

**Configuring Conservation:**  
An Actor-Network Theory Approach To  
Studying The Historic Built Environment

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to assess if actor-network theory (Latour, 2005) is capable of providing an alternative method for looking at the redevelopment of the historic built environment. It is argued that although the historic built environment enjoys a great deal of public attention the relationship between buildings and the people that inhabit them has not been extensively studied. Examination of the literature suggests that most previous studies have either focused on the social elements or the physical elements in isolation and have failed to consider how one influences the other. It is proposed that actor-network theory may be able to provide an alternative ontological perspective that bridges this social-physical divide and allows the influence of the relationships between the human and the non-human elements to be taken into consideration.

In order to assess this, the thesis utilises a single case study that focuses on the redevelopment of the former brewery at Henley upon Thames in South Oxfordshire. The events leading to the closure of the brewery and the subsequent redevelopment of the site into two very different uses form the basis of the case study. Whilst initially these events are narrated using a traditional chronological format, the use of such a format hides the complex nature of the relationships that enable the case.

Actor-network theory therefore provides a means of exposing some of this complexity and as a result can be regarded a valid methodology for the consideration of the historic built environment by transcending temporal boundaries and aligning local interests with global events. The thesis shows that the actor-network perspective allows the redevelopment of the historic built environment to be considered in a manner that demonstrates the complex interdependent relationships between the physical and the social dimensions.

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Figures</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction To The Thesis</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Background To The Research.....	6
1.3 Initial Areas Of Research.....	11
1.4 The Focus Of The Study .....	14
1.5 The Research Outline.....	16
<b>Chapter Two: Literature</b> .....	<b>23</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	23
2.2. Buildings As Repositories Of Collective Memory.....	27
2.3. The Development Of Conservation .....	35
2.4 Other Social Considerations.....	51
2.5 How The Physical Shapes The Social.....	57
2.6 Conclusion.....	62
<b>Chapter Three: A Discussion Of The Method Of Inquiry</b> .....	<b>64</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	64
3.2 The Initial Proposal.....	67
3.3 Doubts.....	69
3.4 The Pilot Study.....	71
3.5 Changes Following The Pilot.....	72

3.6 Case Study Selection .....	74
3.7 An Argument For A Single Case Emerges .....	79
3.8 A Change of Approach .....	82
3.9 What to Do With It .....	88
<b>Chapter Four: A Case Study Of The Henley Brewery 1812 To 2002 .....</b>	<b>94</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	94
4.2 Brakspear's New Street Brewery.....	95
4.3 Brakspear Brewers In The Twentieth Century.....	99
4.4 A Report On The Supply Of Beer .....	104
4.5 The Office Proposal.....	109
4.6 Preferential Beer Duty .....	114
<b>Chapter Five: A Case Study, The Henley Brewery 2002 To 2005 .....</b>	<b>120</b>
5.1 The Sale Of The Henley Brewery.....	120
5.2 Barriers To Entry .....	124
5.3 How The Brewery Was Sold.....	132
5.4 The Old Henley Brewery Company Proposal .....	138
5.6 Who Would Build A Hotel In A Brewery?.....	144
5.7 The Hotel Conversion.....	149
5.8 A Contested Space .....	171
5.9 The Development .....	177
5.10 A Practical Problem Of Parking .....	178
5.11 Disagreement And Negotiation.....	184
5.12 The Recommendation .....	190
5.13 The Decision .....	192
5.14 Post Approval .....	194

5.15 Conclusion.....	196
<b>Chapter Six: An Alternative View Of The Development Process .....</b>	<b>198</b>
6.1 Introduction.....	198
6.2 Actor-Network Theory.....	206
6.3 Buildings and Networks .....	218
6.4 Boundaries .....	219
6.5 The Application Of Actor-Network Theory .....	221
6.6 Problematisation And Interesement.....	221
6.7 Enrolment And Mobilisation.....	226
6.8 Conclusion.....	231
<b>Chapter Seven: Composition and Configuration.....</b>	<b>233</b>
7.1 Introduction.....	233
7.2 The Material Actors' Influence In Configuring Identity .....	236
7.3 Instability And Dissolution.....	241
7.4 The Influence Of The (Past) Material On The (Present) Social .....	243
7.5 Roles And Stability .....	247
7.6 Local And Global .....	249
7.7 Satellites And Subsidiaries .....	257
7.8 Reconfiguration And Resurgence.....	260
7.9 The Buildings as Actors.....	262
7.10 The Hotel Conversion.....	268
7.11 The Mineral Water Factory And New Brewery Yard .....	271
7.12 Approval .....	275
7.13 Conclusion.....	279

<b>Chapter 8 Conclusions .....</b>	<b>282</b>
8.1 Introduction.....	282
8.2 Answering The Questions Posed In Chapter Three .....	285
8.3 The Application Of Actor-Network Theory To The Study Of Conservation Led Redevelopment .....	288
8.4 Actor-Network Theory In Relation To Policy And Listing .....	292
8.5 The Implication For Practice.....	294
8.6 Limitations Of The Study .....	295
8.7 Further Possibilities For Research .....	296
8.8 The Final Conclusion.....	298
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>301</b>

## Table of Figures

Figure 1: Extract From 1879 Ordnance Survey Showing The Brewery ....	98
Figure 2: Ordnance Survey extract showing outline of site for sale .....	122
Figure 3: Old Brewery Yard East Elevation Source: Hotel Architect.....	128
Figure 4: Old Brewery Yard North Elevation Source: Hotel Architect .....	128
Figure 5: Old Brewery Yard West Elevation Source: Hotel Architect.....	129
Figure 6: Old Brewery Yard South Elevation Source: Hotel Architect.....	129
Figure 7: Courtyard, North and West Elevations. Source: Hotel Architect .....	130
Figure 8: Courtyard, North and East Elevations. Source: Hotel Architect .....	130
Figure 9: Site Plan Showing Extent of Planning Applications .....	139
Figure 10: Plan of the Proposed Development.....	143
Figure 11: Inside the Main Brewhouse, Source: Hotel Architect.....	158
Figure 12: Malthouse Interior Source Hotel Architect .....	161
Figure 13: Malthouse Interior: Source Hotel Architect .....	162
Figure 14: Billiard Room (previously the Malthouse): Source Hotel du Vin .....	162
Figure 15: Exterior 84 New Street, Following Conversion to the Hotel Reception, Source: I Elsmore.....	165
Figure 16: Interior 84 New Street, Brewery Reception before Conversion, Source: Hotel Architect.....	166
Figure 17: Interior 84 New Street, Hotel Reception after Conversion, Source: Hotel du Vin Brochure.....	166
Figure 18: The Mineral Water Factory, source; I Elsmore .....	172



Figure 19: Access to the New Yard (source Daniel Watney)..... 173

Figure 20: Loading Dock (source Daniel Watney) ..... 174

Figure 21: Cask Store and Turntable (source Daniel Watney) ..... 174

Figure 22: Sketch of Proposed Residential Development (source SODC)  
..... 177

Figure 23: Construction of the Service Access. March 2005 (source: I  
Elsmore)..... 181

Figure 24: Artist Impression of Live/Work Unit Interior (source: The  
Developer)..... 186

Figure 25: Punters Flow Diagram of the Development Process: Source  
Punter (1990:13) ..... 200

# Chapter One: Introduction To The Thesis

## 1.1 Introduction

In 2003 the popular comedian, writer and broadcaster Griff Rhys Jones presented the BBC television series *Restoration*. Subtitled 'Discovering Britain's Hidden Architectural Treasures', the series took the 'reality television' format tried and tested on 'wannabe' pop stars and applied it to the historic built environment. Every week viewers of the programme were:

*"Invited to vote (for one of) three restoration candidates in each of the ten programmes."* (2003:11)

Based on the viewer's votes, ten finalists were selected from the regional entries. A proportion of the money raised by charging a premium to the voting viewers went towards creating a prize fund to be awarded to the winning project. During each programme the conservation experts (an architect and surveyor) visited the selected buildings and suggested why it was important to conserve the building as well as providing a professional appraisal of the buildings structural condition. The two experts also met with members of the public who outlined proposals for the future of the buildings. In order to be included in the series the buildings were required to have a future proposed use that allowed them to have a 'self-supporting' element to ensure their future maintenance and survival

The thirty neglected 'architectural treasures' that were featured on the programme were all selected from the English Buildings at Risk

Register or the equivalent lists held by the other home nations. Compiled by English Heritage, the Scottish Civic Trust, the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society and CADW, the heritage organisation for Wales, the registers list historic buildings that according to English Heritage:

*“are in poor to very bad condition, but a few in fair condition are also included, usually because they have become functionally redundant or are vulnerable, making their future uncertain”* (English Heritage, 2008)

The initial series was successful and generated considerable public and media interest. The winner of the first series was Manchester's Victoria Baths (Listed Grade II), which are an ornate example of the Victorian concern for raising standards of public hygiene (Wilkinson, 2003). The building was the recipient of extensive local media support that encouraged the Manchester public to ring in and vote for the baths. That the baths won the restoration final, was as much a product of the local medias ability to orchestrate the parochial support and convert it in to votes than any architectural superiority over the other contenders in the series. Following its success as the winning contender the project was awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £3million to which a further £500,000 was added from the restoration prize fund raised through the viewers telephone vote charges (B.B.C., 2008).

Irrespective of the architectural merits of the winning building, the programme was successful and two further series were broadcast.

Subsequent series also benefited from extensive viewing figures and importantly voters, demonstrating the level of interest that the public at both the local and national level have in the historic built environment. This level of interest is also evidenced through the membership figures of the National Trust. Unquestionably the leading conservation-based charity, the National Trust has a membership of nearly 3.5 million people, equivalent to the population of Britain's four largest cities after London (Vidal, 2007) making it one of the most influential public interest groups in the country.

The strength of public interest in the built environment is a reflection of the ways in which the buildings that surround us influence our daily lives. This influence is demonstrated in a multiplicity of ways determining how we work, where we live and how we spend our leisure time. This complicated and multifaceted interaction between people and the structures that surround them raises buildings beyond simply being inert structures. Positioned at the fore of the backdrop on which the social world is projected, buildings signify the relationship that exists between humans and their environment (Brand, 1994). Buildings are not only representative of the decisions taken about how we construct things, but about how we house technology, utilise space and employ resources. Understanding this relationship provides a challenge for social science research, a challenge that is intensified when the buildings at the centre of the research are part of the historic built environment, bringing factors such as heritage, culture and identity in to consideration.

The historic environment in Great Britain covers structures belonging to many different types from great antiquity through to almost the present day:

*“Castles and Churches, houses great and small, theatres and railway stations, shops and industrial buildings – Britain is incredibly rich in buildings of all sorts”* Wilkinson (2003: 11)

With the recognition that ordinary, everyday and functional buildings should be considered worthy of preservation alongside more monumental, grand and impressive structures, Wilkinson effectively illustrates the shift from the conservation movement’s elitist roots (Delafons, 1997) to engage a populist and inclusive audience. English Heritage the body set up by the Government with responsibility for the conservation of the built environment in England, describes this change in the following manner in its annual report:

*“The past decade has seen a revolution in heritage. The revolution has involved both a step-change in the funding available for those who care for heritage, and a radical new understanding of how historic assets can be used to benefit people and places all over the country”* (English Heritage, 2004:4)

The growing interest in the conservation of the built environment has been met by an increase in the type of buildings that are being conserved. The early conservationists were primarily interested in

monumental public buildings or buildings of great antiquity. Since these narrow beginnings the field of building conservation has widened. Not only are a wider range of building types now considered worthy of preservation but the time line has also been extended to include more recent buildings. The recognition of the merits of Georgian buildings, considered too modern by the early conservationists, was followed by a concern for the loss of Victorian constructions. A gradual acceptance of more modern constructions followed until, by the end of the twentieth century, the listing system had expanded to include significant examples of post-war architecture such as Sheffield's Park Hill housing estate.

With the inclusion of buildings from the Victorian era came a growing concern for preserving examples of vernacular and industrial architecture alongside the more monumental edifices, in order to represent the industrial nature of the age. Yet industrial buildings more than any other structures are built to serve a particular purpose, with "*spaces, physical structures and designs... produced to satisfy the requirements of specific functions*" (Ashworth, 1991: 1). This creates an intimate relationship between the physical structures and the socially organised processes that they were designed to house. This interconnection can make it difficult to find satisfactory alternative uses for some industrial buildings, particularly uses that would satisfy the requirements of a 'conservation plan' approach (Gard'ner, 2007) which advocates ensuring that any future use should be self sustainable.

## 1.2 Background To The Research

The inspiration behind this research stems from experience of the difficulties in reconciling the preservation of the built industrial form and changing socio-economic needs, which was gained in the east Staffordshire town of Burton upon Trent. The built environment of Burton was, and continues to be, dominated by the buildings of the brewing industry. Often historically overlooked in favour of the heavy industries of the industrial revolution, brewing was one of the first industries to make the leap from a cottage industry to one of organised mass production. Initially limited to serve local markets, advances in brewing and transport technology in the mid 1800s saw phenomenal changes in the form and structure of the industry (Brown, 2003, Pearson, 1999). At the forefront of the brewing revolution was the town of Burton upon Trent. Brewing had been established in the town since the Middle Ages and the breweries benefited from a good natural water supply. When the railway arrived in Burton in 1839 the Burton brewers were quick to seize on the availability of new markets in industrial towns where drinking the lighter coloured Burton Ales became popular.

The industry dominated the Burton townscape. Barnard, the most complete source of information on the British breweries of the nineteenth Century provides this description of Burton as seen from the hill above the town:

*“Nothing can be more interesting than the view of the beer city from the hill [Stapenhill] with its tall chimneys, mammoth buildings and*

*numerous spires, surrounded as it is by most beautiful country through which meanders the silver Trent with its many branches giving a pleasing and cool beauty to the scene.” (Barnard, 1889b)*

A hundred years later the view of the town from the same hill still suggests the dominance of the brewing industry. Yet, although some still survive, Barnard’s tall chimneys and mammoth buildings are now subsidiary to modern metal and glass scientifically controlled factory buildings in which modern global brewing conglomerates produce millions of gallons of keg beer and lager. Amongst, and often incorporated into, these new buildings the redundant buildings of one of the great Victorian industries still stand. The post-war rationalisation of the brewing industry was forced not only by technological and organisational change within the industry but also by changes in society in general. The combination of these changes left Burton’s town centre with a large number of imposing yet obsolete buildings.

Imposing though some of these buildings were, they provide an obvious contrast to the newer brew factories. Designed to house what are now redundant production processes, the size and scale of the buildings make the buildings difficult to find alternative uses for, a problem compounded by the high cost associated with converting such distinctive buildings. In a more prosperous area a greater variety of alternative uses may have been available but the town had been economically challenged not only by the restructuring of the brewing industry but also by the



collapse, in the 1980s, of the mining industry in the neighbouring south Derbyshire coalfield (S.D.D.C, 2007). The Labour-led local authority recognised the importance of the town in the history of UK brewing and tried to utilise it as an asset and had at one point provided joint backing for what proved to be an unsuccessful brewing museum (see Elsmore, 2004). However the authority's main concern was to improve the areas economic prosperity and this took priority over and above the sympathetic conservation of its historic building stock.

The fermentation technique favoured by Burton's brewers, where a number of wooden casks were linked by troughs in what is referred to as a union set, required more horizontally orientated buildings than the tower structures used for brewing in other parts of the country (Pearson 1999). Barnard offered this description of the size of the union room at the Bass New Brewery:

*"This magnificent chamber will seat 2000 persons, and contains nearly a mile of avenues between the unions. There are here to be seen no less than 2,548 unions averaging four barrels each, ranged in nine avenues one way and five the other"*(Barnard, 1889a).

This meant that not only were the buildings more closely massed than in some other brewery towns but they were of a size and shape almost unique to Burton. Despite the contribution these buildings made to the townscape and the contribution that through them Burton had made to the brewing industry, their preservation could be interpreted as an

impediment to the regeneration of the town. This frequently left the Council's conservation officer in a state of disagreement with the elected members, constantly trying to juggle the conflicting demands of encouraging economic growth without destroying the remains of the town's industrial heritage.

The issues apparent in Burton highlight a problem that runs throughout the field of conservation. There may be strong public support for the conservation of the historic built environment which may be sustained through conservation policies that encourage building preservation and acknowledge the importance of these structures to local communities and the collective understanding of the past. However these policies, no matter how diligent and motivated the conservation officers applying them may be, are always at risk of being compromised by alternative or conflicting interests.

The permission for conversion of Burton's Heritage Brewery and the neighbouring Goat Maltings (Elsmore, 2004) followed changes throughout the Council. The departure of the conservation officer to a more affluent and sympathetic borough council was accompanied by a change in the Council's political leadership. Both of these changes led to a shift in the manner in which policies were applied, indicating that the application of policy was not only influenced by local economic circumstances but also by those responsible for their implementation. The continued conservation of the historic built environment seemed as dependent upon the social

characteristics of those charged with its stewardship as with any innate physical characteristics that the building offered. From this it became apparent that an investigation of the social characteristics and links that underpin and support the implementation of conservation policy would offer an interesting and relevant field of research.

A body of work researching the consistent application of conservation policies was completed by Hobson (2000) for his PhD. Later published as a book (2004), Hobson's research indicated that the implementation of policy was subject to interpretation between different local authorities and also within individual local authorities. Hobson also suggested that as a result of further reductions in funding and increased work loads in the (public sector) planning profession, inconsistencies in policy interpretation between individual officers would be likely to increase.

The importance of the individual and the influence they may have on the application of policy suggested by Hobson is also supported by Townsend and Pendlebury (1999). Both sets of authors make a claim for the significance of the individual within the process. However, they also both imply that the factors that determine the involvement and the motivation of the individual have not been adequately researched. It is therefore this aspect, the significance of the individual, which this research intends to investigate.

### 1.3 Initial Areas Of Research

In setting out to investigate the role of the individual in the regeneration of the historic built environment the research aims to move away from the policy based approach that has been a characteristic of earlier research. An examination of some of the literature relating to conservation of the built environment (see Chapter Two) suggested that the role of the individual had largely been ignored. Yet experience of Burton as described above suggested that individual attitudes were a contributory factor in the way that conservation led regeneration projects occurred in practice.

Having identified this as a gap in the existing knowledge, the initial aim of the research was to address this gap by asking:

**How do the actions and attitudes of individuals affect decisions made relating to the historic built environment?**

In order to do this the research needed to identify the principal actors involved, assessing what it was they were trying to achieve, discovering what their involvements or attachments were and explore the strategies they used to enable them to achieve their goals or ends. The answers to these questions would allow conclusions to be drawn about the manner in which individuals operating within a redevelopment project operated and what motivated them. By examining the strategies they used it would be possible to see how the redevelopment process is influenced by the actions of individuals.

As can be seen from Chapter Two writing on conservation seems to be directed towards either the physical attributes of a building or the effect that the building has on the social world in which it stands. The role of the individual within the process is one that has mostly been ignored yet the outcomes of human actions are influenced by the way that individual actors choose to behave. Therefore any consideration of the wider outcomes of actions in a social world must also take into account the way that individual actors interpret events based on their own social meanings, motives, attitudes and beliefs (Gill and Johnson, 1997).

Building conservation is in many ways an emotive subject, and the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of those involved in the field always seemed irrevocably tied to the structures in question. The nature of the relationship between buildings and those that inhabit them means that the physical-social divide that is flagged up in the following chapter is a false dichotomy. Therefore any research that seeks to investigate the manner in which individuals influence the process needs also to consider the influence that buildings may have on the humans.

In order to do this it was decided (for reasons introduced in section 1.5 and then covered in more depth in Chapter Three) to look at the redevelopment process through an actor-network theory perspective. This unconventional methodological stance, which is discussed in depth in Chapter Six, provides the opportunity to construct an alternative narrative of the redevelopment of a listed building. By awarding equal significance

to human and non-human elements it is possible to examine the complex interlinking nature of humans and their material surroundings and cut across the physical/social dichotomy that it is a consistent feature of previous studies. Previous applications of actor-network theory to the built environment and the development process had been limited. The key examples being Jenkins' (2002) study of 11 rue de Conservatoire and an examination of Glasgow tower blocks (Jacobs et al., 2007). Both of these influential and interesting studies highlight the ability of actor-network theory as a methodology to provide a different perspective to the mainstream approach of looking at buildings and what happens to them.

Therefore the decision to use actor-network theory to look at a conservation-orientated project had the potential to offer a different view of the process, one not available through other methodologies. This meant that as well as considering the original question about:

**How do the actions and attitudes of individuals affect decisions made relating to the historic built environment?**

the research also asked questions regarding the suitability of actor-network theory to examine the historic built environment, as follows:

**Is actor-network theory a suitable methodology for this type of research?**

**What are the advantages of this approach?**

Before any of these questions could be answered it was necessary to find a suitable case study to apply the methodology to.

## 1.4 The Focus Of The Study

As mentioned above, understanding the relationship between humans and the historic built environment provides a challenge for social science research. Part of this challenge arises from the historic built environment providing such a wide and seemingly increasing area of study to draw upon. As a wide-ranging study was beyond the resources available to this particular project, it was decided to focus the research upon one particular aspect of the built environment. Therefore the subject of this work is the redevelopment of the Brakspear's brewery site at Henley on Thames in Oxfordshire. The rationale behind this is explored below and in more depth in Chapter Three.

Exposure to the problems of regenerating brewery buildings at Burton suggested that this type of building would make an interesting subject area. Brewery buildings despite being an integral part of our townscapes and a visible contribution to our culture (Pearson, 1999) have received very little academic attention. Yet almost all of England's major towns have at some point had a local brewery. Even as late as 1910, when the industry had already passed its peak in terms of number of firms in operation, there were still 4,512 common or wholesale brewers in the market (Wilson, 1990). While many of the industry's buildings have already been lost, a number of those that remain are now considered to have significant architectural or contextual merit to be added to the lists of protected buildings.

The extension of the conservation agenda to include structures from the recent past, vernacular buildings and examples from what could be termed as our industrial heritage is not without problems. For instance, what may be considered significant and important to those with a particular interest in a building type, industry or area may seem mundane and ordinary or an intrusive eyesore ripe for demolition to those without a similar interest. Even if there is consensus between different parties about the value of retaining either a specific building or building type, this is still often accompanied by issues of financing ongoing conservation and maintenance. These and similar issues have been the subject of previous studies which are considered in Chapter Two.

The issues of finance and appreciation are problems common to many conservation projects but are especially relevant to industrial buildings and breweries in particular. The link between form and function or the social and physical is emphasised in the construction of nineteenth century breweries. Even after the introduction of steam power the buildings took on a height and scale designed to make best use of gravity in the process. The external size of the building often hides an internal space divided by numerous mezzanine floors at heights dictated by the brewing vessels rather than by any notion of human height. This combination of external size and internal design increases the difficulty of finding suitable post-industrial uses for listed breweries without resorting to unsympathetic reconstruction or blatant façadism.



## 1.5 The Research Outline

The research project is an attempt to examine the influences introduced above. It is the story of the research, how it happened and the information gleaned from it that provides the subject of this thesis. The following chapter (Chapter 2) sets the context for the study with an examination of some of the conservation literature. This chapter deals with the way in which the historic built environment has come to be considered since the start of the conservation movement. Much of the previous writing on conservation appears to separate the social elements of the subject, which were the main concern of this project, from the physical elements of buildings. It is this social and physical dichotomy, that is brought to the fore in Chapter Two, that underpins the approach throughout the rest of the thesis.

It became apparent however that the maintenance of this division between the physical and the social would lead to a study that would fail to answer the problems that it set out to address. The implications of this for the research are considered in Chapter Three, which discusses the approach to the project and the way in which the research was undertaken. This chapter explains the decision to move away from the way in which the research was initially conceived utilising Silverman's (1974) social action approach to focus upon the human actors. The main fault with this human-centric approach is that it assumes a completely passive role for the physical non-human components of the study. To fully understand the nature of the decisions made and the decision making

process and to avoid further reinforcing the existing dichotomy, it is necessary to step beyond the boundaries applied by conventional sociology and take into account the influence of the buildings on that social world that determines the existence of those buildings.

That buildings, and other material objects, should be awarded influence is not as abstract as it may initially seem. In reality the built environment is not static as it is constantly changing to accommodate the unfolding needs of the social world (Adams, 1994). In doing so it is more than just a backdrop upon which the actions of others are staged and is actually composed of very real multi-dimensional physical forms that, through their tangible existence in the present, are the lasting evidence of what would otherwise be forgotten decisions made in the past (Brand, 1994). The actions taken by humans in the present are consequently constrained or enabled by these previous decisions in the same way that the decisions made in the present inevitably affect the future.

This implies that the social and physical aspects of the historic built environment, that in the literature examined in Chapter two are seen as divided, are in reality indivisible. This inescapable realisation meant that a different methodology needed to be explored, that allowed the role and influence of the material or non-human actors that are an innate part of the decision making process to be considered alongside the human actors. In order to do this it was decided that the research would refer to the ideas expressed through the actor network theory approach (Callon, 1986,

Latour, 1999a, Law, 1999). This methodology and its implications and use within this body of research are described in full in Chapter Six.

A qualitative approach to research such as actor-network theory is best approached through using a case study. This required the selection of a case or cases drawn from the 371,191 listed buildings in England (English Heritage, 2004). With such an array of potential case studies available there needed to be a clear rationale to the way that the case was selected. The decisions concerning the case study selection are discussed in Chapter Three as are the methods employed in support of the chosen methodology.

Having set the context for the study and explained the rationales for how the study was conducted, Chapter Four then moves into a description of the chosen case, the Brakspear brewery. The use of actor network theory provides the potential to follow the threads of the research infinitely (Latour, 2005), identifying links between actors that cross temporal and spatial dimensions. However such an extensive approach is beyond the limitations of even the most highly resourced research projects. In reality there must be some boundaries imposed (Strathern, 1996) that set the research within some kind of definable limitations. The spatial boundaries to this research were easily set but the temporal extent of the research required a greater degree of deliberation. With the study focus on the historic built environment it was necessary to consider where the case study narrative should begin and end. It became obvious during the

fieldwork that a focus limited to the current development would fail to expose the 'grain' of the story and promote the human aspects at the expense of the physical. Having therefore decided that it was necessary to include a historical perspective upon the case the decision then became about how far back to trace the story. The final decision was that the most pertinent issues regarding the case could be traced as far back as the late 1700s when the most recent phase of ownership began. Chapter Four therefore chronicles the operational history of the site from the late 1700s through to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century when the decision was taken to cease operations and find alternative owners and a new use for the buildings.

Following the decision to end the traditional use of the buildings, the site underwent a period of redevelopment and Chapter Five concentrates upon this period, from 2002 when brewery operations ceased through to 2005 when the main brewery buildings reopened following conversion into a luxury hotel. This chapter deals with how the redevelopment of the whole site was structured and examines the manner in which the application for planning consent progressed. Although the eventual use of actor-network theory influences the information that is introduced, the intention is that Chapters Four and Five follow a traditional linear narrative. This narrative first and foremost presents the information in chronological order, with event A being followed by event B which in turn leads to the occurrence of C. This provides a simple and easy to follow version of the story but one that fails to illuminate the true complexity of the relationships

present between the actors. Without an understanding of this hidden complexity it is difficult to appreciate the influence that these actors have upon the redevelopment of the historic built environment.

Although criticised in Chapter Three and despite its continuing reinforcement of the social-physical divide considered in Chapter Two, the use of this simplistic linear approach to the narrative has some merit. Examining the case through an actor-network lens exposes the previously hidden complex inter-relationships between the human and material actors involved in the case. However, launching straight into a complex multi-relational description without awareness of the general direction of the redevelopment would prove to be overly confusing, with the result that while it might be possible to trace the manner in which the different actors interrelate it may not be possible to see how these individual configurations combine.

Having established the story-line in Chapters Four and Five using a linear approach to set out the progress of events, Chapter Six takes a number of the key occurrences and relationships and starts to examine them from an actor-network perspective. The first part of the chapter introduces the reader to actor-network theory and sets out the terms of reference used to explore the case. The final sections discuss how Callon's (1986) phases of translation can be used to show how actors come together and form into actor-networks. Thus employing this

perspective provides an insight into the previously concealed complex and intertwined relationships present in the case.

Chapter Seven moves beyond identifying the phases of translation and examines how, through the concept of generalized symmetry, actor-network theory offers an alternative ontological perspective to view the relationship between the physical and the social. Again examples drawn from Chapters Four and Five provide a means of demonstrating how it is possible and necessary that both human and non-human elements are awarded equal status.

Having defined and applied actor-network theory to the chosen case study in Chapters Six and Seven, Chapter Eight moves on to discuss the implications of taking this approach to the study of the historic built environment. One of the aims of the research was to assess if actor-network theory could provide an alternative to the traditional linear narrative usually employed in the consideration of conservation-led regeneration projects. The success of using actor-network theory as an approach is discussed in this part of the thesis. It asks questions about whether it is a viable approach: what is it that makes it viable and what are the advantages that can be gleaned from this rather than the more usual method of narrative demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five. An issue with the literature discussed in Chapter Two was the division of the social aspects of the subject from the physical characteristics of the buildings being studied. The decision to adopt actor-network theory was therefore

taken in an attempt to bridge the gap between these two aspects of the subject area. The success of the methodology in achieving this is also therefore examined in this chapter.

Studies of the historic built environment, particularly examinations of conservation-led redevelopment are inevitably influenced by the application of policy. Hobson's study of conservation planning policy and its implantation was influential in the original design of this research project. One of the areas addressed in Chapter Eight is how using actor-network theory as a methodology to explore conservation-led regeneration projects may alter perceptions of the role of planning policy. Related to this is the key concept of placing buildings on the statutory list and whether looking at listed buildings through this methodological lens may offer an alternative perspective to the value of listing.

Any research project is subject to limitations and those that constrained or challenged the conclusions found in this thesis will be considered in Chapter Eight. Following this, and partially in answer to these constraints, some recommendations for the further development of the work will be made. The final chapter concludes by considering whether actor-network theory is a suitable methodology for examining conservation-led redevelopment in the historic built environment.

## Chapter Two: Literature

### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter One introduced the general theme of the thesis and set out the reasoning behind the study and an outline for the progression through the thesis. Having established the form that the thesis will follow, the function of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the key conceptual ideas drawn from existing literature that underpin the research. There are two main strands of literature that relate to the research: literature from the field of conservation and that concerning actor-network theory. The application of actor-network theory as a methodology for the study of building conservation provides its own challenges that relate to the richness of the description and the final form of the narrative, and therefore will be explained in greater depth in Chapter Six. This chapter is therefore used to explore the key topics arising from the conservation literature.

These topics are the central considerations of the research project and set the scene for the adoption of actor-network theory as an alternative but appropriate methodology. By examining the literature, it appears that throughout much of the existing work on historic building conservation there is a distinct divide between the social elements involved and the material or physical objects that are the subject of the conservation initiatives. The choice of a brewery as the central facet of the research, for reasons introduced in Chapter One and discussed further in Chapter Three, requires that certain interlinked themes are considered.



Although applied here to a distinct individual building, these themes are drawn from studies relating to a diverse range of building types in a variety of situations and locations.

*“The historic environment embraces all the works of man and has evolved over thousands of years. Historic buildings are among the more obvious features and England is exceptionally rich in these.”*

(PPG 15.6.1)

This statement taken from Planning Policy Guidance 15 The Historic Built Environment, is as applicable to the brewery that was chosen as the case study at the centre of this thesis as any other historic building. As the statement suggests Britain is rich in historic buildings. Of these, it is frequently public or monumental buildings that have received the majority of the attention and the more mundane buildings that surround them, particularly the industrial ones that have not received the same level of interest. Yet they have as significant an impact on the townscape of the country as any other form of construction. This is particularly true of eighteenth century breweries with their distinctive form and scale and located close to their market, at the very heart of the communities they supplied.

The brewery that is the central subject of this thesis is just one example taken from the rich wealth of buildings with which all of Britain is endowed. This particular building, the selection of which as a case study is described in the next chapter, provides an example of the way in which the built environment evolves, as suggested in the quote from PPG 15 above.

The evolutionary process of the case study is charted in Chapter Four. The fact that buildings do adapt and change over time despite their perceived permanence, is a subject covered by Brand (1994) and is central to the thesis as it is the way in which that this change occurs that underpins the research. This change occurs because the built environment is neither static nor permanent, but in reality is the scene of constant re-configuration as the urban landscape adapts and adjusts to the changing social worlds that occupy it. The adaptation of old buildings for new uses and the demolition of obsolete building stock for redevelopment (Adams, 1994) (Forsyth, 2007) are just two characteristics of the ever changing nature of townscapes. This process of demolition or adaptation has been carried out through repetitive cycles of development since the earliest times. With the intense pressure on development land in modern Britain these cycles are more regulated than ever. Part of this regulation has been an increased willingness by government, operated through planning control, to ensure that the significant portion of the existing building stock which is considered as having some architectural or historical significance (Walker, 1995) is conserved for future generations. But this raises questions about what is it that is being conserved and for whom.

