end, fail to fulfill, let alone promise, a "radically transformed society" (Lane) then perhaps it is right that they should, in their present form, become defunct. It is possible that the changing circumstances in what has become known as the post-industrial society can offer as much as they appear to take away.

The large, almost at times monolithic, unions of the past had great power. They could, especially under strong leaders, effectively control not only the Labour Party, but the whole labour movement. The union block vote gave enormous power over the decision making at Labour Conferences.

Whether this power was used to the whole movement's benefit or more usually to the sectional interests of the union concerned is a matter that cannot be adequately discussed here, but that such power existed is not in doubt.

This power could sometimes be abused.

"It wasn't just the Tories who preferred road to rail. The road lobby in the TUC had great influence. And used it. Which meant that the railways were outnumbered. The Transport and General for road haulage. The Shipbuilders and Boilermakers. The Seaman's union. All would fight for their corner at the expense of rail. It meant that the labour movement as a whole was pro-road and anti-rail.

Sid Weighall. General Secretary of NUR 1979-84

The break-up of these great unions has, perhaps, begun to change that pattern. This re-grouping of influence, together with the changing structure of voting in Labour Conferences, may mean a certain diminishing of a certain type of union power, but perhaps this will bring about a union

movement better suited to a new type of membership.

"Flux in the labour market and economic structure means that unions will, for the foreseeable future, remain in the role of supplicants. In terms of their regeneration this is no bad thing, for the weakening of the state fixation will force them to direct their attention to their only source of power: their members and the even greater numbers of potential members. Economic crisis, mass unemployment, and ideological challenge compel the unions on pain of continued decline to begin to forge a new contract with their members by going back from when they came- to the factories, the mills, the mines, the offices, the warehouses, and so on to plant and nurture the seeds of their own revival."

"Trade Unions and Politics" pp 197-198 Andrew J Taylor 1989.

What is clear is that if this "revival" does not take place many working people are going to have firsthand experience of what our "industrial heritage" really meant.

On 26th April, 1986 David Walker of "The Times" reported on a speech by Lord Young, the then Secretary of State for Employment. The noble lord had been asked to give the Stockton Lecture of that year. His theme was "Enterprise", but he dealt primarily with industrial relations

"The economic facts of life, Lord Young said, are as follows. If wages are constrained 'firms have lower costs' That encourages them to produce more and sell more- they then can set lower prices and enjoy higher profits. Real demand and output will increase. And where does that leave trade unions? The logic is plain: trade unions are bad for business, business is good for workers, ergo trade unions are bad for workers."

Walker continues his article with a comment on "What Right To Strike?", a publication from the Institute of Economic Affairs.

"A new IEA pamphlet out this week is blunt (about unions) 'Modern unionism is an affront to the rule of law upon which the authority of the liberal state should rest. Hence the proper role of law would be to proscribe them.' Unlike the minister the IEA is unafraid to face the logic of its premise. Trade unions exist to stop labour being supplied. They should be declared illegal combinations."

There will always be some who would wish to return to less troublesome

days. When public opinion stopped people stuffing small children up chimneys there would no doubt have been some who would have seen even this as an unnecessary increase in child unemployment figures. But these rather atavistic desires for the "good old days" do give voice, if rather crudely, to an underlying element of right wing thinking which is not confined to the UK.

Claude de Brie writing in "Le Monde" ("How the hard right made its policies 'respectable'" 9th May 1986) describes how the "traditional right has abandoned the ideology it held from after the war until the 1970's, that of an interventionist welfare state which steers the nation towards necessary reforms". In two lengthy feature articles he goes on to describe how French academics and economists on the right regard questions of equality.

"Inegalitarianism and elitism would be the link between all the strands of the right...in the beginning there was inequality, between humans, historical inequality between peoples, ethnic groups, cultures...Inequality is not just an established fact but is in the very nature of things. It is a vital necessity that gives human adventure its spice and its variety. It is the mainspring of history yet finds itself threatened by the levelling forces of egalitarianism and universality."

He concludes his first article with a resume of how the right could use the state to use "strong arm tactics" to defend "democracy" against threats of terrorism, immigrants, etc.

"In the meantime free enterprise- that 'only begetter' of wealth and jobs- and the elites which control it would be left free to ensure the community's prosperity. Individualism and competitiveness would be exulted and natural hierarchies respected."

At the other end of the spectrum there is equal confusion about how, in a rapidly changing world, workers rights should be respected. In the same month of the "Le Monde" article (June 1986) Francis Blanchard, Director

General of UN Labour Office addressed his annual conference with the message that those in "organised work" now represented the minority. He was, of course, talking about the labour market world-wide, but much that he said had relevance to what is happening in western Europe; the break up of organised central places of work into small disparate units scattered across a whole range of locations.

Blanchard's goal was to encourage the "'informal' world of street vendors, repair shops, tool makers, and fish dryers to 'organise themselves'. The road to a better life is not going to be via the factory floor." ("The Times, 6th June 1986). Although what he said mostly concerned third world economies, his message could be increasingly seen to be pertinent to Europe; certainly in those areas which have suffered the recent very high levels of unemployment.

It will have particular relevance where, as in Shildon, large scale industrial employers have been replaced by small factories employing a few dozen people in locations scattered around the outskirts of town. Whilst some employed in such places will have come from employment where union membership went with the job, many will not. Or, perhaps more importantly, have had bad experiences of union practice and now want to actively work AGAINST having a union represent them.

In many ways the Shildon experience showed that unless trade union members are kept fully informed of what is being planned for their job- both inside and outside the factory gates- rumour will quickly replace debate. The notion, amongst some union officials, that an acquiescent membership is easier to lead is a dangerous one. It might suit short-term because it

seems to allow the official(s) more space within which to negotiate, but in the long-term it often makes the officials appear linked, however unfairly, with management- they can even appear to have become PART of management.

In some cases, of course, they do become part of management, often for very good reasons.

"After nationalisation (of the railways) we hoped for better things, but it didn't happen. Management remained the same, it didn't change. I became a shop steward to try change things. There was hell on with management trying to get them away from doing stupid things. Really to the detriment of the job. I could instance things over and over again. It was bad management and slowly I saw the unions, from having no power to them getting recognised and then the tail wagging the dog. But the unions could do this because of lazy, inefficient management. Very often, in all good faith, the unions were doing things that the management should have done and had failed to do."

Former shop steward in Shildon Works

It is easy to see how this "mutual-aid" between management and unions could quickly lead to a confusion about either's role. It becomes a short step from this to the union becoming an agent of, rather than mediator with, management. This, in turn, can soon breed disillusionment among the membership, especially if the union seems to be assisting in any run-down, or alteration of working practices.

The relationship between union and employer is always a difficult one, but no union officials can allow a confusion to come between the interests of their members and the interests of the employer. Each may depend on the other, but they will almost always have different intentions- one to maximise profits, the other to get a fair share of those profits.

As the changes mentioned above begin to bite so some unions seem to be

acknowledging the need for new strategies. Following the re-election of the Conservative Government (1987) Bill Jordan, President of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, described the need for change in his article "Unions: Self-reform is best" (The Times, 13th July 1987).

"The British trade union movement faces another five tough years. If it can break out of the iron grip of its history it will emerge in better shape to do the things it was created to do: improve the wages and conditions of its members...The private sector continues to move away from manufacturing which housed the big battalions of unionized labour, towards a small-company economy, increasingly a service economy, providing poor pay and conditions. This sounds ideal ground for the unions, but in fact recruitment is difficult to organise."

He does not go on to suggest much that might overcome this "difficulty" beyond arguing that the old style confrontational policies alienated many more people than it attracted. Jordan's views on fellow trade union leaders are well-known and it is not surprising that he condemns the "misguided" policies that lead to the miners' strike of 1984, but much that he says does make a kind of sense.

"For trade unions, the best reform is self-reform. However getting out of the tramlines of tradition is not easy as demonstrated by the number of unions still bargaining autonomously in each establishment. Ideally we should have the sort of rational system the British trade union movement designed for West Germany after the war; single-union industries, or at least companies...Policies should be adopted or rejected because they are right or wrong, not because they are 'left' or 'right'."

Perhaps the fact that the "single union" appeals to this particular trade union official is part of the problem. How, for instance, would such a structure help "organise" the "small company economy" he had described at the beginning of his article? It might be possible to attract members from such an economy via a large structure, but it is difficult to see how this would make the job any easier. It might, perhaps, prevent inter-union rivalry, but beyond that there seems little here to attract the

underpaid part-time woman packer tucked away in the corner of some industrial estate.

Unless the union movement can really democratise itself it will continue to be no more than a bureaucratic- sometimes useful- appendage to the majority of working people. To democratise, however, implies a degree of sophistication from the "electorate". This has, in most cases, been absent from most shop-floors. How to overcome this lack of interest, indifference even, is undoubtedly the main problem. Perhaps the membership has become indifferent because it had indifferent leaders? Perhaps a better trained union official might understand more clearly how to involve the members in real decisions? Perhaps worker representation at Board level might create a different respect for union officials?

Trade unions are needed more now than at any other time since the war. As has been shown there are many who would like to do away with them altogether. In a sense unions are at the beginning again, they will have to recruit and develop in much the same way as the earlier unions developed; piecemeal and adapting to local circumstances. This may not create the great unions of old, but it might create that more "sophisticated" membership upon which their success depends.

As this revival, if it occurs, develops it will face what is probably the problem of all; inter-union rivalry. Jordan argues for larger unions organised on the German model, but being the leader of a large union "he would wouldn't he". The inter-union machinations at Shildon were not unusual; they were the norm. This will have to change because the nature of large scale employment is changing, but as once large unions see their

membership dwindle, or be attracted elsewhere, they will fight.

Power struggles are never pretty affairs. No doubt much workplace energy will be spent fighting other unions as well as dealing with management. The average member will be no more than a spectator and possibly become even more disillusioned than before. All the while the means of communication itself will become further debased. The spectacle of men and women using the jargon of comradeship to squabble and connive over control of their respective memberships degrades everything it touches. Throughout, the Government, governments, and all who want to have unions declared "illegal combinations", will continue to flourish in the sure knowledge that, for the moment, the trade unions are usually otherwise engaged.

ii GOVERNMENT TRANSPORT POLICY:

"I didn't know they had one." That is how John Prescott, Shadow Minister for Transport, described the Government's policy during the period of the closure. It might perhaps be worth asking whether any recent UK government has had a transport POLICY- as opposed to simply responding to situations as they occur- during the last twenty years, or even beyond? To have a policy implies some kind of strategy, whether modest or grand, accompanied by a developed philosophy on the transport needs of a country. If this perhaps crude, but reasonable definition is applied then the answer seems to be that no UK government has anything that could be loosely described as a POLICY since the invention of the wheel.

From the canal boom (1790's), through the development of the railways (1830 onwards), and on to the building of roads for the car, all governments have followed developments rather than planned for them. Once a need was described they usually reacted, but it was just that- a reaction. It could be argued, especially if "market forces" are about, that it is not the job of governments to have a transport policy anyway and that they should simply let supply follow demand. This might have worked during the days of the ox-cart, but it is worth noting that it was the slow and muddy progress of armies that brought about the turnpike, not that goods could not be moved- when a policy threatens a government things happen.

One explanation of this reluctance of government to get involved in transport was the underlying suspicion that there was no profit in it. It was recognised that transport was part of commerce, but did not seem, in itself, commercial.

"...the capitalist did not wholeheartedly commit himself. And you can see why: only traffic along trunk routes really 'paid'. Everything else, the ordinary, everyday, unspectacular traffic was left to anyone who was prepared to countenance the very modest reward it brought. So the capital investment in transport gives us an estimate of the modernity or archaism, or rather the 'return' of the various branches of transport: capital investment in overland transport was low and in the inland waterways it was of limited significance; maritime transport aroused a little more interest but even here money was very selective and made no effort to take over everything."

"Wheels of Commerce". pp 349-352 Fernand Braudel. 1983

It is interesting to reflect that Braudel, when judging the "modernity or archaism" of a system, is referring to the 18th and, to some extent, the 19th centuries. He suggests that it is archaic to regard transport as something purely concerned with profit and loss; that it must depend "on services provided by other people" (Braudel) who themselves will not

profit. Who else in modern times can do this, but the government? Does this mean then that any government who judges transport in purely market terms is archaic?

Any transport system, except perhaps that based on the horse, helps destroy its environment. Since the invention of the internal combustion engine most countries have found great difficulty in keeping ahead of transport developments. If too many goods travel by road our cities become polluted, and our highways disintegrate- as larger lorries create greater congestion so the rest have to squeeze through the gaps that are left. Houses crack, buildings crumble and ever increasing cost of repairs escalates. The speed with which the car has altered, often for the worse, the landscape of cities, towns, and countryside is clear evidence that most governments lacked a coherent policy. Such a policy needs to be planned well in advance because it will be, by its very nature, supply led and whatever "market forces" are they are not supply led.

In the past the reaction to an increasing demand for more roads was to build roads and close the railways- one appeared to be replacing the other. It was argued that there was a demand for roads and not for railways. How this conclusion was arrived at is less clear. If, for instance, a government fails- through insufficient subsidy provision- to build a railway it cannot then say there is no demand because no one queues up at the railway station. Those lost customers will have to walk, cadge a lift, or get a bus. If they can afford it they will get a car, but whether they would have used the train or not will have depended, not on "market forces", but on whether their government wanted them to have a railway in the first place.

