

## INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

**Through the Past Darkly**

ELECTRICITY'S past may be preserved in a museum. The museum subcommittee of the Electricity Council meets next week and may recommend that a museum should be established. But it is still a matter for debate. Since December last year, Mr J. P. Tanner, formerly manager of the Northern District of the London Electricity Board, has been asking the area boards for details of equipment in their possession that might be of historical interest. The response has been mixed, but most of the boards have appointed somebody to keep in touch with Mr Tanner and the information he wants is beginning to come in.

It is not yet clear if there will be enough equipment worth preserving, but if there is—as seems likely—a museum is not the automatic answer. Would there be sufficient public interest in such a venture to make it worthwhile? Where would it be? And how would it be financed? All these questions need to be answered.

The site problem could be solved by using an old power station. There are several in London, for example, that are being phased out, but clearly only one complete generating plant and assorted smaller items could be displayed in the space available, and to allow for more than one complete plant would require a very large site. And if the museum were to be open to the public, it would have to be easily accessible. But the cost of a large site near the centre of a city could be excessive. An alternative method would be the continuation of

Mr Tanner's work of compilation and documentation in considerably greater depth, with detailed descriptions of early power stations and equipment put on record, along with accurate models. Films could be made about old generating plants that are still in use before they are phased out and dismantled.

But the basic question to be resolved is for whom this preservation of gleams from the past is intended—the general public or the specialist. A detailed compact record, with models and film, available to only a limited number of people at any one time, would presumably be a more economical operation than establishing a large and costly museum for a possibly apathetic public. The cost of either project would be high, although the museum would probably prove to be the more expensive of the two, and government aid would almost certainly be needed to make either scheme viable.

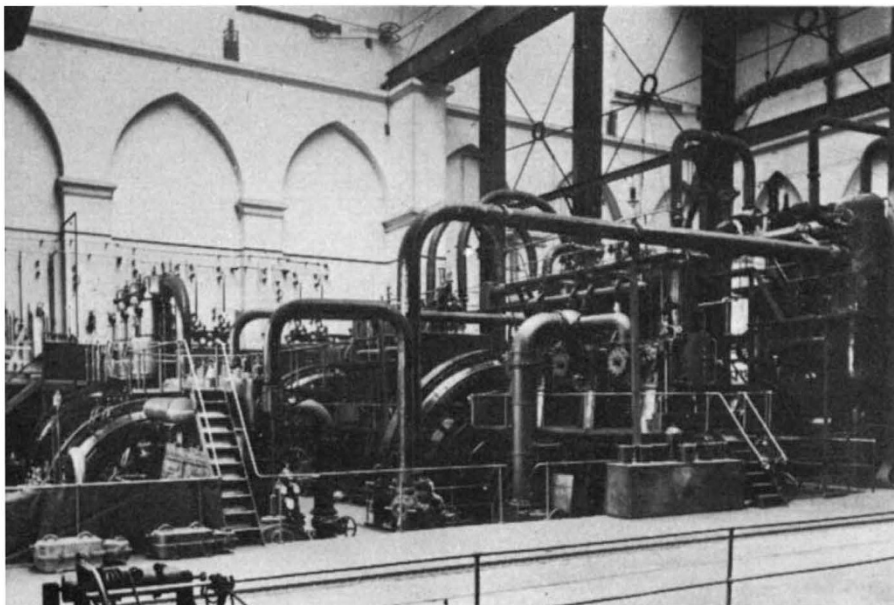
At present Mr Tanner is based at the Science Museum where Mr Brian Bowers, keeper of the electrical section is advising him. They are not alone in their work for since March 1965 members of the Institute of Electrical Engineers History of Technology Group have invited interested members to send in record cards of existing historical pieces to the group who collate the information and offer it to museums. Until a full assessment of the equipment available has been made, and a decision taken as to the precise purpose of preservation, the best method of preserving the past cannot be decided.

**Miscellaneous**

BRITISH production of both plastic materials for packaging and aerosol cans is expected to increase by about 15 per cent during 1971 compared with an increase of 20 per cent in 1970, according to a review carried out by Pira, the research association for the paper and board, printing and packaging industries. But the market for glass containers is expected to go up only by 2.5 per cent to 6,400 million items. Sales of packaging materials in 1970 were worth more than £900 million of which £180 million was accounted for by tinplate containers and £120 million by plastic materials. Plastic prices reached their minimum in 1969 and in some cases (notably PVC polystyrene) have since begun to rise. All packaging prices increased during 1970.

THE mirror blank for the 3.6 metre telescope of the Meudon Observatory has now been delivered to the French National Institute of Astronomy and Geophysics. After two years of grinding and polishing, the mirror will form the main part of the largest telescope in Europe, probably in the Pyrenees. Although the new telescope will be a little smaller than the Anglo-Australian telescope (144-inch compared with 155-inch) and that to be installed at Cerro Tololo by the Kitt Peak Observatory (158-inch), the French mirror is, like those of these other modern instruments, made from "Cer-Vit", the material with a low coefficient of thermal expansion that has brought telescopes of 300 inches or more within the range of practical propositions.

THE Council for Scientific Policy will be joined for the new term beginning in September by Dr S. L. Bragg, Vice-Chancellor elect of Brunel University, lately a research director at Rolls-Royce. The new recruits also include Dr J. G. Collingwood, director of research at Unilever Limited, and Professor Marie Jahoda, professor of social psychology at the University of Sussex. Professor Jahoda should help to introduce the Council for Scientific Policy to psychoanalytical ways of looking at problems, but it may be of more immediate value that in private life she is married to Mr Austen Albu, MP, long a stalwart of the Labour Party's science policy. After all, as everybody knows, the council will need all the political aid it can muster to help it through the months ahead, when Lord Rothschild's pronouncements may be expected to make up in daring for the way in which the promise of them has helped to justify prevarication in Whitehall.



These Ferranti Alternators (10,000 volt, 1 megawatt), with a 35 foot flywheel ring, and with armature and crankshaft weighing 225 tons, were installed in Deptford Power Station for the London Electricity Supply Corporation at the turn of the century by Ferranti.