The first part of this chapter looks at the way that the social characteristics of a building can be relegated in favour of the physical elements and makes the point that it is these physical characteristics that are instrumental to how developers approach conservation-led

redevelopment opportunities. This need for an instrumental profit orientated approach can be accused of ignoring the social roles that these buildings may take as repositories of collective memory (Hareven and Lagenbach, 1981) and the embodiment of decision-making (Brand, 1994).

Following this the chapter addresses the way that the conservation movement has grown from its elitist roots concerned primarily with monumental buildings (Delafons, 1997) to include more ordinary structures and in particular examples of industrial architecture such as the Henley Brewery. A key issue of this wide view of the historic built environment is the need to find what PPG 15 again describes as “a creative approach to finding new uses for historic buildings”, a view which once more strengthens the tie between the physical aspects of the protected form and the social elements necessary to support their long term survival.

The nature of this economically instrumental relationship between the human and the material is not without tension at its interface (Pendlebury, 2002). The next section of the chapter examines the nature of this interface, and draws attention to the manner in which conservation policies are applied and the role of individual actors in their application. The final section of the chapter acknowledges that a body of literature already exists that considers how the built environment is considered by social scientists. Referring to the work of Kim Dovey (2008) and Nan Ellin (1999) this section indicates that the interaction between the physical and

the social is complex and that the built environment is capable of determining the manner in which the humans that occupy it react and behave in many different ways.

The chapter concludes by reiterating that much of the literature reviewed, constructs a division between the physical aspects of conservation and the social or human aspects, but that despite this divide the historic built environment is composed of both aspects. Therefore if we are to study the manner in which the actions and interactions of actors influence the way that conservation-led redevelopment occurs, then we need to utilise a methodology that bridges this divide and allows us to consider in more detail the configurations that determine the relationships.

Breweries, like the one that is the focus of this research, have until recent decades been an integral part of British townscapes and in doing so have made a visible contribution to our culture (Pearson, 1999) therefore the main body of this chapter begins by considering the representative nature of historic buildings.

## **2.2. Buildings As Repositories Of Collective Memory**

*“The re-use of historic buildings for purposes of redevelopment in the name of ‘heritage’ and ‘preservation’ is a complicated, and at times disturbing, global phenomenon with counterparts in every major city. In England the fabric of historic buildings, and even whole building types, have been threatened and lost in the property boom of the 1990s – and*

*the process continues. Some buildings are not necessarily lost to wholesale demolition but rather to what has in fact, been carried out in the name of 'preservation'.*" (Weiner, 2004:109)

The above statement by Weiner challenges the accepted notion that the preservation of the built environment is necessarily desirable and argues instead that the process of preservation could, in reality, lead to the destruction of that which it is attempting to preserve. Weiner suggests that this loss is the result of conservation being dictated to by the demands of developers and their target market. While this market is usually happy to take advantage of the benefits that the conversion of a historic building may bring, these benefits are dependent on the physical attributes of the building rather than any consideration of the role played by the building throughout its history. Accordingly it is the building's architectural characteristics that are the subject of the majority of attempts at conservation or preservation.

Weiner (2004) suggests that the overriding consideration of making sure that the future of a building is financially viable and therefore ensuring that the structure will be preserved for posterity, requires that developers provide a usable space un-contaminated by previous occupants. Long-term architectural survival therefore becomes dependent upon the sanitization of the social, where the memories of the buildings previous uses become erased:

*“While extremely articulate about retaining the fabric of the building, the historic preservation movement allows the significance to be often sacrificed to the scheme of the developer willing to ‘save’ the building.”*  
(Weiner 2004:201)

The way in which the social elements of a building’s history can be erased is illustrated through Wiener’s 2004 case study of the redevelopment of a listed building on the outskirts of London. This large complex of desirable residential apartments set in its own parkland was, before its re-development, an asylum built to house mentally ill paupers. This separation of the development’s physical present from its social past resulted in what Weiner suggests is:

*“a fantasy for the urban commuter, a Disneyland-like distortion of asylum cum country manor. It offers a fantasy of an elegant rural life linked by an underground rail to the city by swipe card where once patients were brought to the asylum.”* (Weiner, 2004: 205)

The realisation of this ‘elegant rural life’ being offered by the developers is only obtainable in Wiener’s reckoning by the separation of the positive physical characteristics of the buildings history from the social aspects of the building’s past. For whilst the physical characteristics of the building can be used as a positive selling point after its conversion, its social past as an asylum for the mentally ill poor, is not likely to be regarded by the developers as a positive attribute in the eyes of prospective residents. The building’s past therefore sits ill at ease with its future, irrespective of the fact that they are inextricably linked, as the positive aspects of the

architectural form were constructed specifically to accommodate the social function.

A similar incongruous incompatibility between past and present is echoed by Kezer's (2004) case study of the Four Seasons Hotel in Istanbul. Since it opened this impressive and luxurious hotel has become a popular destination for celebrities visiting the city. However, the buildings from which the hotel was converted have a history of offering accommodation to locally famous guests:

*"This building, which now houses the Four Seasons Hotel, has had a long history of housing famous guests. In an ironic twist of fate, for the better part of the last century, some of Turkey's most revered writers, poets, artists, and political activists also stayed in this building – albeit in its previous incarnation as a prison."* (Kezer, 2004:212).

Whilst the creation of a five star hotel from a prison and the development of 'upmarket' residential apartments out of a mental hospital for the poor may be particularly striking examples of the 'erasure of memory' they are symptomatic of a consistent theme in the redevelopment of the historic built environment.

The notion of erasure of memory considered by Weiner and referred to above echoes the sentiments of Tamara Hareven and Randolph Langenbach (1981) who set out to examine the interconnection of people and the built environment. Hareven and Langenbach focused

their attention on the relationship that people have with places of work and the more mundane buildings of everyday life. Through their study they pointed out that even buildings considered ugly and monstrous from an architectural perspective may have a sentimental meaning to those who have lived or worked in them. Such buildings, they claim, possess “*an intangible worth beyond their usefulness or their value as brick and stone*” (Hareven and Langenbach, 1981:110) as they represent the consciousness of the people that have worked or lived in or near them. Therefore, through their presence, these everyday buildings become the carriers of the personal attributes of previous occupants and in doing so they enliven what would otherwise be nothing more than an abstract and generalised view of history. Hareven and Langenbach suggest that:

*“We are currently living at a unique industrial moment, with remarkable but highly transient opportunities to reflect on the meaning of the historic work and living places before they either disappear or become subject to formal preservation efforts. Memories of the active use of these buildings during their prime are fading, but still accessible for a limited time in a generation now dying out”* (1981:110)

By suggesting that the buildings upon which their study is based are the location of the personal experience of many of the community, they then also become the embodiment of narratives that are an essential part of the folklore and culture of the locality, in addition to their physical presence. Essentially they are a physical embodiment of the memories of everyday life. The destruction of such buildings would consequently result in the loss of the collective memory of the community. Hareven and



Langenbach refer to this erasure of the collective memory as social amnesia, declaring:

*“We are saddened by the sight of an individual suffering from amnesia. But we are often less concerned or aware when an entire community is subjected to what amounts to social amnesia as a result of massive clearance or alteration of the physical setting. The demolition of dwellings and factory buildings wipes out a significant chapter of the history of a place. Even if it does not erase them from local memory it tends to reduce or eliminate the recall of that memory, rendering less meaningful the communication of that memory to a new generation. Such destruction deprives people of tangible manifestations of their identity” (1981:115).*

This potentially leads to problems about how future generations relate to their area’s historical context. There can be no objective history, as every generation reinterprets its own history in its own time and the removal of buildings also removes the physical frame that helps to locate history in its local context. The removal of this contextual framework may result in a lack of continuity between generations unable to combine their separate histories at common points of reference. These common points are often not the outstanding or special buildings of architectural significance but the more mundane industrial and vernacular buildings of everyday life.

Yet, despite the effects that the demolition of these buildings has on the collective memory of an area and its people, there has often been a reluctance to preserve the more recent and mundane structures. This less striking face of the historic built environment is often made up of industrial buildings dating from the late nineteenth century and for many people is too recent and ubiquitous to warrant preservation (Hareven and Langenbach, 1981: 112). When these buildings are preserved the focus is on the physical rather than the social and if Weiner's suggestion is correct it is necessary for the social aspects to be discarded if the physical attributes are to be saved. This discarding of the social goes against the view of Hareven and Langenbach that:

*"Buildings derive absolute historical importance ..... from their creation in a particular period, or from their established aesthetic and stylistic value, but also from the social context in which they were used, the functions they fulfilled and the historical experience associated with them." (1981:119)*

While Weiner and Haven and Langenbach make a strong case for considering the social aspects concerning the preservation of the historic built environment. It must be recognised that continued long-term survival of the building stock requires that an economically supportable use be found for them. Hayden writing about similar aspects of public memory and architectural preservation makes the point that:

*“Most social history landmarks cannot be turned into commercial real estate to pay for their physical preservation, nor can they all function as income producing museums” (1995).*

The recognition that the sustained survival of socially mundane yet architecturally unspectacular buildings requires that alternative uses are found, may mean that to make them attractive to developers and future users then the type of ‘sanitization’ of buildings criticised by Weiner may be unavoidable. Without this then the possible alternative may be the complete loss of the buildings. If the built form is no longer preserved then any memories that may be held within that form will be lost as a consequence. Therefore it could be argued that in-order to attempt to retain the social integrity of a building it may first be necessary to find an economically viable use to support the physical attributes, even if this does lead to a partial loss of some of the social memories with which the building is associated.

The recognition that the social aspects of the built environment may be as important as the physical contributions has led to an increasing range of buildings to be considered worthy of preservation. The mundane and vernacular buildings considered by Haven and Langenbach (1981) although possessing social importance are very different from the ancient and monumental constructions that were the subject of the earliest conservationists.

### 2.3. The Development Of Conservation

Useful accounts of the history of building conservation policy are provided by Delafons (1997) and Hunter (1981), both of whom chart its progression from the concern of a scholarly elite to the popular interest that it has become. The early conservationists were only concerned with the preservation and protection of monumental public buildings, with those in private ownership considered as being beyond what was justifiably their concern. This was a view that they shared with governments who were not keen to provide legislation to protect the built environment. However, with increasing popular interest in building conservation, fuelled by the loss of privately owned landmark buildings and unsympathetic post war development the government could not maintain a non-interventionist stance as the heritage started to become an increasing source of political capital (Delafons, 1997:1). As a result of the growth in interest the legal protection for English historic buildings has evolved over the last 150 years from the founding of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) in 1877, through the passing of the Ancient Monuments Act in 1882 and the Town and Country Planning act in 1947 to the adoption of PPG 15 in 1995 (Barter, 2003). PPG 15 stressed the importance of preserving the more ordinary examples of the historic built environment and in particular their contribution to the social aspects of the community:

*“The physical survivals of our past are to be valued and protected for their own sake, as a central part of our cultural heritage and our sense of national identity. They are an irreplaceable record which*

*contributes, through formal education and in many other ways, to our understanding of both the present and the past. Their presence adds to the quality of our lives, by enhancing the familiar and cherished local scene and sustaining the sense of local distinctiveness which is so important an aspect of the character and appearance of our towns, villages and countryside'. (PPG15, paragraph 1.1)*

PPG 15 clearly expresses the view that the built environment is not only important for its architectural merit but also for the contribution it makes to cultural history and the identity of communities.

It is this recognition of the importance of cultural history and community identity that led to the development of conservation area legislation alongside that relating to listed buildings. The power to designate conservation areas was introduced in the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 (Walker, 1995).

*"The Act defines a Conservation area as 'an areas of special architectural or historical interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' "* (English Heritage 2006:5).

The introduction of conservation areas recognised that not just individual buildings but groups of buildings, their relationships with each other and their relative positions in the space they occupy are equally worthy of preservation. Conservation Areas are intended to recognise that places may have a distinctive character dependent on its topography, history,

current uses and features such as buildings and monuments (English Heritage, 2006). In defining what makes an area of special architectural or historical interest English Heritage suggest that:

*“The distinctiveness of a place may well derive from more than its appearance.... Such distinctiveness may draw on other senses and experiences, such as sounds, smells, local environmental conditions or historical associations. The qualities of a place may change from daytime to night. Such elements of character can be identified but not directly protected or controlled. Defining and protecting what exists, such as buildings and the spaces between them (street, squares, paths, yards, and gardens), can help to sustain the activities and uses that contribute to the special character of a place”.* (English Heritage, 2006:8)

It is the combination of these types of elements that contribute to the local distinctiveness and help to define the qualities that make an area unique and contribute to the idea of a sense of place.

In considering how we relate to the environment around us, Larkham (1996) suggests that the identity of a place is closely linked to its form and history, which contribute to its sense of place, a concept he explains by citing Conzen's description of the formation of genius loci:

*“In the course of time the landscape, whether that of a large region like a country or of a small locality like a market town, acquires its specific genius loci, its culture and history conditioned character*

*which commonly reflects not only the work and aspirations of the society at present in occupancy but also that of its precursors in the area.” (Conzen ,1966, Cited in Larkham 1996:23)*

According to Norberg–Shultz (1976) the existence of genius loci allows humans to orientate themselves and locate themselves in space. This creation of place through buildings and the way that we experience them concurs with the work of Relph (1976) and his discussions of place. The existence of conservation areas to protect and maintain the distinct character of particular areas, retaining what Larkham refers to as familiar and cherished local scenes, prevents the realisation of Relph’s prediction of inevitable ‘placelessness’. This situation occurs where an area becomes devoid of significant places and character, which in turn leads to the alienation of their inhabitants.

Despite the importance of preserving the sense of place and its importance in understanding and experiencing particular areas Hobson (2004) makes the point that it is the physical objects within conservation areas from a legislative perspective that define them and that any concept of historical interest is identified through the grouping of objects and the relationships between them, suggesting that although:

*“Townscape analysis was lauded as a more holistic approach, it suffered from concentrating solely on the physical relationship between buildings and spaces” (Hobson, 2004:68).*

The importance of physical attributes to the creation of a sense of place is further reinforced by Larkham who suggests “*fundamental ... to examining the genius loci is the suggestion that the key variables are unity and diversity*” (1996:24). Larkham provides the example of how the uniformity of style and mass contribute to the sense of place associated with classical Georgian layouts and street scenes, where it is the diversity of size combined with the uniformity of plot size that characterises medieval market towns.

Responsibility for the implementation of conservation area legislation like that regarding listed buildings rests with the local planning authorities and therefore the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act and PPG 15 provide the framework for planning officers who, employed by local authorities, are responsible for controlling development of the historic built environment and safeguarding any sense of place of genius loci that may exist. In turn planning officers are able to turn to English Heritage, the government’s advisors on the historic built environment, for assistance. Officially known as the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, English Heritage is an Executive Non-departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and is responsible for all aspects of protecting and promoting the historic environment. The role of English Heritage encompasses advising the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on proposals to “list” buildings of special historic or architectural interest and advising local authorities and, where necessary on applications for



listed building consent relating to Grade I or II\* buildings or the demolition of any listed building (English Heritage, 2004).

Some of the social issues resulting from the expansion of the conservation remit were dealt with by the English Heritage report 'The Power of Place' (English Heritage, 2000). This report outlined some of the main issues concerning the historic environment and made recommendations for policy, drawing attention to the following five key points:

- A high percentage of the population values the historic environment and thinks that public funding should be available to preserve it.
- People care about the historic environment and wish to be consulted on decisions concerning it.
- The historic environment should be regarded in its entirety. People value places not just individual sites or buildings.
- To preserve the historic environment there is a need for a more joined-up partnership approach, uniting different agencies and the public.
- The historic environment contributes greatly to our knowledge and understanding of history, which should accommodate multiple narratives and take account of the value people place on their surroundings.

One of the key aspects of this report is the continued widening of the conservation agenda, with the shift away from the grand 'classical'

buildings towards further inclusion of locally important buildings and scenes. The importance of locally important buildings is further supported by English Heritage's report entitled Heritage Counts (English Heritage, 2003). This report examined the state of the historic built environment primarily at a national level and then through regional sub-reports.

The report is arranged so that it covers four main areas of interest. The first area examines the state of England's historic assets measured through the formal system of designation and protection and section two focuses upon the economic value contributed by the historic built environment before moving on to look at the third area of interest, its social importance. The final section of this publication addresses the need to find suitable indicators as a basis for future reports. Once again this report draws attention to the importance of the historic built environment in more than purely economic terms, claiming that '*much of the benefit [is not] easily expressed in financial terms*'. While acknowledging the existence of non-financial benefits, the report does make a case for an economic contribution from the preservation of the built environment. It does this by suggesting that the preservation of the existing (historic) building stock has an economically viable contribution to make not only to the regeneration of areas but as a more sustainable method of re-development rather than complete clearance and new development.

The report concurs with the view of Adams (1994) that the historic environment is constantly changing and is not static. Because of this,

although its contribution is dependent on its continued preservation, it is also necessary that it is allowed to evolve to meet the needs of the present. If the historic built environment is to provide the maximum contribution to regeneration, tourism and the general quality of life, it needs to be allowed to change to meet the needs and culture of the population.

The relationship between the physical and the social has always required a sympathetic balance to be struck:

*“The form of cities, their buildings, spaces, physical structures and designs are produced to satisfy the requirements of specific functions”* (Ashworth, 1991: 1)

The perceived permanence of the building stock can be attributed to the different rates of change between the physical and the social. The form of the townscape has a slow rate of change, with individual buildings and street layouts possibly dating back over hundreds of years. While the buildings may have changed over the years the functions associated with them are often subjected to a far faster and more cataclysmic rate of change. With a rapid rate of social change compared to the slower physical changes it is inevitable that questions need to be asked as to how quickly those responsible for the control of urban form should respond to the demands of function. This need to establish a working balance that allows the needs of the present to be realised without compromising the continued existence of the built environment is summed up by Ashworth:

*“The choice has never been between the complete fossilization of an existing morphology created to satisfy demands that no longer exist thus the denial of the needs of current functions and, on the other, a total and instant response in the built environment to each nuance of functional change.” (Ashworth, 1991:1)*

In the immediate post-war era Britain’s townscapes were subjected to dramatic and comprehensive redevelopment. The new urban landscapes that resulted from these post-war redevelopments have since been severely criticised and the outcome of this criticism is that public opinion has since rejected such wholesale change. Without the support of the public for major clearance schemes, the philosophy of redevelopment has changed and attempts have been made to conserve and utilise what remains of the historic townscape by sensitively incorporating it into new development (Townsend and Pendlebury, 1999).

The redevelopment of land made available by changing social factors such as the collapse of traditional industries is actively encouraged and regulated for, with the use of previously developed land (so called brownfield sites) captured within government policies such as PPS3 which calls for:

*“at least 60 per cent of new housing [to] be provided on previously developed land. This includes land and buildings that are vacant or derelict as well as land that is currently in use but has potential for redevelopment.” (DCLG, 2006: 41)*

Much of the target 'brownfield' land available is situated at the heart of the urban fabric and is a by-product of post-industrialism. The desire to reuse this land brings with it further issues for conservation. While architecturally insignificant vacant or derelict buildings occupy the majority of this land, buildings that, despite having outlived their functional use, have some architectural or historical significance occupy some of the sites. These buildings are protected by the policies contained in PPG 15 (DOE, 1994) and are increasingly valued by building conservationists. This disagreement between different sets of planning policies, exemplifying the changing needs of the social on the one side and the physical on the other, remains a continuous challenge to all parties, developers, conservationists and regulatory bodies. The challenge that they face is one of how to accommodate pressures for redevelopment at the same time as ensuring that aspects of the historic built environment remain protected.

The seemingly opposing positions of preservation and regeneration can supposedly be melded together by using a heritage planning approach to integrate conservation into regeneration schemes. By allowing conservation to become a key part of urban development plans it might be possible to create *"a new city in which conserved buildings and sites play an important contemporary role"* (Ashworth, 1991:4). Ashworth suggests that urban regeneration follows three basic strategies; urban rehabilitation, urban renewal and urban revitalisation. Of these it is urban

rehabilitation, the re-use of existing urban forms to satisfy contemporary functional demands that provides the strongest tools for those concerned with the conservation of the built environment. The emphasis placed on providing infrastructure improvements through urban renewal programmes can change the nature of specific districts which together with the creation of new economic functions through urban revitalisation, can lead to greater changes to the existing building stock, if not the wholesale clearance that is a frequent feature of renewal programmes.

The application of an urban rehabilitation strategy can help those responsible for conservation planning to make the sort of significant contribution to regeneration initiatives that is suggested by the Heritage Counts report (English Heritage, 2003) that Ashworth describes in the following manner:

*“The link between the heritage function and the economic revitalisation of inner cities has assumed a particular and dominant importance in the Western city... to the extent that heritage planning has become an inseparable active ingredient of revitalisation while revitalisation has become the main motive for the conservation of structures”*(Ashworth, 1991:100).

It has been argued that the rehabilitation of the historic environment can strengthen regeneration policies as the perceived attractiveness of the buildings involved can be used as a tool to attract new investment into areas where traditional industries are no longer viable (Strange 1997).

Ashworth (1991) describes this exploitation of the architectural legacy of previous generations as conversional marketing. This notion of conversional marketing draws heavily on the physical attributes of the buildings, often at the expense of the more social attributes of the building, as discussed earlier in the chapter. The utilisation of the historic environment as a means of generating income in the present rather than as a historic curiosity is according to Cullingworth and Nadin (2003) what differentiates heritage management from conservation. While conservation planners as well as private sector developers are able to exploit this in favour of the regeneration of historic areas, there is the possibility that the success of this kind of policy may contribute to the erasure of collective memory that concerns Weiner (2004).

Different philosophies underlying policies of heritage management may have a different impact on the nature of this possible erasure. The promotion of heritage tourism that was a feature of the Conservative government of the 1980s (Strange, 1997) at least required that some notion of the building's history be retained in order to promote the building as a feature, although the history managed for this purpose may have been sanitised and romanticised to the extent that it possibly bore little resemblance to the history that would be remembered by previous occupants. With the move away from the creation of heritage tourism towards the historic built environment as a means of achieving a more 'sustainable' approach to development under the following Labour

governments (Larkham and Barrett, 1998), the preservation of memory may have less importance.

As Lowenthal (1981) maintains, the buildings revered by the early conservationists were valued not for their intrinsic architectural qualities as much as for the ideals that they projected. This ethos extended beyond buildings to many different sorts of antiquities, with some relics becoming objects of devotion and worth in their own right and *“treasured not as representative features of the past, but as spectacular objects precious for their cost and rarity”* (Lowenthal,1981:11). However, the current emphasis of conservation as set out in the Power of Place report (English Heritage, 2000) turns this completely on its head. The focus has moved away from the idolized preservation of the spectacular and rare to the conservation of representative and often mundane constructions. The preservation of the built environment has become increasingly popular and with it the movement to preserve historic buildings has grown to a level beyond recognition by its earliest advocates. However if these buildings are not spectacular then why should we bother to save what could be regarded as just ordinary and mundane examples of the historic environment?

Lowenthal suggests that these more ordinary and everyday building types may be worthy of conservation for the following three reasons. First, they recall a past epoch and are representative of a building type, either of a particular style or a particular function. Second they offer a notion of congeniality that supports a sense of continuity with the past. The



retention of older buildings also softens the environment, helping to balance newer constructions by providing recognisable and familiar features as an anchor to the past. Thirdly the conservation of buildings is economically favourable in some situations. Through conservation it is possible to capitalise on the material and energy costs already incorporated in the building. It can be argued that the investment of previous generations in the building stock means that the physical existence of a building is far more likely to outlast its social use. The result of this is that it is external economic forces and operational obsolescence that are more likely to signal the end of a building's useful life rather than the building becoming un-repairable.

Yet despite the contributions that the historic built environment can make to regeneration policies, as outlined above, the widening of the conservation agenda to include more of the less spectacular building stock brings its own problems. The increase in the number of protected buildings as a result of this increase in interest means that there is:

*“a growing stock of protected buildings and their inescapable costs of maintenance is an increasing burden on public finance” (Ashworth, 1991:13).*

It is not economically feasible or socially desirable for every listed building to become a museum or an artefact preserved in a fossilized state, unable to contribute positively to the economic and social environment of which they are part. Therefore not only do they have a role

to play in regeneration but they are, in most cases also dependent on regeneration or redevelopment for their own survival as it is only the buildings for which an economically justifiable use can be found that are likely to survive. Even though buildings are considered worthy of preservation they are still likely to fall into disrepair, irrespective of any protected status, if they are not able to conform or be converted to an economically viable use.

The need to find an economically viable use for preserved buildings is a continuing issue for conservationists. The claims, like those made above, that the historic built environment can contribute to the regeneration of areas and that the buildings themselves represent a potential resource only has the opportunity to take effect if the buildings themselves are maintained and put to an attractive and desirable use. Too often the act of protection in itself becomes an obstacle to the long term survival of the building as some owners unable to find a profitable use, neglect their legal obligations and being unwilling or unable, allow them to fall into disrepair. Some owners even deliberately and illegally destroy protected buildings that stand in the way of alternative profitable developments (Prince, 1981: 47).

The continued emphasis on the conservation of the physical rather than the social, although making a positive economic contribution to regeneration can also still have potentially negative social effects. Areas

where the physical conservation of buildings has been successful may see the social aspects of the area changed. Townsend and Pendelbury (1999) point out that one of the reasons why people support conservation legislation is that these properties are capable of attracting premium values. However the success of a regeneration and conservation initiative implemented around Nottingham's lace market resulted in some of the original objectives of the plan being thwarted (Tiesdell, 1995). This project was intended to not only ensure that the buildings were conserved but also that a traditional local industry retained its inner city location. However following the success of the conservation area initiative, the area became increasingly attractive to developers seeking locations for hospitality-orientated industries. The subsequent increase in property values, meant that it became far more viable for the traditional manufacturing industries based in the area to realise capital by selling their attractive city centre premises and relocating to cheaper modern premises elsewhere.

Following this change in function, questions start to arise concerning the buildings form (Earl, 1997). Why should some buildings be considered worthy of preservation? Of those that are protected, should every part of the building be considered in the same way or are some parts more important than others? How important is it that original features are retained and what counts as original? To what extent are changes acceptable in order for a building to have a new future?

The answer to these questions almost inevitably leads to a conflict of opinion between developers and conservationists. It has been suggested that it is the micro-issues of what changes and how these changes are executed that are the main issues that arise between conservation professionals and developers. This in turn leads to the extension of the debate to include the suitability of modern materials and techniques when dealing with historic buildings. This can range from the suitability of replacing individual windows with modern replacements at one end of the scale, to the technique of demolishing all but a building's façade and constructing modern offices behind at the other. Earl also suggests that while the adoption of modern techniques and materials may make a building more useable and therefore increase its chances of long term preservation, it also weakens its historical credentials. The true historical value of a building is determined by its survival as a complete and unaltered entity and just as the sanitisation of a building's social past reduces its cultural representation, the adoption of form to suit modern requirements also impacts on its historical value as a physical structure.

## **2.4 Other Social Considerations**

The theoretical conflicts arising when a building ceases to have historic meaning is given more practical consideration in Barter's (2003) exploration of the issues facing conservation professionals in relation to the application of conservation legislation to vernacular buildings in the North Pennines. Focusing her attention on 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses she asks whether it is appropriate to apply the same values in preserving

mundane houses of this type as to a landmark building such as a stately home. These buildings exist not just as examples of particular styles of buildings from specific periods that should be preserved for future generations but they also have to function as practical family homes. To the owners of this type of building the value they may possess through the architectural style or exemplary craftsmanship come secondary to the functional practicalities of everyday living. Although the modern occupiers of these buildings may see the listed status of the building as a desirable capital asset, the reason why the building was added to the list such as the retention of original features or layout may not be conducive to occupying the building as a comfortable experience.

To the conservation professionals the desires of the current occupiers to carry out modernisation, such as installing new heating systems and bathrooms, even when executed sympathetically, may result in long-term damage to the building's original fabric. Although ensuring short-term survival, modernisation of this kind may reduce its representational ability for the future. Furthermore, while agreeing to such alterations may go against the principles of the guidance and policy available to the conservation professionals, Barter questions whether professionals have the right to impose their philosophies and values on those who, by ownership and occupation, are responsible for the stewardship of these properties.

Although conservation may no longer be primarily the concern of *'an educated elite of art historians and architects, drawn from the middle and upper classes'* (Jacobs, 1992) and is able to attract support from a wide range of the population, the responsibility for ensuring that it survives remains with the planning professionals (Townsend and Pendlbury, 1999). The successful implementation of national policies largely remains at the discretion of conservation professionals employed by local authorities. Research by Hobson (2004) suggests this may result in widespread differences across the country in the way that these policies are interpreted. Lack of resources and a shortage of conservation specialists may mean that, in some cases, applications concerning alterations to listed buildings are left to the discretion of development control officers who may only have very limited knowledge of building history and conservation. Hobson maintained that without enough specialist professionals, local authority planning departments under increasing pressure to meet performance targets were unlikely to be able to dedicate sufficient time to conservation related applications. One outcome of this is that relatively minor applications for listed building consents, such as those concerning modernisation of buildings flagged by Barter (2003), may be granted consent without due appraisal. This lack of specialist knowledge is likely to lead to a loss of integrity in the physical aspects of the building stock. Once the integrity of the building is lost, its ability to represent the social aspects of the buildings history is likely to be lost with it.

The importance of the actor is an important factor that influences how conservation is viewed and carried out as:

*“Sound conservation depends upon the availability of accurate historic data authoritatively interpreted”* (Cherry, 2007:10).

The authoritative interpretation of historical data relates to the physical or the social aspects of a building's history; however, it is still the responsibility of the conservation specialists to guide the way in which it is interpreted. The act of listing of a building implies that the building has architectural or historical significance, the question is: of significance to whom?

The majority of listed buildings became so as a result of surveys of the area. The first comprehensive surveys were carried out following the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1944 and 1947, which concentrated on Georgian and medieval buildings. Under these acts protection for the buildings on the list was not guaranteed as the legislation only called for the owners to notify the local planning authority if they intended to carry out work on the structure, who then had to issue a building preservation order to preserve the building. This was amended by the 1968 Act where the lists became the central instrument of control (Walker, 1995). According to Earl (1997) the ambiguity that still exists in the system was instigated from the beginning of the listing system as whilst there was recognition of the importance of character, there were no specific instructions to link the buildings to their context. This resulted in the isolation of buildings of exceptional architectural merit a situation

intensified by the removal of grade III status from the lists. This uncertainty in the listing system means that the discretionary emphasis of the British planning system is equally as applicable to the consideration of the historic built environment as to any other sphere of planning.

While other sources have examined the influence of people on the historic built environment, these investigations have tended to remain abstracted, concentrating on groups rather than individuals. Some of the work considered earlier in this chapter illustrates this manner of thinking. For example, examining the buildings in terms of their local and cultural context Hareven and Langenbach (Hareven and Langenbach, 1981) concentrate on the effect buildings may have on the wider audience and how this informs policy (Strange, 1997). The work by Weiner (2004) and Kezner (2004) suggests that the conversion of buildings leads to the erasure of memories that belong to or represent particular groups of people. Although these groups are composed of individuals, the focus remains with the collective.

Hobson's (2004) investigation of conservation and planning recognises that much of the way that conservation policy is interpreted is dependent upon local circumstances. One of the major considerations is the influence of the officers involved in the application process. While Hobson highlights this as an area worth further research, he acknowledges that it was beyond the scope of his remit. This is a familiar theme touched upon by other writers on conservation who suggest that,



throughout its history, a prime driver behind the conservation agenda has been the personal or somewhat limited interests of those involved, even though in most instances this has been done in the name of the public good (Townsend and Pendlebury, 1999, Hunter, 1981, Delafons, 1997). While recognising that individuals do have the ability to influence the application of conservation policies and have an impact on the way in which the historic built environment is considered, preserved and developed, the research referred to above is one sided and focuses its attention on the role of the conservation professionals, particularly those representing local or central government.

The ability of individuals to influence organisational outcomes is well documented in both applied and academic studies of business and management. Although many management writers do draw upon the public sector, these tend to concentrate on the health service and health care provision (see for example Silverman, 1987), and as a result, how individuals interpret and interact with the historic built environment is under researched. Examination of organisational strategy has shown that this can reflect the needs and life choices of individual strategists. By introducing the notion of strategic exchange, Watson (2003) suggests that individuals may seek to achieve a positive outcome for their own interests by reconciling the needs of the organisation with those of external parties.

This process-relational perspective is as applicable to the redevelopment of the historic built environment as to any other aspect of

commerce. Planning officers or developers, in order to gain the best advantage for themselves and their positions, have to establish a set of complex working relationships both within their own organisations and with other parties. The progress of any development is a direct outcome of the way in which the relationships between the parties are created and maintained. To an extent Flyvbjerg's (1998) influential study of the manner in which relationships between actors influence the planning process goes some way to addressing some of the issues of decision making in respect of the built environment. However, the focus of his study is the relationships between human actors and on the whole ignores the physical backdrop upon which the humans play out their strategies. Therefore, while not being a study of the historic built environment it does highlight the overall trend in development literature of separating the physical from the social.