Now, as environmental issues become fashionable, this process is, at least in many parts of Europe, being reversed. As European public transport systems begin to make a come-back so railway/bus systems start to grow again. In a sense it could be argued that it was only when the environmental costs of our ever-burgeoning transportation systems became better understood that governments realised the need for a planned response- a policy. That if they were not careful our means of travel could, instead of moving us more quickly, kill us. This growing awareness of the need for government aid for, and control of, how we move people and goods continues to develop- except in the UK.

The crucial factor in any government's transport policy is how much it is prepared to spend. That is, in essence, the crux of any POLICY; define the transport needs of the country early enough and then provide the funds to satisfy that need. Present Government spending on transport during the 1979-90 period, gives, perhaps, some indication of its priorities.

"Mr Dalyell: More money has been put into the railways of Paris by the Government and the city than has been given to the whole of British Rail."

Hansard. Volume 26. Session 1981-82. (21 June- 2 July 1982) page 50

In June 1982 the House of Commons debated the future of British Rail. The debate's discussion of a threatened rail strike has been referred to earlier, but the debate also examined the transport policy of the Government in general. The Opposition's main criticism was on the lack of Government investment. The Government, David Howell MP, Secretary of State for Transport and Reginald Eyre MP, Under-Secretary of State for Transport) countered this by accusing the rail unions of blocking progress

and therefore endangering any further investment.

"Mr Howell:...I beg the right hon. Gentleman and his friends to tell the industry, which is in a very dangerous condition, that its future is in its own hands. The demand for more taxpayers' money merely promotes the delusion that there is an easy way out of the difficulties. There is not. Such a demand postpones recognition of the railway's vital need to keep and win customers. It is worth bearing in mind that customers can and will go elsewhere. Indeed some have already done so as a result of the futile interruptions earlier this year (ASLEF strike) in the rail service. The customers cannot be taken for granted, and may not- possibly will not- come back if railways are constantly interrupted."

Ibid.

It is easy to take a statement out of context and inflate its importance, but this description of an industry from a State Secretary responsible for that industry does give some indication of how Government, at that time, saw its role vis a vis transport. It seems to come to this; if the railways cannot attract customers then the problem lies with the railways, not the Government. There is a curious feeling that the Government exists as something apart from responsibility; as if it is in being to observe, on behalf of the tax-payer, what others decide.

Later in the debate Harry Cowans MP presented the Secretary of State with an interesting comparison with the transport policy of other countries. It came as part of a general account of how the industry viewed its future and provides a worthwhile summary of the problems facing the industry.

"Mr Harry Cowans (Newcastle upon Tyne)...Despite what the Secretary of State says there has been a chronic lack of investment in the industry. Nowhere has this been better highlighted than by the unique occasion when the ten major organisations that represent the road and railway industries-management and unions- got together and agreed to submit a document to the then Secretary of State...(It said) 'It is not an understatement to say that the whole transport industry is deeply concerned at the continuing decline in public investment in public transport. We believe that public transport is vital to Britain's industrial development and that it is essential to restore investment to the levels of the mid-1970's. In collaborating in

"this way we are making it clear that we are concerned not simply with the comparative claims on resources of road and rail, but with the fundamental need to maintain and develop the necessary infrastructure to enable road and rail to make the most of what each has to offer. We would wish to press on the Government, therefore, the view that failure to increase the level of investment in transport is deterring the economic recovery which the nation is seeking. We see action in this area not only as supportive of national recovery, but it is a 'forerunner of it'. The views are not mine; they are of those of management and trade unions throughout the transport industry. They pointed out that, compared with investment in transport infrastructure in the rest of Europe, Britain lags behind. In 1977 Germany devoted 1.3 per cent of its GNP to rail and road investment. France devoted 1.2 per cent, Italy 1 per cent and the UK 0.8 per cent. Yet both Germany and France already have superior road and rail networks to our own. Two other documents, "The Challenge of the 80's" and "Balance Sheet of Change", were presented to the Government...Where has investment been synchronised with productivity? Even if one accepts that half of the productivity was agreed- a premise I cannot accept- one would have thought that half of the investment would be forthcoming. Productivity can be generated only if investment is made. Productivity cannot be generated by constantly reducing investment, but the Government has done just that. Whatever the Secretary of State may say, investment is half that required by the board (BRB) in its 1981-85 corporate plan, and half of what it was 10 years ago, and the external financing limit has been set so low that actual investment is less than half what is required. The Minister mentioned the public service obligation. There was an increase before he took office, but there has been a £15m reduction in the currently PSO and even that is £80m less than the board asked for merely to retain and maintain rural and commuter services. The board's total investment in 1982 was £265m. In 1978 it was £351m. ...One does not need to be a bachelor of mathematics to know that that is not an increase...It is equally easy to calculate that it is only 47 per cent of the investment required. Where is the synchronisation? Where is the Government investment to balance the unions' productivity?..Lest it be thought that that is merely the unnecessarily gloomy view of a potentially biased NUR-sponsored Member, I quote the best authority in the world on the subject- Mr R.B.Reid, chief executive of BR. Mr Reid said: 'Initially investment is urgently needed to catch up on the backlog of renewals and repairs to BR's network to make it suitable for electrification. There will be little benefit from electrifying a worn-out railway.'"

Ibid.

The first response to this speech was from the Conservative MP (Tim Eggar) who asked if he could be forgiven for "not following the speech. I recognise that he felt he had to earn his official sponsorship fee in the

debate." He continued, in an attempt to be more constructive, with a reiteration of how rail unions were to blame for whatever was wrong with the rail industry.

"I understand the reluctance of railway unions to change. They are after all part of what is, through an accident of history, a declining industry that has been declining for a number of years. Jobs have been lost because there has been a lack of demand for the services and because technology has changed. The unions are naturally anxious to preserve their membership because it gives them political and other power."

Ibid.

Tim Eggar was not speaking for the Government, but as a backbencher, although his comment about "other power." is an interesting one. As mentioned earlier the considerable change from rail to road haulage had other implications. When most freight travelled by rail the unions concerned had, if they wished to use it, the power to seriously hamper the economy. Road haulage, however, was in the main poorly unionised and therefore posed less of a threat.

The main Government spokesman closing the debate was Reginald Eyre MP. He again stressed that union intransigence had caused the Government to be reluctant to consider higher investment. He also claimed that investment was not inadequate.

"The figure for last year was £907m and the figure for this year is £902m. The change is insignificant since the figure is virtually the same as that for last year...we cannot go on indefinitely increasing the resources that the railways pre-empt from the economy. Private business and, indeed, other nationalised industries have to live within the financial resources available to them and we all know what the country can afford.."

Ibid

The comments- "resources that the railways pre-empt from the economy", "there is a limit to what the country can afford"- again suggest that the Government is somehow defending the nation against the profligate and mischievous incursions of people and institutions who are, in some curious way, separate from the rest of us.

The Secretary of State continued:

"Overall the board's (BRB) investment ceiling has remained at roughly the same level for the past 10 years...In this financial year the ceiling stands at £462m. Of course the Government would like to see more investment in the railways, but the investment ceiling is not to blame. It is the failure to reduce costs and improve productivity that has eaten into the funds available for investment. On this, as on everything else, we return to the problem of productivity."

It is difficult to understand how the Minister could argue that investment is good if the ceiling for that investment has "remained roughly at the same level for the past 10 years". Given normal levels of inflation this would suggest that investment had fallen throughout the preceding ten years. The rest of his speech simply repeated the Government's basic position; that Government investment in the railways was sufficient, and if it wasn't then it was the fault of the unions.

Parliamentary debates are as much about point-scoring as they are about the matters under discussion. They do, however, give some indication of what the Government of the day is thinking about the topic. Ministers come and go, but they are briefed by officials who stay. Therefore a Minister's statement will, despite the twists and turns of political ob^sfu_λcation, show something of Government policy- or lack of it.

Perhaps another way of trying to assess Government commitment to transport

is to look at its expenditure proposals. On January 22nd 1985 Peter Rees, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, published the White Paper on Expenditure for the period 1987-88. He claimed it represented " a restatement of the Government's unchanged and continuing strategy for public expenditure...Constancy is the single most important issue."

"Constancy", as far as transport was concerned, seemed to mean standstill. (from 1985 £4,758m to 1988 £4,830m- an increase from 4.7 bn to 4.8.bn) Transport did slightly better than spending on the arts and libraries (0.6 to 0.7) and certainly better than housing (3.1 to 2.6), but compared to law and order (5.2. to 5.6) and social security (40.1 to 44.0) it did less well. The environmental lobby, yet to become fashionable, was to remain throughout at 3.5. The White Paper suggests that the Government was committed to a policy of simply maintaining the transport infra-structure rather than improving it.

The policy of the Government's EEC partners is quite different. A list of comparisons with European rail investment was published in the BR Annual Report for 1988-89. Even allowing for the somewhat biased source- and the possibility therefore of some statistical massaging- the figures make clear that there is a wide gap between the UK and European investment.

Country	Govt Support per train km	Subsidy per head per yr.	% of rail spending from govt.	Rail investment £m	% of operating costs
UK	£1.95	£17	28	412	(12.4)
France	£5.83	£32	35	604	(14.4)
W. Germany	£5.37	£48	32	1190	(16.7)
Netherlands	£3.45	£28	41	172	(31.1)
Denmark	£3.19	£38	n.a.	131	(33.5)

Other comparisons show that there has been a greater increase of passenger traffic in other countries than in the UK and that the decline of freight traffic is exceeded only by France. It is possible that the higher rate of rail freight traffic in Germany might come about because of the greater control there on heavy goods vehicles on roads.

Country	Rail change % change 1976-86		Train km per staff		
	Pass.	Freight	member 1986	1976	%
UK	+8	-19	2413	1817	+33
France	+17	-25	2010	2096	-4
W. Germany	+11	+2	2173	1750	+24
Netherlands	+9	+15	4125	3909	+6
Denmark	+37	0	2332	2242	+4

The Report also showed that as a percentage of the GNP the UK spent 0.22% of public spending on rail whereas the average for eight other European countries was 0.67%.

European investment in high-speed links shows, perhaps, more clearly how much the UK lags behind its European partners- and competitors. High-speed links are being built in France, Germany, and Italy. Lines are being upgraded in Switzerland (part of a "Rail 2000" plan approved by referendum), Austria (a "Neue Bahn" modernisation programme), Spain (a "Rail Transport Plan"), and the Netherlands (a "Rail 21" prospectus). All of these, with the Channel Tunnel, are designed to form a network.

("Proposals for a European High-Speed Network", Community of European Railways 1989.)

The commercial importance of rail, public transport in general, is also becoming better understood in Europe.

"The spirit of the law which established us is that transport is a service good for Paris and a major investment in the economic life... The employers here count their VERSEMENT TRANSPORT (a tax paid by all

"employers in the Paris region) in their cost of production; they have made an investment in a good system of transport...It is not a matter of left wing or right wing. Our role is to raise the expectations of the city and to propose solutions."

Jean-Pierre Balladur, Finance Director of the RATP (Paris equivalent of the London Regional Transport) "Le Monde" 10.3.89

The UK Government seems, as yet, not much impressed by the policies of its European neighbours. A speech given by Cecil Parkinson (Secretary of State for Transport) to a conference on transport was reported in the "Independent" of 23rd May 1990. The conference on European transport had been sponsored by the "Financial Times". Nicholas Faith, writing for the "Independent". was more than a little critical of the Secretary of State's stated position

"If the Government is right in not putting money into new railway lines, then an awful lot of other people- the French, Germans, Italians, Swiss, Austrians, Spanish, and Koreans- who have accepted that railways are on the way back and are planning and constructing new lines and improving old ones, are all as wrong as only foreigners who disagree with Mrs Thatcher can be...Even Mr Parkinson had to admit that subsidies on social grounds were justified...but went out of his way to dampen speculation about building and financing the fast link and singled out freight as a sector where BR had to justify its existence. The idea that it might be worth a bob or two to take a few juggernauts off the road does not seem to have occurred to him, or to the Ministry of Transport. Their Sir Humphreys manage to justify investment in roads on social and environmental grounds while if BR wants to invest it has to provide a commercial rate of return."

Nicholas Faith then elaborated on the problems caused by BR's expected rate return on investment.

"The rate of return was upped from 5 to 8 per cent in real terms just as inflation was starting to explode: so whereas two years ago BR could justify a scheme if it yielded a nominal rate of 8 or 9 per cent, the target is now nearly double that figure."

It is not only the rail lobbies who are concerned about the Government's apparent lack of investment. Another Secretary of State for Transport said:

"We know the great advantages that spring from setting free the entrepreneurial spirit giving customers a better service and increasing efficiency."

Paul Channon MP (Secretary of State for Transport 1988)

(This rapid turn-over of Ministers responsible for Transport is, possibly, another indication of Government priorities?.) Whichever Secretary of State it is they do not appear to convince some businessman that all is well. Colin Stannard, a banker brought in to become joint chief executive of Eurotunnel- he subsequently left to advise Ove Arup on their plans for a Euro-rail link- commented that the BR link, as proposed, "could cripple the British economy in the decades to come." What he was complaining about was that unless proper provision was made in the UK benefits of being linked to Europe would be lost; irrespective of which consortia eventually ran the Tunnel. This disquiet amongst the businessmen involved in the Tunnel project was described in a lengthy article, again by Nicholas Faith, in the "Independent on Sunday" 4th March 1990.