## **2.5 How The Physical Shapes The Social**

Not all the literature relating to the built environment separates the physical and the social in the manner considered so far in this chapter. A considerable body of work exists that suggests that the physical built environment has a considerable influence in determining the way that humans are organised and behave in relation to the buildings that they inhabit and use. Although human actions are not definitely determined by the built environment, its existence allows the opportunity for humans to react in different ways based upon the possibilities offered by its physical attributes. This ability for interaction in a variety of different ways between

the social and the physical elements present is however countered through the notion of probabilism which suggests that certain responses are more likely than others (Johnson et al., 1986) and this may be particularly relevant in regard to the historic built environment where issues such as legislation, finance and historical significance constrain the way that humans are able to react.

The way that the built environment, historic or contemporary, frames the everyday world according to Dovey (2008) makes it possible for those with control of the necessary resources to design and construct it in a way that allows them to pursue certain interests, such as; amenity, profit, status and political power (2008:1). By examining how various sociological approaches to power relationships, social programming, the representation of place and the concept of what constitutes place combine in relation to the built environment, Dovey suggests that the built form is a critical component in the way that we orientate ourselves, the way that public and private space is created and the way that we structure and segregate society. Buildings and places symbolize socially constructed identities and through the juxtaposition of large and small it is possible to signify relations of power, domination and intimidation. Equally through the built form it is possible to convey messages of stability or progress and to make socially constructed histories appear universal. Because of these expressions of power and the inherent potency of the experience of place, the built environment is particularly vulnerable to ideological appropriations of power (Dovey, 2008). Dovey goes on to examine through particular

examples of the built environment, the Nazi architecture of Berlin, Beijing's Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square, corporate office blocks and shopping malls how the practicing of power socially can be defined through the physical environment.

Nan Ellin (1999) also considers the relationship between the built environment and the social elements that inhabit it in her examination of the major trends and theoretical attributes of post-modern urban design. From these trends she suggests that there are four critical stances that should be considered in understanding the approach of post-modern architects and urban designers in the creation of the built environment.

The first of these, form follows fiction, relates to the creation of a nostalgic and romanticised view of the past, that has a:

*“Tendency to edit history, valorizing and idealizing selective pasts while denigrating and erasing others”* (Ellin, 1999: 156)

By re-creating the styles and facades of earlier periods designers are attempting to recreate a period that never really existed and does not correspond to contemporary needs. Drawing on the past in this manner it is suggested is an attempt to move away from global corporate architecture and recreate a locally orientated return to the values of the pre-industrial society. However, being able to sample from a variety of styles, materials and histories regardless of the geographical and contextual appropriateness can lead to design descending into inauthenticity and sentimentality (Larice and Macdonald, 2007).

The second critique, form following fear, is concerned with the decrease of public space and the increased importance of the home in Western society. Ellin makes the point that the physical environment can influence the way that humans behave in a variety of ways suggesting that:

*“Gated communities, policing and other surveillance systems, defensive architecture, and neotraditional urbanism contribute to giving people a greater sense of security. But such settings no doubt also contribute to accentuating fear by increasing paranoia and distrust.” (1999:177)*

The third critique suggests, according to Larice and Macdonald (2007), that post-modern urbanism can be regarded as a *“narcissistic undertaking”* (2007:205), with designers and architects being overly concerned with the aesthetics of built form making the city less affordable for lower income inhabitants. This concurs with Dovey (2008) who suggests that the imposition of the values and culture of architectural and design professionals acts to segregate and exclude those who do not share or cannot afford to share their view of how the built environment should be.

The fourth of the critiques offered by Ellin suggests that the increased apoliticism of urban designers and architects in the post-modern era exacerbates existing inequalities and reinforces corporate capitalist

agendas (Larice and Macdonald, 2007). The fascination with vernacular architecture and the contextual experience serves to increase the profit making potential by concentrating on the creation of attractions and retail experiences from the existing post-industrial building stock. This places urban design firmly in a position of subjugation to market forces as firms seek to

*“Achieve ‘distinction’ while simultaneously investing prudently in objects with resale potential, which look ‘solid’ or ‘traditional’”(Ellin, 1999:185).*

Both Ellin and Dovey draw on the work of other eminent writers on the built environment and society to develop and support their arguments. This allows both authors to suggest that the recent trends towards preserving historical settings and the contextual placement of development is a tool that can be used in a variety of ways to influence the relationship between the physical and the social, that can be used by those with the necessary resources to promote interests of finance and authority in-order to achieve particular aims and objectives. This Ellin suggests leads to problems where designers *‘draw upon a fictionalized and media massaged past or vernacular’* (1993:185) to create a romantic view of history that Dovey describes as being *‘wrapped up with authorship’* (2008:18), Ellin, however, goes on to make the point that while it is possible to criticise the preservation movement for inventing histories (which it could be argued leads to a loss of real cultural meaning as suggested earlier in this chapter) and promoting the values of the elite, it

also ascribes value to the existing urban fabric. This literature shows that that the separation of the physical and the social presents a false dichotomy and that through an examination of the built environment, particularly the historic built environment it is possible to see how the two exert influence over one another.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The conservation of the historic built environment is a complex issue and from this chapter it can be seen that there is often a separation between the physical attributes of a building's form, and the social considerations of a building's past. The extent to which either of the two is allowed to take precedent over the other is the result of human intervention in one form or another. This may take the form of a developer seeking to 'cash in' on the historical fabric of a building or conservation professionals seeking to uphold their professional judgement. Neither of the two is capable of realizing their desired ends without achieving some kind of consensus with the other. For example the developers responsible for the conversion of Colney Hatch (Weiner, 2004) could not do so without gaining planning consent from the local authority. Similarly using the historic built environment as a tool in regeneration planning (Strange, 1997) needs developers prepared to risk investing in dilapidated building stock.

Yet much of the literature tends to focus on the conflict between developers and conservation planners on ideological grounds. How this conflict becomes resolved and the negotiations that are the everyday tasks of conservation professionals and developers alike are often ignored. The resulting accounts of conservation and the issues affecting and arising from it are normally situated on one side of the divide or the other. This singularity leads to the creation of simplistic narratives that, through the struggle to create a clear and decisive description of that side of the argument, end up concealing the true complexity of conservation. It is apparent therefore, that in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how the physical, social and human aspects of conservation are negotiated to facilitate the conservation of the historic built environment, an alternative methodology that allows all three of these aspects to be considered would need to be employed. A methodology that allows us to move forward and examine to what extent the actions of humans are determined by the built environment.



# Chapter Three: A Discussion Of The Method Of Inquiry

## 3.1 Introduction

As set out in the introductory chapter this research project aims to provide an alternative to the way in which many mainstream accounts of building conservation projects are constructed. This chapter sets out the manner in which this alternative account became constructed and in doing so, tells the story of the research. Telling this story about how the research developed will illuminate the way in which the research and the account of the research is in itself a product of the interaction between the subject and the researcher. This interaction is further bounded by the need to provide a valid yet accurate description of the research that is able to convey ideas about things, what the people are doing and so on (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The need to create an account rich in detail is countered by the need for the creation of an account that does not confuse and bewilder the reader.

The necessity for simplicity that guides many accounts of the redevelopment of the historic built environment has the accompanying affect of hiding the complexity that underpins the stories being told. This thesis while seeking to expose the hiding places of complexity, also suffers from the same problem confronting all storytellers, authors, and researchers: that of how to relate the story in sufficient detail that the reader can become immersed in the narrative, without drowning in a deluge of irrelevant information. The case at the heart of this research

provided such a problem as the multifaceted nature of the development itself and the interlocking, interweaving relationships between the principal actors meant that it was a difficult story to tell.

From the initial inception to the eventual execution, this body of research has been an iterative process, changing and adapting to the twists and turns of the paths being followed. Neuman (1994) describes this cyclical type of research as being illustrative of the, 'logic in practice' that is a feature of qualitative research. This, Neuman claims, is a messy and ambiguous process, that has no set rules and is heavily reliant on the 'judgement calls' on the part of the researcher. The application of such 'judgement calls' brings with it the danger of constructing a body of research which unless the thinking behind it has been explained may be criticised, because it;

*"looks inefficient and sloppy. But the diffuse cyclical approach is not merely disorganized, un-defined chaos. It can be highly effective for creating a feeling for the whole, for grasping subtle shades of meaning, for pulling together divergent information, and for switching perspectives."* (Neuman, 1994: 319 ).

The research presented in this thesis is the result of this type of iterative approach and because of this, it is very different in character from that envisioned when the project was originally proposed. The purpose of this chapter is to look at the way that the research was carried out, the

changes that were made throughout the process of doing the research and the rationale behind these decisions.

Because of this, the focus of this chapter is not on the methodology guiding the research but instead the actual methods used to conduct the enquiry. This division between explanations of the 'how' as opposed to the 'why', even within this chapter, is ambiguous and inevitably the explanation of the 'how' is directly driven by the decision to use actor-network theory to explain the 'why'. Because actor-network theory provides not only the means of examination but also the essential theoretical stance that underpins the research, the main discussion of the methodology is found in Chapter Six. However method and methodology are co-dependent and inevitably it is impossible to discuss one without referring to how it supports and in turn is supported by the other. Therefore a stand-alone description of the method would not tell the full story.

The methods that were eventually utilised were often not those that had been considered at the outset of the research, when a different methodology to that eventually employed was envisioned. Therefore as well as outlining the methods employed, it is also the intention to explain the reasoning behind why these methods were chosen and how they relate to and were influenced by problems that arose as the research progressed and also how they were negotiated in light of the research undertaken.

Therefore the chapter begins by introducing the research as it was originally planned before describing how the research eventually progressed. By doing so it sets out the rationale for the case study selection and the advantages and disadvantages this choice afforded the project. Following this it examines the actual methods utilised for data collection and how these in turn were influenced by a consideration of the methodology. An integral part of this project, as with any other, is the manner in which the research is presented. This interrelation between the conduct and the account of the research (Munro, 2001) and the way in which the research is presented is influenced, not only by the subject of the research, but also by the theories that the researcher in multiple ways often quite un-self-consciously brings to the process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

### **3.2 The Initial Proposal**

Driven by the background to the research and the researcher set out in Chapter One, the research aim was initially stated as to what extent do the actions and attitudes of individuals affect decision-making relating to the historic built environment. The intention was to consider the subject by employing a methodology centred upon social action theory (Silverman, 1970, Silverman, 1994). As a methodology this would have provided a means by which the development of the historic built environment would be considered in a context where the motivation, attitudes and ambitions of those involved were seen as an essential and influential part of the process.

With this original methodology in mind it was proposed that the following set of five questions would provide a framework for the investigation:

- I. Who are the principal actors relating to the case study?
- II. What attitudes do they hold towards the case and what are their ambitions?
- III. Why are these important in relation to the case?
- IV. How do these ambitions and attitudes influence the strategies they use?
- V. And as a result of which what effect do they have on the overall development process?

By answering these questions in relation to two or three case studies in different locations it would have been possible to identify why the individuals become involved, what were the differences and commonalities were, whether any patterns emerged that would explain why developers may choose to take on conservation led developments and what advantages or disadvantages this brought to the process.

The research as originally considered followed a typically planned doctoral format where an initial period of desk-based research would be followed by fieldwork. Data generated from the fieldwork in two or possibly more locations would be used to prepare comparative case studies. The

data would be gathered using semi-structured interviews conducted with a number of pre-selected actors at each site. These actors would be drawn evenly from each case and be representative of the various parties involved; councillors, planners, developers etc. The views solicited from these interviewees would be triangulated against secondary sources such as planning documents and newspaper reports. The data gathered would then be used to create draft concise case studies which would then be analysed with regard to the original research questions from which it should have been possible to extract a set of findings that may have been generally applicable. As a general plan this had much to commend it. In reality though, the research ended up following a very different path and as a result emerged looking very different, both in terms of output and execution.

### **3.3 Doubts**

Very early on in the research process, nagging doubts about the nature of the planned research began to appear. While the angle of inquiry was appealing and pertinent, something seemed to be lacking from the heart of the research. By examining the nature of the people involved and the relationships between them, social action theory provided the opportunity to consider the subject area in a different manner from the usual economic/profit or conservation/value driven standpoints. However, although it was a different way of looking at the people involved it still effectively ignored the contribution of the buildings and other material elements. This seemed to be the major criticism of this approach as in any

discussion concerning the built environment conversation almost inevitably turns to the actual buildings themselves. Therefore to examine the activity of the social actors while excluding the contribution of their material counterparts seemed to be tantamount to ignoring a major part of the account. In the midst of planning the proposed research, the concept of actor-network theory (Latour, 2005) was introduced as an alternative methodology and after some research the possibility of substituting the planned social action theory approach with actor–network theory began to take hold.

This substitution completely changed the nature of the research. The adoption of actor-network theory as the theoretical vehicle to carry the research (See Chapter Six) allowed these otherwise silent and excluded actors to have a voice. By recognising that human actors are dependent upon the mobilisation of non-human elements to achieve their aims and ambitions (Law, 1986), it becomes imperative that more than just the human elements are considered. This seemed an appropriate methodological stance for considering the historic built environment. Not only do the buildings themselves move from being a backdrop to becoming lead players in the process but it also allows the influence of other factors to be taken into consideration to the extent that elements such as texts (Callon, 1991) can be considered as potential actors in the process alongside the more concrete structures, such as the buildings (Jenkins, 2002). The ability to move away from a purely socially orientated approach to the research and to allow the material elements to be

considered in symmetry to the human elements quelled the doubts that had existed at the beginning of the research process. Thus, the decision to embrace actor-network theory as the primary methodology was taken.

This decision was the first major departure away from the initial research plan. To assess the practicalities of applying actor-network theory to a study of the historic built environment, it was decided to trial the approach with a pilot study. This would allow issues with the planned research to be highlighted and assess how practical the approach would be within the constraints imposed upon the study.

### **3.4 The Pilot Study**

The focus of the pilot study was on the buildings that had become known as 'The Heritage Brewery' in Burton upon Trent, one of Burton's smaller Victorian breweries. At the time of the pilot case study research the building had stood disused for a number of years and was relatively untouched by improvements in brewing technology and therefore had remained close to a complete example of an operating Victorian brewery. Rationalisation by its owners, a Leicester based regional brewer, led to its closure as a commercial brewery. As a unique example of this type of brewery in Burton (Cooksey, 1984), it passed into the hands of a preservation trust, administered by the labour controlled local authority. The aim of the trust, supported in the first year by the regional brewer, had been to operate the brewery as a working museum and tourist attraction. However, one of the major national brewers also operated a brewing



museum and visitor centre elsewhere in the town and unfortunately without the financial support of the industry the newly re-named heritage brewery had been unable to compete economically and had been forced to close. After standing empty for a decade, the building had become the centre of a residential development proposed by a local house building company, a proposal supported by the recently elected Conservative majority on the Borough Council.

Studying the case through an actor-network perspective started to illuminate areas of interest that may not have arisen using other methodologies. Telling the story of only the human actors involved in the case would certainly have been interesting but by also including the non-human elements, the story became enriched. Some of the ideas that pervade the literature, particularly concepts of buildings as representative of early actors and stories (Brand, 1994) (Hareven and Langenbach, 1981) became much more relevant with the application of actor-network theory. This was illustrated by the way in which the building as a material object constant, throughout the different incarnations of networks, allowed past actors and their actions to directly influence the current round of decision making.

### **3.5 Changes Following The Pilot**

The pilot study showed that actor-network theory as a methodology was a viable and interesting way of viewing the development process because a number of issues became illuminated that more mainstream

methodologies may have left concealed. However, in contrast to these positive benefits (which are considered primarily in Chapter Six), some problems were exposed which led to a reconsideration of the planned research.

While as a methodology actor-network theory seemed an ideal fit for the investigation of the relationships between humans and their surroundings, it did not sit at ease with the original research questions set out above. The consideration of material objects as actors in symmetry with their human counterparts (Callon, 1986) meant that the first question was expanded. Previously unconsidered objects would emerge as key to the line of inquiry and it was critical to find ways of ensuring that the roles of these inanimate objects were investigated and recognised. However, allowing these objects a central role in the research caused problems with regard to the remaining questions. Questions two and four, specifically formulated with a social action approach in mind, had the attitudes and ambitions of the actors as their focus. These could no longer be considered as valid lines of inquiry as while actor-network theory recognises that the non-human elements may influence human elements and therefore be considered as actors within the process (Murdoch, 2005) this does not imply that it is possible to attribute attitudes and ambitions to the material elements. Such a claim would extend the concept of material agency into anthropomorphism, which would be inappropriate for this research.

With the threat of anthropomorphism looming over the research, the focus moved away from the social concerns of attitudes and ambitions and instead focused on the nature of the relationships between actors, both human and non-human. This focus emerged from the actor-network literature and was also apparent from the pilot study and as a result, the research shifted to address the following questions:

- Who or what are the main actors?
- How do the networks that link these actors develop?
- How strong or stable are these relationships?
- How do the actors involved influence the development?

The adoption of these questions required that other aspects of the planned research needed to change. One of the most telling aspects of the pilot study was that it showed that a shallow level of inquiry would not allow the detail required from a case to be revealed. Therefore careful case study selection would be essential to ensure access to a useful supply of data.

### **3.6 Case Study Selection**

Initially it was planned that the research would examine two or possibly three brewery case studies. The decision to look at breweries as a particular aspect within the industrial historic built environment fitted well with this planned mode of operation. The research originally set out to study the way that human attitudes and ambitions influenced the

development process and therefore it made sense to choose a building type united through a basic set of shared characteristics.

Victorian breweries are an example of such a building type. The breweries built during the mid-to-late 1800s provide a classic example of architectural form following the demands of function (Pearson, 1999). As a result of a boom period in the industry there was a surge in brewery construction at the end of the nineteenth century (Hayden, 2001). The legacy of this boom was that across the country, in diverse locations from market towns to industrial cities there stood buildings of similar size and shape, designed to house a shared technology and similar processes. The decision to choose breweries as a focus for the research therefore not only provided a number of very similar 'building shells' distributed across the country but also buildings that were at the very heart of the collective culture of Britain (Pearson, 1999). The importance of beer and brewing to British culture is further reinforced by the often iconic presence of the brewery buildings which are often situated right in the heart of towns. Many of these buildings had been designated as having architectural or historical interest and had been included on the list of statutory protected buildings.

However, Britain's brewing industry was not exempt from the restructuring activity that had befallen many other traditional industries (Watts, 1991), (Knowles and Egan, 2002). Improvements in brewing technology, changes in legislation and the influence of global competitors,

meant that a large number of the small regional brewers had gone out of business and many of the buildings that were once home to distinctive locally produced products now stand redundant and neglected, awaiting repackaging as town centre development opportunities.

Following some initial research and consultation with an English Heritage inspector interested in breweries a list of potential case studies was compiled that had recently been closed or were threatened with closure. Closer examination of this list led to the elimination of a number of these. For instance some breweries were discounted because they were not built in the selected period or because the buildings were not listed. Following further scrutiny of the shortlist, it became apparent that the selection of cases would also be dependent on a number of other factors, the most significant of which was the time frame available for the research project, which was limited to a specific two year period of fieldwork. The ideal case study would have been one where it would have been possible to become engaged in a longitudinal ethnographic study of a development. This would have provided an opportunity to work alongside either the planners or the developers for the duration of the fieldwork, seeing first hand the way that interaction occurred between the various parties involved. However this was not possible as there were no development of any of the short-listed breweries that was about to begin.

In essence, the short-list comprised either of breweries that had already been developed or ones where it was not possible to accurately

predict that the redevelopment work would commence within the time available for the research. The priority therefore changed from finding a site where it was possible to follow the development as it happened to finding one that was still 'fresh'. This had the effect of removing many of the remaining sites on the list. Sites like the Ward's brewery in Sheffield, where the bulk of the development had been completed in 2000, did not have the immediacy that the research required and it was felt that this time delay would have presented problems in simply finding some of the key actors, let alone arranging interviews with them. Other potential sites like the Boddington's brewery in Manchester had only just announced that production at the site would cease, with the resulting problem that, even if development did begin immediately, the development process would outlast the duration of the time available for the fieldwork.

From the original list only two of the potential case studies initially stood out as warranting speculative investigation. One of these was the former Tollemarche and Cobbold, Cliff brewery at Ipswich and the other was the Brakspears brewery at Henley upon Thames. With the Cliff brewery an application had been submitted for redevelopment, but this had been refused by the local planning authority and was waiting to be heard at appeal. The brewery had quite a colourful history and had the potential to be an interesting case study. The recent history of the brewery included being the subject of a management buyout coupled with an unsuccessful attempt to make it into a tourist attraction as a working brewery visitor centre. This had the advantage of being the subject of an

episode of the BBC television programme “Troubleshooter” subsequently recorded in an accompanying book to the series (Harvey-Jones, 1992). The brewery had been spot-listed to prevent it being demolished and to ensure the preservation of the historic brewing equipment it contained. Developers attracted by the location of the site on the Ipswich waterfront overlooking the harbour had submitted an application for a residential conversion, but this had been rejected due to the site’s proximity to a large oil storage depot.

Although the issues surrounding the site made it attractive from a research perspective there were also a number of limitations. The initial research was conducted in the spring but the planning appeal was not scheduled to occur until the following autumn, presenting a considerable delay to the research process. Added to this, its geographical location on the East coast meant that from a purely practical point of view, conducting the research would have proved troublesome for a researcher based in Sheffield due to the need for frequent fieldwork visits.

From a practical perspective therefore the alternative site at Henley on Thames was more appealing than Ipswich. With the journey an hour less more frequent and extended research visits were possible. Some initial research revealed the brewery had closed in 2002, whereupon it had immediately been sold to a developer and subsequently converted into a boutique hotel, the opening of which fortuitously coincided with the beginning of the period allocated for fieldwork. An initial site visit and an

interview with the hotelier was arranged. This interview, which took the form of a conversation carried out during a tour of the converted brewery, changed the course of the whole research project. It immediately became apparent that the case was far more complex than had originally been considered. Rather than a single brewery building, the site was actually composed of three distinct areas with the part of the site occupied by the hotel only representing a segment of the entire brewery. A separate company was redeveloping the other parts of the site for commercial and residential occupation (see Chapter Five). During the course of this preliminary interview it became apparent that the planning application had not had a smooth passage through the planning process and the relationships between the various parties, the developers, the hoteliers, the planning authority and the conservation experts were fragile. This mix of uses and the unstable relationships suggested that the Henley Brewery had the potential for an interesting case study. In addition, the development was still in the process of completion, thus making it possible to gain access to those either recently or currently involved in the project.

### **3.7 An Argument For A Single Case Emerges**

The lessons learnt from the Burton pilot and the focus on relationships that taking an actor-network approach demanded raised questions about the need for multiple case studies. After the completion of the first two interviews at Henley and an interview at the alternative case study site in Ipswich the idea of focusing on a single case started to look feasible. The initial Henley interviews suggested that the issues surrounding the site would be sufficiently 'meaty' to justify using it as a



single case study. Justification for using a single case instead of multiple case studies is provided by Yin (1994) and also (Flyvbjerg, 2006) particularly where the case is being used as a means to examine a particular happening or occurrence leading to what Yin describes as either a critical, unique or revelatory case.

The circumstances surrounding the alternative case in Ipswich lent a certain amount of reassurance at this stage. The scheduling of the Ipswich appeal meant that if the early investigations in Henley proved disappointing then it would still have been possible to return to a dual case approach if necessary. Even with this safety net to fall back upon, it soon became apparent that the only advantage that pursuing two case studies would bring was one of choice. Moreover, as Yin notes:

*“the conduct of a multiple case study can require extensive resources beyond the means of a single student”.* (Yin, 1994 : 45)

Using actor-network theory also meant that more than one case was unnecessary, as with this methodology the focus of the research became the interaction between the actors. Applying actor-network theory to brewery-based case studies would not have resulted in contrasting views of independent cases. Breweries were selected as the focus of the research because it was possible to identify examples that displayed similar traits such as shared market characteristics, corresponding histories, similar technologies and comparable forms. Therefore despite disparate geographic locations these common links mean that potential

case study breweries are all originally integral parts of a single network and any attempt to look at this particular subject area using multiple case studies could be regarded as just an examination of a wider single case. The main benefit from using multiple cases would be to examine how the original wider ranging network dispersed and re-configured as it reacted to the pressures to change that emerged as the industry changed at the end of the twentieth century (see Chapter Four). However, whilst this would have made it possible to view the extended overarching links and relationships it would have possibly obscured the more immediate lower level linkages.

A single case study concentrating on what, at first appearances, seems to be the local, rather than the global, allows the more intricate relationships between the elements to take centre stage. It also helps in determining where the boundaries of the research can be drawn. An issue within actor-network studies is the creation of boundaries and knowing where to stop following the threads that linked the actors together (Latour, 2005). By accepting that even everyday elements are contributing components of networks opens up what are potentially infinite possibilities for investigation. The temptation could be to continue following the threads and bonds between the alliances to a point where the end result is so extended that the expanse of interactions creates a view where the detail in the foreground draws the attention away from the overall scene. By limiting the focus of the case study to the examination of a single point, a particular development it allows boundaries to be drawn around the

research in order for it to be manageable. Even with this concentration on a single case, the boundaries still reach out and extend beyond the immediate. This is particularly clear in Chapter four where remote actors, such as the Government and global brewing conglomerates, operating at a distance from the focus of the research have an influence on local outcomes.

### **3.8 A Change of Approach**

The decision to use actor-network theory as the means to examine a single case study was the catalyst for considerable change to the proposed approach. The original proposal was designed around a pre-selected list of representative actors to be interviewed and this was the approach employed for the pilot study. While this was still the intention at the outset of the fieldwork there was some deviation from the original plan which was instigated as a result of the early interviews. Through the interview process it became apparent that there were aspects of the development that would be interesting to investigate that had not been considered at the outset of the project. With the desire to include these new elements into the research project came the recognition that the plan to complete the fieldwork within the original time frame would be unrealistic. It was difficult to arrange meetings with the human actors as most of them were self-employed professionals based in the South and West of the country resulting in considerable problems in synchronising mutually convenient times.

The primary method of data collection was ten interviews, conducted between March 2005 and April 2006. Following the initial interview with the hotelier it became apparent that there were key human actors who would be able to provide interesting information regarding the cases study. This was confirmed by subsequent interviews, telephone conversations and analysis of documents regarding the case. The adoption of this approach to assembling a sample population aligns with the actor-network theory concept of following threads suggested by Latour (2005) and concurs with Neuman's (1994) description of snowball sampling, which it is suggested is a suitable method for exploring the interconnected nature of relationships. While it would have been possible to continue to follow the threads or leads suggested by the interviewees it became apparent that a nucleus of actors were central to the case and based upon this interviews were conducted with the following human actors:

1. The Hotelier
2. The Lead Developer
3. The Developers Planning Consultant
4. The Hotel Architect
5. The Area Planning Officer
6. The Conservation Consultant
7. Brakspear's Property director
8. The Selling Agent
9. Brakspear's Planning Consultant
10. The English Heritage Inspector for the site

In addition to those identified and interviewed two other actors were approached, the area Conservation Officer responsible for the site and a member of the District Council who had expressed strong opinions concerning the scheme. Unfortunately they both declined to contribute to the research. The non-participation of the Conservation Officer was disappointing but the existence of documents prepared by her meant that it was still possible to gain some insight into her contribution to the case.

The formal interviews outlined above were supplemented by informal conversations both in person and over the telephone, including discussions concerning the case study with members of the Town Council and reporters from the Henley Standard. Most of the formal interviews lasted between one and two hours, with one notable exception where the interview ran on close to four hours. The interview experience varied considerably depending upon the individual circumstance. For the most part they were carried out in a formal interview manner, with the conversation recorded for subsequent transcription. However, two complete interviews and a major proportion of another were not recorded. One of the un-recorded interviews was with the hotelier. This interview was conducted during a guided tour of the hotel and its facilities partially in the company of a feature writer for an up-market magazine. The other completely unrecorded interview was with the planning consultant who had acted on behalf of the brewers prior to the closure of the brewery and who had been instrumental in the formulation of a previous proposal for

the site (see Chapter Four). The majority of this interview was conducted as we walked around the site and the neighbouring area of Henley, looking at and talking about the buildings, the earlier proposal and the relationship that had existed between the brewers and the planning authority. The third unrecorded interview occurred directly after the closure of the formal interview with the conservation consultant for the project. This took place in the hotel bar and as we got up to leave, he suggested that we look at “*what kind of job they had made of it*”. What followed was forty-five minutes to an hour spent examining the outside of the site talking about the buildings and some of the features of the conversion.

The first interview with the hotelier set the pattern for the subsequent interviews. Conducted for the most part during a tour of the hotel conversion, the hotelier had a very easy going and open manner which he used to tell a number of stories to illustrate points regarding the conversion and his history of being involved in the industry. The free flowing nature of the conversation led, with minimal prompting, to the telling of an interesting story. This story explained the involvement of different actors and introduced the traces of relationships to follow. Reflecting on this following the meeting it seemed that this was a method of data gathering that fitted the actor-network methodology, as it allowed a story to emerge from the actors rather than impose a pre-defined structure through the use of a set of questions.

With this in mind subsequent interviews were all carried out in a manner aimed at replicating the informal proceedings of the first interview. After explaining my interest in the research, the interviewees were asked to relate the story of their involvement in the case study. This approach proved to be effective as all of the interviewees responded enthusiastically and embarked on relating how they had become involved and the part they had played. Although a structured list of questions were not used, analysis of the interview data following each interview allowed for a list of themes to be constructed and used as a checklist with which to prompt the interviewees. Although in practice the list of prompts seldom had to be referred to as the interviewees without prompting mentioned most of the key issues in the case. This led to multiple narrations of what was basically the same story but each told from a different perspective and with different start and finish points. By gathering several accounts of the same story from different viewpoints it allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject. In addition having different, and slightly conflicting, accounts to consider acted as a way of retaining some degree of detachment from the case thus going some way towards achieving the balance between immersion and detachment (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) that allows a researcher to provide a valid but interesting account of the case study. Allowing each interviewee to tell their story also fitted well with the actor-network theory methodology, as it allowed each actor to relate the story pertaining to their own view of the network that they think surrounded or is attached to the case. Another advantage that arose from this method of interviewing is that it allowed material elements to become

involved in the process. Three of the interviews took place at the brewery or in its immediate vicinity and the informal manner of the process allowed the interviews to carry on as we walked at around the site looking at points of interest. Other interviewees took the opportunity to elaborate their stories by introducing materials such as plans, drawings, photographs and brochures to illustrate certain points.

The secondary materials introduced by the interviewees were supplemented with other data sourced from the Internet and the press. Some of these resources were used to illustrate and inform the points being made by the interviewees through the course of the narrative. Used in this manner they provided a useful set of tools for examining the material aspects of the network and were drawn on extensively to consolidate and expand the stories of the human interviewees when assembling the case study chapters.

Although the use of this material was an important aspect of researching the case some of the material data supplied had a more direct impact on the course of the case study. Under the auspices of the concept of generalized symmetry (Callon, 1986) referred to in Chapter Six, material objects are as important a source of information as the interviews with humans. It is argued in Chapters Six and Seven that elements such as plans, policy documents and the sales brochure for the site were instrumental in directing the outcome of the development and through the ability to represent material elements of the development, they were



influential in organising the configuration of the network that eventually formed.

In much of the actor-network literature the concept of narrative is used as a tool to describe the events or the situation being considered. This approach is taken to its extreme in 'Aramis or the Love of Technology' (Latour, 1996). In this study of a proposed transport system for Paris, Latour narrates the story of the research in the format of a novel, interspersed with interview transcripts and sections of reports. Many of the other writers working with actor-network theory also use a similar if not quite so extreme narrative approach to describe the cases under consideration. Therefore not only did the prompting of story-telling from the interviewees seem a practical way of accessing the material elements of the case but it was also a method that fitted well with the chosen methodology.

### **3.9 What to Do With It**

Collecting data in this way meant that it was no longer possible to approach the research project as if it was split into easily definable stages that could be dealt with as individual elements. The notion that the fieldwork could be completed as one phase with analysis following afterwards was no longer a realistic proposition. Potter (1996) suggests that analysis "*begins in the data gathering stage and does not end until the writing is complete*". The truth of this became apparent as the research

project followed the pattern described by Strauss and Corbin who state that:

*“Analysis begins with the first interview and observation, which leads to the next interview or observation, followed by more analysis, more fieldwork and so on. It is the analysis that drives the data collection”.*(1998: 42)

In line with the above, from the first unrecorded interview with the hotelier it was possible to identify a number of key themes for further inquiry. In subsequent interviews the interviewees often referred to these themes with no prompting which further reinforced their significance. However, it was necessary on occasions to ask the interviewees their opinions on one or more of these topics. It was these themes that are used as the basis of the ‘storyboard’ for chapter five.

Although the use of narrative is a frequently encountered method within actor-network texts, the presentation and use of the data acquired by asking interviewees to relate their tales, presented its own problems. Each of the actors related their individual account of the overall story, viewed from their own perspective (Latour, 2005). A much larger research project may have been able to relate each of these perspectives in full. Yet the constraints on space imposed by the thesis required that these individual and equally valid perspectives be combined into a single all-encompassing narrative. But to create a single story from many is an ambitious undertaking if the twist and turns, transformations, players, plots

and sub-plots that circulate around a single case are to be included. This raised questions about where the story would begin, which actors would feature and whether it was possible to expose the complexity inherent in such a combination of stories without falling into the trap of over-complicating the plot in too much detail or simplifying it to the point that all the detail becomes lost.

To overcome this problem and to allow an alternative view to that which is normally presented in accounts of development processes it has been necessary to present the case study in two formats. In Chapters Four and Five the life story of the brewery and its conversion is created by layering the contributions of the individuals into a single composite creation. This story draws upon the accounts of the human actors to formulate the overall account of the non-human and illustrates the importance of the one to the other. To create a story of a purely material artefact without reference to the social components involved in the story would not be possible. Equally, because of the mutuality that exists between people and things (Graves-Brown, 2000) it would not be possible to reverse this and narrate the biographies of the human actors and their social groupings without locating them in materially defined situations.

All the actors that are a subject of this thesis can be regarded as having a life-span and as discussed in more depth in Chapter Six the use of actor-network theory recognises that different types of actor may have different life spans. The life span of a material element may allow it to exist

beyond the lifespan of any human co-actors. This is certainly the case with the brewery at the centre of this thesis and further highlights the problems around where to locate the beginning of the narrative. The story in Chapter Four starts when the Brakspear family become involved in the site. The site existed before this and as such its life history began before the brewers took it over. However it was necessary to fix a start and equally an end date and the beginning of the involvement of the Brakspears was clearly a significant moment for the building.

Life histories, just as any other method of research are dependent upon 'the collusion of the researcher' in forming the story and 'does not presume that the researcher is some impartial, value free entity', (Musson, 1998), as noted here:

*"One brings to every biography some prior conception of what is to be its focus. We accept that every person has many biographies – psychological, professional, political, familial, economic and so forth – each of which selects some aspects of the life history and discards others."* (Kopytoff, 1986: 66)

The story told in Chapters Four and Five is the result of this editing process. It is by no means the complete story but is a story constructed in such a way that it is possible to follow a set of buildings coherently through a period of their existence, albeit a period defined by the author. This single story is a laminate of the biographies or life histories that emerged from the interviews. Although biographies are normally considered in a

human context, they have been used in a variety of ways in anthropology, including for material non-human objects. Applied to buildings, Kopytoff (1986) provides a potted biography of a hut drawn from his research amongst the Suku of Zaire, and Brand (1994) takes the biographical technique further by the use of images to help described the life histories of a number of buildings as they evolve over periods of time. A categorization of life histories is added by Holtorf (2002) who, by applying the concept of a life history to an archaeological find, introduces the idea of short and long life histories applicable to the same artefact. The artefact has a short life history that covers its original use as a functional object as well a long life history that charts its complete existence including its progress from discovery, naming and cataloguing through to storage. Similarly, the case study chapters presented here cover both the short and long life histories of the brewery buildings in the form of a single narrative that introduces the human actors and their material counterparts such as the buildings, plans, brochures, committee reports, machinery, cars and trucks, etc that are examples of material or non-human actors involved in the development process.

In Chapter Five, some of the segments set out in Chapter Four are revisited, which allows an alternative view to be considered, one which allows the socio-technical networks that have formed through the life history of the site to be examined in greater depth. This exploration of the influence of actors and networks and the extra depth and detail that this adds to the more conventional approach taken in Chapter Four thus

provides a means to reappraise the way that the overall development process is viewed.

# **Chapter Four: A Case Study Of The Henley Brewery**

## **1812 To 2002**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The case study for this thesis is based upon what was for a considerable part of its history the Brakspear brewery in Henley upon Thames. The site developed over the second half of the last millennium and it has been estimated that some of the buildings on the site may have stood there for 500 years. While the focus of the story is the re-development of the site since 2002 the way that this development came about can not truly be understood without looking at the overall history of the site. This will hopefully provide the central story of how the buildings developed to comply with the needs of brewing in Henley and South Oxfordshire.

This history located on the brewery premises, charts the manner in which the industry initially grew in the nineteenth Century and then how the regional brewers such as Brakspear faced a period of rationalisation in the twentieth century which led to the eventual demise of brewing at the site in the twenty-first century. The last phase of the story takes the buildings beyond their existence as Brakspear's Henley Brewery and in to a new incarnation as the Old Henley Brewery. This later period in the re-development of the site will be the actual focus of the case study and in order to do so the main outline of the narrative will be sketched out,

creating a background from which a number of more detailed sub-plots supporting and explaining the role of actor-networks can be explored elsewhere. The story of the Brakspear brewery, or that part of the story which is going to be told here, starts when Robert Brakspear moves from Witney in Oxfordshire to Henley and ends two and a quarter centuries later when the brewing of Brakspear's beer moves from Henley, back to Witney and leaves the Henley brewery ripe for re-development.

#### **4.2 Brakspear's New Street Brewery**

The story starts at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, in 1779. This was the year that Robert Brakspear, the landlord of the Cross Keys in Witney, moved to Henley to join his uncle Richard Hayward in his brewing business (Sheppard, 1979). In doing so he became one of the increasingly successful 'common brewers' (Hayden, 2001) who brewed commercially for the wholesale trade. Before the dominance of the common brewers most beer had been brewed by individual publicans for sale at the place of production. Despite not having as large a population as some towns Henley was a good place to brew: it had a good water supply and the town at that time had a thriving market where barley and corn were traded and the traders at these markets meant a strong demand for beer in the town's pubs. Added to this the wharfs on the Thames provided a means for shipping the finished beer to other towns up and down stream while allowing the brewer to source raw materials from further afield. Robert Brakspear and his uncle ran a brewery and malt house in Bell street which in 1803 passed to Robert when he became the sole proprietor (Sheppard,

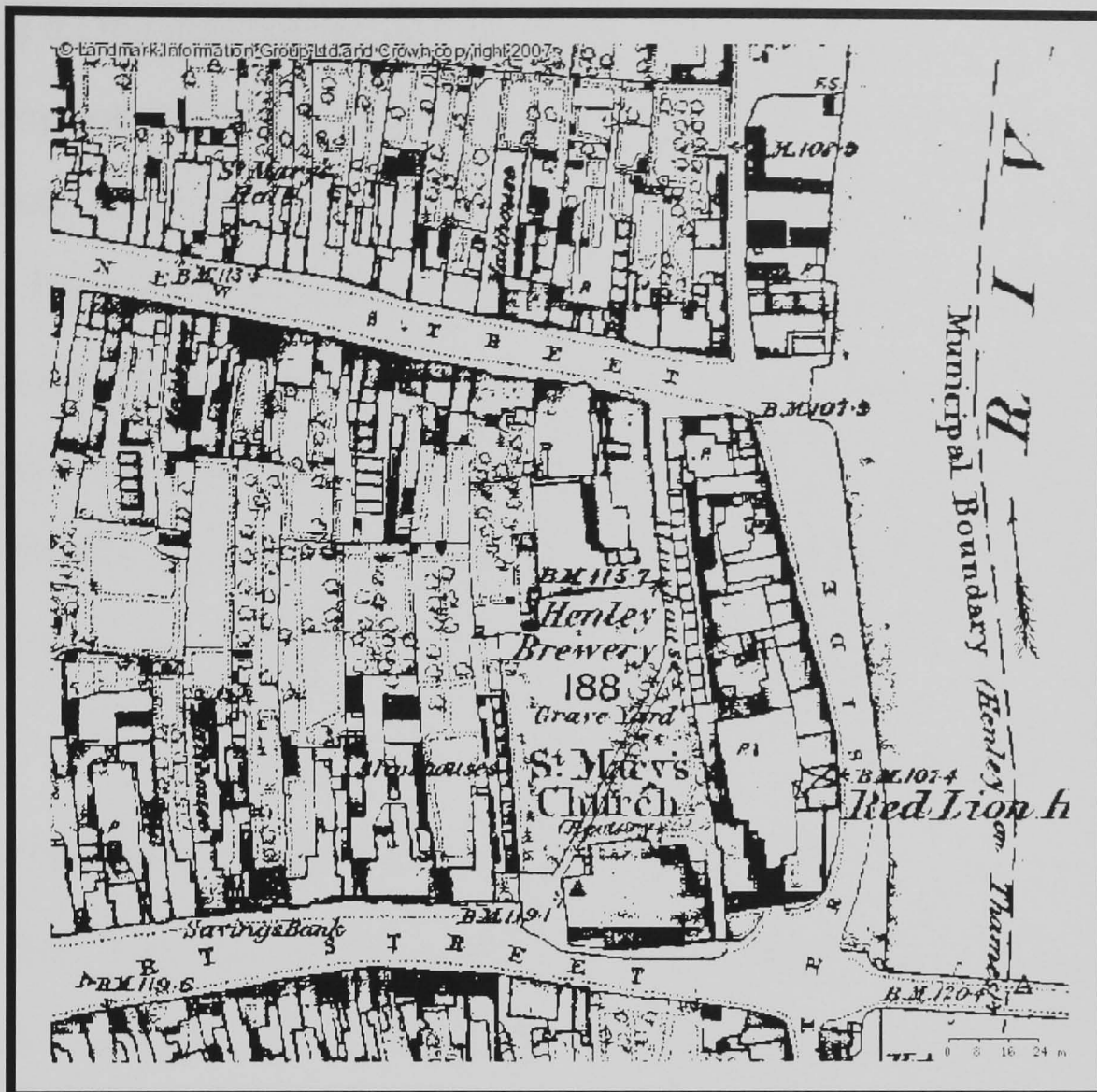


1979). In order to secure markets for their produce common brewers would lend sums of money to aspiring publicans wishing to set up licensed premises. This loan would effectively 'tie' the publican to selling that brewer's beer and prevent another brewer from selling his at that house. Changes in the licensing laws making it more difficult to open public houses (Hayden, 2001) meant that the brewers needed to find other ways of guaranteeing a market for their products. The more successful of the brewers did this by either buying out or merging with their rivals, in doing so they bought all the loans that publicans owed the brewery and thereby increased the number of beer houses tied into selling their beer. Henley in common with most towns supported a number of brewers and shortly before his death in 1812 Robert Brakspear successfully negotiated a merger with his main rivals in Henley, Appleton and Shaw. As a result of this union the site at the centre of this story came into being, when the new company's brewing operations were consolidated, at what had previously been Appleton's premises in New Street and the Bell Street brewery closed. Robert was followed into the business by his son William Henry who became a partner in 1825 and levered himself into a position that enabled him to take over the company completely in 1848 (Sheppard, 1979). William ran the company for 57 years and during this time the company expanded considerably, taking over more pubs and maltings, the success of the company in this period can be demonstrated by an increase in production from 9000 standard barrels a year in 1838 to 14,300 in 1882, this level of growth was by no means unusual in the

brewing trade at the time and reflects changes in the nature of the industry across the country (Pearson, 1999).

At the end of the nineteenth century William's sons Archibald and George took over the Company and shortly after managed to buy out the last of their major competitors in the town. As a result Brakspear became not only the dominant Henley Brewers but also dominant amongst the brewers in the region. This period of consolidation by Brakspear in the later half of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries, replicated in Oxfordshire the growth and ownership patterns that were occurring throughout the British brewing industry. At this time the Company owned many of the public houses selling its beer, leasing the premises to the individual landlords. By continuing to buy individual pubs and the estates belonging to rival breweries the company effectively created a strong market for its beer while also amassing a varied property portfolio. Although this market was stable it was mainly restricted to those parts of South Oxfordshire and the Thames valley that could be reached by the Brakspear horse-drawn drays.

The company was firmly embedded in its New Street premises, (illustrated in the following Ordnance Survey map extract from 1879) and unlike many other breweries at this period, which were subject to wholesale rebuilding, many of the original New Street buildings were retained, being added to and modified to suit the changing demands of the company.



**Figure 1: Extract From 1879 Ordnance Survey Showing The Brewery**

In 1897 the company extended their premises West along New Street with the addition of the Mineral Water Factory. This two storey building with a red brick façade and blue brick decorative touches was built to use the water pumped up from the brewery well to enable the company to take advantage of the newly fashionable trade in sparkling soft drinks. It also provided room for the company's bottling operation. With the increases in production that accompanied this period of growth the Company required a greater malting capacity and to achieve this in 1899 they built a three storey malt house on the opposite side of New Street to the brewery, this was a large development that also provided

stabling for the dray horses and cart sheds. With this building complete the company sold its previous malthouse in Bell Street and for the first time the whole of the company's brewing operations became located in New Street. The completion of improvements to the old brewery, the addition of the Mineral Water Factory and the new malthouse allowed Archibald Brakspear, the chairman of the company in 1904, to claim that "*they now had a thoroughly up to date brewery which would enable them to meet all modern requirements*" (Sheppard, 1979 : 79).

#### **4.3 Brakspear Brewers In The Twentieth Century**

The twentieth century was not as profitable for the regional brewers. Changes in society resulted in the market for beer declining as consumers found themselves with ever-increasing ways to occupy their leisure time and spend any surplus income (Hayden, 2001). In response to this, the larger brewing companies became involved in aggressive take over policies which by the end of the century had led to five national brewers (Scottish Courage, Carlsberg-Tetley, Whitbread, Bass and Guinness) being responsible for the production of around 90% of the market (Knowles and Egan, 2002). This dominance of the market had been achieved by taking over and closing down many of the smaller regional brewers. This process of mergers and acquisitions had been helped by changes in brewing technology and methods. These technological changes allowed the consolidation of brewing into large modern breweries enabling brewers to benefit from the advantages of volume production and the associated economies of scale (Watts, 1991).

In the face of the economic power available to the big five, the remaining independent low volume breweries found it ever harder to compete.

Not only had the national brewers obtained the lion's share of the market but they had achieved domination by changing the nature of the product. Producing beer in large volumes required a much more cost-centred approach to brewing than the traditional craft based approach allowed. Traditional ale conditioned in the cask was too unreliable for the demands of high volume production and the live nature of the product, with its limited shelf life, presented problems for distribution and warehousing. To get over these problems the national brewers gradually introduced chemically controlled and pasteurised keg beers and lager. More suited to the methods of mass-production used in what had become large beer factories; keg and lager have a very long shelf life, chemical controlled production ensures a reliable end-product which is easier for pub tenants to keep. In every stage of the process these products are subject to reduced volumes of waste and therefore result in further increases in profit for the brewers. The market for these products was initially slow to grow when they were first introduced in the late 1960's, but the scale of the big brewers and their available budgets enabled them to market the new beers intensively and despite a slow start first keg and then lager became the dominant products in the UK drinks market (Brown, 2003). Even though lager and keg beer accounted for the majority of on and off sales there still remained a demand for traditional cask ale, the

production of which became the specialist niche of independent brewers such as Brakspear.

Increases in production efficiency by the large brewers matched by a steady decline in the market meant that the brewing industry was subject to over capacity (Watts, 1991). As a result of which, in common with the other major industries that grew out of the industrial revolution, brewing went through a period of reorganisation and rationalisation as the brewers sought to maintain profitability. The management thinking of the time (see Peters and Waterman, 1982) required that the brewers identified their core business activities and rationalised their operations by disposing of any non-value adding processes. One of these activities was the production of malt in house.

The traditional method of producing malt involved spreading or 'flooring' the grain several inches deep to allow it to germinate. To ensure even germination and to prevent the germinating shoots from matting together, the grain needs to be turned continually. This required a large surface area and took place over a number of floors. As soon as growth occurs, the barley or 'green malt', would be dried in a kiln preventing further growth, the type of malt produced being dependent on the temperature and time for which it is dried. The dry malt is then 'dressed' by removing all the shoots and dust before being bagged and stored ready for use (Lay, 2004). This process with the floored malt being turned by hand was used by many of the smaller brewers until high labour costs and

other overheads made it uneconomic to continue doing so. Instead it became much more cost effective to buy malt from specialist malting companies who with mechanised turning systems and improved methods of drying and temperature control could efficiently produce in sufficient volumes to sell to supply many brewers. As a result Brakspear's New Street Maltings were redundant, but the buildings still housed the company's transport operation and the fleet of dray lorries operated from what had been the Company stables and cart sheds. The soft drinks industry at this point had also become dominated by large national and multinational organisations and Brakspear had withdrawn from the manufacture of soft drinks leaving the mineral water factory redundant apart from a low capacity beer bottling operation. With surplus bottling capacity available from the big brewers in purpose built automated bottling plants, this operation was also not economically viable and as a result it was more cost effective for Brakspear to outsource their bottling operations and bottling on site ceased in 1983.

With surplus floor space available to them in both the Mineral Water Factory and maltings buildings, Brakspear took the opportunity to rationalise its operations, which they did by transferring the transport operations to the mineral water factory in order to redevelop the maltings. The decision was taken to keep the maltings building within Brakspear's property portfolio and to convert it to provide office space to satisfy the demand for medium sized commercial premises in the Thames valley. The traditional method of making malt required the building to have an

extensive floor area, but as there was no need to operate machinery in the space the buildings are characterised by their low ceilings supported by rows of columns that the maltsters would use to sub-divide the quantities of floored malt. This style of construction left a particular type of space difficult to adapt as the low ceilings make it difficult to locate the services required for alternative commercial or residential uses. The redevelopment of the malting building required that the interior had to be completely remodelled with the floor levels to be repositioned to provide adequate working headroom for office use. With such a difficult and costly conversion it was necessary that a stable single tenant be found. This was achieved when a computer company took over the lease of the whole building, which subsequently became the highest value and most profitable component of Brakspear's non-licensed property portfolio.

The conversion of the maltings was achieved by the relocation of the Company's transport operations across New Street to the former Mineral Water Factory. The Mineral Water Factory was not an ideal location for the operation. Substantial alterations had to be made before it could adequately provide the parking, loading and maintenance facilities needed for Brakspear's fleet of heavy goods and smaller commercial vehicles. These alterations resulted in the creation of the new brewery yard at the rear of the plot, this was achieved by the demolition of a building (the later 1925 addition to the rear of the original building) and the lowering of the ground by approximately two metres to create a transport yard. To allow the lorries access to this new yard the rear portion of the



original mineral factory was substantially altered and part of it was removed to provide an entrance between the mineral water factory and the neighbouring cottages. Even with these alterations to the building, access to the yard involved a tight turn off New Street that was difficult for the heavy goods vehicles to negotiate. With disruption to the traffic in New Street caused by the trucks entering and exiting the yard creating a problem, the company installed a steel turntable in the new brewery yard. This was to enable the trucks to be turned in the yard and thereby eliminating the need to reverse into the traffic flow. Loading bays were also added to the rear of the original mineral water building and a garage built at the rear of the plot to which a pallet store and new boiler house were eventually added. The brewery continued with this arrangement through the late 1980s and 1990s with heavy trucks coming and going out of the yard into New Street. Congestion both in the yard and on New Street still occurred, as the dray drivers preferred to undergo a complicated manoeuvre with their lorries rather than use the turntable, which was inadequate for the size of the vehicles in use.

#### **4.4 A Report On The Supply Of Beer**

Changes in the overlying structure of the brewing industry continued to influence the way that Brakspear and other smaller brewers operated. The majority of the 'on sales' trade for the beer brewed at Henley was through the company's own pubs but a significant amount of sales came through an alliance between Brakspear and Whitbread. This alliance came about through Whitbread's (one of the national brewing giants) substantial shareholding in Brakspear. This shareholding provided

Whitbread the supplier of cask ale that they needed for their share of the market in that region. In turn the alliance provided two major benefits for Brakspear; first it provided some security for the brewery against hostile takeover threats from national brewers and secondly it provided an extended market for their cask-conditioned ale outside their own pubs. By the late eighties the trade through the Whitbread outlets accounted for approximately 30% of Brakspear's output and with a small resurgence in the demand for real ales this market enjoyed a small degree of growth.

The history of the British brewers has on many occasions been influenced by central government legislation and continues to be so. As the power of the national brewers continued to grow in the 1980s government started to show concern over the manner in which the industry had developed with the control of the majority of the nation's brewing and pubs in the hands of an ever-decreasing number of national companies. The response to this concern was the publication of the 1989 report: *The Supply of Beer; A Report on the Supply of Beer for Retail Sale in the United Kingdom*. This report by the Monopoly and Mergers Commission (MMC) was heavily critical of the structure of the industry. In the opinion of the MMC the system that had evolved where public houses were 'tied' to particular brewers reduced the choice for the consumer and prevented competition (Knowles and Egan, 2002). This report stated that:

*"We believe that the complex monopoly has enabled brewers with tied estates to frustrate the growth of brewers without tied estates. We also*

*believe that, over time, the monopoly has served to keep the bigger brewers big and the smaller brewers small.” (MMC, 1989 para:1.23)*

The legislation that followed this, the Beer Orders of 1992, set a limit to the number of pubs that brewers were allowed to control. By separating the ownership of pubs from the ownership of breweries the intention was that smaller breweries without extensive pub estates would be able to find outlets for their products on a larger scale and the consumer would be able to exercise their preference for a particular beer by shopping around. The consequences of this were not what the authors of the report presumably envisioned. By opening up the industry to competition the beer orders further reduced the chances of survival for the small independent brewers. Their corporate competitors faced with having to reduce their pub portfolios decided to retain the more profitable side of the industry and concentrate on the leisure and property opportunities. Rather than divest themselves of the more profitable hospitality side of the industry they kept the pubs and sold their brewing operations. The result being that the British brewing industry stopped being controlled by a handful of national brewers, who were replaced by a smaller number of global brewing giants. Bass, for many years the biggest of the British brewers, sold its brewing operation first to the Belgian corporation Interbrew, who then subsequently sold it on to the American brewer Coors. Whitbread a shareholder in Brakspear also decided to exit brewing and concentrate on leisure provision. The other major outcome of the Beer Orders was the formation of the specialist pub companies such as the

Tavern and Punch groups, taking advantage of the legislation limiting the number of licensed premises the brewers could hold. These non-brewing organisations set up extensive pub owning organisations that were free of the tied system and able to buy their beer from who ever could sell it cheapest.

For brewers such as Brakspear these changes to the market brought with it a number of problems, while the legislation forced brewers to allow tied houses to offer a beer from outside the tie this did not necessarily mean increased opportunity for the smaller regional brewers. The reduction in the stranglehold of the national brewers allowed the smaller independent or micro-breweries to compete at the local level. Brewing on a tiny scale, often in outbuildings attached to a pub or in small industrial units, they were able to offer increased choice in the real ale niche that the small regional brewers had managed to preserve, but were able to do so without the overheads incurred by firms like Brakspear. At the other extreme of the real ale niche Brakspear had lost the guaranteed trade that had been available to them through Whitbread and although the new pub companies were not tied into particular brewers they were able to buy who ever could supply the beer their customers wanted at the cheapest price. This once again increased the pressure from the bigger operators, who seeking to preserve their share of the real ale market ploughed extensive money into the marketing of what had previously been regional brands to encourage their demand on a national scale.

*“In the past, the existence of the beer tie gave breweries less incentive to compete on brand as the brewers’ faced less direct inter-brand competition on the bar top. Rather, brewers were happy to maintain a generic image of ales as far as on-sales were concerned. Thus the changes brought about by the Beer Orders have encouraged the growth of branding by the big brewers; this has a major impact on competition, particularly with the small brewers, where the increasing importance of brands has made it harder for smaller brewers.....to gain market share. This in turn reduces their ability to raise economies of scale in production, distribution and marketing” (Knowles and Egan, 2002: 68).*

Faced with these difficulties Brakspear continued to rationalise while retaining their brewing operation. A major step was the outsourcing of their distribution activities. They already received the wines and spirits for their pub holdings through the Scottish Courage group and it seemed a rational step to outsource their dray operations to them. In doing so Brakspear made immediate savings on their overheads, they no longer had to run and maintain a fleet of dray lorries or employ the draymen themselves. Outsourcing also had additional advantages in that by sending their beer with a distribution specialist it was now possible to supply small quantities of ale, particularly bottled beer, as part of mixed loads to free houses anywhere in the country, an option that was not cost effective when transportation was ‘in house’. Equally it was also possible for them to start acquiring pubs at a greater distance from their Henley

base than was previously possible, reducing their own exposure to local market fluctuations. The rationale for doing this was explained by one of Brakspear's directors:

*“So the decision was made to get out of distribution first of all and we went to a national distributor Scottish Courage..... Because we buy all our wines through their wine and spirit arm meant that all their stock lines were mostly our stock lines anyway so all we had to do was feed our beer into it. And once it was in the system all it had to do was go round and be distributed wherever we had a pub and that immediately meant we could buy pubs further a field”* (Interview: Brakspear Director, 2006)

With Brakspear no longer operating its own transport fleet the Mineral Water Factory buildings and the new brewery yard, which had already undergone substantial redevelopment, became largely redundant. The Mineral Water Factory had been used as warehousing for wines and spirits for distribution to the pub chain by the dray lorries and with responsibility for delivery passing to Scottish Courage there was no longer any need for Brakspear to retain warehousing space and a more profitable use was sought for the buildings.

#### **4.5 The Office Proposal**

In common with the big national brewers, Brakspear's profitability was increasingly dependent upon the non-brewing parts of its operations. Although core to the Company's identity its brewing activity was losing

money and was dependent on Brakspear's property holdings for support. The most profitable component of their property portfolio was the office accommodation in the former maltings in New Street. The success of this earlier conversion and the potential provided by the site of the brewery buildings, including the Mineral Water Factory, in a prime position, indicated that a profitable alternative to brewing could be achieved by the further development of some of the New Street site. Despite the potential profitability of developing the brewery site and relocating the operation elsewhere, the importance of brewing to the Company and the perceived connection of Brakspear to Henley, encouraged the directors to seek a way in which the company could continue brewing at New Street while ensuring its long term future. The classification of the brewery in planning terms as B2 (bad neighbour) general industrial use effectively prevented a residential conversion of the Mineral Water Factory, if the brewery remained operational. However a plan was developed which allowed Brakspear to capitalise upon their historical position as the Henley brewer while retaining its brewing niche and seek financial security. By converting the Mineral Water Factory and what had become known as the New Brewery Yard into office accommodation and adding it to the company's property portfolio it was hoped that enough profit would be generated from the scheme to support a greatly reduced brewing operation in the buildings surrounding the Old Brewery Yard. An integral part of this scheme was the conversion of what had been the rowing club buildings owned by Brakspear on Riverside into a visitor centre, allowing the brewery itself to be opened up as a working tourist attraction complete

with brewery tours. In support of this scheme it was argued that it would be the most appropriate use for all aspects of the site. The brewery would continue as an employer whilst increasing the towns' capability as a tourist destination, the conversion to office use would bring added footfall to the town centre and be preferable to a continued use as warehousing which would increase traffic levels in the all ready congested town centre. In order to carry out this development it would be necessary to convert the basement of the Mineral Water Factory to car parking and create a first floor within the development by remodelling the existing floor levels and adding an elevated glass roof and inserting a new entrance into the distinctive New Street façade.

The application detailing the proposals was submitted by Brakspear in 2000, and was opposed by South Oxfordshire District Council's planning staff. The main cause of this opposition was the proposed office development of the mineral water factory. SODC's conservation officer at the time thought that the proposed alterations were not compatible to the character of the building and would be detrimental to the composition of New Street's attractive streetscape. The proposal would have:

*“actually involved taking out the roof structure of that building completely and certainly remodelling some of the internal floor levels and it would have basically have just kept the façade of the building at that stage I felt that that was, in this particular context of New Street, inappropriate. Sticking a glass box in the sort of middle of the building*



*and just keeping the façade was not really an appropriate option.”*

(interview: Conservation Consultant, 2005)

The area Planning Officer responsible for dealing with the brewery application also shared this view:

*“I actually recommended the scheme for refusal...we were concerned that they were amongst other things putting a sort of glass roof on that building which both Nick and I thought was completely at odds with the brewery building and the streetscape of New Street”* (interview SODC Planning Officer, 2005)

As well as the conversion of the Mineral Water Factory into office accommodation and alterations to allow tours of the brewery, the application submitted on Brakspear's behalf by a local planning agent, included a package of measures that involved improvements to the river frontage along Thameside. Intended to help the brewery's reinterpretation as a tourist destination these measures included the reinstating of a riverside boardwalk that was lost from the river in the 1930s. The scale of this riverside improvements were beyond the scope of Brakspear but after it was widely agreed that it would be beneficial to the town, Brakspear agreed to be responsible for funding the feasibility studies and the project management of these improvements and appointed a firm of fundraising specialists to help and identify and access whatever funding initiatives were available. The cost of the part of the development not funded by

Brakspear or for which other funding could not be located would be born by the remaining private and public landowners.

Despite the Planning Officers' concerns regarding the planned work on New Street South Oxfordshire District Council's planning committee agreed to allow the scheme conditional upon legal agreements being signed by the various interested parties to fund the improvements to the river frontage. This caused the scheme to be delayed as the intricate details of who owned and was responsible for the various sections of the river frontage and particularly one minute piece of land between the river and the road immediately in front of the Little White Hart Hotel proved difficult to unravel. Delays were also incurred through a number of other issues that were difficult to resolve. The Environment Agency was concerned about possible reductions in the flow beneath Henley Bridge because of the boardwalk. One of the local pubs the Angel on the Bridge situated on the bridge approach was worried about the effect that the boardwalk may have on trade and Highways Authority were reluctant to state whether they would eventually be prepared to adopt the boardwalk leading to questions about who would be responsible for its maintenance. The result of these delays was that the redevelopment of the Mineral Water Factory by Brakspear was overtaken by other factors and in reality was never commenced.

#### 4.6 Preferential Beer Duty

Ongoing concern over the fate of many of the nation's smaller breweries and their inability to compete against what had now become brewing giants even after the Conservative Government's Beer Orders of 1992, led to the treasury to attempt to throw the independents a life-line in the 2002 budget. The preferential beer duty (PBD) was introduced to reduce the level of duty paid by those brewers with a lower volume of output. However the level of production set to qualify for this relief was much lower than the level allowed by the rest of Europe and consequentially the new tax regime was only beneficial to the 'microbreweries', although the volume of beer produced by Brakspear was a fraction of the output of the big brewers they were still shouldered with a high level of duty. The plight of the small independents and Brakspears in particular in relation to the PBD was brought to the attention of Parliament by a number of MPs including Boris Johnson, who at the time was the MP for Henley, who said:

*"I speak on behalf of one of the 27 breweries not to be favoured by the Bill, unlike the other 320 that are to be favoured by it. Like my hon. Friend, my heart leapt when I heard the Chancellor speak of measures in the Budget to help small breweries, because I thought that he must mean Brakspear in my constituency. Hon. Members will be familiar with Brakspear's bitter. If they are not, they jolly well ought to be. I do not mean to cast aspersions on any of the other excellent beers that are brewed in my hon. Friends' constituencies, but they will agree that Brakspear is the finest because it is brewed by the traditional double-*

*dropping method and therefore contains a higher quotient of hops than most normal beers. Indeed, when I was at school, my school had a contract with Brakspear. We were supplied with Brakspear's beer every Sunday. I am a living testament to the benefits of that drink". (Hansard 8<sup>th</sup> May 2002)*

Despite being debated in parliament brewers such as Brakspear remained unable to benefit from the PBD and continued to be faced with competition from both above and below. Brakspear as brewers, still with the proposals for the mineral water factory not finalised, found themselves in a further predicament.

With the majority of Brakspear's profit being generated by their property holdings, the continuation of brewing was dependent on the success of their tenants. The offices in the former maltings had been the most profitable of the Company's portfolio and this building was let to a computer software company who in 2001 decided that they would close their operation in Henley. This left Brakspear with over 16,000 sq ft of vacant office space. The initial success of the conversion had encouraged speculative developers in a number of similar office developments in the area. However the town was not popular with commercial tenants and with the maltings empty Henley as a town had somewhere in the region of 100,000 sq ft of vacant office provision, and no immediate prospects of finding suitable occupants. The loss of revenue from the maltings placed Brakspear in a difficult financial predicament, with the brewing operation losing considerable amounts of money. It was estimated that if brewing

had continued throughout 2002 the company would have incurred losses in the region of over £½ million (interview: Brakspear Director, 2006). With the prospect of continued unsustainable losses from brewing exaggerated by the inability to let office space in Henley, the Company Chairman Mike Foster asked the surveyor to the Brewers Livery Company, a commercial property specialist and partner in Daniel Watney a London firm of commercial agents, to evaluate the proposed conversion of the Mineral Water Factory.