"CHUNNEL PLANS OFF THE RAILS: ...This major new crisis, for the rail link is the single most important transport decision for the decade. Because of that, it is also the planning and economic decision of great historical significance for Britain. The stakes can be spelled out quite simply: without a new railway link that can take enough trains travelling on all Britain's main routes at high speed and carrying passengers and freight this country will be relegated to the periphery of the European economy, overlooked and ignored by major trans-continental industries. Yet while virtually every Western European country is building new fast lines, the planning of an adequate new line to link Europe with Britain's industrial heartland is being left to two ad hoc private consortia."

What is at stake is the use of public money. The Government is, as has been seen, reluctant to countenance, beyond maintaining an existing network, any large scale rail investment. It argues that public money

must seek a good return on investment and that, unless there are overwhelming social reasons, rail investment must be determined by strictly commercial criteria. Those concerned about the lack of public funding for the Channel Tunnel argue that under-funding the project could seriously affect Britain's economic future.

"'Without a proper line' says Mr Stannard, 'BR will not be able to attract its due share of freight traffic simply because customers on the Continent would not be willing to confine themselves to the relatively small wheels and small containers available on the BR loading guage.' The artificial isolation would inevitably increase its marginality (BR's) when international companies are forming their industrial plans."

Whatever the eventual outcome, whether about rail-links to Europe or developing the UK system, the Government, for the moment, seems intent on spending more on the roads than rail. It argues that this way tax-payers get a better return for their money. In a report published by Transport 2000 Ltd, "Rails for Sale", there is an analysis of how the Government does this. It shows that by using a cost-benefit analysis- which values, among other things, the saving in drivers' time and accident reductions (loss of life= £500,000)- the Government can appear to be getting a better return on investment. However:-

"this way of traffic forecast using such analysis have been much criticised by the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office ("Road Planning: House of Commons Paper 101" May 1989; Dept of Transport, Scottish Development Department and Welsh Office Road Planning", NAO October 1988). Environmental benefits are also taken into account in the roads planning process and in policy-making. There are therefore several differences from rail:

- * there is no attempt to make roads "pay for themselves" or even to see if they do;
- * a range of factors are included in assessing road investment which are not assessed for railways;
- * there is no external financing limit for roads spending."

"Rails for Sale" report by Transport 2000 September 1989.

Transport 2000 claim that 80% of CoBA benefits are:

"...in driver's time saved, and much of the rest is in reducing accidents (priced at £500,000) a life. In other words, the more traffic you forecast to congest the existing road network, the greater the benefits (saving in drivers' time and accidents) that CoBA shows in building new roads, because the more drivers there are to benefit. So if traffic increases by 280% instead of 140% were projected road spending would soon show a 5.1 return."

"Transport Retort" Vol 13 No 5. June 1990.

Transport 2000 came into being because of a growing fear amongst transport unions, users of transport, and environmental groups, that unless such a pressure group existed the UK transport system would face long-term disintegration. It is not surprising to learn that it is unpopular with the Government who, no doubt, see such organisations as contrary to the iron rule of "market forces." Mr Parkinson, at a meeting reported in St Albans Observer, certainly showed small regard for such groups.

"If any group ever misled people it is the Friend of the Earth who give the impression that everybody is dying to live in rustic simplicity and walk to work. It is you people who pretend there are simple answers to the problems while it is people like me who have to deal with the problems of congestion...I suggest you put away your abacus and start trying to understand how things are really financed..."

"St Albans Observer" 14th April 1990

It is undoubtedly true to say that being in office quickly teaches a politician the hard financial facts behind trying to run the economy. Parliamentary opposition thrives on the notion that it can suggest alternative policies in the sure knowledge that it will not have to implement them- not yet anyway. The same goes for pressure groups, like Transport 2000, but without informed opposition Governments will do whatever they like. They will, of course, claim to be acting in the "interests of the nation" but as this invariably means them staying in

office its utterances are, in the end, not much more reliable than those of the pressure groups.

One thing that is certain about politicians is their desire to be re-elected. If environmental issues begin to interest the electorate so politicians become interested in the environment. This can create interesting paradoxes.

"Chris Patten, the Secretary for State for the Environment, will revive the Whitehall battle over rail subsidies...by pressing for environmental benefits to be taken into account in future financing of the railways. His case has been strengthened by the report yesterday of the central Transport Consultative Committee, which warned Cecil Parkinson (Sec. of State for Transport) that the subsidies for the commuter system were at an irreducible minimum. Network Southeast has been set the target of eliminating all subsidy by 1992. This is believed to be part of a strategy of preparing BR for privatisation. Mr Patten believes that rail finance should be balanced by the measure of the advantages -called 'cost benefit analysis' that rail travel brings... Robert Key, Mr Patten's Parliamentary Private Secretary was among a group of Tory MP's that met Mr Parkinson to impress on him the need to increase government aid for services on one line to the West country. But some came away angry at Mr Parkinson's rejection of the 'cost benefit analysis'... They warned that the Ministry's policy was driving more people to use the M4 motorway into London."

Colin Bell. "The Independent" 2.8.90

It is an interesting irony that it is the Secretary of State for the Environment who is arguing for more Government funding for the railways, not the Secretary of State for Transport.

As mentioned in Bell's article much of the current debate on rail concerns itself with the possibility of privatisation of, if not all, at least large parts of the system. This process has already begun. BREL was privatised, through a consortium including the managers of workshops, in 1989. Most of the hotels owned by BR have been sold. Sealink, BR's ferry subsidiary, was sold to Sea Containers Ltd in 1985. Seaspeed, BR's

hovercraft, was sold through a worker buy-out. British Transport Advertising was sold to its managers in 1988. Travellers Fare, responsible for station catering, was sold to a management buy-out in 1989. On-train catering, on provincial lines, has been contracted out. Franchising of station shopping sites is almost complete. BR's Property Board has become increasingly involved in joint development projects with private developers such as the Broadgate development in the City of London and proposed development at Kings Cross.

The development of privately owned freight wagons is, in the Shildon context, the most interesting one. There are now 180 private freight terminals around the country, many funded through Government grants (under Section 8 of the 1974 Railways Act finance is available to companies wishing to have their own access/sidings to the rail network). The larger freight users usually have their own wagons or lease them privately. If coal wagons are excluded, 80% of the total wagon fleet on the network is privately owned. One company, the mineral company of Foster Yeoman, even has its own locomotives and pays BR for use of its track.

This piecemeal privatisation did not occur overnight. During the negotiations over the closure of the Shildon Works, and the others that followed, BR must have been planning for just such a privatisation. Not to have done so would be have been an act of gross negligence.

In 1988 the then Secretary of State for Transport, Paul Channon MP, reported to the House of Commons that:

"This year I have put BREL and Travellers Fare well on the road to the private sector. But that's not enough. I want to look at the whole of BR's future to see whether privatisation is the way ahead.

"Although we cannot do it in this Parliament, I have set work in hand to study the options because before we make any decision about whether to privatise, we need to be clear about how best to do it."

Rt. Hon. Paul Channon. "Hansard" 11th October.1988

This statement, just four years after the closure at Shildon, suggests that privatisation plans must have been well advanced during the period studied.

The Government made no secret of the fact that it regarded BR's "monopoly " as something contrary to its overriding concern, that wherever possible "market forces" should determine income. It has repeatedly claimed a mandate for its policy of reducing Government spending. It argues that it has always made its intentions about privatisation clear and that, in the main, its privatisation programmes have been popular with the electorate. Whether these claims are reasonable or not is not the concern of this study, but it is important to remember that throughout the period examined some form of privatisation for BREL, and perhaps much more of the system, was always thought inevitable.

Two basic factors are involved in this policy- ownership and competition. It is argued that transferring ownership from the public to the private sector gives better access to private capital. It is also possible that such a move will reduce state control and regulation.

The sole purpose of such a policy is, the Government claims, to give the customer a better service. This improvement will come because the "market" will determine, via competition, how the service will run; if the service is bad people will go elsewhere. If the service is good people will flock to use it and it will thus flourish. This will be facilitated by having a service which is more flexible and less bureaucratic. There

will be a greater incentive to provide a good service because everyone concerned will know that if they fail their job fails with them.

Competition is also thought to bring greater consumer choice. By freeing the providers from the restrictions common to publicly owned enterprises- excessive bureaucratisation, absence of consumer pressure due to lack of competition, a workforce often indifferent to effects of its actions- it is hoped, a better customer relationship evolves. Anyone having to use public utilities will have some sympathy with these aims. Unfortunately there are just as many disadvantages to a rail privatisation.

There would be the obvious need for some kind of regulatory body which would have to have quite formidable powers. Each day the railways move millions of people about the country and their safety would have to be protected. If the system were to be broken into parts that process would, inevitably, become even more difficult than it is now.

Rail travel is a mixture of profitable lines, and less profitable; the one subsidizing the other. If the system were to be separated this would no longer happen. Profit making lines would attract investment, but what of the lines which were not profitable? When the bus industry was deregulated the rural areas soon suffered a diminished service whilst the more profitable areas became choked by a superabundance by the development of numerous bus "wars".

In the past, when railways were run privately, the difficulty of making connections between the separate companies often led to duplication; some towns having, for instance, more than one station. Information was not

always shared and the traveller was often confused as to when trains were available. In some cases common ticket arrangements were difficult to agree with the result that the traveller had to buy from each company. The proposal of "sectorising" parts of BR (Inter-City, Provincial Lines, the South-East network, etc) has already started to develop problems similar to those described. This is best seen in the link between Edinburgh and Glasgow where the competition between Inter-City and Provincial could result in each having its "own station with each having to pay to use the other's lines, signals, etc." (Don Kent, Transport 2000's northern representative)

Whether BR is privatised or not will almost certainly depend on the next general election. The Conservative Party has already privatised much that was formerly publically owned, if re-elected it will, no doubt, continue that process with BR as a prime candidate. If they are not returned then it is likely that BR will remain, for the time being, under public control. Whatever happens it seems very unlikely that BREL will be re-nationalised; although there will no doubt be some public funding for new construction and refurbishment of rolling stock. What is sure is that whatever happens it will now make little difference to Shildon.

Whether Shildon Wagon Works could have participated in the privatised wagon market cannot be known. Whether the removal, by BR, of the railway track had anything to do with a fear that such a facility would produce unwanted competition cannot be known either. There are those who claim the Works was deliberately denied access to the new market, there are others who say that there was too much needed doing before the Works could have competed

with the modern facilities elsewhere. These are, in the end, technical arguments and beyond the scope of this study- what is clear, however, is that Shildon ended up with a redundant BR trained workforce unable to participate in a market that is almost certain to expand.

ii) "TRAINING FOR THE FUTURE"

High levels of unemployment have, since the early 1970's, become almost commonplace. It would be tempting to argue that this is primarily a phenomenon of industrialised economies, but it is very likely that there are just as many people without work everywhere; their presence perhaps being less noticeable than in the more "developed" economies. What is fairly certain is that no one knows what to do about it. The levels, in some countries, appear to have stopped rising, but how much this is due to real changes in employment and how much to simply changing how we measure unemployment is less clear.

What has changed is that:

"states with mixed economies who had enjoyed 'full' or near full employment since the early 1950's have been haunted by the spectre of rising unemployment over the last decade (see table 1.1).

Annual average unemployment rates in selected OECD countries 1971-83					
	1971	1974	1977	1980	1983
France	2.10	2.25	4.80	6.30	8.00
Italy	3.20	2.85	7.10	7.40	9.70
Sweden	2.10	2.00	1.80	2.00	3.50
United Kingdom	3.00	2.52	5.70	7.40	13.10
USA	5.90	5.60	7.00	7.00	9.50
West Germany	0.70	2.65	4.60	3.10	8.00

Source: OECD, Economic Outlooks (OECD Standardised unemployment Rates.)"

"Unemployment in the UK" pp 5-6 Jeremy Moon and J.J. Richardson 1985

Moon and Richardson go on to discuss the "differentials" in how governments respond to these figures- job creation, job subsidy, etc- and also suggest that compulsory military service in some countries will alter youth unemployment figures. What is clear, however, is that however one qualifies these figures they do represent unusual rises in unemployment.

That the changes occurred is not in doubt. Why they occurred is less easy to determine. Moon and Richardson (pp 7) suggest that the 1973 Middle East war, with its traumatic effect on world oil prices, started the process. They argue that increasing costs of production coincided with a slacking off of consumer demand with the consequence that only the more efficient producers, and exporters, were able to survive. Showler and Sinfield ("The Workless State" 1980) are less specific in their analysis beyond noting "that the rising trend in unemployment in the 1970's was principally a consequence of an inadequate pressure of demand for labour". The latter is obviously more a consequence than cause, but they do go on to describe that during this period of "inadequate" demand there was also a growing labour supply; especially among the young.

What most commentators seem to agree on is the notion that we are entering into a kind of "post-industrial" society.

"Deindustrialisation', with one million jobs disappearing in the manufacturing industries during the 1970's, has already created many social and economic problems that are perhaps most visibly revealed in the large number of redundancies. A quarter of a million payments were made from the Redundancy Fund in 1979 alone, with a third of these coming from mechanical engineering, the distributive trades and construction industry, and many more from textiles, metal manufacturing, vehicles and electrical engineering. It is not known precisely how many more people lose their jobs at the time of a

"redundancy, as many leave early or do not qualify for a redundancy payment. Various estimates put the total affected by redundancy at two to three times the official number of payments."

"The Workless State" pp7-8 Brian Showler & Adrian Sinfield. 1981

"Deindustrialisation", as mentioned earlier, seems to be very much the creature of monetarism. During the last decade old economic theories, those that placed great stress on interest rates and money supply, have been re-heated to provide us with a "new" way of measuring economic prosperity. Belief in the efficacy of any particular economic theory often depends as much on faith as on conviction. Economists, like so many latter-day alchemists, labour long over their econometrical deliberations in the hope that what they might discover will turn baseness into light.

If any "theory" is going to take root, especially in the minds of those who believe themselves part of a process which "run things"- politicians, commentators, administrators- it needs to be simple. It must have that quality of being succinct and yet apparently profound. All great religions have this. Monetarism has "market forces."

"Market forces", as a tool to help us understand economics, is, in many ways, part of a reaction against the post-war Keynesian consensus that tried to control inflation by taxation and prevent unemployment through government spending. Keynes tried to account for the economic traumas of the 1930's, high unemployment, trade wars, and monetary collapses, etc. His "General Theory" rejected the notion that the interest rate determined investment and savings decisions.

"The failure of the rate of interest to achieve this reconciliation (between investment and saving) assumed in classical theory was, according to Keynes, the result of a possible liquidity trap where

"liquidity preferences could, in a deep depression, become highly interest-elastic, whilst the investors' demand for money is likely to be highly interest-inelastic"

Ibid pp 34-36

This "inelasticity" could, therefore, lead to a diminution of investment just at the moment when it was needed most. The consequence of this was that once an economy appeared to be in decline the reaction of investors would be such as to hasten the collapse. The only effective way of reversing this process would be for the government of the day to intervene. "It is undeniable that postwar governments have accepted a responsibility for the level of economic activity and employment and a degree of intervention that was unthinkable in the prewar context." (Showler and Sinfield pp37).

This process of the government "accepting responsibility" for how the economy determines levels of employment has in the UK, since the election of the Conservative Government in 1979, been drastically modified. Throughout the 1980's governments in the developed countries encouraged- in Japan's case demanded- that industry invest much of its profits in research and development. In the UK the policy was to let industry have the freedom "to manage" its own affairs. The Conservative Government's conversion to the belief that "market forces" was all that was needed to solve its economic problems meant that the economics of laissez faire- the economic theories of the late eighteenth century- were back in favour.

As large sections of the economy slid slowly into oblivion the workers in those industries became more anxious, more militant. This in turn led to these same workers being blamed for the departure of their industry; their

only means of achieving a modicum of prosperity. The Government argued that if management was simply left "to manage" all would come right in the end. Meanwhile, while managements got down to managing, the economy could be trimmed of "excess fat." The "deadwood" of old and outworn practices could be discarded and replaced by the industrial practices of the future.

A government basing its policy on "market forces" would hardly view the social consequences of its actions as being relevant to that policy. It would be inconsistent if it did. If a policy is powered by the philosophy of the "market" then, by the very nature of the arguments used to justify the policy, those same "forces" would eventually solve any of the problems initially created. If those pursuing the policy did not believe this then their whole theoretical argument would collapse. Whether this is a wise policy is a separate issue, but the degree to which it can be trimmed, to suit electoral considerations for instance, is an interesting example of theory giving way to pragmatism.

Any government presiding over a manufacturing decline- on the scale experienced in the UK during the last ten years- would, it seems reasonable to suppose, have some plans for what might come next. If the old industries- coal, shipbuilding, steel manufacture, etc- were now to be something in the past then what would take their place? "Market forces" might have the answer, but this would mean waiting until the "force" was with whatever was coming next. What, in the meantime, could Government do to help?

One the problems of "market forces" is that it is not always clear how to prepare for their twists and turns. How can training be developed for

an economy which is subject to the vagaries of the market place? If education itself is subject to the market what then, beyond, primary skills, does the school teach? If technology is going to make labour-intensive industries redundant then what is to be done with the redundant labour? The answer is, of course, to retrain it, but for what?

In a past there were two sorts of industrial workforce: the apprentice trained skilled and the casual unskilled. The former had largely developed out of the idea of the journeyman whose:

"organisation was based around the possession of an occupational skill and their economic objective was to preserve and increase the value of that skill. To achieve this they attempted to monopolise the supply of their skill on the market. Using Weber's terminology we can say they adopted policies of 'closure'. They attempted to close social and economic opportunities to outsiders in order to maximise the advantages their skill could bring group members."

"British Industrial Relations" pp 96-98 Gill Palmer 1983

Anyone working in Shildon Wagon Works, or anywhere in an industrial setting, will readily recognise this description. The whole network of working practices, rules of procedure, maintenance of manning levels, even what tools should be used, began in that labyrinthine defence network of job protection.

This protectiveness is, of course, not confined to industrial workers. There is no more protective a pair of associations than those of law and medicine. These "associations attempt to control or influence recruitment to training; the length and content of training; qualification of the practitioner"etc. (pp 98 Gill Palmer) In this they are not very different from the industrial pattern except that their standards are much higher and entry more controlled. The professional needs time to learn his/her work,

the industrial apprentice could often learn all that was needed in half the time allowed, but as this would have meant being paid a higher wage earlier it was discouraged.

One of the most important purposes of trade skills was to keep out the "unskilled" worker. By laying down a series of rules, sometimes spurious, sometimes essential, groups of workers could appear to have some control over their workplace. As in so many things their development evolved as much from a feeling of insecurity as from being something that might be a necessary part of the daily routine. The need to have authority when negotiating with a management meant skilled trade unions needed a disciplined membership. It was, however, but a short step from this to having a "rubber stamp" membership. Having a reasonably acquiescent membership was fairly easy when it was in a shipbuilding yard, a mine, a steel works, etc, but less easy when the workforce is in small disparate scattered groups. Strength in negotiation would now no longer simply evolve around numbers, but on communicating to a membership across "skill" boundaries.

As the workforce becomes more disparate, less orientated to a specific skill, so the business of training becomes more difficult to organise. What, for instance, should one train for? Today's demand might be for machine tool operator; tomorrow it might be for someone who operates, via a computer, the robot working the same machine tool.

The decline in apprentice training, or shortening of the time allowed, has also led to some trade unions fearing "'dilutees' equipped for skilled jobs by means of special training schemes". ("The Workless State" - Chapter 4

"Unemployment and Government Manpower Policy" Michael Hill 1980). The idea of a workforce trained by agencies "outside" a particular industry inevitably causes concern for those who want to maintain a role in representing that workforce. (Hill) On the other hand there has been some criticism that government training agencies have deliberately set out to create a non-union attitude amongst its trainees.

Another criticism of the various training agencies is that they seem primarily designed to remove the unemployed from otherwise depressing statistics. If someone has no job then place them on a training scheme and they are no longer unemployed; they are training- the theatre profession calls it "resting". The method of calculating the unemployment figures has changed twenty nine times since the 1979 election. Many of those changes involve placing the unemployed- especially the young, into some form of training. Whilst someone is being trained they are not available for work and are not, therefore, unemployed. This manipulation has had its critics.

"Sir Claus Moser, former head of the Government Statistical Research (GSS) and Sir David Cox, a former president of the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) identify the turning point in the history of British official statistics as the White Paper in 1981 entitled Government Statistical Services. 'In two and half pages there were seven references to efficiency, five to value for money, four to economies, and two each for saving and cost effectiveness. Integrity, validity and reliability merited one mention each and objectivity got two. Before the Raynor Review (a Government based review which cut funding for the GSS by 25 per cent and changed the responsibility for the Central Office of Statistics from the Cabinet Office to the Treasury) the purposes of the government statistical services were to serve several masters, first and foremost the Government but also industry, academics, and the public...I don't know of any government that has actually falsified figures. But there are different grades of interference. There is non-publication or limited circulation of figures. Then there is changing definitions or the method of collection of statistics in such a way that something

"misleading is produced. At present I worry most about the unemployment statistics, the poverty data and any suggestions of tampering with the Retail Price Index.' (Sir Claus Moser)"

Rosie Waterhouse "The Independent" 9th October 1989.

Later that month the London School of Economics hosted a forum sponsored by the Association of Learned Societies in the Social Sciences and the Association of Social Research Organisations. The forum published a "statement of principle" which spoke of "widespread concern about the state of official statistics in Britain today. Accusations have been made in the media, supported by the business community and leading statisticians that statistics are doctored, misrepresented, or subject to interference by governments." Professor Catherine Hakim, director of the government-funded Economic and Social Research Council National Data Archive, said "The Government has swept away information which reveals increasing inequality such as the distribution of income and wealth or the mortality rate in different social classes... Problems have been caused by the changes in the categories, questions and coding schemes: this leads to difficulties in making comparisons over time. Statistics provide factual information vital to our understanding of what is happening in the world." (Independent 31.10.89)

In the following December The Statistical Society held a special meeting to discuss Government's use of statistics. Most speakers again stressed that manipulation of statistics would lead to bad planning.

This disquiet about the way Government statistics were being used had been voiced before. In August 1989 the Bank of England, in its "Discussion paper 39. 'The relationship between employment and unemployment'"

attributed "much of the steep fall in unemployment in the last three years to the Government's special employment measures, such as various job training schemes rather than a growth in jobs." It goes on to outline that:

"Our results suggest that, although unemployment is falling because there are more jobs, it is also true that much of the decline in the claimant count which has occurred since mid-1986 has been due to the shift in unemployment-employment relationship resulting from changes in the Government's range of special employment measures."

When "training" is used as much for statistical convenience as for preparing people for new jobs its clients cannot be blamed for becoming cynical as to its real purpose. If training becomes compulsory then these suspicions only grow. In April 1987 the Government issued new guidelines about training. If anyone "unreasonably refuses offers of training they can lose their benefit and up to 40 per cent of income support for six months." This would also apply to those leaving training courses "without good cause". Anyone "selected" for a training scheme who failed to turn up for the interview was removed from the unemployed register.

Any government facing the unemployment levels common in Europe must re-train its people for the jobs that do exist- or might exist in the near future- but to appear to be using training as some kind of punishment is certainly not going to help either the unemployed, or, in the long term, the government. Another problem with "forced" retraining is that it debases any good that might come from the exercise. For those people who felt they had "failed" at school re-training could easily suggest a return to further humiliations.

In the early 1980's training did seem to offer, apart from its statistical uses, a way for the Government to create a better trained workforce. The rapid rise in unemployment had frightened the unions into a grudging co-operation with some Government training schemes and industry seemed prepared to acknowledge the need for more training investment.

It is obvious that industrialists want a better educated workforce, but this usually means educated for their business requirements.

"The serious unemployment problems facing Britain will be solved only when, led by politicians, society devotes all its energy to reform the education and training systems to instil the right work and managerial ethic into all its young people... (We) along with other companies would be happy to take the risk of faster expansion, to create even more jobs than is planned at the moment, if we knew that our biggest problem, the supply of a well-educated labour force, hungry for work and responsibility had been solved."

Gary Hawkes, Managing Director of a Trusthouse Forte Division.
"The Times" 20th June 1985

Few businessmen would quarrel with this, but many educationalists might. Do we educate people to become good workers or to become better equipped to UNDERSTAND their changing world? Do we educate people towards a good wage or towards a greater adaptability when faced with change? Neither option need exclude the other, but it is how they are emphasised in education and training that matters.

Another article in the above series showed a growing awareness that Britain's ability to trade was becoming strongly connected with the success, or failure, of our educational and training systems.

"The direction and pace of change places great emphasis on people's competence and adaptability, and the signs are that this will become still more pronounced as time goes by. All this highlights the connection between education, training and work. How do our arrangements match up to the increasing demands being placed upon them? One way of judging is to observe what other countries do.

"Last year the National Economic Development Council and the MSC published 'Competence and Competition' which compared (our education/training) with West Germany, USA and Japan. The report prompts some important questions.

* is it satisfactory that the number of young people entering apprenticeships every year in Britain has declined from 100,000 to 40,000 whereas in West Germany in 1982 no fewer than 620,000 young people PASSED EXAMINATIONS completing their apprenticeships.

* why have we been content to accept that the majority of school leavers still seek to enter the labour market in Britain at 16 while the normal age in West Germany and the USA is 18 and in Japan 20.

* can we compete in the engineering field if we produce 15,000 engineering graduates a year while the Japanese produce between 60,000 to 70,000?"

John Cassels Director General of the Nation Economic Development Office. "The Times" 13. June 1985

Neither of the people quoted above would be regarded as being particularly critical of the Government of the day, nor did they say anything that is suprising, but they did represent a growing awareness that Britain's educational and training provision was not all it should be.

These criticisms of the British attitude to training were again voiced a month later.