*“Mike had called me to say that he was very concerned with the advice they were getting from their existing surveyors about the site because they had been working for a long while on getting a planning consent on the Mineral Water Factory part of the site for office use and they had been told at the beginning of 2002 to build speculatively 30,000 square feet of offices at Henley and he wanted to know if that was the right thing to do or not ... .. my advice to them was that it wasn't a terribly sensible thing to do...as the market in Henley in my humble opinion was dominated by small users who liked to own their own buildings, a very weak lettings market ..... my advice was clearly well received because when I was appointed my involvement initially was purely in regard to the Mineral Water Factory and what should be done with that building. Quite soon or quite early in the process I was asked to join meetings with Brakspear's merchant bank and sign a confidentiality agreement because Brakspear were losing a great deal of money from brewing there.” (Interview Property Agent, 2005)*

On the property agent's advice the company started to seek alternative uses for the site. The brewery was operating at somewhere in the region of 20,000 barrels under the capacity that was necessary to allow it to break even and with the prevailing market conditions there was no prospect that it would be possible to sell enough to increase the output. Without the financial support provided by the office lease, the brewery as a visitor centre was no longer viable and even though the brewery was operating so far under capacity it was still not eligible for relief under the Preferential Beer Duty and it became increasingly apparent that brewing could not continue at the site.

By announcing its intention to redevelop the Mineral Water Factory Brakspear had started to attract unwelcome attention in the performance of the company which resulted in speculative share buying from a number of property developers aware of the potential of such a prime site (interviews Property Agent, 2005, Brakspear Planning Consultant, 2006). With the directors increasingly nervous about the prospect of a takeover by potential asset strippers and with losses from brewing increasing the directors finally took the decision that *'as owners of the business with a duty to their shareholders they felt that if anybody was going to realise the assets and make it work they should do it themselves'* (Property Agent 2005). The property agent joined the Brakspear directors and the company's bankers in discussions relating to the future of the Company, as a result of which Brakspear announced their intention to cease brewing in the summer of 2002. With this decision the role of the property agent

changed from advising on the viability of the office proposal to that of directing Brakspear's exit from the New Street brewery and marketing the site to realise its maximum potential. Brakspear were reluctant to cease brewing and to leave the New Street brewery both being seen as an integral part of the company's composition. Despite brewing on the scale of the operation at the Henley Brewery being unprofitable, the beer itself had an excellent reputation and there had seen an increase in sales of both their cask and bottled beer in the year before closure (The Publican, 2002). Commercially it made sense to keep the brand alive which led to Brakspear agreeing a deal with Refresh UK, a specialist small scale brewer of real ales. With a much smaller capacity it would be possible for Refresh to brew Brakspear beer in profitable volumes alongside a number of other premium real ale brands owned by the Refresh group. Refresh decided to keep the brewing of the brand in Oxfordshire though there was a break of 18 months when it was brewed at their Cheshire plant while alterations were carried out at their Witney brewery which was to become the new home of Brakspear beer. When Refresh bought the Brakspear brand with it they also took much of Brakspear's brewing equipment as part of the deal, including the unique double drop fermentation system, the mash tun and the brewing copper. These were removed from Henley and eventually reinstalled by Refresh in the Wychwood brewery at Witney allowing it to continue brewing the beer in the traditional manner, using the original equipment. With Brakspear remaining in business as a pub company they moved their headquarters from the New Street site to a

small group of offices in the Bell Courtyard that had formerly been occupied by their estates team.



## Chapter Five: A Case Study, The Henley Brewery

### 2002 To 2005

#### 5.1 The Sale Of The Henley Brewery

The decision to leave brewing was part of a strategy by Brakspear's directors to divest themselves of some of the more diverse aspects of their property portfolio and concentrate on their pub chain. As a result of this strategy Daniel Watney were instructed to sell a comprehensive bundle of the company's town centre property (see plan; Figure 2). This consisted of Brakspear's properties on Riverside namely The Little White Hart hotel, the former rowing club and a number of other residential properties. Included with the properties on Riverside were the main buildings around the Old Brewery Yard, the former Mineral Water Factory and the buildings surrounding the new brewery yard were also offered for sale. The sales brochure prepared by Daniel Watney described the site in its entirety as a:

*Landmark town centre site prominently located at the junction of New Street and Riverside in the heart of Henley on Thames and enjoying significant and prominent frontage to the River Thames...*

*The site comprises a complex of well maintained buildings that have been assembled over the last four centuries by the vendors and constitutes a broad cross section of properties. The subject properties conveniently divide into three constituent parts...namely:-*

- *The Henley Brewery*

*An eclectic collection of buildings (many of which interlink) partially purpose built but generally much adapted to facilitate the brewing process. Accommodation is mixed use – industrial, offices, storage, retail, caretaker's accommodation and a visitor/reception centre. This element of the site also includes the former rowing club, now a reception centre, which fronts the river between the White Hart Hotel and the riverside cottages.*

- *The Little White Hart Hotel*

*Fronting the River Thames, comprises a twenty nine bedroom facility (within the annexe and the main hotel) together with an inter-connecting bar/restaurant. Courtyard and outbuildings to rear.*

- *Riverside Housing*

*Consists of four recently renovated cottages (all two bedroom) which turn the corner from New Street to Riverside, plus the adjoining three bedroom house at 88 New Street which encloses the entrance to the private courtyard.*

The total area covered by the site was equivalent to approximately 1.66 acres all of which was situated in the Henley Town Centre Conservation Area. Of this 1.66 acres the total gross floor space of the buildings amounted to slightly over 93,000 sq ft. The property was offered on a freehold basis mostly with vacant possession, except for some existing short-term tenancies, which remained on a number of the

Riverside properties. The selling agents invited bids on an unconditional basis in excess of £10,000,000.

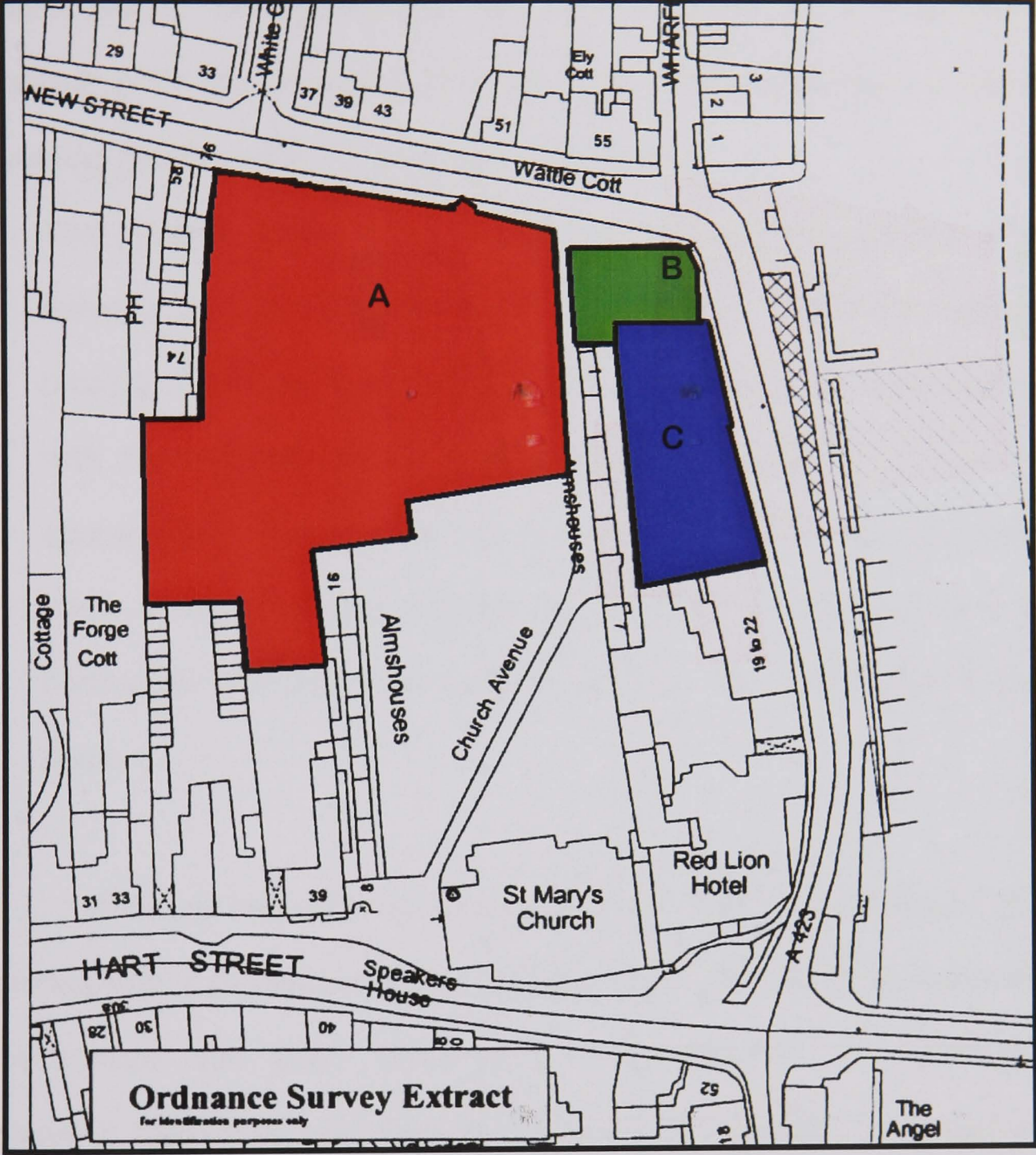


Figure 2: Ordnance Survey extract showing outline of site for sale

Key

- A: The Brewery and Mineral Water Factory
- B: The Riverside Housing
- C: The Little White Hart

The sales brochure included a draft-planning brief, prepared by the planning consultant who worked with Brakspear on the proposed office development. Consequentially this drew heavily on the application submitted for that proposal. Within this part of the document under the heading general advice is the following statement:

*The Councils Officers would prefer a comprehensive review of the brewery site which would encompass a number of different uses and occupiers. Any use must respect the listed buildings and be compatible with the character of the surrounding area Conservation Area and appropriate to the town centre. They would prefer to see a scheme in place to reuse all the buildings to ensure that proposed uses are compatible and that proper access and servicing arrangements are in place.*

Although the property agent was keen that the site should go to market with a development brief in place and had had some exploratory discussions with South Oxfordshire District Council and Brakspear's planning consultant, the planning brief was not adopted. The importance of the listed buildings and their relation to any proposed future use of the site was emphasised in the sales brochure by the inclusion of *A Conservation Statement/Qualitative Assessment Of The Constituent Buildings And Spaces For Brakspear And Sons PLC Off New Street And Riverside Henley On Thames*. This was prepared by the architects Brownhill Hayward Brown who had been the architects for the office proposal of 2000. Along with plans and photographs of the various parts of

the site it lists each component of the site and provides a brief statement to describe the building.

The news that Brakspear had decided to exit brewing led to extensive interest in the site and the company's property director found himself fielding numerous phone calls from potential buyers. The selling agent dispatched approximately 200 copies of the sales brochure to parties who had registered an interest in acquiring the site. From the 200 potential buyers six serious bids were eventually received for the site. These were mainly from locally based developers who were mostly local house builders. Of these six bids one of the proposals was perceived as being far more attractive than the others. This bid was submitted on the basis of the site being used for a mixed-use development that would see the older buildings at the centre of the site retained and converted for commercial use and a proposal to develop mainly residential properties from the Mineral Water Factory and the distribution yard behind it.

## **5.2 Barriers To Entry**

Brand (1994) suggests that a building is the physical manifestation of decisions taken in a previous era; this is particularly evident in an industrial building such as a brewery. Although the brewery at Henley had not gone through the wholesale redevelopment that many of its contemporary establishments were subjected to in the late 1800s, it still represented a collection of buildings that had evolved over a period of time to house a specific function. This functional form had led to an '*eclectic*

*collection*' of interlinked buildings that formed a sizable complex. Before the introduction of motorised transport the distance to market for the finished product dictated the location of breweries. Traditionally brewed beer is relatively cheap to produce but because of its bulk is difficult and expensive to transport, a situation further exasperated by the 'living' nature of traditional cask conditioned ale, which reduces the shelf life of the product. As a result of these factors breweries tended to be built close to the centre of towns where there would be an extensive market for the product within a fairly limited travelling distance, a distance originally limited by the range of a horse drawn dray. The Henley brewery was no exception to this, and occupied a position in the centre of town. Although this location had served the company well as a centre for its distribution operation it also had the fortunate side effect of ensuring that it would be valued at a premium as a development site. However, anybody wanting to take advantage of this desirable location in the centre of a popular and affluent town was faced with a number of issues that would influence what they could or could not do with the site.

First and foremost of these were the buildings themselves. The brewery was the result of a gradual evolution of the site over a number of centuries resulting in the form that was offered for sale. This evolution may have started as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century with the construction of the half timbered building at the rear of the site which is thought to have been built as a malthouse. The site had definitely been used continuously for brewing since 1715 when records show that Benjamin Sarney operated as a

common brewer on the site of what eventually became the brewery offices at number 86 New Street (Sheppard, 1979) and this carried on till Brakspear ceased brewing in 2002 when the site was sold.

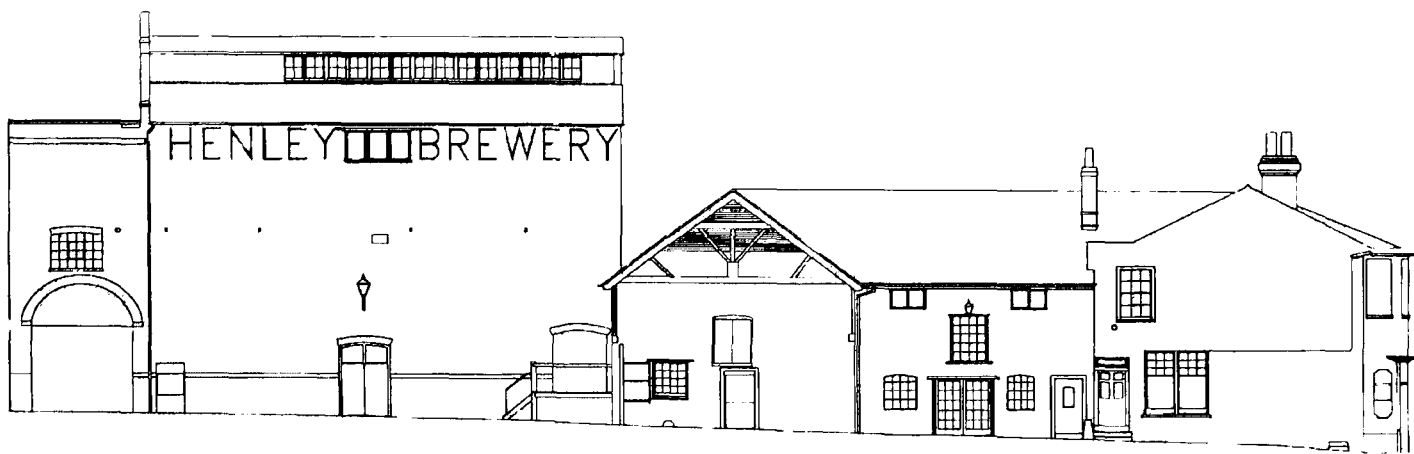
This evolutionary process resulted in a mix of building types crammed together in a relatively small area. These buildings ranged in age from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century malthouse through the 19<sup>th</sup> Century brewhouse to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century constructions in the New Yard behind the Mineral Water Factory. The form of these individual components was also very different as can be seen by referring to the elevations on the following pages. The Old Brewery Yard was dominated on one side by William Bradford's brewhouse of 1892 (Pearson, 1999) which at five storeys high, with its brew tower and vast internal spaces, dwarfed the single storey store buildings on the opposite side of the yard. Both of these were very different from the Georgian office and head brewers house that fronted the site on New Street which again contrasted with the industrial mass of the adjoining Mineral Water Factory which hid the late 20<sup>th</sup> century distribution buildings around the New Yard its rear.

The physical diversity of the buildings was not the only problem facing any potential developer. As well as being representative of decisions made about form by the brewers, they were also the physical embodiment of legal decisions made by statutory planning bodies. Having been added to the list of buildings considered to be of architectural or historical significance some of the individual structures that comprise the brewery

complex were protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The developer's conservation consultant explained the limitation of the protection:

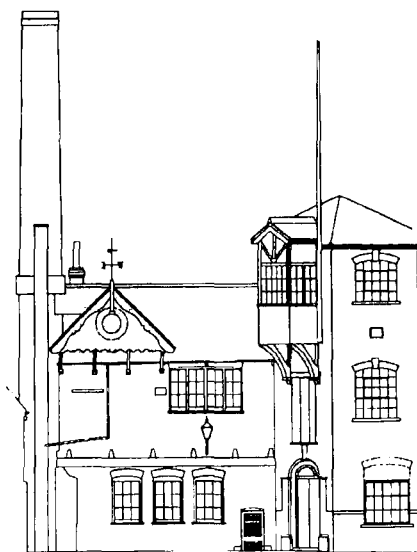
*“What they'd listed in 1973 was basically the house on the front corner listed 2 star and the timber framed building the rough cast one that you can see from Church Avenue”* (Interview: Conservation Consultant, 2005)





**Figure 3: Old Brewery Yard East Elevation Source: Hotel Architect**

The large mass of the main five-storey brewhouse dominates this side of the courtyard. The building has few windows overlooking the courtyard apart from the range of windows in the roof. Adjacent to the main brew house can be seen the overhanging gable from which a bunch of mistletoe was traditionally hung every Christmas. To the right of this is the entrance to the brewery shop and then abutting this range of buildings is the brewery office with its bowed front.



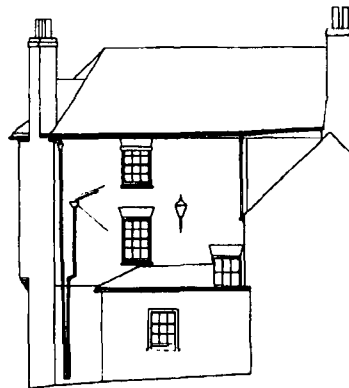
**Figure 4: Old Brewery Yard North Elevation Source: Hotel Architect**

The brew tower is situated behind the corner formed by the intersection of the East and North Elevations and is not shown in any of the elevations but would be on the right of this elevation. The range of buildings shown is overshadowed by the Brewery Chimney on the left and the lucam projecting from the building in the corner. These buildings adjoin what is believed to be a 16<sup>th</sup> Century malthouse forming the corner of the site.



**Figure 5: Old Brewery Yard West Elevation Source: Hotel Architect**

This elevation clearly shows the assorted range of buildings lining the west elevation of the courtyard. Comprised mainly of storerooms the predominantly single storey buildings are significantly different in scale and mass to those on the opposite side of the courtyard.



**Figure 6: Old Brewery Yard South Elevation Source: Hotel Architect**

Elevation showing the rear of the buildings that front onto New Street. The building at the left extent of the drawing is joined to the Old Brewery Offices that complete the range of buildings depicted in figure 3 by a wrought iron arch



Figure 7: Courtyard, North and West Elevations. Source: Hotel Architect

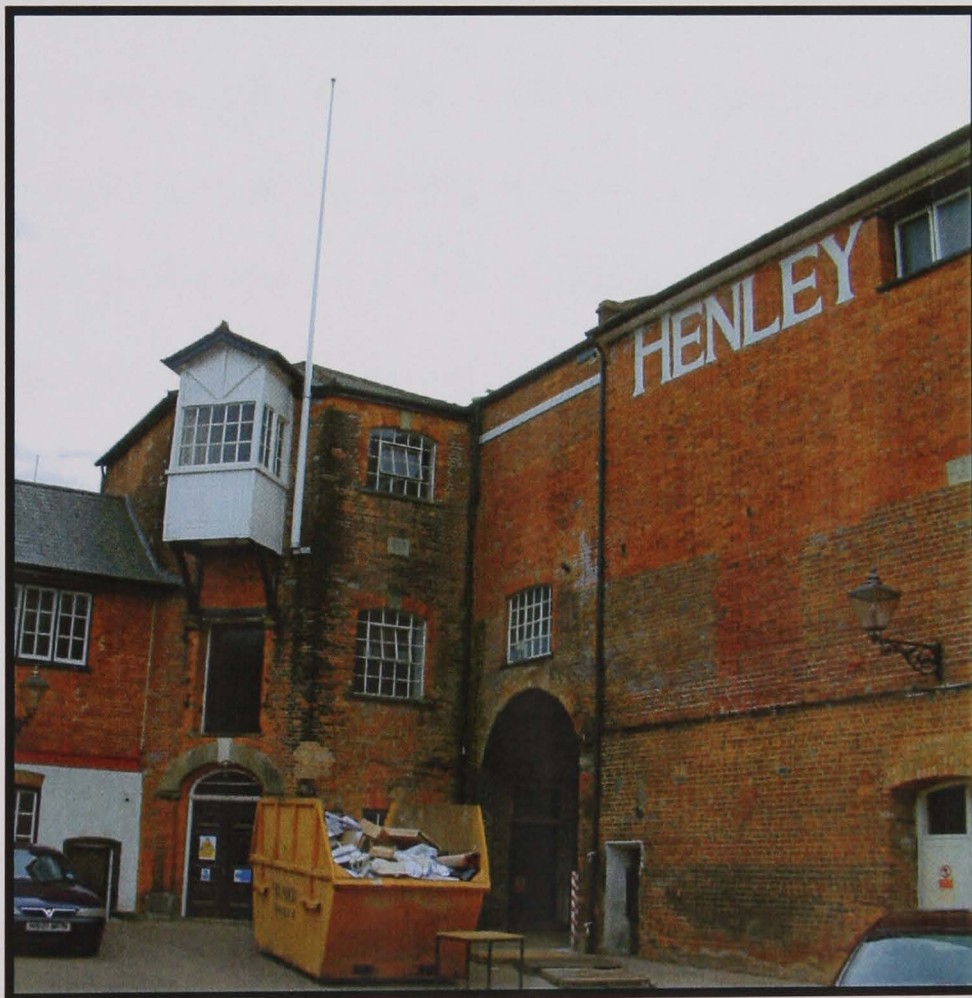


Figure 8: Courtyard, North and East Elevations. Source: Hotel Architect

Since this list was compiled there has been a greater appreciation of the merit of industrial structures and in particular importance has been directed towards conserving typical groupings of buildings and less towards individual buildings. This was not the case when the list for Henley was compiled. The result of this was that the buildings, although a remarkably intact example of a Victorian brewery complex, were not added to the list. In keeping with the listing criteria of the time preference was given to individual buildings and the 18<sup>th</sup> Century brewery house (listed grade II \*), the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century office buildings (listed grade II) that front New Street and the timber framed 16<sup>th</sup> century malthouse building (listed grade II) at the rear corner of the site were the only buildings added to the list. The statutory obligation to consult English Heritage where a building listed grade II\* is included in a planning proposal led to the extent of the development site being redefined to exclude the grade II\* Brewery house in an attempt to ensure that the planning decision remained with the local authority. This meant that the only listed buildings on the site to be developed were the malthouse and the brewery offices. However, despite only these two particular buildings being protected by statutory listing this did not mean that any developer purchasing the site had the unfettered opportunities to do what they wanted with the remaining buildings. There is an argument that as part of an interconnected complex of buildings that the non-listed structures would be granted protection by virtue of what is known as the curtilage argument. This basically suggests that as the rest of the buildings were part of the same site then they stand within the curtilage or boundary of

the listed buildings and are therefore an integral part of those buildings and therefore the same level of protection should be applied to them. This ambiguity over what or was not listed would be a major cause of dispute for the whole of the development.

### **5.3 How The Brewery Was Sold**

Following the issues regarding the proposals for the Mineral Water Factory outlined in the previous chapter, the London property agents Daniel Watney had been engaged by Brakspear to sell the whole site; the waterfront properties and the whole of the brewery complex including the Mineral Water Factory and New Brewery Yard together with the older parts of the brewery. This meant that any developer would have not only to deal with the issues above relating to the older buildings, but also be able to cope with the redevelopment of the other parts of the site. The property agent, a senior partner in Daniel Watney whose speciality is the more unusual and challenging properties, oversaw the compilation of a sales brochure to present the site. This brochure included the following as a caveat to potential developers:

*“The Council expect that a significant proportion of the buildings should be used for employment generating development, but would be unlikely to support alternative B2 or B8 uses. Other uses may be explored outside the ‘B’ classes which are significant employers. Such uses could include leisure uses (e.g. a gym or health club), for conference or function rooms, possibly in association with The Little*

*White Hart. Limited retail use may also be acceptable, albeit this is not a primary retailing location.”*

This added to the information available through Council policy specifically policy HEN 6 which stated:

*“Proposals for the re-use of the buildings should relate to the whole site. Any re-use could involve a number of different uses and occupiers but it is important to ensure that a scheme is in place to re-use all the buildings that the proposed uses are compatible and that proper access and servicing arrangements are in place.”*

With the site presenting this many obstacles to any potential developer it was clear to the selling agent that it would be difficult to find a suitable buyer for the plot. The property agent described the type of developer that he thought they were looking for to be able to develop the site profitably while coping with the limitations:

*“ what we needed to do was to identify people who could make things like this work and would actually apply themselves in the appropriate manner so from the outset I never really felt comfortable that this was a house builders lot .....So we needed to identify what I would regard as an entrepreneurial property developer” (Interview: Property Agent, 2005)*

This ‘entrepreneurial developer’ was found locally, although born and brought up in Australia, the developer who eventually purchased the site,

lived in the nearby village of Fawley. After building up a successful property development company in the 1980s and early 1990s that specialised in industrial to commercial conversions, he had sold the bulk of the company, apart from a few small properties, and now operated on a much smaller scale. At the end of the 1990s he had been involved in the conversion of another local brewery, Wethered's in Marlow, where he had been invited to help redevelop the historic brewery at the core of the site, which had been bought by a firm of specialist house builders. This site had been the subject of a prolonged planning dispute over what would happen to the core buildings. Using a team assembled from mainly local companies, a suitable and highly profitable redevelopment was carried out, as a result of which the original core buildings were retained.

*“The Marlow brewery was put to us on the basis that we’d had experience in doing up old buildings but the developer there was only interested in doing the residential new build and although they have a commercial section they didn’t want to get into the complication of [dealing with] listed buildings that had sat there for about ten years. I think the town had just about got sick of it and so we came along and got planning very quickly, we got planning for office use, we got planning for a restaurant. My argument was to retain the buildings which was a really strange thing because we had to argue with some of the councillors who wanted us to rip it down, its in the town centre and would have been such a shame. It had a lovely character and of course half your marketing’s done for you in the shape of a building if it’s a conversion because there’s lots of history there’s lots of stories*

*to be told around it there's lots of bits you can sort of pick up out of the building and feature and kind of make a story to it. And so Marlow turned out to be a success we were on a fairly good time in around 2000 when commercial property was in a shortage so we rented it well, we sold it well" (Interview: The Developer, 2005).*

As well as being profitable the development was critically well received gaining an award from the civic trust for the quality of the conversion (Pearson, 1999). The involvement in the Marlow development gave the developer what he regarded as 'a sort of track record I suppose', a track record of not only dealing with difficult brewery buildings but also of working effectively with the planning authorities. Considering Brakspear's difficult relationship with the local authority this meant that the developer was ready for whatever difficulties lay ahead:

*"We could take the proposal to them with a bit of knowledge about how to go about it and more importantly from my point of view I'd been able to build a team in that time of architects, engineers and planning consultants and so on that knew their onions pretty well and knew who to speak to about what issues, making sure that most of the people are happy most of the time and informed, which is the big thing we'd learnt. We cut our teeth at Marlow so that's how we came to end up at Henley." (Interview: The Developer, 2005).*



This level of confidence dealing with sensitive planning issues helped to ensure that after all the developers interested in the site were reduced to a shortlist of serious bidders, the bid proposed by the developer was regarded by all the parties as being both the most attractive and realistic. Although he had directed the conversion of the Marlow brewery for mainly commercial uses he thought that the Henley site offered considerable residential opportunities.

With the experience of his team in converting listed industrial buildings they knew that disregarding the policy restrictions imposed by South Oxfordshire DC, the actual form of the buildings at the centre of the site would create enormous problems that would effectively prevent them from making them into a profitable residential conversion. Because of this it was decided to try and find a suitably sensitive, yet viable, commercial use for the centre buildings that would satisfy the mixed-use criteria set out by the planning authority and allow them to concentrate on the residential development of the remainder of the site. The developer described the reasoning behind their approach:

*“ Because there is a policy from the employment people that they weren't to change it from commercial to residential ... in the first instance where bids were made on the basis of it being a 100% residential they weren't going to work. So we had to put a use in there that would be job creating and come up with something that would mean that less of the fabric was being changed because the rules on conversion now in residential from old buildings is so strict*

*that it's very hard to keep any of the original fabric. We had to really focus on what sort of uses that we could get in there with the least touch. By the time we were down to the last three we had pulled it apart in quite a lot of depth and we knew principally what we wanted to do and that was to retain the brew tower for a commercial use like a hotel. So I went to several hoteliers to see if they were interested. That was the [hotel use] lightest touch on the building, on the fabric of the building". (Interview: The Developer, 2005).*

The former Brakspear brewery was sold to the newly formed Old Henley Brewery Company established by the developer in an undisclosed deal for a sum in the region of the £10 million asking price. Immediately following the sale, the central part of the site comprising the buildings around the old brewery yard, was sold to the Hotel du Vin hotel company for approximately £3.4 million. Drawing on his successful development of the Marlow brewery the developer assembled a development team with the help of the planning consultant he had worked with at Marlow. As part of this team they enlisted a conservation consultant who, although now in private practice, had for many years previously been employed as a conservation officer for South Oxfordshire District Council. During his time with SODC the conservation consultant had developed an extensive knowledge of the brewery site, and in his former role had been one of the objectors to the ill-fated previous office proposal. This team, which for planning purposes also included Hotel du Vin's development team,

proposed that the site should now be divided into three distinct sub-developments:

- The Riverside and in particular the re-development of the Little White Hart which was being dealt with exclusively by the Old Henley Brewery Company's development team.
- The old brewery yard and its buildings which would be developed by Hotel du Vin.
- The New Brewery Yard and the Mineral Water Factory which the Old Henley Brewery Company wanted to develop primarily into residential accommodation.

#### **5.4 The Old Henley Brewery Company Proposal**

Although the Old Henley Brewery Company were not responsible for the design and construction of the hotel, the hotel development was included as an integral part of the planning application assembled by the developers planning consultant and eventually submitted to South Oxfordshire District Council. This was done to ensure that the proposals satisfied the requirements of HEN 6 and the call in the draft development brief for an approach that considered the whole site. Although the developers referred to the development as a single scheme, it was actually submitted to the authority as two applications, which reflected the physical split of the site divided as it is by Church Avenue. Figure 9, following, illustrates the areas of the site referred to in the separate applications.