"All over the country, even in the areas of highest unemployment, employers complain about a shortage of skilled labour. I ask the employers: What are you doing about it? How much are you spending on training this year? Why not set a target of 5 per cent of the payroll for 1985/86 for training? At a time when profits have on average increased sharply shouldn't there be a conscious decision to invest a share of them in training?...Employees who have not received training recently should ask their employer why? If the employer seems unenthusiastic they should consider ways of undertaking the training themselves. In some major companies in West Germany more than half the employees are undertaking self-improvement courses in their own time with part of the cost paid for out of their own pocket. In this country we tend to leave the initiative to employers with the result that we are undertrained and less skilled than our competitors."

Tom King (then) Secretary of State for Employment.
"The Times" 9th July 1985.

Everyone seemed to know what should be done, but beyond exhorting each other in the press and on television little actually changed. In July 1986 the Government announced that they would be extending its pilot TVEI project (Technical and Vocational Education Initiative- designed to help young people bridge the gap from school into work) into a fully operating scheme by the autumn of 1987. But although it was generally welcomed some worried about its funding.

"The scheme is worth supporting and its extension is welcome. But it could be hard for schools to find enough science and technology teachers. And another big problem will be finance. £900m over ten years sounds like a lot of money. But so far only 3 per cent of the pupils between 14 and 18 are in the scheme. As the government has only doubled the money available, how many of the 97 per cent are they really going to be able to cover?"

Caroline St John-Brooks. "New Society" 11th July 1986

And even if funded properly did the funds go to the right place for the right reasons. On the 10th of February 1987 the National Audit Office issued a report on the cost-effectiveness of Government training schemes. Of the MSC it said:

"The Commission has no national or local data base recording the skills possessed by the working population, and since the introduction of voluntary registration for employment in 1982 it had kept no inventory of the skills of the unemployed...Although some data from surveys are available the Commission does not have the information which would enable it to be certain that training is not being provided in skills already in good supply or in surplus and available for use."

Amidst the confusion of what schemes should be funded by how much a further problem arose in that it is not always certain what people meant when using terms like "education" and "training". Are they necessarily the same thing? We toilet train a child, but educate a graduate. Does one follow from the other? Is one superior to the other? We would find it difficult to train without educating or educate without some training?

When we learn to use the toilet we also learn an important fact about civilised behaviour. When a graduate studies he or she submits to a disciplined pattern which is made easier through some training. These distinctions are important because how we use them often determines our expectations of what they might provide.

"While the distinction remains within a recognisable educational context it represents a question of subtle interpretation, but once it leaves that context and becomes a general policy making fact then complications will occur- especially where the distinction is not even acknowledged as a possibility."

"MSC and Further Education" John Sansick 1981

In the above study an MSC officer responsible for a TOPS PREP course remarked that all that was required of the course was that the student "Be able to read instructions in a factory...Just be able to understand any signs, not to be able to read as in school. It's training, not school." This is all the more remarkable when it is realised that the officer's prime responsibility was for courses designed to help unemployed people suffering from illiteracy. This kind of (mis)understanding is not that uncommon among people who ask that we improve our educational standards. The official saw training as a way of making people more employable. Perhaps he thought education was about helping the unemployed endure the time spent waiting for a job?

This relatively junior training official is not alone in his confusion about what training should be. Over the last ten years anyone involved in the "training" industry would need of a fairly extensive glossary of acroynms.

"Whenever a course seemed to be running out of steam, or was thought to be not working the usual answer was to change its name. Once you'd done that you re-issued its guidelines under the new name and called it something like 'A New Intiative' or 'A Programme for Change.'

"Nothing actually really changed though. The same people ran the same courses for the same reasons. They decided the course content and providing it appeared to be doing something that was it. Without an external system of assessment- a nationally agreed set of criteria it was left in the hands of local officers. They, in turn, had to try and follow the policy as IT changed in Sheffield (MSC Head Office). Everyone involved, from top to bottom, knows it can't go on like this but also knows no one can do anything about it."

Senior Careers Officer responsible for Government Training Schemes 1979-90

Throughout the 1980's the principal agent for training had been the MSC, but in 1987 the MSC metamorphosed into the Training Commission which in turn announced (1st September 1988) its own demise when it became the Employment Training Agency (ET). ET was designed to bring all training under one central control and to give six months training to the long-term unemployed, who would be recruited via Restart Centres. It was soon to attract a familiar pattern complaint.

The principle criticisms of ET were two-fold; that financing was still too inadequate and, perhaps more importantly, that it was a "back-door" method of introducing the American system of "work-fare"- where the recipient had to work before being eligible for benefits. Whether this was the Government's original intention it soon became clear that "compulsory" or not the schemes offered were not attracting enough people.

"Minsters have accepted that the £1.4bn Employment Training Scheme is likely to attract little more than two thirds the original target. The Government scheme has been attacked on the quality of its training and critics say it has met with little enthusiasm from potential trainees or employers, particularly in the private sector."

"The Independent" 7.12.89

Those who did go on the schemes also found that the training provided was, in the main, little different from what had gone before. A further difficulty was discovered when the National Audit Office discovered:

"widespread inadequacies in the financial controls of government-funded training schemes...It found that weaknesses in the system created scope for overspending, mismanagement, and fraud. The NAO estimated that excess of payments of £4m through non-recovery grants was based on Training Agency office records."

Brian Clements "The Independent" 2nd September 1989

In January 1990 the Department of Employment announced, perhaps in response to accusations of poor financial management, it was to cut back some of its funding for training. The Department argued that the cuts were due to "falling unemployment", especially among the young, and consequently "provision has been cut by £120m in 1990-91 and by £230m in each of the following years." ("The Independent" 30.1.90).

In May 1990 the Government then announced it was to cut its funding on the Training and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI). This scheme, designed to prepare 14-18 year olds for work, had been supported by many local authorities, who believed it an ideal platform with which to alter the training base of school-leavers.

Later in May further cuts, this time in Youth Training places, was disclosed via a Department of Employment leaked document.

"Challenged during Commons questions Michael Howard, Secretary of State for Employment, said that over the past four years government spending on training had risen by 60 per cent when unemployment had fallen by 50 per cent. 'It is not surprising that some adjustment this year should be necessary.' Tony Blair (Shadow Minister for Employment) claimed that the 'switch to unit pricing for places, where employers offer a fixed number of places at a given rate, rather than grants being related more closely to individuals, had particularly hit special training needs. The figures showed thousands of places and hundreds of trainers' jobs at risk...If we were in power now we would not be cutting training. The fact that there could be fewer people requiring training should be an opportunity to upgrade the quality of training, not to cut basic training provision."

"The Independent" 23. May 1990

Even allowing for the usual political point-scoring it is difficult to argue with Blair's analysis. If the figures did show a fall in unemployment- and it has already been noted that these figures are themselves often rather suspect- then improved training provision could have become more possible.

Another of the Government's particular concerns- privatisation- was also added to the training debate. This, in turn, created further worries for the National Audit Office.

"The National Audit Office is to investigate whether all potential purchasers of the Skills Training Agency were given equal information over the planned sale of its 60 skill centres in the privatisation completed this year. The move follows complaints from bidders that they did not know that government cash to 'sweeten' the move into the private sector was available...Mr Macleish (Opposition Spokesman on Employment) said there were 'serious doubts above how fair the bidding process has been. Forty five of the skill centres went to Astra Training Services, a company created by three senior civil servants in the Agency who were given £10.7m by the Government as part of a 'management buyout.'"

Nicholas Timmins. "The Independent" 14th. June. 1990.

And so the story continues.

It would be fair to say that whatever the Government intends- whether "massaging" figures, trying to train "on the cheap", or simply reacting to an long inherited problem by pretending it isn't there- it is only following a pattern that has changed little since the Education Act of 1944.

The current policies on training are perhaps more important than ever because unemployment now is of a kind that will not go away if and when "the economy picks up." Any government which fails to ensure proper provision for creating a skilled workforce will eventually have to suffer

the consequences of that neglect. The present administration seems unaware that that process is already well advanced.

It is, perhaps, appropriate to end this chapter with a reference back to the first draft of the SHILDA Industrial Training Scheme.

"New technology offers industry a chance to become productive and to create new and better jobs selling goods and services to the rest of the world. But in order to do so we require and need a better educated, better trained and more adaptable workforce.

Our major competitors successfully tackled this training problem many years ago and in Continental Europe some of the main countries now provide 80% or more of their young people with further education and training of some kind. In Britain, in 1979, the figure was less than two thirds... We have assumed that the training given in a person's life is all that they will need for the rest of their working life. The result is that the present system of training is failing to produce the numbers of skilled people required by a modern competitive economy and it is just this situation which the Industrial Training Scheme would hope to improve."

SHILDA Industrial Training Scheme. pp 3-5

The Scheme, as described, never happened. Maybe it was too ambitious, perhaps lacking in a realistic assessment of what could be provided, but it cannot be faulted for its analysis of what was, and is needed, not only in Shildon, but throughout the UK- a massive investment in proper training for the future.

"We lost £40,000 for training from the Community Projects Foundation, a Home Office funded body, because they didn't want anyone else on the Board. Training was forgotten and it should have been the most important part of the whole scheme."

Tom Toward discussing the move from SHILDA to SASDA.

While we continue to regard training as something peripheral, something to be "fitted in" when things are slack, the rest of the world's developed- and developing- countries steadily increase their spending on training. If

the people trying to run Shildon see what is needed, what stops our central government(s) from drawing the same conclusions? Who knows, perhaps they too are reluctant to have "someone else on the Board"?

Shildon's Works closed largely because those in charge of the Government's "transport policy" thought it proper that it should close. The same people, give or take the odd civil servant and politician, decide what to do with the people made redundant. One thing, at the moment, seems fairly certain, if the people of Shildon want to learn new skills they are, perhaps, better advised to put their trust in their own efforts and not in those who caused their problems in the first place.

This was how one ex-worker in the Wagon Works responded to a question about the closure. The comment is a natural one given the feelings of many in the area, but how much is it a true assessment and how much a simple expression of indignation?

The "North" this man had grown up with- full order books in the Tyne and Wear ship building yards, mines working to capacity, and steel manufacture continuing to provide jobs in Consett and Middlesborough- has gone. But does this mean the North is "finished?" As the interviews progressed it became clear that what was being lamented was the loss of these traditional industries. Nothing unusual in that- radical change frightens all but the most placid (or indifferent)- but how much is this concern simply a desire to be safe inside old certainties and how much a worry about lost jobs. Bit of both probably, but wanting things to always remain the same can be dangerous.

Should we regret the demise of our industrial "heritage"? Most, if not all, of the "lamented" industries were dangerous and exploitative- spending one's life down a hole in the ground, or dodging dangerous loads in dock and shipyard has little to recommend it. There was always a certain sense of pride in having to do dangerous work, but this is an easy attitude to exploit. Such work nearly always depends on a locally "tied" workforce which can quickly become trapped inside a dubious sense of dependency- having no choice but to work in the local yard, pit, or factory is not a good basis for negotiating improved conditions. Working in such places

was always hard and injurious- many endured the work only to end their days crippled by the disease and injuries that had been part of that work.

Then public ownership came along but did much change? The industries often most affected by decline were publically owned, but did this make any difference when they closed? When you're sacked, whether by the state or by "market forces", you're sacked.

From the early 1970's, perhaps even earlier, it was becoming increasingly obvious that a drastic change was needed in how we manufactured things. That the changes would happen was not much in doubt, but as each successive^s government "modernised" so it was faced with the inevitable unpleasant consequences of that process. Tony Benn, in his introduction to "The Politics of the UCS Work-In", neatly sums up the problems for politicians as they sweated through "difficult" decisions.

"The death sentence on UCS (Upper Clyde Shipbuilders) was unexpectedly delayed because Rolls Royce went into bankruptcy first, and Mr Heath's government did not feel able to handle two such major examples of their hard-line policy simultaneously so the UCS crisis was deferred until Rolls Royce had been saved by nationalisation in the spring of 1971"

"The Politics of the UCS Work-In" pp 12. Foster & Woolfson. 1986

He goes on to describe the events immediately following the decision to close UCS.

"At first Harold Wilson was very angry with me, as the Shadow Secretary of State, for the support which I gave, but then he realised that he could not stand aside and began in a discreet way to associate himself with the campaign for jobs while carefully distancing himself from the stewards and the occupation (the work-in which followed the closure announcement). Victor Feather, the then General Secretary of the TUC, also found himself drawn in because of the support of the unions, but he, like Wilson, was anxious lest the leading role of the shop stewards might undermine the normal hierarchical discipline of the unions"

Ibid.

This jockeying for positions that can appear sympathetic yet remain uncompromised seems, as we have seen in Shildon, to be a familiar part any fight against closure.

UCS, like Consett, like two thirds of the mining industry, like most of Sheffield steel mills, like Shildon, like so many others, went in the end. Foster and Woolfson (pp 422-428) argue that the UCS work-in helped to forge an increased political consciousness amongst the Clydeside workers and that this was a victory over the divisiveness of old "craft sectionalism". How true this is remains to be seen. Even if we accept that the closure of the Shildon Works was a much smaller affair and therefore, perhaps, untypical, it is difficult to see much evidence of a raised political consciousness resulting from the campaign against closure. On the contrary the campaign and closure is now seen, by most of those interviewed, as something that was, although traumatic, simply part of some inexorable process which is unalterable and even, for many, mysterious. They know that somehow they've been had, yet still seem prepared to pay for a guess about which cup has the pea. It would be satisfying to think otherwise, to believe that the experience of fighting together had, somehow, created bonds that would endure, but evidence for such hopes has yet to emerge.