**Figure 9: Site Plan Showing Extent of Planning Applications**

Key:

**A:** Application P03/E0626, registered on the 23/09/03, accompanied by an application for listed building consent P03/E0626LB (The Riverside Proposal)

**B:** Application P03/E0710, registered on the 7/10/2003, accompanied by an application for listed building consent P03/E0762/LB (Brewery and Mineral Water Factory Proposal)

The first application P03/E0626 was registered on 23/09/03 and proposed:

- I. Conversion of the Little White Hart Hotel Annex to form 1 three storey house.*
- II. Conversion and change of use of part of Little White Hotel rear stable building to form 1 bed two storey dwelling.*
- III. Conversion and change of use of part of ground floor of the Little White Hart Hotel to form 2 Retail units*
- IV. Conversion and change of use of upper floors (above proposed shop units) to form 4 flats*
- V. Conversion of remainder of the Little White Hart Hotel (cottage pub) to form independent public house*
- VI. Cessation of rear beer garden use and erection of rear single storey extension, to new public house*
- VII. Conversion and change of use of former rowing club building to form restaurant*
- VIII. Retention of 4 residential cottages and courtyard*

This was also accompanied by an application for listed building consent (P03/E0626LB) covering the details of this phase of the development. This application preceded a full planning application, number P03/E0710, which was registered on the 7/10/2003 with South Oxfordshire District Council and which proposed:

*Change of use of former main brewery buildings to form 42 bedroom Hotel and Bistro for Hotel du Vin Ltd including utilisation of existing access into old brewery yard.*

*Partial demolition of three curtilage buildings, change of use of retained former brewery buildings to form 7 B1 units. Erection of 14 dwellings and conversion of cooperage into 3 flats.*

*Utilisation of the existing New Brewery Yard to provide access with basement servicing and parking.*

This was accompanied by P03/E0762/LB an application for listed building consent, proposing:

*Conversion of buildings around old brewery yard to hotel use, comprising internal and external alterations. Conversion of front section of the Former Mineral Water Manufactory into 7 B1 units.*

*Demolition of rear section of Former Mineral Water Manufactory.*

*Erection of flats F4-F9 (attached to retained brewery buildings)*

*Conversion of cooperage to 3 Flats. Erection of Houses H4-H5 (attached to existing site boundary wall). Erection of Houses H1-H3 (attached to existing site boundary wall)*

The Council's planning officers, although very supportive of the majority of the planned hotel and riverside sections of the development, were not as keen on the proposals for the conversion of the Mineral Water Factory into 'live work units' or the plans to demolish the later warehousing and buildings around the New Brewery Yard to allow the construction of the proposed residential units. This lack of support for the residential part

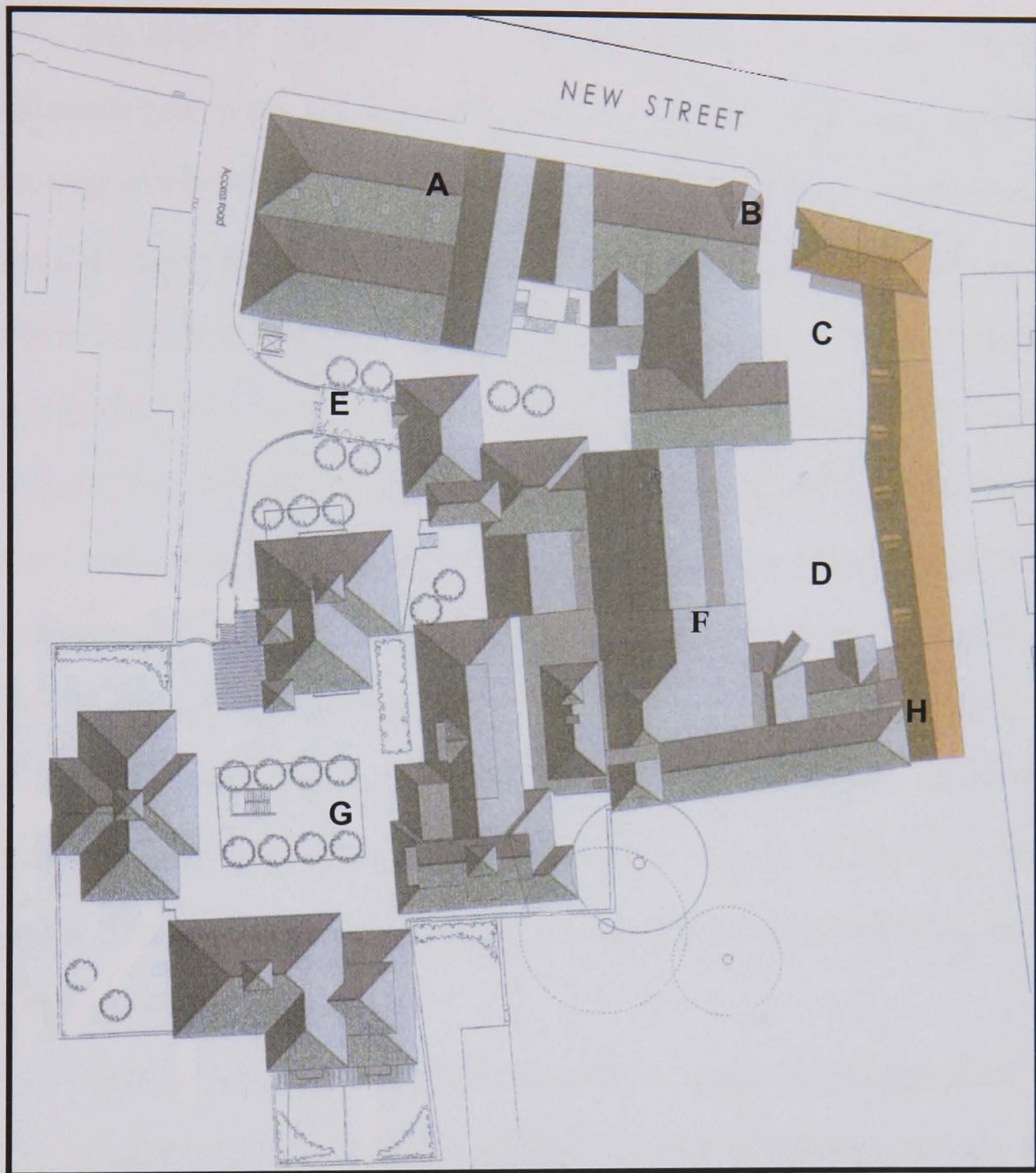
of the development continued when the two applications were taken to committee in March 2004, even after a series of amendments that involved retention of the cooorage and cask washing area, a reduction in the number of dwellings and the change of proposed live/work units in the converted Mineral Water Factory buildings to B1 business units.

*“I supported the scheme for the relatively modest work and the alterations to the riverside but my recommendation for the scheme for the residential development hotel and office use was one refusal however our elected members were very sympathetic to the proposals”*

(Interview: Area Planning Officer SODC, 2005)

The two applications were considered together at committee and were regarded as being significant to Henley on Thames. Despite the continued misgivings of the planning staff the applicant presented a very strong case for supporting the scheme and permission for both of the applications was granted with conditions relating to details of the conservation elements of the development and that work would not progress till a contract for the work on hotel had been signed.

It is this second part of the application, P03/E0710, that covers the hotel conversion and the residential aspects of the development that are the concern of the rest of this case study. Figure 10 on the following page, shows the architect’s plan of the extent of this part of the development with some of the key buildings identified.



**Figure 10: Plan of the Proposed Development**

Key:

- A. Mineral Water Factory
- B. Hotel Reception In The Old Brewery Offices
- C. The Old Brewery Yard. Arrival Zone
- D. The Old Brewery Yard. Restricted Guest Space
- E. Access Into Underground Parking
- F. Brewhouse
- G. Proposed New Build Residential Complex
- H. Location Of The 16<sup>th</sup> Century Malthouse Building



## 5.6 Who Would Build A Hotel In A Brewery?

The idea of converting the central buildings into a hotel was an attractive proposition for the hotelier who at the time was the chairman and founder in the 1990s of the Hotel du Vin chain of 'boutique' hotels, one of the market leaders in this hotel sector. Voted as the Hotelier of the year in 2003, he had trained at Claridge's and the Berkeley in London before going on to work in Paris (Caterer, 2004). This was followed by a period as a resort hotel manager in Bermuda and it was while working in Bermuda that he struck up a friendship with the architect who became Hotel du Vin's architect. On returning to Britain he was appointed managing director of the Chewton Glen country house hotel before leaving to open Hotel du Vin's first hotel in Winchester with sommelier Gerard Bassett, a venture that was partly financed by Anita Roddick the founder of the Body Shop chain. The company developed into a small chain of award winning hotels offering:

*"stylish yet unstuffy hotels in which a focus on basics such as customer service keeps standards up, and an absence of frills and superficial gloss keeps prices down"* (Caterer, 2004)

Describing the introduction of this type of hotel Ransley and Ingram suggest that he and a number of other hoteliers with a similar philosophy were:

*"new players in the market [who] exploited the opportunity to develop a range of niche products such as town house, designer or so-called 'lifestyle hotels'.*

*These units inevitably were of a smaller scale, specific service standard and very individual in their product or management style. Since they were adaptable to conversion of existing properties whether offices, houses, warehouses or other types of buildings, they were able to place themselves in prime city locations. In some of the early examples ..... in the UK, the desire for differentiation led to guests staying in secondary locations, yet happy to pay prime location rates". (Ransley and Ingram, 2004: 8-9)*

This description could certainly be applied to the strategy used to develop the chain, which quickly acquired a reputation for excellent customer service characterised by attention to detail in all aspects of the business. The company's attention to detail is demonstrated by its concern that all members of staff are knowledgeable about the products the company offers. To ensure this the company goes to such extraordinary lengths as flying bar staff to Cuba to learn about the cigars the hotel offer; a strategy that can be justified by cigar sales alone being worth £250,000 annually for the company (Caterer, 2004).

This attention to detail is also evidenced by the extensive personal involvement of the hotelier as the company chairman in the selection and subsequent conversion of the group's hotels. This extended from the initial identification of potentially suitable sites, through to a high level of involvement in the management and co-ordination of the construction part of the project and including together with his wife, designing the interior

decoration of the finished hotels. This level of involvement and personal attention remained evident at Henley where (according to several of those interviewed) in the days before opening he could be found, paint brush in hand, helping to ensure the deadlines were met, even though at that time he was in negotiations to sell his share of Hotel du Vin to a larger hotel group.

The exceptional levels of service offered by Hotel du Vin were further enhanced by the company's policy of seeking unusual buildings to locate the hotels in. By the time that the Henley Brewery came onto the market, Hotel du Vin had a very experienced property development team. This team, under the command of the hotelier, working closely with the architect, had developed a reputation for the sensitive conversion of existing buildings into upmarket boutique hotels. Prior to Henley they had applied their winning formula to what had previously been a Birmingham Eye Hospital, a Brighton nightclub and a Bristol Salt Warehouse turning them into successful boutique hotels. Their location in these unusual buildings added to the attraction for the hotel guests and served as a method by which the company, in keeping with other boutique hoteliers, sought to differentiate their product from that offered by other mainstream hotel groups. This strategy allows the hotels to take on a status as destinations in their own right with guests opting to visit the hotel rather than the host town in which it is located.

As part of a gradual growth strategy, the company had been seeking a suitable site in the Thames Valley to add to their portfolio. According to Hotel du Vin's architect they had already spoken to the owners of a number of other buildings in the Henley area before it came to their attention that the Brakspear brewery might become available as a development site. The position of the site within the Henley Conservation Area its proximity to the riverside opposite the site of the annual regatta made attractive to the organisation and the profile of customer they wished to attract. However, when the site came to the market, the inclusion of the Mineral Water Factory and the riverside properties meant that it was too big for Hotel du Vin. The type of boutique hotel that the company specialised in was only really suited to relatively small scale developments which would allow around forty guest rooms with attached dining and reception areas. This format had proven to work at their other hotels and the buildings at the centre of the brewery site were ideal for the up market, slightly 'quirky' hotels that were Hotel du Vin trademark. Although the central buildings were ideal for what the company required, the purchase of the whole site to obtain them was too big an undertaking for, what was at that point, an independent hotel company.

That the hotel company had an interest in the site had come to the attention of the selling agents who appreciated that a hotelier could provide the type of commercial application needed to ensure that the development met the criteria of the planning authority. The property agent recounted that:

*“I’d also spoken very early to [the hotelier], I just felt that this was a classic site for him and I thought that the best way of making the whole thing come together was when we invited bids, was to put him in touch with all the parties that had indicated they wanted to make a bid. So there could be a joint approach, because I felt the planners would support a hotel use of the site, it was employment generating, it was a very effective means of retaining the core buildings in the centre of the site. I think [his] reputation went before him for dealing with buildings of a sensitive nature”*

The desire for Hotel du Vin to acquire part of the plot fitted in very well with the plans of the fledgling Old Henley Brewery Company and the subsequent coming together of the two sets of developers presented the opportunity that all the parties had been looking for, the developer described the final arrangement:

*“The hotelier Hotel du Vin had been interested in this site for a long time and had been speaking to Brakspears when we got down to the wire we got in contact with them because they didn’t want the whole site so we went forward with a bid with me buying the whole, so that Brakspears were effectively selling the whole site and getting clear of it. We then said we’ll sell that [the central buildings] to Hotel du Vin and let them do their own thing in there” (Interview: The Developer, 2005)*

Through this arrangement the developer was able to divest the core historic buildings thereby reducing some of the financial exposure from the development leaving them with the potentially profitable residential elements of the site. Correspondingly, Hotel du Vin got the core buildings that they needed without the peripheral buildings that they did not want, whilst the planning authority got the employment generating mixed use that they desired. As a result of successful negotiations between the two sets of developers, the whole development site was sold to the developer's Old Henley Brewery Company for approximately £10 million. This sale was synchronized with the sale of the central buildings around the old brewery courtyard to the Hotel du Vin group for approximately £3.4 million. Before going on to consider the actual conversion the next section will take a closer look at what it was that the hoteliers actually bought.

## **5.7 The Hotel Conversion**

The buildings at the centre of the development site, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, provided a challenge to any potential developer. These buildings grouped around the old brewery yard are disparate in character and varied considerably in age and size. As stated earlier these ranged from single storey buildings to the huge space contained by the brewhouse all contained in what may or may not have been listed buildings (see figures 3-6, Old Brewery Yard Elevations).

None of these buildings immediately lent themselves to a hotel conversion. The portion of the site purchased by Hotel du Vin had a limited frontage, restricted to what had been the brewery's offices on New Street and the adjoining entrance to the old brewery yard. The taller buildings that flank the western side, in particular the mass of the main brewhouse, dominate this inner courtyard. At the time the brewery was sold only the office building at the front of the complex and the malthouse to the rear of the site were listed (see figure 10, the two listed buildings the old brewery offices and the malthouse are labelled B and H respectively).

In defining a listed building the Planning (listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 states:

*1990.1.5 A listed building means a building included in the statutory list and:*

*a) any object or structure fixed to the building*

*b) any object or structure within the curtilage of the building which, although not fixed to it, forms part of the land and has done so since before 1<sup>st</sup> July 1948. (Walker, 1995)*

All the parties involved in the development were prepared to consider that the above argument could and should be applied to the central part of the site, and were happy to accept that the buildings grouped around the old brewery yard were curtilage listed. However, the local authority planners were unhappy with the proposals for the residential proportion of the site and were keen that this should be

extended to include the Mineral Water Factory and the buildings behind it. Extending protection to include the buildings around the New Brewery Yard would have meant that the proposed demolition of various buildings on the other part of the site to enable the residential new build would have been more difficult. The distinctly industrial nature of the later buildings around the New Brewery Yard would have ruled out their retention for anything other than continued industrial use. While it was possible to argue that the buildings were within the curtilage of the listed portion of the site, on the Ordnance Survey the whole site is drawn as one plot, the developers were unwilling to accept that they were worthy of being regarded as listed. In the opinion of the developer's conservation consultant:

*“the Mineral Water Factory didn't quite meet the criteria for listing and also another building round the back which was initially proposed for demolition that the Council were very keen to keep was not of list-able quality but those were the two buildings that were causing the main hang ups on progressing the scheme as a whole were concerned and I think that the Council were hoping that those buildings were going to get listed in the event officers from EH came down here looked at the site and as a result of that basically listed all these buildings round the courtyard.”* (Interview: Conservation Consultant, 2005).

The continued disagreement over the value of the New Brewery Yard buildings led to English Heritage being called in. After a visit from English Heritage Inspectors mid-way through the development process the



following description of the newly listed site was issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport:

*The buildings form an L-shaped range around a yard behind the New Street brewery office, starting from the right a malt store then fermentation range, then brewhouse, then forge store.*

*Exterior: the mid-19th Century maltstore has a steeply pitched cantilevered gable with exposed truss on scalloped brackets, below this is a first floor loading door, central entrance with 8-over-8 pane sash to left; some light scantling timber framing to rear and side elevations.*

*The Fermentation range is mostly blind to brewery yard with WHB 1898 date-stone and inserted ground floor entrance; first floor of later red brickwork with scars of earlier openings in lower brick wall. Small 3-light window below eaves and wide carriage entrance to left below segmentally arched multi paned window. The Brew house has cantered corner with rounded stone arch with key-block entrance, altered first floor loading door and second floor timber framed lucam; large multi-paned windows to rear. To rear, the taller brew tower with hipped roof, weather boarded and louvered sides, tall brick chimney and a raised weather boarded ventilation cupola under hipped roof; massive rounded arch window flanked by pairs of lower windows under segmental arches; base of brew tower supported by girder marked erected by AB and GEB 1892 on 4 large cast iron column colonnade. The Forge /Store has 3 identical windows to ground floor under segmental brick arches. First floor has central*

*stone date-stone marked WHB 1857 then 4 light windows to right. To left gabled dormer on brackets with scalloped barge boards, clock and weather vane. Chimney to rear re-built in mid 20th Century. (DCMS 2004)*

The developers regarded this intervention as favourable, as it reduced the potential for the council to object to the demolition of the buildings around the New Brewery Yard as they had not been deemed worthy by English Heritage of being added to the list. This change in the terms of the argument was described by the developer's conservation consultant who explained the intervention from English Heritage in the following manner:

*"Effectively with the whole site looked at that made it more difficult for the council to argue the curtilage argument because you know ironically if you've got a few buildings listed and that list dates back to 1973 and hasn't been looked at since you can then bring more credibility to the argument that the whole thing is listed by virtue of curtilage. Where if you know for a fact that EH have recently come in and looked at the whole site and come to the conclusion that only certain buildings are of list-able quality, while it doesn't necessarily demolish the legal argument that other buildings are listed, it does blow a fairly big hole in the credibility of the argument that those buildings are actually listed because they have actually been assessed by today's criteria and rightly or wrongly found wanting."*

(Interview: Conservation Consultant, 2005)

While this re-evaluation of the site was crucial in clearing the way for the development to get through the planning stage and of course made things much simpler for the developers of the residential new build part of the site, it did not particularly change the approach take by the hotelier's team. They had already established a reputation that partially relied on the sympathetic conversion of historic buildings and to this end they had taken the decision to treat their portion of the site as if it were all listed from the start. The conservation consultant described the approach the hotel development team had taken:

*"We'd always on the developer's team taken the view that the whole site was listed, in spirit at least, and that was the approach we tried to take. We, you know, believed in the scheme in conservation terms and we were approaching it as if the whole site were listed and listed building consent was applied for, for everything on site, VAT exemption may also had something to do with it (laughs) from the developer's point of view, and the council were happy to receive an application for listed building consent for virtually the whole scheme. So it was a delicate balance really where we said weren't afraid of listing as we actually felt that the scheme was acceptable in conservation terms and in the end as I say only certain buildings were actually specifically listed."* (Interview: Conservation Consultant, 2005)

Apart from the issues over what was or wasn't listed, the buildings brought with them a number of physical problems which the hotel

developers had to deal with. The conversion of character buildings into a fully functioning hotel provided numerous challenges for the architect. Although the main building on that part of the site was quite large the site was restricted on all sides and the range of buildings surrounding the central courtyard varied tremendously. This variation in size was a result of the gradual evolution of the site over the course of the brewery's history, as it had not undergone the wholesale reconstruction that many of its competitors had experience during the brewing boom of the late 1800s.

The architect for the project was very experienced in hotel design and had been responsible with the hotelier for all of the previous Hotel du Vin projects. He first got involved in hotel design when working for a practice in Bermuda. Architecturally he realised that the industrial nature of the building and the limitations of the site would create problems, which they dealt with in the following way:

*“We took a very specific approach with our section which was the oldest part of the brewery and involved the factory of the brewery, if you see what I mean. We took the approach that we were going to retain the existing envelopes, the walls of the buildings that formed that brewing factory and work within them. We’ve not tried to add incongruous carbuncle like extensions and we would very much work within the confines of what we would find ourselves owning and that proved to be an extremely good decision. We also made a conscious decision rather than to cover up or hide any of the brewing process manifestations in terms of architecture or machinery that remained in*

*the building we decided to build them into the rooms and to really put them on show rather than to conceal or hide them” (Interview: Hotel Architect, 2006)*

This in itself was not a particularly easy task and while the smaller buildings brought problems of access, it was the main brewhouse that caused the most concern. This was the most obviously industrial of all the buildings on the site and had been designed for one purpose, to brew beer.

Traditionally, the brewing of beer was done with the assistance of gravity, water and other raw materials were pumped to the top of the building and gravity then allowed them to pass through the various processes eventually reaching ground level as beer. In her book on the architecture of brewing Pearson (1999) gives a fuller description of the brewing process and the various stages that it passes through. At the end of this description she states that:

*“Even this brief summary of the brewing process indicates the complexity of the spatial requirements to be considered by a brewery designer. The basic problem is one of heating, cooling, moving and storing substantial volumes of liquid (and constituent solids) in an environment where ideally ventilation and temperature can be controlled. Numerous large wooden or metal vessels, quantities of pipework, elevators and pumping equipment need to be arranged to take as much advantage of gravity as possible. The eventual result*

*was the traditional Victorian tower shaped brewhouse.”* (Pearson, 1999:20)

It was this process that the main building had been constructed to house, a process that was very different from that of its proposed use as a hotel. Although the main brewhouse from the outside was five floors high the inside was arranged in such a way to make conversion difficult (see figure 11, following page) the architect described what they found when he first looked at the interior:

*“When we first went there it was actually filled up with all this kit all at different levels and the levels didn’t relate to human habitation at all the levels related how big was the piece of kit that this platform had to support and where was it in the kind of gravitational brewing process..... It was very interesting that the tun room in the centre there was divided up in that way, it was almost like a Chinese puzzle of interconnecting platforms some of them just had half a meter between the level of one platform and the level of another because they just had to have that gravitational fall to the next ..... to be honest with you to work with the very Heath Robinson assembly of structures which divided up that tun room would have been impossible for the reasons I’ve just said the structure was designed to carry pieces of equipment not at all for human habitation”* (Interview: Hotel architect, 2006)



**Figure 11: Inside the Main Brewhouse, Source: Hotel Architect**

The conservation consultant described it slightly differently:

*“it was just huge great bloody void right the way up from ground level all the way up to the apex of the roof “(Interview: Conservation Consultant, 2005)*

These enormous spaces presented a challenge to the architect who as outlined earlier was trying very hard to fit with the personality of the building as it already existed and wanted the character of the building to be evident and influential in the design of the conversion. Trying to achieve this while still creating an upmarket hotel in what he described as a chopped about and added-to Victorian industrial building would inevitably mean altering the layout of the internal spaces. The main

obstacle in the way of coherent hotel use was the differing levels found in the main brewhouse, these required the architect to develop a strategy to reuse the space effectively:

*“The structure was designed to carry pieces of equipment not for human habitation so what we did we looked at where the common vertical supports were and kept those. We looked at where the other levels of the adjacent buildings were ..... where they joined in and we came up with a way to sub-divide that space horizontally which was the least intrusive way of dealing with it. The actual horizontal steelwork that already existed there was stripped out as part of the approved demolitions and we proved the case that we had to take those differing platforms out in order to make a reasonable use of that particular structure”* (Interview: Hotel Architect, 2006)

Even with new floor arrangement in the main brewhouse its interconnected relationship with the other buildings and the need to incorporate the ability for future users, staff and guests, to ‘flow’ successfully around the hotel while making optimum use of the space led to the installation of many flights of steps.

*“Floor levels were totally disparate, you know just all over the place. We ended up scheduling all of the staircases that we needed to put in to make the hotel work and I think we ended up with something like forty different individual flights of stairs to reconcile the changes in level”* (Interview: Hotel Architect, 2006)



The main brewhouse was not the only building in the complex that would provide the hotel architect and his team problems. In the south-east corner of the site adjacent to Church Avenue stood the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Malthouse. During the final years of brewing on the site this had been used as a general store room and as mess room for the brewery staff. Despite the relatively small size of this individual building it was in the architect's opinion that it was *'going to be the most sensitive tiny little building'*. This timber framed building (see figures 12 and 13) was the oldest construction on the site. Listed at grade II, the building is described in the statement of significance prepared by the conservation consultant in the following manner:

*"Former Malthouse. This actually comprises several structures. The bulk of this building comprises the original malthouse a building that appears likely to date to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and is probably the structure in which Benjamin Sarney was malting in 1715. On the 1836 map it is shown as No 4 store. Roughcast timber frame building originally on two floors, much of which has now been thrown open to the roof to accommodate boilers etc installed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The timber frame has been disturbed by modern activity but the roof structure remains essentially intact. This building was archeologically recorded by Thames Valley Archaeological Services as part of the Applications P00/SO829 & P00/SO828/LB although further recording work and structural analysis is required. Significance: HIGH."* (Statement of significance submitted with planning application).

The decision was taken because of the age of the building and that fact that the time the development started it was one of only two buildings that were definitely listed that it should not be turned into guest bedrooms but kept as a more public space. To this end the malthouse was converted into a galleried billiard room that could also be used as an additional function room. This required the architect to find a way of making the gallery fit:

*“We inserted a new floor but very clearly identified it as a new floor. If you look at the way the new joists have been spaced off the old beams we haven’t tried to bullshit it, it’s very obvious that the new stuff has been added with new timber and stuff. The juxtaposition between the new stuff and the old elements and the new has been left on view we haven’t tried to cover it we haven’t tried to conceal it.”* (Interview: Hotel Architect, 2006)



**Figure 12: Malthouse Interior Source Hotel Architect**



**Figure 13: Malthouse Interior: Source Hotel Architect**



**Figure 14: Billiard Room (previously the Malthouse): Source Hotel du  
Vin**

The malthouse was linked on that side of the range to another function room that had been converted from the former cask washing area. The designation of this area as a function room was not in the original plan and only came about after drawn out discussions between the development team and the planning staff. According to all the parties the *cask washing area was one of the main bones of contention*. Originally it was planned to convert the building which the statement of significance rated as Low into one of the rear of house areas incorporating the boiler room.

But after considerable pressure to make it a public space from the authority's conservation officers it was decided to make it into a private dining or function space. The iron columns in the centre of the space were left in to divide the room and the bricks that had been eroded over the years from washing out the barrels were left exposed as a feature. By doing so this part of the building technically remains open to the public, even though it does not provide one of the main front of house facilities and as such is probably not seen by the majority of the hotels visitors.

A much higher percentage of the hotel's customers than those that see what had been the cask washing area, do, however visit the hotel reception. This is situated in what had been the brewery office fronting onto New Street and providing one side of the entrance into the old brewery courtyard. Like the malthouse referred to above, this was one of

the buildings that had been a subject of the original listing in the 1970s.

The listing entry described it as:

*Early C19. Red brick. Late roof with wide eaves, paired, flat, brackets. 2 storeys. 2 Windows including flat bow with 3 windows, centre door to bow on ground floor. Windows, sashes with glazed bars. Additional ground floor window enlarged with reeded architrave. Door in bow has reeded architrave with flat bracketed cornice, altered fanlight. There has been an arrangement of steps inside this door with an inner door on the reverse curve modified.*

Drawing on this description the conservation consultant took a slightly more historical if not quite as technical an approach when referring to this building in the developer's statement of significance:

*Brakspear Brewery Office, No 84 New Street. Listed Grade II. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century re-fronting of probably mid-18<sup>th</sup> century house, notable for its full height bow to the street, which can probably be dated to between 1804 and 1808, when it was noted as an 'encroachment'. Red brick with wide eaves and relatively low pitched slate roof. The home of W.H. Brakspear from c.1826 – 1844, when it was still usual for the head of the company to live on site, the building was later adapted as company offices with little adverse effect on its original domestic character. Good interior including traditional reception area with substantial timber counter and stained glass windows; well proportioned company boardroom on first floor. Much original detailing survives, including fine 19<sup>th</sup> century staircase. In the 1826*

*inventory, shortly before it became the home of W.H. Brakspear, the house is described as follows 'spacious and well arranged family house, New Street, adjoining the Brewhouse now in the occupation of Mr Appleton. Numerous well arranged rooms and domestic offices, cellar (part of which is used in the trade), well planted garden yard and well of water'. Significance HIGH.*

This building with its characteristic entrance was the obvious choice to locate the hotel reception enabling the developers to retain the buildings function and as far as possible the form. The original brewery counter (see figure 16) has been kept and adapted and now serves as the hotel reception desk. This reflects a philosophy carried out throughout the



**Figure 15: Exterior 84 New Street, Following Conversion to the Hotel Reception, Source: I Elsmore**



**Figure 16: Interior 84 New Street, Brewery Reception before Conversion, Source: Hotel Architect**



**Figure 17: Interior 84 New Street, Hotel Reception after Conversion, Source: Hotel du Vin Brochure.**

development where as many of the original features of the brewery have been reused or retained in the hotel. Many of the original cast iron staircases were taken restored and relocated; many of the bedroom walls retain the white glazed bricks that lined the brewhouse and a number of rooms have features such as grain elevators still in place.

The hotel chain has a specific reputation for bathrooms and in some of the more luxurious rooms feature bathrooms have been created out of what were originally features of the brewhouse, for example the lucam projecting out over the courtyard (see figure 4) now houses a bath and the circular space in which the main copper was housed has been converted into a 'wet room'.

This desire to keep many of the original shapes and layout of the hotel is probably at its most evident in the bar/lounge area, which was where the brewery shop was in the final days. The arched nature of the building has been used to divide the room and existing brick stores are now utilised to house the hotel's extensive wine and cigar collections within the public view.

Not all the brewery equipment was retained for use by the hotel. When the brewery closed much of the brewing equipment was stripped out and sold. This caused one of the respondents interviewed to comment that:



*“Brakspear having closed the brewery unilaterally stripped out all the brewing equipment and sold it to other brewers and the question should really have been asked whether listed building consent was needed for that process, for while a lot of the equipment was modern there were the old brewery coppers. I suppose... .. that the brewery were taking advice and may have been advised that the best thing to do was to ship out the equipment before it got spot listed.”*

Spot listing is an emergency measure available to planning authorities to protect non-listed properties that may be under threat and if they had spot listed the brewhouse all the equipment within it would be included as part of the listing and Brakspear would not have been able to remove it until they had been granted permission by the planning authority. Similar measures had been applied to the Cliff Brewery in Ipswich where the local authority had intervened to keep what had been a traditional functioning brewery intact. If this had occurred at Henley it would have made the brewery far more difficult and expensive to develop. This reportedly did little to improve the relationship between Brakspear and the local authority not only because of the actions taken but also because of the ‘unilateral’ manner in which it was done. This was commented on by a member of the hotel development team describing an early pre-sale visit to the site:

*“They were in the process of stripping out all the machinery and equipment and that was another process that really upset the planners. There was no scheduling of equipment, there was no recording done*

*they just basically walked in there with a specialist contractor, a bunch of zig zag saws, torches and sledgehammers and just took it out. I don't know what happened to it. But it upset the powers that be because that was a working brewery, whether it would have been preserved as such, I don't know, but Brakspear's just decided that it would be another restriction to the sale process.*

However the removal of the brewing equipment from Brakspear's point of view was necessary as it allowed the company to continue brewing beer in an alternative location albeit under licence issued to another brewing company. The mash tun, copper and unusual double drop fermentation system were stripped from the brewery and stored while a building to house them was made ready at Refresh UK's Wychwood brewery (CAMRA, 2004). The following justification for this was offered by one of the Brakspear directors:

*"We gave them to Refresh because well I'm not sure it's scientifically proven but there is a huge superstition that if you change the volume of these vessels it irretrievably changes the flavour of the beer so Refresh were very keen to get our fermenting squares." (Interview: Brakspear Director, 2006)*

The brewers also maintained that realistically it would have been foolish to include the equipment in with the listing as most of it had been replaced.

Explaining that:

*“[They] were completely modern bits of equipment which replaced the same size of vessel, which were copper but open topped and had to be cleaned by hand so they were keen to get the squares. The squares were modern and so the bottom of this is that there was no need for the listing staff to be concerned with that and likewise the majority of all the rest of the equipment had all been replaced over 30, 40, 50 years ... in order to brew to the capacity and a standard, I can’t remember the standard is it ISO 200 or what ever it was, but a lot of our customers required vessels to be covered or they simply wouldn’t buy the product. You know pigeons flying in and out and all the rest of it that was inevitable as part of the brewing process over 40 or 50 years so really as it came to actually closing it down there wasn’t really a great deal of equipment that could really be described as very ancient”*

(Interview: Brakspear Director, 2006)

Whether the equipment should have been regarded as being listed or not was of no avail because, for whatever reason, the majority of the brewing equipment was gone by the time the hotel developers took over the brewery.

The conversion of the old part of the brewery presented a number of challenges that have been described above. Yet the overall success of the development was as dependent upon the solution of problems that arose from the proposals for the other part of the original site covered by

application P03/E0710 and P03/E0762/LB. That is the area behind and including the Mineral Water Factory.

## **5.8 A Contested Space**

The Mineral Water Factory was built in 1897 to bottle water drawn from the brewery well in a bid to exploit the increased contemporary demand for soft drinks. Built from red bricks the structure is an instantly recognisable feature of New Street, and is recognisably much more industrial in character than the brewery office buildings next door. Described in the developer's statement of significance that accompanied the planning application as a good example of late Victorian architecture, the building has distinctive recessed round headed windows and a central pediment, with the red brick ornamented by the addition of blue brick edgings to the features. This provides the building with a particularly striking façade topped by a decorative pediment providing prominent signage declaring *W.H. Brakspear & Sons Ltd: Brewers, beer bottlers, wine and spirit merchants.*



**Figure 18: The Mineral Water Factory, source; I Elsmore**

Behind this distinctive façade stands a two-storey building, five bays long. The first floor of the building is raised up from street level and internally this retains the original king post roof trusses supported on cast iron columns, set below street level is a basement with what is thought to be an early example of a corrugated metal profile shuttered concrete ceiling supported by cast iron columns. Over time this building became used to house the brewery's bottling operation and from the 1920s extra space was added in the form of additional buildings in an extension to the rear of the original building. As described earlier the over capacity in the national brewing industry in the late twentieth century forced Brakspear to outsourcing the bottling of their beer to the Courage group, which left the Mineral Water Factory buildings redundant. When Brakspear converted their former maltings into office accommodation the Mineral Water Factory became the new distribution centre.

To enable this, the garden of a house behind the site was incorporated into the site and much of the post 1920s building was demolished to form a new brewery yard. The Mineral Water Factory itself was altered with part of the buildings rear corner demolished to create access for the company's dray wagons through to the new transport yard. This still only provided a narrow access to the yard as can be seen by the following photograph.