This prompts the question of just how typical was the closure at Shildon. In many ways,, as we have seen, it followed a familiar pattern. The "announcement" of closure was followed by a "postponement" which in turn immediately preceded the actual closure. This almost exactly followed the developments surrounding the closure of the Consett steel works four years

before. In many ways it resembles most closures. Sometimes the closure is part of a take-over strategy- where the seller "trims surplus" labour or the buyer "rationalises" the assets- or sometimes simply the result of a "market forces" type decision. Whenever and however, it almost always happens much as it did in Shildon.

Was there anything about Shildon, however, that was different from other closures? In one sense the relatively unusual nature of what was made there, as opposed to other industries in the area, did make it slightly untypical, but this is stretching an already fine point- the closure of a factory is much the same whether it is in Durham or Dunkirk. The response to the closure was, in one sense, typical, but the size of the community involved did make it somehow a more personal affair- everyone seemed to know everyone else.

It is difficult to compare one closure with another. Certain similarities will obviously occur, but each will also have its own special circumstances. Perhaps the closure at Consett offers the nearest parallel to Shildon. Both happened within the 1980's, both happened in the same County, both affected relatively small towns.

Kathleen Price, in "An Alternative 'Consett Story'" describes some further similarities. There was the threat (and eventual stoppage) of a steel strike during the campaign. In Consett the feeling was that "if Consett came out they'd never get back in." and in Shildon "a strike is all they need to close us". Price describes (pp 205) how the other threatened steel town, Corby, "gave up the fight" in much the same way as Horwich "left us to fight on our own" in Shildon. Inter-union

differences were also common to both campaigns; many in Shildon will see an ironic echo in the comment (pp 210) that "the National Union of Blastfurnacemen admits that the local union leaders have 'rarely seen eye to eye', but nonetheless planned a "Save Consett Campaign".

Price makes an interesting comment on the peculiar difficulties for unions faced with a closure:

"If closure situations are compared with other sources of conflict between capital and labour it would appear that, whereas forms of collective bargaining and withdrawal of labour are well developed strategies, which have clear procedures and a strong basis of collective identity among the membership, a closure evokes more individualist and fragmented actions and arguments about strategies, affecting the extent of inter-union cooperation".

"An Alternative 'Consett Story'" pp 191. Kathleen Price 1986

And later:

"Union procedures are very precise (and that) the committee structure for the campaign...were inappropriate if a united campaign was to be conducted...One advisor (union) noted that the workforce were angry and wanted to do something about the situation, but they couldn't 'discover how to protest' and that union leadership did not try to gauge their reactions"

Ibid pp 226-227

Price, when discussing mass demonstrations, also makes an interesting comparison with Shildon which is both complimentary to Shildon and yet reflects similar attitudes in both towns. A planned "mass demo" in Consett (25th July 1980) expected an attendance of 10,000, but in the event only around "1500-2000" turned up which seems to indicate that Consett was less interested in their campaign than Shildon where attendance was always good. Consett did, however, see the same fairly rapid dwindling as the speeches wended their rhetorical way through the day- "by the end of the speeches most people had left" (Price. pp 223); this does mirror the slow

departure of crowds at Shildon as they grew irritated by the "political cliches". There is also a sense, in the Consett description, that the march there attracted more "onlookers" than participants, and that there was a feeling of "community detachment" (Price. pp 223). These are, of course, subjective impressions, but are nonetheless worth recording- what people who were there believe happened will always be important to any study of the kind Dr Price made and is being presented here.

So, as we have seen, closures do provoke similar responses and yet, naturally remain unique to their time and place. We will all experience the same rhetoric whenever a new closure is announced, the same pledging of support from politicians, the same sense of raised expectations, all leading to the same end- a closure. Rarely does a campaign seem to do more than simply delay matters. This, of course, can be useful- if only to give the workforce time to organise itself around other jobs, other possibilities- but in the end the jobs usually go.

If this is true what then is the point of campaigns against closure? Would it be more sensible perhaps to simply accept the fact and quietly do the job until it is taken away? The only people likely to advocate such a policy would be those who, like Lord Young, yearn for the days when any combination of workers brought out the troops.

It is obvious that any threat of closure must be resisted because to do otherwise means giving away too much too soon. The very act of resistance will create SOME raised consciousness- whether political or simply the first glimmerings of altruism (perhaps the same thing?)- and this in turn will help form a united response. It is obviously necessary for people to

combine against threats to their livelihood, but it also necessary that they fully understood what is happening during the campaign.

Closure campaigns, like wars, use rhetoric and bluff to conceal true positions- it is crucial, however, that the leadership knows which is which. It does no one any good to promise what is not possible. This simply raises expectations and encourages the notion that victory is only about defeating the opponent. To persuade people of the need to compromise DURING a campaign is a tricky process, but one that constantly needs attention.

The main difficulty of any anti-closure campaign is that it usually involves a process of PUBLIC negotiation. The workforce, perhaps formerly acquiescent, is suddenly watching their "leaders⁹" every move- this can be a disconcerting process for those used to operating in "cabinet". Because the stakes usually evolve around some sort of salvaging process it is often necessary to convince the opposing negotiator that what is on offer will not only be an acceptable solution but one that can be clearly explained to the workforce.

Such negotiating skills are not as common as is popularly thought. The trade union movement is becoming aware of the need for training in these skills- the Trade Union Research Unit (1984) noted that better communication with the workforce was an essential part of the 'politicisation' process- but it would be a mistake to simply see the process as a simple extension of the old political practices somehow writ large.

As industries are forced to change so dealing with the management of those industries will have to change. In the past once an industry felt that it would make economic sense to move it moved. What happened to its former workforce was someone else's problem. As we face industrial change this process will have to change. Some degree of responsibility for a former workforce will have to be statutorily devised.

In discussing the Shildon closure Alan Roberts, Chief Executive of SDC, made some interesting comments on the implications surrounding BREL's involvement with SASDA.

"I reckon the cash value that BREL put into SASDA was eventually around £2m. They got some of that back from Europe via grants, but it would still be around £1.5m plus. This is important because one of the problems in terms of closures in this country, and from what I know of other countries, is that we do let the major companies, whether public or private, off very lightly. Whether it is the kind of German moratorium, or how the French and Italians operate—they make it difficult in the short term for companies to close down. Either by extending the period of notice or whatever. Whereas in this country we let multinationals off too easy. Both (political) parties do this. We should tell them that they must make, in addition to statutory redundancy payments, a grant of a £1000 per lost job. Redundancy payments are alright for the 50 year old, but no good to the younger person or, more importantly, the person who would've worked at that plant. These are the sort of people who leave once the jobs are gone and the community dies. The government should look at what BREL did in Shildon. They lost 2500 jobs and put in around £1000 per job back into the community. We should make all these cash-rich companies do the same. If they want to leave they must put that money into the community, not through local authorities because they might use it to cut back on the charge to the ratepayers, but directly into the community. It should be done via an agency, if one doesn't exist create one. And that cash will be used, through this agency, to help the economic regeneration of that community." (From the transcript of an interview at SDC offices- 3rd July 1990)

How much the campaign was responsible for BREL's making such sums available is difficult to evaluate, but it seems fairly certain that without such action BREL would have had a much easier time avoiding that kind of commitment.

How does Shildon seem now, six years after closure? In some ways little has changed and yet there does seem to be a slightly different "feel" to the place. During the months following the closure there was a sense that the town had lost, not only the Works, but also any sense of purpose. The "mini-boom" which often follows lump-sum redundancy payments did not, with a few exceptions, make much impact and the people, as if attending a dying relative, seemed prepared for the worst. That sense of quiet despair does appear now to have eased. It was almost inevitable that once the closure had become fact the town would, after a short period of "mourning", get on with things.

Any town is more than a mere collection of individuals, but how it gets its particular sense of place is very hard to determine. If, when people meet, they are mostly friendly this becomes normal practice; if they ignore each other, or are positively aggressive, this, in its turn, affects how people treat their neighbours. The rumours (and suspicions) that were part of the closure campaign were bound to condition attitudes. Whether people worked in the Works or not, they could not help but be affected by the tensions that accompany any threat to jobs. Now the closure is becoming history those tensions are slowly disappearing.

Perhaps one small part of this process is, perhaps ironically, the low cost of housing in Shildon. The town's problems affected house prices which made them attractive to first-time buyers from outside the town. These "newcomers" brought new attitudes and, more importantly, were not affected by the past in quite the same way as older residents. They also represented a different kind of person; more mobile, less nervous of

change, and possibly less obsessed with the minutiae of gossip and myth that pervades any community which has "turned in" on itself.

Whether this gradual arrival of new people is something to be welcomed or not, is, in a sense, irrelevant. It might, after all, mean that some in Shildon could be deprived of something that might eventually have become theirs, but it has happened and the process will not now be reversed. It is, of course, possible for the local authority to provide cheap housing, but recent moves towards home ownership has changed many people's attitude towards council housing. Owning your home was always felt somehow to be the prerogative of the middle classes, but, following recent Government policy, that option has moved down a social peg or two. The motives behind this policy may be suspect, but it would be difficult to deny that for many who were dependent on the council for their homes, the change has not been wholly unwelcome.

Work has also returned to the town, but it is difficult to accurately assess how much of this is due to SASDA and how much to the normal, if slow, process of regeneration. In July 1990 the SDC Development Committee conducted a "1990 Employment Survey of the Manufacturing Sector in the District". It noted that the:

"manufacturing sector is the major component of the district's employment structure, representing 58% of all employment. This is in contrast to the position in the Northern Region and Great Britain, where manufacturing employment accounts for 29% and 25% of the total employment respectively."

Many of the new industrial estates on the outskirts of Shildon are manufacturing industries. It is normal to expect such industries to employ more women than men, but the Survey seems to contradict this.

"During the last year the total number of jobs has increased by 420 resulting from an increase in male employment of 1,110 and a decrease in female employment of 690. This level of job growth, 2% over the last year, is below the average increase over the last three years of 6%: being suppressed by the decrease in female employment."

In a later paragraph it explains where the losses occurred:

"areas experiencing job losses include Spennymoor (100 male and 240 female jobs), Shildon (140 female jobs) and Fishburn (320 female jobs)."

It states that a large percentage of the losses have "been concentrated among a few large employers" which might explain the loss in female jobs, but this is a surprising reversal of recent trends where it has been the women who got jobs rather than men.

The Survey does express some optimism about the "trend" of job creation.

"Comparison of the 1990 Survey with that for 1989 also indicates that the trend evident in the last year's survey of new jobs created moving ahead of jobs losses has been maintained; a reverse of the situation that had existed for much of the 1980's. This success is in part due to the efforts of all concerned with industrial promotion, including the Council and SASDA. The latest survey showed that during the year-

- a) 72 new companies established in the District providing 660 new jobs.
- b) 46 companies ceased trading with the loss of 330 jobs; and
- c) In other established business there has been a new increase of 90 jobs."

When the Survey comes to detailing the size of the companies it becomes clear that the above jobs depend on very small size "firms".

"Analysis of the size of the 'new firms' shows that 65% employed fewer than six people and 86% few than 21 people. In comparison, last year 75% of new firms employed less than six people and 95% less than 21 people...Overall 91% of the manufacturing sector firms in the District employ fewer than 100 people."

These figures certainly suggest that many people in the District now work for quite small companies although the Survey does point out that "50 firms employing more than 100 people make up 70% of total employment".

This type of job pattern suggests that people are working in very different jobs than was normal in the past. The older, and much larger industries, mining, and railway engineering, have been replaced by small (sometimes very small) companies which appear, if we note the comment in the Survey about keeping "ahead" of job losses, to come and go. The workforce in such companies will have to be very adaptable, readily prepared to change to whatever is demanded. Job security, as was understood in the older industries, will have virtually vanished.

Whether such changes are welcome depends on a number of rather complicated considerations. This kind of mobility can lead to low wages- lacking security it become more difficult to argue from strength. The jobs are rarely skill-based and labour can, therefore, be changed very quickly- the "troublemaker" is more easily got rid of. Union recruiting becomes difficult, if not at times, impossible- and in some cases firms, unsurprisingly, actively discourage union membership. Constant changes of employment encourage a very individualistic attitude which makes joint action to remedy unfair working conditions difficult.

On the positive side such a working pattern does mean people are less dependent on one employer. They become skilled at learning where conditions have become unacceptable. They will have to learn to rely more on themselves for work. They will learn that their job simply depends on a demand for their labour and not as if according to some strange law of nature. They will, in fact, learn the realities of a market economy and having absorbed this lesson might, perhaps, start to use that market to their benefit?

It might, for instance, occur to some that perhaps they could work for themselves? That small companies often need only small amounts of capital and are, therefore, not that difficult to develop as co-operatives. Such activity will hardly solve the unemployment problems of the District, let alone the region, country, etc, but if working people begin to really understand how their labour is used they may begin to make other connections- perhaps even political ones?