**Figure 19: Access to the New Yard (source Daniel Watney)**

As part of this conversion, parts of the buildings structure were altered and a loading dock was added to the back of the building (See figure 20), before when the drays had been located in the maltings it was necessary to reverse the lorries across the road into the very narrow opening of the old brewery courtyard to be loaded. However, the new yard remained almost as difficult to access as the old yard had been and to

prevent a need for the delivery lorries to reverse out into New Street a steel turntable was installed in the centre of the yard (see figure 21).

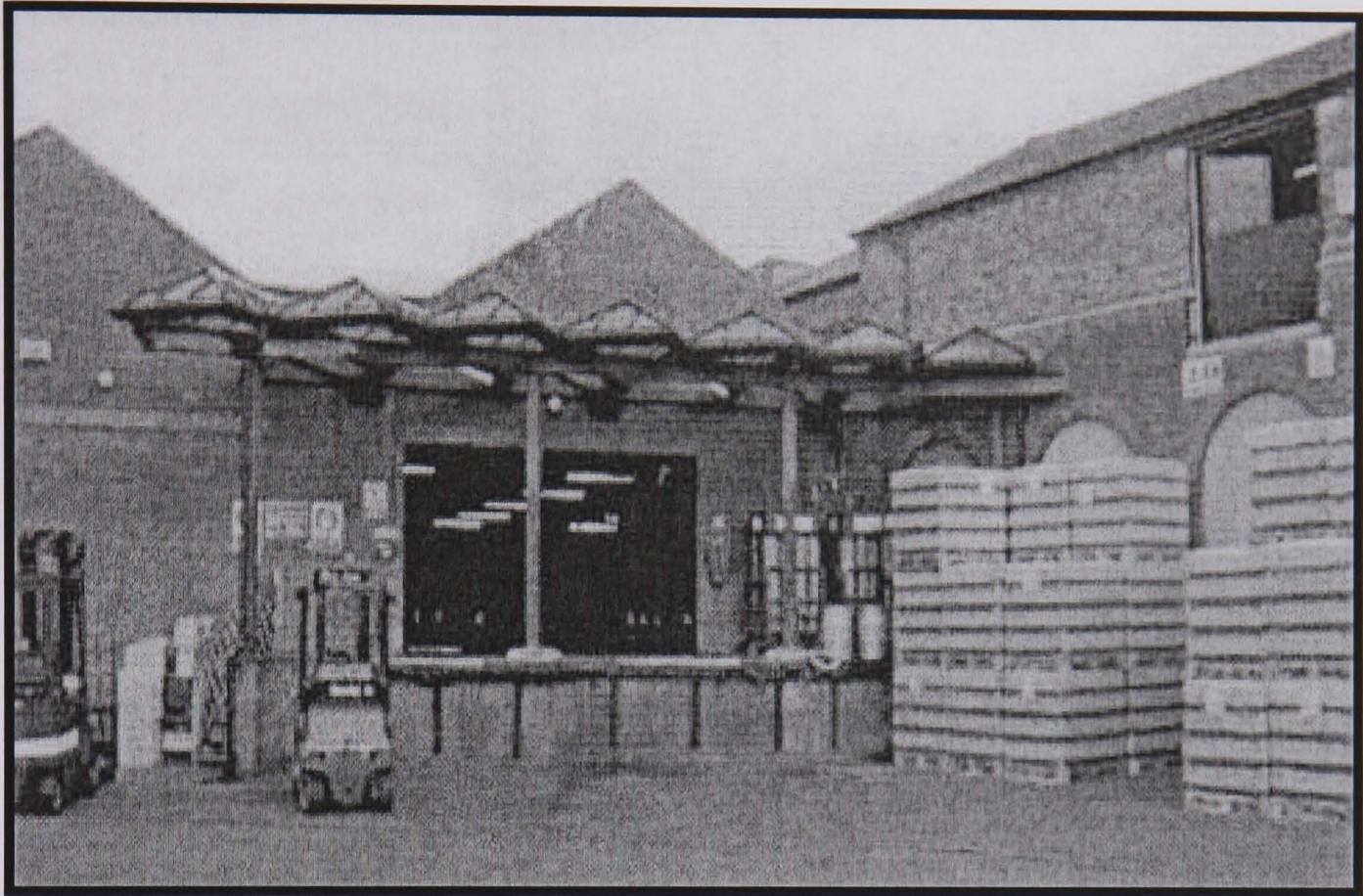


Figure 20: Loading Dock (source Daniel Watney)



Figure 21: Cask Store and Turntable (source Daniel Watney)

To create this new distribution yard and loading facilities the later buildings at the rear of the Mineral Water Factory were demolished and the ground level reduced by approximately 6 feet. At the back of this yard a transport maintenance workshop, a new cask washing facility and a pallet store were also built. By the late 1990s Brakspear had also outsourced their distribution operations and as a consequence the vehicle workshop had been used to house new boilers. Although the company had outsourced its distribution operation, the New Brewery Yard continued to be used by heavy vehicles and the Mineral Water Factory remained in use as a warehouse until the final closure of the brewery in 2002.

It was this configuration of the new brewery yard and Mineral Water Factory that the Old Henley Brewery Company became the owners of. Unlike the older buildings that comprised the adjacent hotel development, no individual buildings in this section of the site were actually listed. Although the Mineral Water Factory building at the front of the site was largely original the rear of the building and the yard behind it had been subject to numerous physical changes in the latter half of the twentieth century. The Old Henley Brewery Company assembled a team of specialists who had had considerable experience of historic industrial building conversion. Their objective for this part of the development was the retention and conversion of most of the Mineral Water Factory building in particular its distinctive façade and the construction of new build residential accommodation in the new yard.



Their proposal to retain and reuse the Mineral Water Factory was based upon the creation of seven live/work units in the original building. These units were designed to satisfy the mixed-use requisites for the site by providing office or studio type business accommodation, alongside the studio space they were intended to be equipped with kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms. These units were aimed at the perceived requirements of 'creative professionals' looking to work from home and for which the developer thought more of a market might exist in Henley rather than more formal office provision that had resulted in an excess of un-let commercial property in the town.

At the rear of this conversion a concrete deck would be constructed over the distribution yard, upon which 14 dwellings; houses and flats would be built. This new build residential accommodation would be arranged around the concept of a 'new urban square', with the development making the most optimum use of the space (from the developers view) some of these new houses were required to be located against the plot's boundary wall. The architect's sketch (Figure 22) reproduced following shows the location of the new build in front of the surviving brew house and to the side of the Mineral Water Factory.

The sketch shows the buildings constructed above the existing ground level on top of the roof of a proposed underground car park. The proposals for both the conversion of the Mineral Water Factory and the

new residential component turned out to be problematic and would lead to the complete development being placed in jeopardy.



**Figure 22: Sketch of Proposed Residential Development (source SODC)**

### **5.9 The Development**

Often the re-development of an historic building is dependent upon permission for new housing being granted to allow for the profit from the residential to offset the high associated costs of conversion. This leads to a combined planning application being submitted to ensure that the developer secures both permissions together. This was not the case with the Henley Brewery as the independence of the residential proposals from the hotel conversion meant that financially the two parts of the site were

not dependent on each other to fund either part of the development. However, while the integration between the two parts of the site within a single planning application was not required on financial grounds, the submission of a request for a unified planning permission remained a necessity for both sets of developers. A single application granted both parties the opportunity to use a combined approach to achieve maximum gains from the planning process. By showing that the scheme was integrated and compatible, a unified application demonstrated that they as developers were willing to adhere to the desired planning policies relating to a mixed and employment generating development. Satisfying planning policy considerations had distinct benefits for the two sets of developers. For the Old Henley Brewery Company it would effectively make the prestigious and employment generating hotel conversion conditional upon what was considered their less desirable residential accommodation development and for Hotel du Vin it allowed them to exploit the new build to acquire two very important requirements for the success of their venture; access and parking.

### **5.10 A Practical Problem Of Parking**

The conversion of an industrial brewery building into a hotel provided the architect with a number of problems. In addition to the problems of creating forty upmarket hotel bedrooms and the accompanying front of house space and rear of house facilities out of a disparate collection of listed buildings the hotel development team also had to find somewhere to park the cars belonging to its guests. Another major problem that they faced was how to service the hotel. From laundry

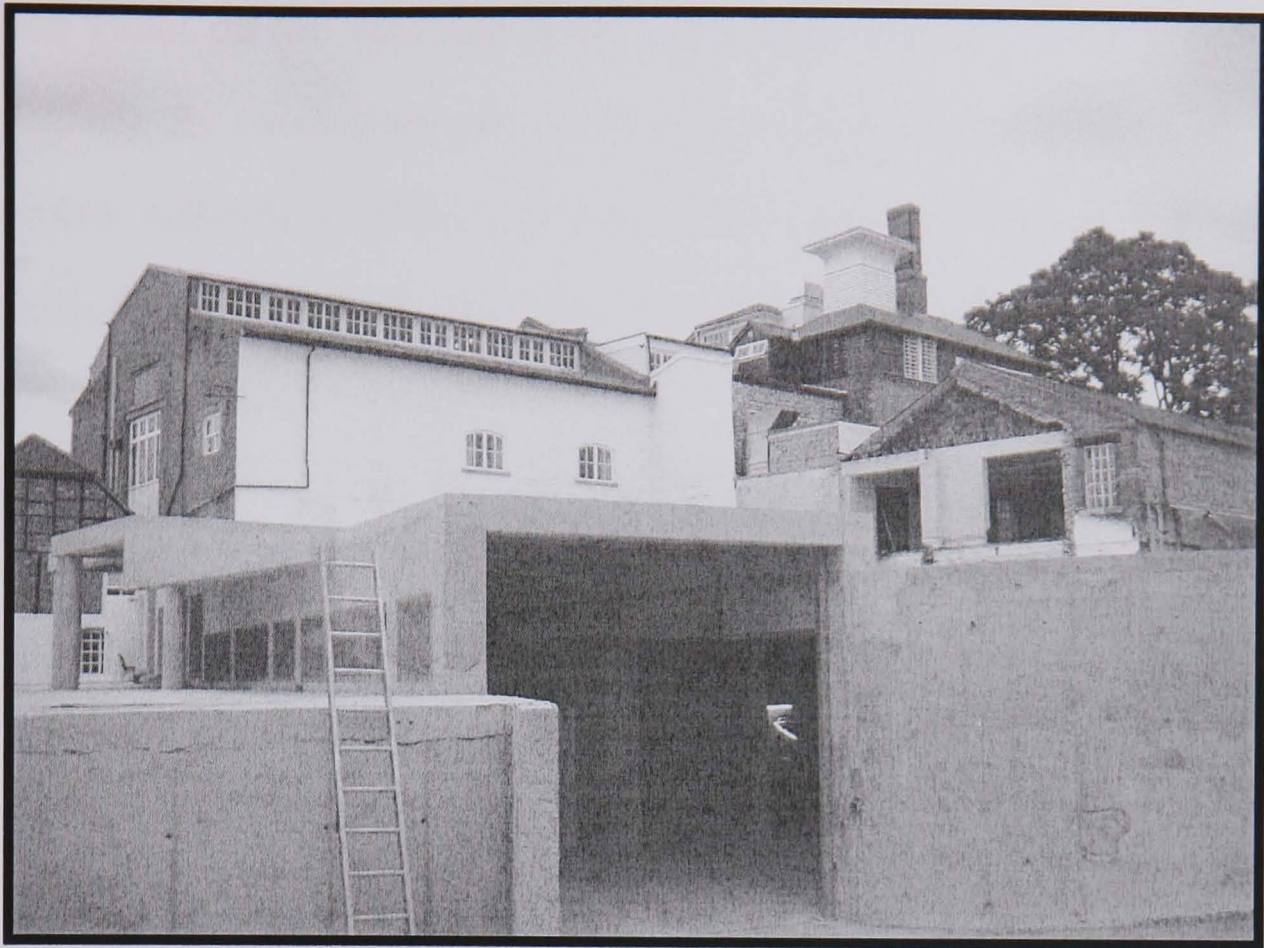
supplies to kitchen deliveries, the hotel was committed to providing the very highest standards, which unsurprisingly meant frequent deliveries. When the brewery was operational, the buildings that were to become a hotel had been accessed through the Old Brewery Yard. Lorries would load and unload there and some of the brewery staff parked their cars in it. But as part of the hotel conversion it was necessary that this yard would become a *'private public'* space and an integral part of the guest experience. The public nature of the space was restricted by a 'feature' metal fence erected to restrict admission to the rear portion of the courtyard to hotel guests, this newly enclosed space would provide disabled access to some of the ground floor rooms as well as an outdoor seating and dining area and therefore become, literally part of the front of house facilities.

With the old brewery courtyard becoming an essential part of the visitor experience it would certainly not be desirable or, taking into account the up-market nature of the hotel, possible for the 'rear of house' activities to be serviced through this space. Equally not only would it not be in keeping with the ambience of the hotel to have guest cars parked there but also there simply was not enough capacity to park the number of cars that needed to be accommodated. Hotel du Vin had an already established practice of valet parking at some of their other locations which they decided to continue at Henley, but they still needed somewhere for the valet to park the cars. The location of the development in the Henley Conservation Area and the general lack of parking close to the town

centre meant that finding a suitable solution was paramount to the success of the development. This was a problem also shared by the Old Henley Brewery Company who also had to ensure that they could provide adequate parking to accommodate the residents of their housing development. This shared problem required both sets of developers to co-operate on finding an innovative solution. The solution to the parking problem also provided a way for the hotel to gain the necessary service access. With the hotel buildings being bounded to the east by the pedestrian Church Avenue and to the south by the church yard of Saint Mary's it was not possible to provide the necessary service access from either of these two sides.

The answer to both the problem of parking and access to the hotel was sought in the design of the new build which picked up on a solution originally proposed as part of the ill fated 2000 office development. By demolishing the rear part of the Mineral Water Factory where the company had built a loading bay and some of the other buildings adjoining it, it would be possible to create a basement level tunnel through which access could be gained to the rear of the main hotel building.

*“the only way of servicing to the hotel you see ... is ... underneath... with a floor plan that goes underneath and that runs straight into the hotel and that means we can service the hotel from under a concrete platform which means there is no disruption to the residential which gets built on top”*(Interview: The Developer, 2005).



**Figure 23: Construction of the Service Access. March 2005 (source: I Elsmore)**

The ramp into this service tunnel (see figure 23) would also provide access to the existing basement of the Mineral Water Factory and to a newly created basement beneath the proposed new build. These two subterranean spaces would create unobtrusive parking for hotel guests and the residents of the properties above and allow the developers to take advantage of the ground level in the new brewery yard which had already been lowered approximately six feet by Brakspears in the 1980s. This new extended basement area would provide adequate parking for the hotels forty-two bedrooms and Hotel du Vin, following a practice perfected at some of their other hotels in conservation areas, would direct guest to arrive at the old courtyard and after checking in, their cars would be driven round by a parking valet to the basement of the Mineral Water Factory,

which Hotel du Vin had agreed to lease from the Old Henley Brewery Company. By parking the cars in tandem a method not acceptable to the highway authority in public car parks they would be able to park a far greater number of cars than would normally be acceptable in such a confined space.

The parking for the occupiers of the new residences would also be provided mainly in this below deck basement area with extra spaces being available off the service road. In the supporting design statement the architect for the residential part of the scheme described the parking provision in the following manner:

*“Almost 100 car parking spaces are to be provided on the site at existing ground and basement levels. These areas will be covered by raised decks, which will form the ground level for the proposed new buildings. This will mean that all car parking is below ground level and hidden from view and approached by the existing access road. This road, combined with the entrance into the basement parking area, will provide a turning point for all service vehicles. All vehicles will, therefore, enter and leave the site forwards. Servicing the hotel is a major consideration and this is located below one of the new raised decks and is, therefore, effectively below ground and out of sight. This will allow delivery services to and from the hotel and also the collection of refuse. Noise and smells are, therefore, well away from the building above this service area. The car park areas contain refuse collection points and in addition to normal car parking, there are disabled spaces*

*and bicycle rack provision. Reference Policy D2 on vehicle and bicycle parking in a 'discreet and sensitive' manner and principle BP7 on unsightly service yards."*

While the developers thought that these arrangements provided an innovative solution to the twin problems of an unobtrusive service access and adequate parking without creating undue pressure on the existing conservation area, it was not a view they felt that was entirely shared by the planning authority:

*"They (SODC) felt that we had overprovided on car parking because their regime at the moment, their current thinking, is that if you build a house without a car park or a garage then the person buying it will not have a car."* (Interview: Developer's Planning Consultant, 2005).

With the Council's Conservation Officer being concerned that:

*"The concept of an underground car park is neither discreet nor sensitive"*

and

*"That the only means of achieving the quantity of car parking generated by this development would be to alter the fundamental character of this area of Henley, suggests that the site is unsuitable for housing"* (Conservation Officers Report 16/12/2003).

While the conservation officer was concerned that the amount of parking spaces being offered was detrimental to the area it was not a view



shared by everyone, with the Henley Standard (15/2/2004) reporting that members of the Henley Town Council were concerned that an adequate amount of parking was not being provided.

### **5.11 Disagreement And Negotiation**

The report eventually submitted by the planning officers concerning the combined application supported the planned conversion of the buildings around the old brewery courtyard into a hotel. This support, however, did not extend to the proposals for the development of the Mineral Water Factory and the new brewery yard. Apart from the concerns mentioned above relating to the proposed car parking provision the planning authority was also reticent about the proposals for the conversion of the Mineral Water Factory building into live work units and held strong objections to the design of the residential apartments and the impact these would have on the architecture and setting of the main brewery buildings.

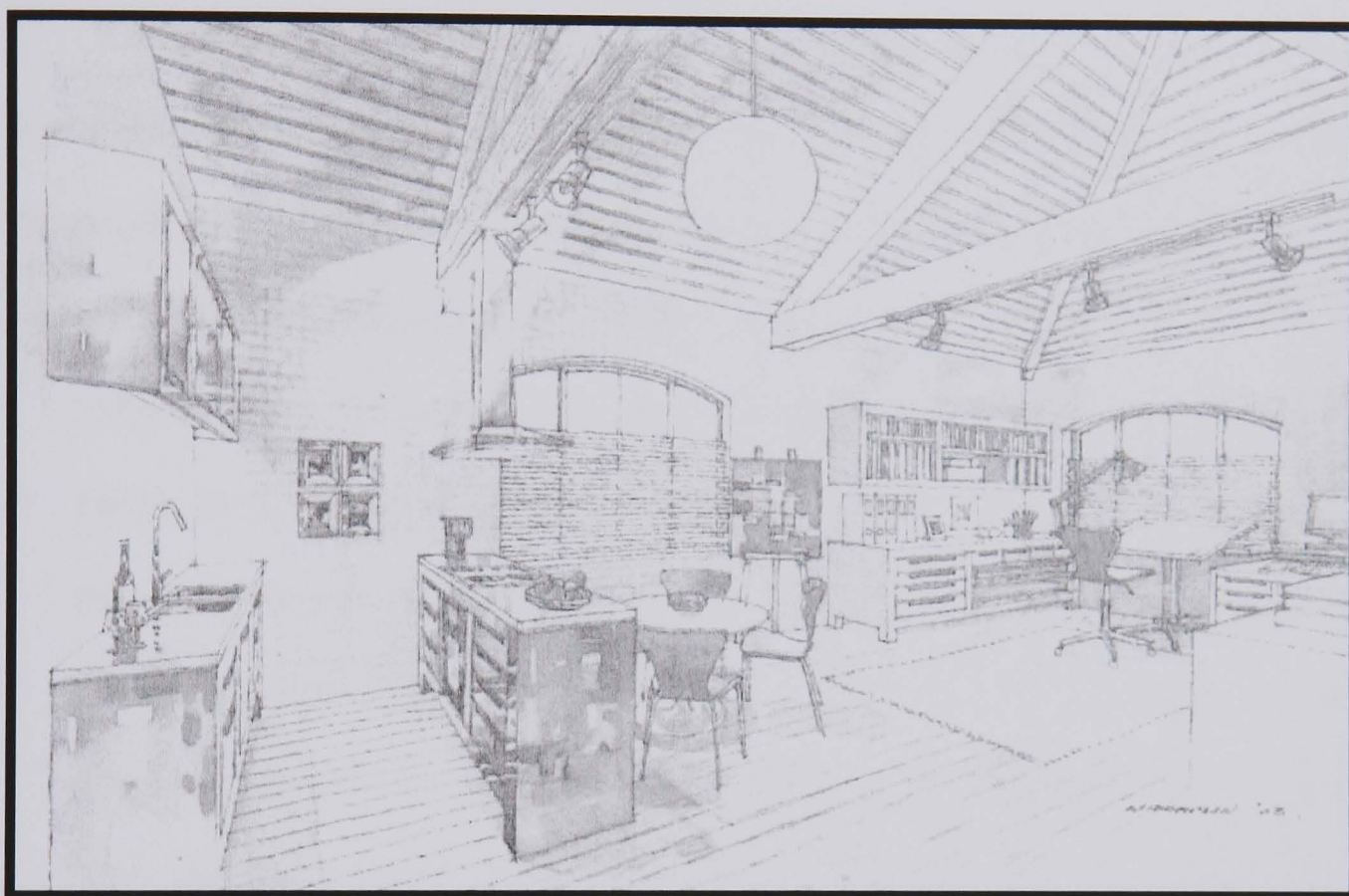
These became the main cause of concerns throughout the application process and tied the developers and planners into negotiations for a period of time that extended from before the application was registered with the planning department of SODC in October 2003, till the application went to committee in March 2004. In fact the implications of these disagreements were to carry on beyond the formal granting of planning permission, with negotiations over the final form of the new build continuing throughout 2005. The protracted nature of these negotiations or disagreements continually threatened the project.

The length of the delay and its potential effect on the viability of the project resulted in Hotel du Vin threatening to cut their losses and withdraw from the site if agreement could not be reached. Yet the hotel was regarded as such an attractive proposition for the town that its inclusion in the scheme was crucial for both sides. The planning authority was eager to ensure that the hotel development went ahead that despite the guidance and policies regarding the site expressed in HEN 6, requiring an integrated proposal, they suggested to the applicant that he break the scheme up into separate applications. This would have allowed them to recommend a refusal for the new build while approving the proposal for the hotel conversion. Contrary to this, the application stayed together with the Old Henley Brewery team insistent on it being considered as a single package despite the pressure from the planning department and some pressure from the hotel company to be allowed to go it alone. The developer's planning consultant described his response to this suggestion:

*"I stopped that because without the hotel being part and parcel of the residential scheme, if the hotel had gone through alone, we'd have ended up with a void piece of the site and there would have been no incentive to approve that, so we had to get the package right..... it was for the hotel and residential or nothing"* (Interview, Developer's Planning Consultant 2005).

There were two main reasons for the planner's dislike of the proposed development; one of their concerns was with the general quality of the designs submitted for the new build the other reason was the

proposed live/work units in the Mineral Water Factory. The intention behind the design of these units was to provide space specifically for people who work from home, the 8 units, seven of which would be created from the upper floor of the Mineral Water Factory building, would have *'small bedrooms and a large working space in a loft environment'*.



**Figure 24: Artist Impression of Live/Work Unit Interior (source: The Developer)**

In the developer's view this proposal not only complied with the desire for a mixed use development, but also allowed to provide the type of commercial space which they thought they may be able to sell as opposed to traditional office provision of which there was surplus in Henley. The planning officers did not share this view, they were concerned that it was a surreptitious way of increasing the residential percentage of the development and that they may have difficulties in:

*“ensuring that the work element remained, that it wouldn’t become exclusively residential units. What do you do if somebody’s business goes belly up? Do you kick them out of their home?” (Interview: Area Planning Officer SODC, 2005)*

Recognising the problems that were inherent with this part of the scheme led the developer to withdraw the ‘live’ element of this part of the proposal and to designate the seven units in the Mineral Water Factory as purely for B1 or business use, with the view that:

*“although the live work units were hinted at in the local plan, when it came to it, the Council’s legal department didn’t have the bottle to actually say we can deal with this..... although they were promoting live work units in the local plan .....so we had an argument about that, but we withdrew that element of it because we didn’t want to run that gauntlet so we made them into proper work units” (Interview: Developer’s Planning Consultant , 2005)*

Although this change in designation was welcomed by the planners as evidence of the developers co-operation *“they did listen to our concerns.....so they took that out of the application”* (Interview: Area Planning Officer SODC, 2005) it did not actually alter the plans of the developer that much

*“We scratched out all the words saying live and ended up with offices but the design stays the same .....I’m obliged to sell them as offices but they will have separate little rooms off that would have been*

*bedrooms and they will have kitchens and shower rooms just as originally planned, they can be used as offices with meeting rooms or they can be used as work /live if people want” (Interview: The Developer, 2005).*

Although this apparent compromise had been agreed the planning officers still were unable to offer support to this part of the development when the application went to committee. Section 6.6 of the officers report to the planning committee initially suggests that the seven units comply with the policies outlined in HEN6 and are therefore be identified as an appropriate use for the site before going on to say that there was concern over the viability of the proposed units. The report suggests this concern is based on the viability of the market for such properties in Henley an opinion acknowledged by the applicant’s planning consultant within the report who is quoted as suggesting that *‘as these are relatively small units his client is prepared to take the risk’*

Despite the developer thinking that a compromise had been reached on the live work units, the main new build residential part of the scheme remained a sticking point. In the officer’s report to the planning committee their objections to the new build was expressed in the following manner:

*6:11. It is, however, the development within the New Brewery Yard that raises serious concern.*

The reason for some of this concern is explored further in section 6.13 of the same document

*6.13 The demolition work is essentially to facilitate the servicing arrangements for the hotel and the new build residential scheme together with its parking. Immediately behind the Mineral Water Manufactory there would be a block containing a mix of six two bedroom flats. Beneath this block there would be a small unit of accommodation located at lower ground floor (replacing a live/work unit). The plans show that this building would have a full three floors of accommodation plus some rooms in the roof. It would be some 4 metres higher than the Mineral Water Manufactory. The second group of dwellings comprises houses and flats that would be arranged around a 'town square'. The architect describes the style of the development as simple and modern. It is argued that it would reflect the best of brewery buildings in the choice of similar materials and some of the detailing. The materials include buff coloured masonry brick work, cobbled masonry, facing brick work, cedar boarding and slates for the roofs. Windows are shown to be white powder coated aluminium and the balconies to the flats would be glazed. The buildings are all located at a raised deck level over a ground floor car park so they would be accessed by steps and passenger lifts. The heights of the buildings arranged around the square would be two and three stories.*

The document goes on to describe how '*as a starting point*' the architect does not recognise the difference between this brewery site and others suggesting that while he may be making a '*passing reference to brewery architecture those references were an expression of the specific function*' rather than a true reflection of the style of building which previously existed on the site. The proposed development was described as being disrespectful to the character of the existing buildings which would result in an '*awkward hybrid in design.....that owes little to either the existing buildings or to the local vernacular*'.

Some of the concerns of the planning staff were acknowledged by the developers who admitted that when they ran a public consultation session although the public seemed to generally supportive of the scheme, especially relating to the hotel development not all the comments about the residential scheme were quite as appreciative, with the developer commenting that:

*"There were some adverse comments about the design, which somebody summed up as looking a bit too Bracknell for Henley"*

## **5.12 The Recommendation**

Although the planning officers were generally supportive of the hotel development proposal their objections towards the new build were such that in Section 8 of their report to the planning committee, dated the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2004, they recommended:

*8.1 That planning permission be refused for the following reasons;*

1. *That, having particular regard to the removal of the tank and plant room and extensive alterations and demolition work to the Mineral Water Manufactory, the proposal would result in the loss of significant fabric and damage to character and completeness of the Brewery buildings detracting from their special architectural and historical interest, their setting and the setting of remaining listed buildings within the Brewery complex. As such the proposal would be contrary to policies CON1, CON 5, CON 6 and CON 7 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan and policies CON1, CON 4, CON 5, CON 6, CON 7 and HEN 6 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 Second Deposit Draft.*
2. *That having regard to scale, height, massing, design and materials of the new residential development, the proposal would result in an unsatisfactory overdevelopment of the site which would dominate and overwhelm the settings of the remaining buildings within the Brewery complex and detract from the setting of surrounding listed buildings and the character and appearance of the Henley-on-Thames Conservation Area. As such the proposal would be contrary to policies G1, G8, H4, H11, CON1, CON 5, CON 6, CON 7, CON 10 and CON15 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan and policies G2, G6, D1, D4, D5, H4, CON 4, CON 5, CON 6, CON 7, CON 9, CON 10 and HEN 6 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 Second Deposit Draft and to advice in the South Oxfordshire Design Guide.*



This recommendation for refusal was the result of the un-sympathetic new build portion of the development and did not reflect their attitude towards the hotel conversion which they considered: *“a very sensitive conversion ..... not withstanding my concerns about the bigger scheme I would not in any way knock the hotel conversion I think it’s excellent.”* (Interview: Area Planning Officer SODC)

Despite their support for the hotel scheme and the alterations to the riverside properties the planning officers thought that what ever advantages were gained from these aspects of the scheme would be outweighed by the new build.

### **5.13 The Decision**

The decision to recommend the application for refusal on the part of the planners was met by a strong case from the developers. Resisting the pressure to split the application the planning consultant insisted that the application be considered as one. The hotel developer’s irritation with the delay in the application going to committee was well known, as were their threats to pull out of the site. Prior to the plans being considered by SODC they were presented for consideration by the Henley Town Council whose planning committee initially opposed the scheme. This decision was subsequently rescinded after a meeting of the full council was requested by the developers. The developers were unhappy that the initial decision had been taken when only two members of the planning committee had been present (Henley Standard,McKean, 2004). At this special meeting of

the Town Council the developers, represented by the hotelier and the planning consultant presented their argument supporting the development. Although the Town Council would not have the final say on whether the development would go ahead or not, winning the support of the members was an important part of the planning consultant's strategy as he felt they would '*carry the torch into the District Council Chamber*'.

The Henley Standard reported that following this special meeting that although some of the councillors may have shared some of the apprehension expressed by the planning officers over the size and scale of the new build, there was greater concern over what would happen if the prestigious hotel development was lost. With one of the councillors quoted as saying that:

*"if this is prolonged over several years New Street will go into a wilderness and that part of town will become run down. The effect on Henley if we don't move on this quickly will be deleterious"* (McKean, 2004)

This desire to see something positive happen to the site meant that the Councillors, aware as they were of the sensitive nature of the development and its position in the conservation area, agreed to support the application when it was considered by SODC.

When the application appeared before SODC's planning committee, comprised in part of members of the Henley Town Council, it

was approved with conditions. The conditions imposed upon the application related to details concerning window opening and materials, as well as insisting that the work relating to the underground parking be completed before the hotel opened and that all the parking and landscaping be completed before the residential accommodation becomes occupied.

Conditions were also imposed relating to the accompanying listed building consent as well as the normal conditions applied relating to construction detail and materials used the conditions also called for a full photographic survey of the listed elements of the brewery building to be completed before work commenced on the conversion.

#### **5.14 Post Approval**

Following the planning committee's approval for the development, work began immediately on the demolition of the building behind the Mineral Water Factory and the clearing of the new yard in preparation for the construction of the service tunnel and parking basement. This work was coordinated between both sets of the development team. At the same time the Hotel du Vin team started to convert the main brewery buildings and work began on the redevelopment of the properties along Riverside. It was these two areas of the Riverside and the Hotel that work concentrated on once the service access had been completed and the majority of work was completed in the two areas at a similar time. At the time of the hotel opening in March 2005 work had not progressed on the construction of the new build beyond the demolition of the buildings in the new brewery yard

and the completion of the major ground works. Although the basement of the Mineral Water Factory had been adapted for parking, the conversion of the first floor had not begun. The Old Henley brewery Company instead concentrated on the other phase of the development along Thameside. This enabled them to place the completed the residential units above the retail premises converted from the former Little White Hart Hotel to be offered for sale from the beginning of May 2005.

Although no physical progress was made on the ground the Old Henley Brewery Company had continued to work on the design. Having secured permission to develop the site for residential use the developer decided to engage the architect responsible for the hotel conversion, which had been widely acclaimed, to revise the design. The brief given to the architect was to take the approved massing and block layout, dictated by the planning consent and physically determined by the already constructed basement, deck and service access, and to make them more visually appealing in line with the up-market nature of the rest of the development.

*“the design that was placed in front of us it was okay but quite frankly you could just as easily go to Reading and find that development in Reading or Bracknell or in fact any conurbation in the UK virtually and find the same spec looking assembly of apartments .....and I found that just to be a little bit unfortunate after all the effort that went in to just have no energy left to design it. I insisted when we were asked to look at it that we had, not free range, but we had the opportunity in*

*terms of time and obviously the budget to re-look at the elevation treatments particularly, but also I wanted to re-look at the interiors of the units so that they were perhaps more open-plan and more contemporary in their layouts” (Interview Hotel Architect 2005)*

The planning authority approved these amendments in October 2005 with the construction scheduled for completion in December 2006.