It was certainly true that in many interviews conducted for this study there was a recurring sense of bewilderment about the Works closure. Many seemed almost to see it as some kind of punishment; as if someone somewhere had plotted the town's downfall as part of a deliberate policy of attrition. Can a town become collectively paranoid? There were times, during the interviewing, when this did seem possible. Even if it were only a few (and there is much to suggest there were many) who thought in this simplistic way then a better understanding of what promotes (and removes) work cannot be but a good thing. Many in Shildon put all their trust in the railways and believed their jobs were safe. They were to learn, perhaps rather brutally, that if you work for someone else your job is never "safe" and that it is best to make plans for when it is taken away.

It seems appropriate to end with the Survey's summary of the current job position in Shildon-

"The overall decrease in employment of 160 jobs is as a result of the closures of 29 companies and the loss of jobs occurring with 17 companies, which has not been matched by the establishment of 14 new firms. The majority of this decline has occurred among female employees (nearly 90%) and has been concentrated at Dale Road and Furnace Industrial Estate."

The people of Shildon, like many elsewhere, have "seen the future" and it doesn't seem to "work." They will, however, have to carry on paying their rents, their mortgages, and feed their families. They will survive because however indifferent successive governments might be they always have to be re-elected and so cannot let matters deteriorate too far.

Too many in the town trusted people elsewhere to look after their interests. They are perhaps beginning to learn that this was unwise.

Throughout the 1980's many of those suffering closures in the region asked "When are they going to do something about it?" At first this seems a reasonable question, but it does, perhaps, betray a fatal misunderstanding. For centuries "they" have come to the region to use its labour then, when "they" had not need of it anymore, "they" went. This seems to suggest that "they" are not very reliable and that it is, perhaps, better not to trust them over much

However we define "de-industrialisation" one thing seems certain- there will be an increasing number of people without a job. How they, and us, deal with this is difficult to understand. The people described in this study are trying to understand these changes and by listening to them- and many like them- it might be possible to, if not provide the answers, at least begin asking some of the right questions?

APPENDIX:

SHILDON SURVEY.

In the summer of 1988 a survey, via questionnaire, was conducted in Shildon. The questionnaire (a copy of which is at the end of the Appendix) arose from a study by the Work and Employment Research Unit (University of Durham) into the possible effects of a proposed British Coal opencast mine to the north of the town. The application by British Coal was eventually refused by the Department of Environment, but the Inquiry- conducted by the local authority in conjunction with British Coal- was a public one and local opinion about the scheme was sought. It seemed, therefore, that some kind of examination of how the town felt about itself was an appropriate corollary to work on the Inquiry. The STC agreed to finance the printing and distribution of the questionnaires.

It was decided that the questionnaire would remain anonymous with no accompanying interviews. This was done for two reasons; one, because the cost of mounting an interviewing team could not be realistically arranged given the budget; and two, it was felt by STC (Tom Toward, Town Clerk) that unless some degree of anonymity was offered co-operation might be difficult to obtain.

Of the 500 delivered 102 were completed with 22 adding comments. 86 were returned unanswered. The survey was delivered to the home and then left to the goodwill of the respondent to return. This helped anonymity, but had obvious weaknesses; it might, for example, have been responded to

by those who were more civic minded than others? The relatively small return- one in five- also meant that any findings needed cautious qualification.

It should be said that such a survey, whilst useful, is dependent on a number of imponderables. This survey, for instance, collected an older range than would be normal in a community like Shildon. This can be explained in a number of ways; the old might be less inhibited by the whole process; might be socially programmed to "do as they're told"; be simply more accommodating; see perhaps that such an exercise might help the town, etc. The young, however, may be tired of surveys and the paraphernalia of the state via Job Centre, MSC schemes, and consequently less inclined to participate. It might also be true that the young are more fatalistic about the future and therefore cynical of attempts to change things? It is true that 66% of the respondents were over 45 years of age, with only 8% being under 30 years.

Much of the response contained inherent contradictions. People would declare no interest in politics, environment, or membership of group or party (33% did not feel this question (Q6) relevant to them) and yet most would want to share decision making with councillors and officials (78% Q16). Similarly 30% were "satisfied" with their social and financial position (Q7) and yet 89% felt a "sense of powerlessness" and had "little hope for the future" (Q13). These contradictory answers would suggest that most respondents answered honestly- the dishonest would perhaps have taken care to be logical- but that there was also a need for caution when dealing with the "results".

Below is the list of questions together with results and, where appropriate, a brief comment.

Question 1. YOUR OCCUPATION WAS/IS?

There was a wide range of occupations from professional and managerial (in education after 21 years- see Q5) to labouring. It was no surprise that railway employment predominated (44% of total returned). The next largest "group" was related building trades (15) with mining following up (5) and then textiles (5). Within both the larger groups there was a range from managerial/foreman/supervisory grades to general labouring.

The rest was a scattering which included civil servants, policeman, fireman, nurses, motor mechanics, bank employees, an oap from out of the area, teachers, domestics/cleaners, postman, porters, a dental surgeon, a management accountant, shop workers(4), health visitors, etc. Two were unable to spell their occupation of many years.

Question 2. THE LENGTH OF TIME YOU HAVE LIVED IN THE AREA?

Up to 5 years	2%
Up to 10 years	3%
Up to 20 years	12%
Up to 30 years	14%
Up to 40 years	22%
Up to 50 years	45%

This question, with Q3, indicated how the age range of the survey was tilted towards the older members of the community. 81% of the respondents had lived in the area for over 20 years, with 67% over 30 years.

Question 3. THE NUMBER OF CLOSE RELATIVES YOU HAVE LIVING IN THE AREA?

None	11%
Up to three	18%
Up to six	69%

The figure of 69% for having six "close relatives" in the area might suggest that the community which is predominantly unchanging, even static. This is, in itself, not unusual. Many communities, larger than Shildon, will have the same type of close family structure, but this can sometimes become a trap: having close relatives nearby is a very good reason for not wanting to move. Some may, of course, move BECAUSE of their close relatives.

Question 4. THE AGE BRACKET THAT APPLIES TO YOU

18 to 30	8%
31 to 45	23%
46 to 65	47%
65 to 100	19%

It is sufficient to note that the preponderance of answers fall in the category "46 to 65 years" (47%).

Question 5. WHEN DID YOU FINISH YOUR EDUCATION?

(Please include any education courses over 9 months)	Before 15	46%
	Before 16	29%
	Before 19	15%
	After 21	7%

The answers here could suggest that the survey should be read with care. The 1944 Education Act provided statutory education up to the age of 15 years which means that anyone over 55 would have been in education up to the age

of 15. Yet 46% of our respondents claim to have left school "before 15" against 73% being under 65 years of age. Now this either means most, if not all, of the 46% in age bracket "46 to 65" are in fact over 55 or, what is more likely, that when some people ticked "before 15" they should have ticked the next box.

Question 6 DO YOU TAKE AN INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING?

Politics	20%
The Environment	34%
Being member of political party or group	12%
Left blank	32%

The biggest reaction to this question was either to ignore it or strike it out of concern by drawing a line through the question. 32% of respondents had no interest in "politics", "the environment", nor were "a member of a group or party".

Question 7. IN WHAT WAY WOULD YOU ATTEMPT TO REALISE YOUR POTENTIAL SO AS TO IMPPROVE YOUR SOCIAL AND FINACIAL POSITION?

Further Education	15%
Retrain and learn new skills	16%
Wait and see what develops	5%
Satisfied	27%
Seek better careers guidance	2%

Seek better in-house training	1%
Work for yourself	15%
Work for yourself with support from the community	3%
Left blank	12%

That only 1% saw any point to "in-house training" suggests either an extraordinary level of suspicion about such activity or that experience had shown it to have been of little use.

Question 8. WHICH INDUSTRIES HAVE YOU/YOUR PARTNER WORKED IN?

Mining	9%
Chemicals	6%
Textiles	11%
Railways	38%
Agriculture	4%
Public services	14%
Shops/Food industry	17%

As one would expect the majority (38%) worked in the railways. The nearest other occupation (17%) is "shops/food industry" and it should be noted that this latter category included a range of different occupations. The other spread of occupations in the town are fairly evenly distributed. The low figure for mining (9%) is not surprising and most miners who responded were obviously long retired.

Question 9. IN WHICH INDUSTRIES HAVE YOU/YOUR PARTNER BEEN MADE REDUNDANT?

Mining	8%
Chemicals	1%
Textiles	8%
Railways	49%
Agriculture	0%
Public services	2%
Shops/food industry	5%

As expected the redundancy figure for railways predominate (49%). It is interesting that when redundancy is compared to work (Q8), we get a far higher figure for railways employment, (38% against 49%) . This could suggest that some who had worked for the railway now have other employment.

Question 10. HAVE YOU/YOUR PARTNER EVER HELD A POSITION WITHIN A TRADE UNION IN THE FOLLOWING INDUSTRIES?

Mining	6%
Chemicals	3%
Textiles	3%
Railways	22%
Agriculture	0%
Public services	3%
Shops/food industry	4%
Left blank	61%

That 61% had had no position in their trade union is perfectly normal for any industry or community. That 22% of those responding had held a position in the railway union(s) is surprising. Either this indicates a

higher level of union involvement in industry than is normal or, perhaps, that those responding are from a group who take an interest such matters. By responding to our survey our respondents, in a sense, became a self-selected group who, by implication might contain people who would involve themselves in trade union affairs.

Question 11 HAVE YOU/YOUR PARTNER EVER HELD A POSITION ON THE FOLLOWING COUNCILS?

Parish	(NUMBERS)	3
District		1
County		1

It is no surprise to find so few respondents involved in council affairs. The question had to be asked if only to formally ascertain the general level of local involvement in town affairs. The averages presented are perfectly normal, but do confirm that the survey located 5 people who are, or were, representatives of the town at local and county level. Without knowing this there was no way of telling whether such representatives had been part of the survey.

Question 12. HOW WELL ORGANISED WAS THE OPPOSITION TO THE REDUNDANCY/CLOSURE PROGRAMME BY THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT?

Strong	35%
Moderate	18%
Weak	17%
Left blank	30%

This question, perhaps more than any other, posed problems for the respondent in that what it asked for was a very subjective response. How

strong" is strong? How "weak" is weak? Perhaps the fact that 30% failed to answer the question is an indication that many felt unable to judge and so ducked the issue.

Question 13. IN WHAT MANNER DID YOU ACCEPT THE REDUNDANCY/CLOSURE PROGRAMME AT THAT TIME?

With understanding of the firms reasons and need to do so	8%
With deep reluctance but feeling of powerlessness	42%
With fatalism and not much hope for the future	26%
Left blank	23%

It seems sensible to combine the figures of answer 2 with those of 3. The line between "reluctance" and "fatalism" is a very fine one. The distinction was offered in an attempt to separate out those who felt some resentment from those who simply accepted their fate, but the combined figure of 68% seems a reasonably accurate, if disturbing, picture of how the community saw the closure.

Question 14 WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION DID YOU FIRST RECEIVE REGARDING REDUNDANCY/CLOSURE?

Personal letter	14%
TV news	13%
Newspaper	4%
Trade union meeting	23%
Verbally from management	15%
Left blank	32%

The question does not specify whether the employer was BR, but that 17% of respondents first heard of their redundancy- whatever the job- from the media is something that should be regretted. To be told one is now without a job is bad enough, but to be told this via television, or through the local newspaper is, by any criteria, unacceptable. Any redundancy brings with it an unavoidable sense of rejection, but to compound that with a kind of casual rudeness seems almost cruel.

Question 15 DO YOU BELIEVE YOU HAVE ENOUGH SAY IN THE DECISIONS MADE BY THE FOLLOWING BODIES? Please tick YES or NO

Numbers, NOT percentages	British Rail	4 Yes	65 No
	British Coal	4 Yes	61 No
	Schildon Town Council	14 Yes	63 No
	Durham County Council	3 Yes	65 No
	S.A.S.D.A.	4 Yes	54 No
	Sedgefield District Council	7 Yes	72 No

This was a complicated question. That the majority of townspeople felt that they had little say in their affairs is evident. This is confirmed by the overwhelming response to all six questions about whether one has any "say" in decisions. As can be seen in almost all cases the answer was "no". As mentioned before there is a degree of contradiction in this in that many express little interest in local affairs yet say here that they have too little say in those same affairs. Perhaps the former indifference springs from an earlier disillusionment at "getting involved"?

Question 16 DO YOU BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY SHOULD

Control decision making?	9%
Share decision making with councillors and officials?	78%
Leave decision making to councillors and officials?	13%
Left blank	1%

When asked if they would like a "share in decision making" it is not surprising that most people said, effectively, yes (78%). That 9% wanted unshared control over decision making is an interesting figure- it could indicate that there is a significant group of townspeople who have a very positive idea of who should run their community- themselves.

Question 17 IN WHICH JOB AREA DO YOU BELIEVE YOUNG PEOPLE WILL FIND EMPLOYMENT IN SOUTH DURHAM IN THE FUTURE?

Community ventures	9%
Government training schemes	15%
Shops and foodstores	8%
Public services	3%
Civil service, DHSS, tax	3%
Further education	8%
Reliance on council to bring jobs to area	11%
Manufacturing	9%
Moving to another area	15%
Chemicals	1%
Electronics	4%

Working for themselves 6%

Working for themselves
with support from the
community 6%

Most people ticked one preference (49), but a few ticked two (22) or more (16). The largest single response was the 19 (20% of the whole) who thought the ONLY alternative was to move to another area..

The questionnaires allowed a space for "any comments". Most did not bother, but a few did- 21 out of the 102 returned. In the main these were of a fairly general nature and in some cases seemed to have had little to do with the questions posed by the survey- statements like "too many dogs roaming free".

One recurring notion was that Shildon was divided into "two towns" with New Shildon being the denied section of town. In a sense most, if not all, towns have an area which the locals will regard as being the "wrong side of the tracks". The accuracy of this description often depends, like many things, on the prejudices of the person making it. The desire to categorise the suitability of one's neighbours probably goes back to when Cromagnon man supplanted his Neanderthal predecessors, but its existence needs to be noted.

One commentator said "there are no civic amenities" in New Shildon.

Another asked why New Shildon had no...

"chemist, doctor, or shopping centre...it makes it very difficult for old and disabled".

Yet another asked for more shops "especially in New Shildon". One correspondent went into considerable detail about provision generally and

concluded with...

"another thing that bothers me is all the rest of the town and entrances to the town seem to get tubs of flowers or hanging baskets BUT NOT NEW SHILDON. Have we got a split in the town?"

Another wrote at some length...

"...New Shildon was gutted of houses and sold to private developers who will take years to replace the housing that was lost. Amenities (sic) in New Shildon are virtually nil and overall since Shildon lost its own council the town appears to have gone downhill and furthermore try counting the number of litter bins available for use."

These complaints were often linked to the feeling that there was "not enough activities and entertainment for young people between 14 and 18 years".

There was also an undercurrent of feeling which suggested that the BREL workforce had somehow been an elite and that there had been a kind of family closed shop mentality operating there.

"I could never get a job at the railway works because my father didn't work there. Unfair"...

was one such comment and another said...

"never having worked at 'British Rail Engineering' ...I have never felt the effects of the closure. However the experiences of my family, to try and get help in their working lives here in Shildon have been hampered by not having worked for B/Rail. It seems to one that having worked with B/Rail is a must if one needs help of any sort."

These were echoed in the comment that

"until what jobs there are in Shildon are shared out fairly, giving (sic) to the people most in need, we feel that Shildon youngsters, have a very hard task indeed for their social and economic lives".

Some expressed anger that they had been made redundant in middle age and consequently were not being considered for any new jobs...

"nothing was done by SASDA to find work for the over 50 years group of which quite a number were skilled tradesmen with up to 15 years of working life left."

A few people complained that there were no

"gas, electric shops" and that "the shopping centre left a lot to be desired...lots of people travel elsewhere to do their shopping- a modern trendy shopping centre is certainly required".

Shops would

"save people having to travel to Bishop Auckland to pay bills. Offices where people can go and report defects also rent and rates office."

Some comments were more a general statement.

"Disgusted that the town has again become a depressed area"

"The closure of the Shildon British Rail Engineering was a political decision and not an economical one. 'Something that will not be forgiven'."

Of politicians

"(I) bundle the lot as adventurers...just as many adventurers in trade unions as there are in politics...our biggest mistake was in not electing a Tory- if we had done so the railway works would still be working...most people don't want any responsibility in making decisions. "

"The only way to help our town is by restoring people's faith in Sedgfield District Council as over the years it has badly deteriorated..."

About Shildon's future there was, perhaps predictably, mixed feelings.

"I believe that Shildon is slowly recovering from the tragedy of the closure of the railway workshops. People are gradually finding other jobs, but in a lot of cases at much reduced wage packets."

"Not enough public money being put into attract new industry"

"I know if I'd been younger I'd have emigrated. This country is slowly being sold off to other countries"

Finally "Dear Sirs, In my opinion, instead of job creation schemes, and YTS, full time employment should be offered to people with a proper wage, and all these surveys people do are of no use to Shildon's future at all. Thank you."

These then represent the feelings of those who bothered to make a comment.

The survey can only be seen as an IMPRESSION of the town. It indicates what those who bothered to answer think, fair or unfairly, about their community. Any conclusions need to be accompanied by much cautious qualification. Most surveys can be used to say many things; by the judicious juxtaposition of figures all manner of judgements can appear validated. We will never know what those who did not respond think about the points raised? Perhaps they would have responded to different questions? Perhaps not, but enough did respond to allow some tentative observations about how Shildon sees itself.

It is clear, as mentioned above, that most of the respondents (66%) were above 45 years of age. This inevitably creates problems when trying to assess, for instance, the mobility of the labour force. If the preponderance of the respondents are old it is very likely that they will be disinclined to move to find work. This group would not, perhaps, view innovation or attempts to alter/modify their attitude in the same way as someone in a younger age range. They would also probably belong to an "extended" family and therefore would have to abandon two sets of relatives if they moved to find work. It is interesting, however, to note that despite the age bias of the respondents 15% of those answering Question 17 believed that to find work people must "move to another area". This response went across all ages of respondents and could, perhaps, suggest a sense in the community that, for some, the town has served its purpose and that the future lies elsewhere?

The responses to educational standards (Question 6) is also interesting. Whilst allowing for the age range it is still worrying that 76% of respondents left school at 16. This figure in conjunction with that of only 15% staying until 19 might suggest that a significant proportion of the townpeople will not be prepared for what might well become a more demanding technological future.

The sense of "powerlessness" noted in the response to Question 13 is perhaps not surprising, but that 26% had "no hope for the future" is, possibly, a little more alarming. Even allowing for the small response (20%) this still suggests that a significant minority of people might be suffering some psychological damage. Even if the figure were halved it would still record a worrying percentage who could be at risk.

It is, of course, perfectly possible that the sense of "powerlessness" and sense of "no hope" is specifically linked to being made redundant and not necessarily an indication of a general emotional state. However, it should also be recognised that many people see their work as something which gives them their identity. Whether this is regrettable or not is not at issue, but that it happens- especially in a small community like Shildon- will not make life any easier for the people affected. Remove work as part of a person's identity and it is possible to be left with someone who is unsure what he or she now is; other than a feeling that they are now useless.

As mentioned above many of the respondents appeared to contradict themselves. The very nature of such a questionnaire will inevitably lead to over-simplification which, in turn, can create confusion. Most

surveys, even those involving interviews, operate around wide margins of error. When asked these sorts of questions do people always tell the truth? Do they sometimes tell the questioner (or compiler of the questionnaire) what they think he or she wants rather than what THEY think. Might they not think something different tomorrow? However, allowing for the shortcomings- whatever they might be- such surveys do give SOME indication of what people are thinking when they write. The very fact that four fifths of the people surveyed in Shildon did not bother to respond tells us something if only that they are like most people- too busy, or preoccupied, to be bothered with abstractions like whether they're feeling "powerlessness" or "satisfied".

Such exercises are necessary, however limited, because they at least begin to illuminate whether assumptions about a place, and the people in it, might be reasonable or not. Asking questions- and understanding the answers- is always a subtle process, but how else can things be learnt? Whether the questionee is a person, a community, or country, does not matter, providing the conclusions are placed in an appropriate context and their limitations properly understood. The Shildon survey was no more than a quick "taking of the temperature". It indicated some things, said little about others, but did go some way towards helping understand how the town saw itself in the summer of 1988.

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

SURVEY OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC
CONDITION OF SHILDON UPON THE
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ECONOMIC BASE

SURVEY ONE

INSTRUCTIONS:

WOULD YOU BE KIND ENOUGH TO DO THE FOLLOWING
WHEN ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

- (1) PLEASE WRITE IN QUESTION ONE WHAT YOUR MAIN
OCCUPATION WAS OR IS AND THE NUMBER OF YEARS
IN THAT OCCUPATION
- (2) PLEASE "TICK" THE APPROPRIATE BOXES OF YOUR
CHOICE IN EACH QUESTION
- (3) YOU ARE INVITED TO MAKE COMMENTS OF A SOCIAL
AND ECONOMIC NATURE ON THE MALAISE AND FUTURE
REGENERATION OF SHILDON TOWN BRIEFLY IN THE
SPACE BELOW:



PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION OF YOURSELF:
PLEASE TICK THE APPROPRIATE BOX:

1. YOUR OCCUPATION WAS/IS?

2. THE LENGTH OF TIME YOU HAVE LIVED IN THE AREA?

3. THE NUMBER OF CLOSE RELATIVES YOU HAVE LIVING IN THE AREA?

4. THE AGE BRACKET THAT APPLIES TO YOU

5. WHEN DID YOU FINISH YOUR EDUCATION ?

Please include any education courses over 9 month duration in your assessment.

6. DO YOU TAKE AN INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING ?

IN WHAT WAY WOULD YOU ATTEMPT TO REALISE YOUR POTENTIAL SO AS TO IMPROVE YOUR SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL POSITION ?

EMPLOYMENT

- UP TO 5 YEARS 1
- UP TO 10 YEARS 2
- UP TO 20 YEARS 3
- UP TO 30 YEARS 4
- UP TO 40 YEARS 5
- UP TO 50 YEARS 6

- NONE 1
- UP TO THREE 2
- UP TO SIX 3

- 18 to 30 1
- 31 to 45 2
- 46 to 65 3
- 65 to 100 4

- BEFORE 15 1
- BEFORE 16 2
- BEFORE 19 3
- AFTER 21 4

- POLITICS 1
- THE ENVIRONMENT 2
- BEING A MEMBER OF A GROUP OR PARTY 3

- FURTHER EDUCATION 1
- RETRAIN AND LEARN NEW SKILLS 2
- WAIT TO SEE WHAT DEVELOPS 3
- SATISFIED 4
- SEEK BETTER CAREERS GUIDANCE 5
- SEEK BETTER IN HOUSE TRAINING 6
- WORK FOR YOURSELF 7
- WORK FOR YOURSELF WITH SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY 8

8. WHICH INDUSTRIES HAVE YOU/YOUR PARTNER WORKED IN??

- MINING 1
- CHEMICALS 2
- TEXTILES 3
- RAILWAYS 4
- AGRICULTURE 5
- PUBLIC SERVICES 6
- SHOPS/FOOD INDUSTRY 7

9. IN WHICH INDUSTRIES HAVE YOU/YOUR PARTNER BEEN MADE REDUNDANT?

- MINING 1
- CHEMICALS 2
- TEXTILES 3
- RAILWAYS 4
- AGRICULTURE 5
- PUBLIC SERVICES 6
- SHOPS/FOOD INDUSTRY 7

10. HAVE YOU/YOUR PARTNER EVER HELD A POSITION WITHIN A TRADE UNION IN THE FOLLOWING INDUSTRIES?

- MINING 1
- CHEMICALS 2
- TEXTILES 3
- RAILWAYS 4
- AGRICULTURE 5
- PUBLIC SERVICES 6
- SHOPS/FOOD INDUSTRY 7

11. HAVE YOU/YOUR PARTNER EVER HELD A POSITION ON THE FOLLOWING COUNCILS?

- PARISH 1
- DISTRICT 2
- COUNTY 3

12. HOW WELL ORGANISED WAS THE OPPOSITION TO THE REDUNDANCY/CLOSURE PROGRAMME BY THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT?

- STRONG 1
- MODERATE 2
- WEAK 3

13. IN WHAT MANNER DID YOU ACCEPT THE REDUNDANCY/CLOSURE PROGRAMME AT THAT TIME?

- WITH UNDERSTANDING OF THE FIRMS REASONS AND NEED TO DO SO 1
- WITH DEEP RELUCTANCE BUT FEELINGS OF POWERLESSNESS 2
- WITH FATALISM AND NOT MUCH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE 3

14 : WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION DID YOU FIRST RECEIVE REGARDING REDUNDANCY/CLOSURE ?

- PERSONAL LETTER
- T.V: NEWS
- NEWSPAPER
- TRADE UNION MEETING
- VERBALLY FROM MANAGEMENT

15 . DO YOU BELIEVE YOU HAVE ENOUGH SAY IN THE DECISIONS MADE BY THE FOLLOWING BODIES:

Y^a-yes N--no Please tick your choice

- Y BRITISH RAIL
- N
- Y BRITISH COAL
- N
- Y SHILDON TOWN COUNCIL
- N
- Y DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL
- N
- Y S.A.S.D.A.
- N
- Y SEDGEFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL
- N

16. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY SHOULD

- CONTROL DECISION- MAKING
- SHARE DECISION- MAKING WITH COUNCILLORS AND OFFICIALS
- LEAVE DECISION- MAKING TO COUNCILLORS AND OFFICIALS

17: IN WHICH JOB AREA DO YOU BELIEVE YOUNG PEOPLE WILL FIND EMPLOYMENT IN SOUTH DURHAM IN THE FUTURE ?

- COMMUNITY VENTURES
- GOVERNMENT TRAINING SCHEMES
- SHOPS AND FOODSTORES
- PUBLIC SERVICES
- CIVIL SERVICE ,
- DHSS:TAX
- FURTHER EDUCATION
- RELIANCE ON COUNCIL TO BRING JOBS INTO THE AREA
- MANUFACTURING
- MOVING TO ANOTHER AREA
- CHEMICALS
- ELECTRONICS
- WORKING FOR THEMSELVES
- WORKING FOR THEMSELVES WITH SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY

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