### **5.15 Conclusion**

The case study presented in this chapter and supported by the previous chapter tells the story of the Henley Brewery from 1812 through to its closure and the subsequent application for redevelopment, including the conversion into a hotel and the proposals for residential new build on part of the site in 2005. This period stretching over nearly 200 years has been presented in a simplified form, based on a chronological description of the events that occurred. Even in this simplified format the case is long and quite difficult to follow. Yet while effectively introducing the key players and outlining the form, function and intended use of the site, it does not adequately explain the nature of the multifarious relationships that exist between the human actors in the case and also the connections that link the human with the material elements of the development they interact with.

In order to try and gain a greater understanding of the interactions that occurred and how in turn these can influence the redevelopment of the historic built environment it is necessary to view the case through a different lens. In the chapters that follow it is the intention to take the story told in this chapter and the one that preceded it and revisit it, employing an actor-network theory perspective. The application of this alternative methodological stance may provide the opportunity to examine in greater depth the influence that the relationships and interactions have on the outcome of the redevelopment of the buildings that are the central focus of this study.

# **Chapter Six: An Alternative View Of The Development Process**

## **6.1 Introduction**

When Archibald Brakspear and his brother George commissioned William Bradford to build a new brewhouse in 1892 (Sheppard, 1979) it would have been inconceivable that just over a century later the building would become a hotel. Therefore they would have had no idea that the decisions they made regarding improvements to what was already a successful brewery would eventually be influential in determining the provision of a very different yet successful industry, albeit one still located in the same building and still connected to the licensed trade. With the aim to chart this transformation from place of production to location of consumption this chapter will examine the interactions between the buildings and the humans that are the central actors in this case. In doing so it will describe the manner in which the various actors came together at different points in the process and how when viewed using actor-network theory the process of translation and the progress of those involved through obligatory passage points (Callon, 1986) can be seen to dictate the final form of the development.

The case study presented in the previous section of this thesis follows the traditional approach for studying the development process. This suggests that there is a sequence of how the process occurs where certain actions lead to following actions, creating steps that must be

completed before moving onto the next one. A flow diagram (figure 25, following) of the development process was devised by Punter (1990) to illustrate the stages in the conceptualisation and execution of office developments and is broadly consistent with other models of the development process such as those described by Adams (1994). The process lends itself to this type of approach and the majority of the authors examined in the literature section have adopted a similar linear based flow to describe how development occurs. This process suggests that in general a site is found, a scheme is worked up, discussions occur with the local planning authority, plans are subsequently submitted, planning officers write a report, the report is considered by committee and when permission is granted construction occurs and the development disposed of.

This approach requires the selection of a fixed point from which the narrator can start to follow the course of the development, passing through a series of distinct steps, to arrive eventually at an identifiable finishing point. This method of describing the process by laying it out as a straight linear progression resembles a form of critical path analysis; where the action of A allows C to act but only after the completion of task B. This depiction of the sequence of events in a linear fashion imposes a chronological emphasis upon the proceedings, which in turn places temporal constraints upon the process.



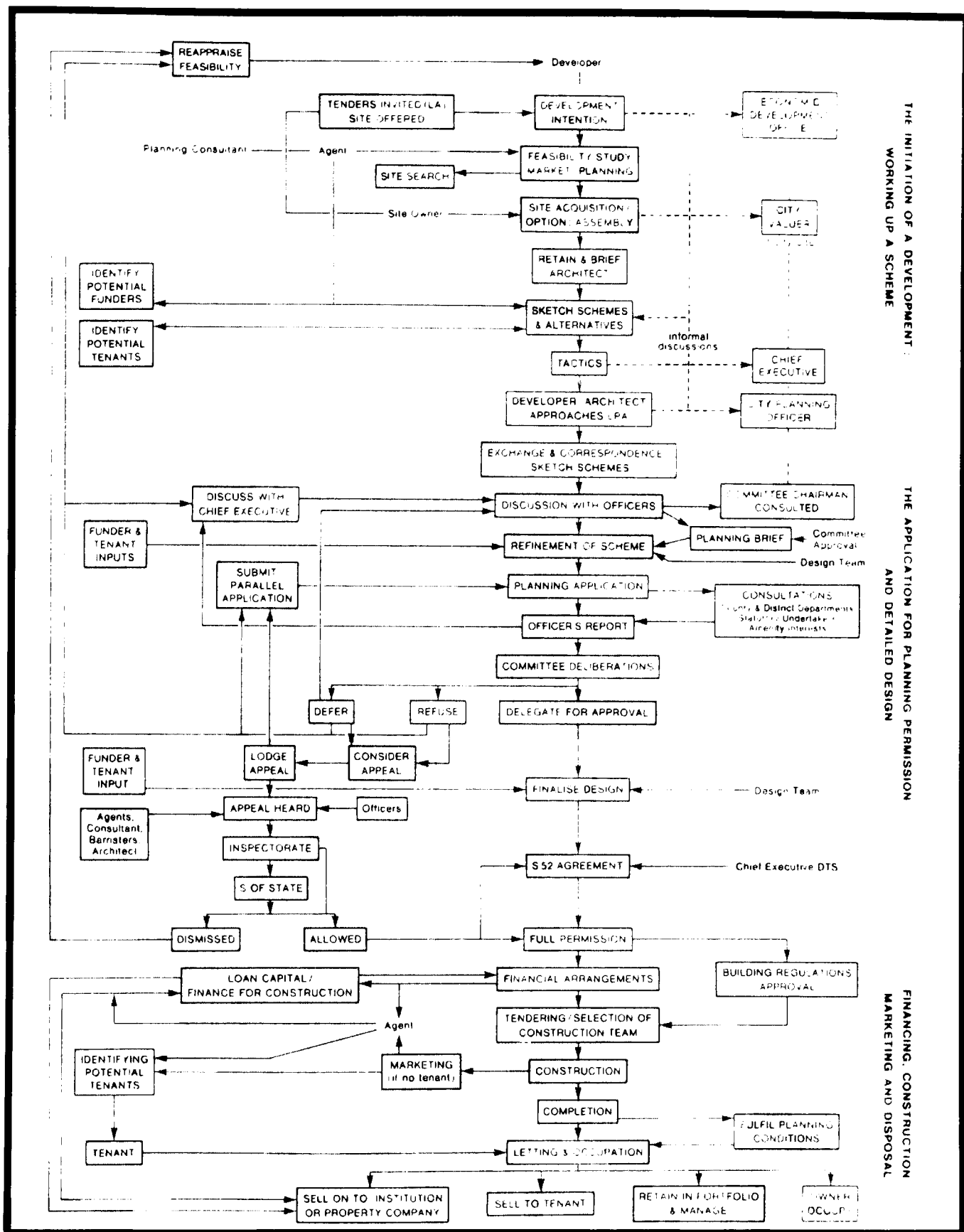


Figure 25: Punters Flow Diagram of the Development Process: Source Punter (1990:13)

These constraints insist that things happen in a certain order and time frame and unless the flow proceeds in that particular order, problems are likely to arise that may lead to the eventual stalling of the development (Adams, 1994).

Using the above method to describe the development system provides a universal if somewhat simplistic model for those wishing to describe the process. Using this model a complex and often convoluted process can be reduced to the following simplistic description of the sequence of events: The site becomes available. The site is marketed. A developer comes forward. A scheme is worked up. Plans are submitted. The submitted plans are examined and approved. The development then moves through construction to completion and eventual disposal.

While this is a good starting point it is not without problems. To describe a project this way relies upon its reduction to a number of clear and distinct steps on route to completion. Unfortunately the reality of the situation may be that the phases are not as distinct and definable as a simplistic model may suggest.

*“Unfortunately, not only are the phases ill-defined, but they may not come in order at all. People who are studying a project may indeed disagree about the sequence. .... Consensus about the length, importance, and order of the phases is not the general case. It is a special case – that of projects that work well. With difficult projects, it is impossible to rely on phases and their neat arrangements, since depending on the informant and the period, the project may shift from idea to reality or from reality to idea.” (Latour, 1996: 67)*

The bigger and more involved the project is, the more likely it is that the boundaries between the phases become blurred. The conversion of the brewery only deals with a small number of buildings within a very compact location, but the intricacies of the conversion, the listing, the intended use and so on, means that it should be regarded in operational terms as a large and complicated project. The story presented in the case was assembled by taking the stories of others and laying them together to create a synergetic narrative. While it was convenient to narrate the story of this development in a linear method, the final form of the telling, as in all stories, was dictated by the intervention of the narrator. But in choosing which points are told the narrator also decides which points are not told or even deliberately concealed (Law, 1994). Because it is not possible to tell all the overlapping stories at the same time the story teller is forced into creating the stages by assigning some kind of temporal distinction to the phases that the development passes through.

The intervention of the narrator leads to an inevitably simplified version of the events contributing to the process. This simple approach requires that many of the details surrounding the case become ignored, allowing an easy to understand view of the nature of the development process to be created. Chief amongst the detail ignored in the quest for simplification and generalisation is the site itself. In the majority of the literature regarding redevelopment the building is taken as an inert object, a blank canvas upon which either social actors or structural considerations express themselves.

*“These texts do treat buildings and the built environment as material objects. However they do so in a way that sees the building as simply a material artefact that is an example of the canon of a specific architect or of a stylist movement or lineage. The material presence of a building (or more often its façade; that which is visible) becomes a safe and easy category to use. It becomes an aesthetic and mono-dimensional field in which to locate or inscribe a preordained or distinctive set of ideas.”* (Jenkins, 2002:225)

Through this, the buildings in the texts are used either to represent particular architectural styles and construction techniques or to represent the type of building of a particular social or cultural trope. Because of this emphasis either on building form or the social considerations with which they are associated, current studies of conservation-focused redevelopments continue to reinforce the divide between the material and the social that runs through the social sciences (Latour, 2005).

Jenkins (2005) claims that through using the building to describe the style of a particular architectural school or product of an economic process the materiality of the building gets reduced to a level where it becomes represented by a plan or a photograph.

*“The whole process of construction and the use of the building, the change in ownership and the day to day complexities are replaced with what Bruno Latour (1987:2) refers to as a black box. “* (Jenkins 2002: 225)

Yet at the centre of this study is a collection of buildings. The story tells us not just what these buildings are and what happened to them, but who built them, why they were changed and what they would become used for, if indeed they were allowed to remain as buildings. If they were indeed just an inert medium upon which the human actors acted, or a black box (Latour, 1987) of inputs and outputs, then they would have no influence at all on the processes that were enacted at the site. But this is not the case; the buildings do influence the process. This continued influence is apparent throughout the story. The material form of the existing buildings affects the whole of the development process in a number of different ways. Beyond the purely material considerations the buildings also are the repositories of social meaning, not just in terms of them being the embodiment of the decisions of previous actors (Brand, 1994) in terms of design, but also of more collective community considerations (Hareven and Langenbach, 1981). All of these are evident in this case study description and had an influence on the development process.

By suggesting that the material characteristics of the building have an influence on the development process and therefore by association the human actors that are also involved, then it becomes apparent that the chronological/linear description while dealing with the who, both material and social, may not be the best tool for exploring the complexity that is imbedded in the process. Therefore in order to consider the complexity of

this amalgamation of material and social factors then we need to employ a methodology that allows us to allocate equal importance to both sides.

This calls for a more radical approach than the one offered by a conventional linear approach. It requires that a more radical ontology is employed, one that recognises the role of the material elements and which exposes the complexity that is concealed within traditional linear descriptions. An alternative approach is to utilise actor-network theory (Law, 1999, Latour, 1993), as a methodology for exploring the case study. An actor-network approach demands that equal consideration be afforded to the material alongside the social in exploring the case. This means that the complexity of the case is potentially exposed as the relationships between the otherwise heterogeneous elements are examined in order to discern the manner in which networks form, stabilise and disperse throughout the course of the development process. By exposing the intertwined processes of translation, negotiation, interessement, and obligatory passage points (Callon, 1986) through which the various actors combine in multiple networks, it is possible to view the role of the building in the development process in a different light. Viewed in this way the building is promoted from a 'backdrop' as it would normally be seen from traditional perspective, to be repositioned as an equal component of the foreground.

In order to carry out this repositioning, this section sets out to examine some of the many alignments or networks of actors that have

assembled during the course of the development and by doing so suggest how they may have directly or indirectly influenced the development process. This exposure of a selection of the complexities present in the history of the development, will allow the reader a glimpse of the factors that influence outcomes regarding not just the historic built environment but which are present in all relationships that determine the use of space. What the next section aims to do is to introduce actor-network theory, as utilised in this thesis, in more detail and use it to provide, illustrated by examples from the case, an alternative view to the traditional gaze on the development process.

## **6.2 Actor-Network Theory**

Actor-network theory is not a theory in the usual sense of the term, in that it is not an explanation, but a methodological stance (Latour, 2005). What has become referred to as actor-network theory emerged out of social studies conducted in scientific laboratories during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Murdoch, 2005). From its early beginnings in studies of science and laboratories it has been applied in different areas including, discussions of geography and spatial planning (Murdoch, 1998), planning and the development plan making process (Tait, 2002), management (Grint, 1997; Legge, 2002) and tourism (Johannsen, 2005).

Its early advocates, Bruno Latour, Michael Callon and John Law, were concerned with the deconstruction of scientific facts and how scientific knowledge is locally derived and applicable rather than being universal (Johannesson, 2005). These studies focused on the way that

'scientific facts' were created by the relationships within the laboratory between the scientists, the objects of the study and the external world.

Referring to these studies Murdoch (2005: 57) states:

*“While it pays great attention to the internal organisation of the laboratory, actor-network theory’s main interest is the relationship between the laboratory and its external environment. In other words, the actor-network approach focuses on the means whereby laboratories draw entities in from the outside, subject them to various processes of translation and then export them to the rest of the world in the form of scientific facts and artefacts.”*

In doing so it provided an alternative to the previous theoretical views of the world by acknowledging that a link existed between the objects studied in the natural sciences, the resulting technology, and the human actors that both create and use it. It is these relationships that are the means by which actors act. Consequentially actors, defined through their ability to act, do not exist outside of a set of relationships. The set of relationships that defines what is or is not an actor recognises that these relationships do not exist in a social vacuum but that they are as dependent upon the non-human components as they are the human. It is this recognition of the role of the non-humans as actors that affords actor-network theorists their alternative perspective and allows them to break away from the traditional sociological divide of nature and society, subject and object (Johhansen, 2005). The successful stabilization of human relationships is dependent on the co-operation of non-human elements. A



mundane illustration of the nature of the relationship between material and social objects is provided by Grint (1997), who asks us to consider the way in which different cultural resonances can be generated by the arrangement of furniture in a classroom or office:

*“For example, rows of desks facing the front, arrayed in straight lines and separated from each other, imply a hierarchical approach to work and school. However a circle of chairs in a classroom, or a communal ‘hot desk’ in an office has quite different connotations about the role of power and equality”* (Grint, 1997: 111).

Murdoch distils the essence of the actor-network approach in the following passage:

*“What the actor-network theorists seek to investigate, then, are the means by which associations between actors and entities come into existence and how the roles and functions of subjects and objects, actors and intermediaries, humans and non humans are attributed and stabilized. They are interested in the how these and other categories emerge from the processes of network building. Actor-network theorists make the radical claim that it is only as a result of network building activities that any stable categories emerge – categories do not exist outside of specific network formations.”* (Murdoch, 2005: 69)

The above passage makes the distinction between actors and intermediaries, while recognising the part that they both have to play in the formation of networks. Murdoch (2005), recognising the influence of

Latour, offers the following explanation of the difference between the two categories. *Actors* are those elements that organize the associations or network, while the term *intermediaries* can be applied to those that are organized. This he explains in the following manner:

*“an actor will only come into being if the links established between the entities enrolled in the network allow one of their number legitimately to claim actor status (that is power flows down the chain towards she/he/it, elevating her/his/its status above all the others). Thus, in an important sense the distinction between actors (those that **organize** the associations or networks) and intermediaries (those that are **organized** within networks) comes at the end of the construction process, when the former can take the credit for the latter”.* (Murdoch, 2005: 69, emphasis in original)

An actor in one network may appear in another configuration as an intermediary, as the role change is dependent upon from where the view is taken or way in which the network evolves (Callon, 1991).

No matter from what perspective the assemblage is viewed there is what Callon (1986) suggests can be described as generalised symmetry between the elements. This principle requires that all the elements under consideration are treated equally whether they are natural or social and that they are all subsequently studied using the same terms of reference without discrimination between the differing elements. This symmetry proposes that it is as likely that the material or non-human elements will be

as capable of ordering the social or human elements as the humans are of ordering the material. Murdoch describes this in the following manner:

*“In a network, all entities are assembled ‘symmetrically’: that is, the natural entities are just as likely to be active as those labelled ‘social’, so that process of ‘construction’ cannot be seen as emanating from purely social or human causes.” (2005: 67)*

So what we actually see is a dependent network formed from individual components, which come together and interact within a particular contextual setting.

This interdependence between human and non-human elements is demonstrated by Michel Callon’s (1986) description of a project to cultivate scallops off the coast of St Brieuc Bay in France. In this example groups of actors representing various interests (fisherman, scientists, and the public) came together concerned with the actions of a non-human group of actors-the scallops. While all the groups of actors exist independently they are all drawn together around the question of whether the scallops will attach themselves to the lines provided. Callon uses this case to introduce the concepts of the sociology of translation or how power is enacted through four stages. The four stages identified by Callon of problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation have specific meanings when applied to actor-network theory that serve as descriptors of the process that are present when a network forms. Callon while warning that in reality the four stages overlap, separates them to describe

how the case being considered developed. At first the researchers at the centre of the case seek to identify the issues that need to be resolved in order to get the scallops to attach themselves to a line to allow cultivation.

This identification of the problem Callon refers to as problematisation. This is the first stage that it is possible to identify an obligatory passage point, a crucial point at which all the actors in the process meet and that their interests combine. In this case at the obligatory passage point the interests of the researchers, the scallops, the fishermen and other parties are dependent upon agreeing through problematisation that it is necessary to find a way for the scallops to be cultivated in the bay. Having agreed that this requirement, the various parties combine through the 'device of interressement' and link together. This term introduced by Callon is used in actor-network theory to describe the interdependence of the interests of the various parties in order to address the concerns of the problematisation stage. To achieve the desired outcome, to solve the problem, requires there to be an alignment of the interests between the actors involved. Through this process the parties become locked in together, strengthening the ties between some elements or loosening the connections with others, bridges are formed and associations created.

It is following the stabilisation of these connections that the actors are enrolled into the network. Enrolment according to Callon:

*“designates the device by which a set of interrelated roles is defined and attributed to actors who accept them. Interessement achieves enrolment if it is to be successful. To describe enrolment is thus to describe the group of multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks that accompany the interessements and enable them to succeed.” (1986: 211)*

To achieve its goal of organizing the elements within the network, along with problematisation, interessement and enrolment the actor has to be able to be representative of the other elements in the network. This situation Callon describes as mobilization. It is through this representation that social and natural realities are created and networks are configured.

It is the progress through these moments of alliance building that the process of translation occurs. Latour and Callon describe the concept of translation to alter an outcome in the following way:

*“By translation we understand all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak on behalf of another actor or force: ‘Our interests are the same’, ‘do what I want’, ‘you cannot succeed without going through me’. Whenever an actor speaks of ‘us’, s/he is translating other actors into a single will, of which s/he becomes spirit and spokesman. S/he begins to act for several, no longer for one alone.*

*S/he becomes stronger. S/he grows.* (Callon and Latour, 1981: 279  
in Murdoch, 2005: 63)

It is this ability to achieve aims and goals through assemblages of heterogeneous elements that is the essence of actor-network theory. Yet a network is always changing, potentially always in a state of flux, as the network adapts and changes to meet the demands of translation. Should the elements, as in the case of the scallops at St Brieuc Bay, fail to act in the required manner at the obligatory passage points then all the effort of interessement, enrolment and mobilisation will be to no avail. The network will not be able to stabilise and will either disband or need to be recreated in another form.

Murdoch (2005: 66) sums up the process of network building and translation by using the following points:

- *Processes of translation must be executed so that the actors and entities are enrolled into network relations*
- *Translation means that the enrolled actor is persuaded to identify with the network. This may mean some modification in the actor's identity and/or it may mean some modification in the shape of the network to accommodate a new actor.*
- *Translation can be executed either consensually or coercively, or through some combination of the two. Actors can be persuaded to*

*join the network because they come to believe it is in their 'interests', or they can be forced to join against their 'interests'*

- *Once enrolled into the network, the relations between entities must be stabilized. These stabilizations are often delegated to non-human entities such as technologies, because materials of various kinds are themselves generally more stable than human actions. In short, technologies can make good disciplinary machines.*

Murdoch (2005: 69-70) distils the essence of Latour's focus upon actors-in-networks into the following statements:

- *Actors can only act in concert with others. Actors only become actors if those others conduct actions in ways approved and recognized by the actor.*
- *Action is thus profoundly relational: it can only take place because of the alignments of actors, entities and resources. These alignments are common, everyday features of socio-spatial life.*
- *Actors, entities and resources only finally take shape (acquire identity) within network relations (any pre-existing identities are likely to become modified or displaced during the process of enrolment). Actors and entities are therefore co-constructed in networks.*
- *Because the networks are heterogeneous in nature, then a host of actors and entities must be mobilized to make any action effective. This means that if any actor or entity leaves the network the whole*

*operation is threatened. Thus all the enrolled entities have power of some kind.*

- *This view of action means we should adopt a 'symmetrical' perspective on potential actors: both human and non-humans have the ability to make moves that hold decisive implications for the network as a whole.*

In the case described above which Callon uses to explain the processes of translation, it is the scallops, the non-human elements of the network, that act in a way that demonstrate the importance of the alignments between the human and non-human elements from which networks are created. John Law's (1986) description of how the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century controlled a far reaching empire, also demonstrates how networks are not only dependent on the human components, but also on alliances with material elements. In this case the non-human components represented in the form of ships, navigation techniques and drilled instruction allowed power to be translated reliably from the centre to the periphery of the network. By engaging with material elements through the process of translation it is possible for the social elements at the centre to dominate another place (Murdoch 2005).

What this example also shows is the manner in which networks are configured through different levels of space and time. This again cuts through the accepted sociological divide, refuting the notion of the local or the global reflected in an agency and structure perspective. Latour (1999)



maintains that it is only possible to see the local focus of even the widest issues. It is thus only ever possible to see the local element of a network, although that element may be interlinked through a series of other associations on a global scale. By suggesting that things can only be viewed from the ground level there is no need to move between spatial scales. Viewed in this manner networks are neither “local” or “global” but are more or less long and more or less connected (Murdoch, 2005). Latour uses the following example of a railway to illustrate how something can be both global and local concurrently.

*“It is local at all points, since you always find sleepers and railroad workers, and you have stations and automatic ticket machines scattered along the way. Yet it is global, since it takes you from Madrid to Berlin or from Brest to Vladivostok. However, it is not universal enough to take you just anywhere. It is impossible to reach the little Auvergnat village of Malpy by train, or the little Staffordshire village of Market Drayton. There are continuous paths that lead from the local to the global, from the circumstantial to the universal, from the contingent to the necessary, only as long as the branch lines are paid for” (Latour, 1993: 117)*

The alternative view that opens up through actor-network theory also allows the examiner to recognise that not all the elements from which a network is composed may operate on the same timescales. Just as a human actor may be a part of many networks, either simultaneously or independently so may a material actor. Networks are dependent on the

cohesion of the links between the various elements, when this dissolves the networks lose their stability and disband leaving the individual elements to reform with other entities in alternative configurations. This is especially true of non-human elements that may possess a materiality that enables them to keep being drawn into new configurations over a much longer time span than their more transient human counterparts.

Law and Mol (Law and Mol, 1995) illustrate this by describing the way in which the tank traps that were erected during the second world war as part of a network of defence, remain as a feature of the physical environment. Their permanence persists despite the social elements that contributed to their original placement no longer playing an active part in their current existence. Despite the dissolution of the defensive network and the removal of other non-human elements, the tank traps still remain in place. This immutability means that they continue to contribute to other networks no longer concerned with defence. Their enrolment into a new configuration requires that they interact with a new set of humans, through the permanence of such artefacts, the actions and decisions of earlier humans are able to span temporal boundaries and contribute to what would otherwise appear to be disconnected contemporary networks.

The ability to recognise that networks may extend beyond that which is immediately visible through both time and space makes actor-network theory an interesting tool through which to examine buildings and

in particular buildings that are deemed to have an historic perspective. It was an approach adopted by Jenkins (2002) in the study of a single Parisian building 11 Rue du Conservatoire. In this study of a building it becomes possible to see that it plays different roles in networks that extend vertically and horizontally through time. Jenkins suggests that the building acts as a network node, or obligatory passage point, that links together a number of actors including the tenants, architects and other stakeholders. The important aspect of this approach is that the building does not just provide a neutral point at which the interests of the architects and tenants coincide, but that the building itself is key to the way in which the actors come together. Over time the nature of the building's role changes as it interacts with the fashions and requirements of the other elements that become aligned with its network.

### **6.3 Buildings and Networks**

It is this notion of interaction, between the building and the human actors that is central to the approach taken by this study. The buildings which the case study describes, like the building in Jenkins' study represent a network node at which many different interests have intersected over time. They also share with 11 Rue du Conservatoire the characteristic of being fairly unremarkable and mundane buildings (Jenkins 2002), yet the networks of which they have been part of and continue to contribute to, bring together narratives that tell of commerce, technology, councillors, developers, politics and civic pride. Yet despite

having their origins in past networks the buildings, like Law and Mol's tank traps (1995), remain actors in contemporary networks.

The story told in the case study, described what occurred when a portion of land in a specific location populated with a particular set of buildings designed for an initial purpose and incrementally adapted over time within that purpose, underwent a major transformation. This transformation resulted in that specific portion of land populated by many of the same buildings, albeit that they are now used for an industry, which although tenuously related to the previous use, has a very different focus. As a result of this transformation the focus has shifted from that of a place of production to a site of consumption.

Applying a conceptual framework based on the interpretation of actor-network theory described above, this transformation from site of production to site of consumption can be seen as the convergence of a multitude of network formations, that during the course of the period examined went through multiple processes of assembly and collapse. The transformation from brewery to hotel and housing provides an opportunity to apply an actor-network methodology to follow some of the 'traces' through the development process.

## **6.4 Boundaries**

One of the criticisms (Strathern, 1996) levelled at the 'Latourian' conception of actor-network theory is that of the potentially never-ending character of the resulting networks. Actor-network theory has the capacity

to keep revealing endless combinations of otherwise heterogeneous elements joined by either strong or weak network alliances that could possibly stretch into infinity. To try and locate all the connections within the network would only reveal complexity in confusing depth. It is therefore necessary to decide where to impose the boundaries of any actor-network theory exploration of a subject. While it may be interesting to continue tracing network alliances wherever they may lead the researcher, it may not add anything to the investigation at hand. For instance, in the example being studied, by following the network associations indefinitely you may be able to describe links that take you back even beyond history to the geological considerations that led to the brewery wells. But for the sake of this study the decision was made to cut the networks at set periods in history and therefore impose arbitrary boundaries into place. The length upon which it was possible to travel along the network connections with the resources available to the research project dictated the placing of these boundaries. Therefore it is the practical considerations of how far the researcher can follow the threads that ultimately dictate the story the narrator can tell.

The act of deciding what to look for and what to relate, means that the researcher/narrator shapes the view of the research as much as the actors in the story. The story created within these boundaries and related through this thesis is, hopefully, an interesting one but it is not the only one. The view that other actors may have, taken from a different perspective, may offer a completely different way of considering the story.

This does not mean that either form of the story is incorrect. Rather it further emphasises the manner in which actors can perform in a multitude of network configuration simultaneously.

## **6.5 The Application Of Actor-Network Theory**

The earlier part of this chapter set out to explain the approach taken by this thesis to actor-network theory. It is possible using this approach to determine stages in the development of networks as relationships between elements. The stages of problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation identified by Callon (1986) provide an alternative method of viewing the phases that the development progressed through. Using this structure it is possible to identify the obligatory passage points where the interests of the actors meet and the future of the network is determined. The successful negotiation of the obligatory passage points is essential if the actors are to become enrolled in stable configurations allowing the mutual organisation of actors and intermediaries necessary to allow translation to occur. The first step in providing an actor-network account of this process will therefore be to try and identify the phases in the light of the redevelopment of the Henley Brewery case study covering the period 2002 through to 2005.

## **6.6 Problematisation And Interessement**

The notion of problematisation refers to the need to bring together the collective interests of a number of heterogeneous elements in-order to achieve a particular end. In this case study there are a number of independent actors who all have particular outcomes that they wish to

achieve. Yet despite their apparent independence the actors all share a common interest or problem. Central to their concerns is an interest in what occurs to the buildings that collectively composed the Henley brewery.

First amongst the collective of actors is the Brakspear Company. At the start of the process the brewery belongs to them and is an integral component of a relatively stable network that has evolved over the previous century. Changes that occur at the periphery of that network, described in Chapter Four, have the effect of destabilising the network to the extent that locally the network disbands. Following this disbanding, a Brakspear-centred network reforms, but the composition of this network is very different to the old one and brewing is no longer a central element. With brewing no longer a central activity of the Brakspear network, the buildings became redundant and their connections to the network, if not quite severed, were considerably weakened. This meant that the Company needed to find a means of disposal that satisfied the local network requirements of creating revenue while at the global extent of the network minimising the adverse publicity that was expected from the closure of their brewing operations.

Another influential actor or set of actors to be considered was the local authority. Itself a network of specialist actors made up in the context of land use by Councillors, Planning Officers, Conservation Officers and other professional officers, the authority had a responsibility to safeguard

the environment on the behalf of the Public. With the cessation of brewing in Henley by Brakspear, the authority became faced with the problem of ensuring that what ever happened to the buildings was not detrimental, in their collective professional opinion, to the wider Henley environment. This was complicated by the consideration that some of the buildings on the site were listed and the location of the brewery within the Henley Conservation Area. The importance of this can be illustrated by the following extract from the sales brochure prepared for the site by the selling agents:

*“The Council’s Officers would prefer a comprehensive review of the brewery site which could encompass a number of different uses and occupiers. Any use must respect the Listed Buildings and be compatible with the character of the surrounding Conservation Area and appropriate to the town centre.”* (Daniel Watney)

This meant that what any potential developer would have to devise was a sensitive yet profitable scheme for dealing with the brewery buildings.

Together with these human centred actors there were the interests of other material elements that needed to be considered. Obviously at the centre were the actual buildings themselves and the need to find a developer able to interact and accommodate their particular needs was of paramount importance. The buildings had the capability of acting both as actors and intermediaries and throughout the course of the development this status changed. As actors their size and form had been instrumental in the disbandment of the previous network ensemble. No longer capable



of operating as a profitable brewery they had been pre-eminent in severing the previous network that existed around the brewery. Now as dormant redundant buildings they would take a lesser, if temporary, intermediary role being organized by the other actors into a suitable solution.

Following the period of problematisation the issue facing the key actors was how the buildings that once housed the Henley brewery could be preserved in such a manner that they retain their historic, architectural and social significance, in a manner that ensure they retained their landmark status within the Henley Conservation area. These aspirations needed to be achieved while still satisfying Brakspear's expectations of revenue and the profit expectations of the site's potential buyers.

With the announcement of the cessation of brewing on the site the local authority planning staff were forced into defining the nature of the problem. Their position as planning professionals upheld them as the guardians of expert knowledge concerning how space and place should be organized in Henley. This expert knowledge re-enforced by the existence of national and local examples of plans, planning guidance, policies and legislation directed the manner in which not only problematisation occurred, but also the acts of interessement that accompanied it. The imposition of the planning criteria directed and controlled the number of possible solutions that could be found and also established some of the obligatory passage points that would dictate the

manner in which the development network assembled and the project eventually proceeded.

Following problematisation the next phase identified by Callon is that of *Interessement*. *Interessement* is the phase where the interests of the heterogeneous elements become combined to allow translation to occur, to engage the various actors and intermediaries into the process. Both the brewers and the planners needed to find a mutually acceptable way in which to facilitate the re-organisation of the buildings at the centre of the case. To achieve their aims both sets of actors needed not only to co-operate successfully with each other but also needed to draw in the interests of other actors. The final composition of the eventual network that formed depended on the successful *interessement* and subsequent enrolment of a number of other actors.

The imposition of planning regulations and policies serve the purposes of *interessement*. The policies and regulations have the effect of determining the manner in which the problem is defined which in turn creates the bonds that bind certain actors into the network and prevent or exclude others from influencing the formation. For instance, the imposition of planning policies calling for a mix of uses on the site excluded purely residential developers from entering negotiations for the brewery. With stringent conditions being imposed on the identities of the potential buyers the actual sale of the site became one of the early obligatory passage points that would dictate which actors were assembled into the eventual formation of the network. With some of the buildings on the site listed, it

was necessary that actors were recruited into the network that had the type of skills to enable a successful yet sympathetic conversion of the protected parts of the development. The listing served not only to strengthen the links within the network between potential developers with conservation expertise and the other actors such as the planning staff, but it also served the purpose of excluding those developers that did not possess the requisite skill sets. This consolidation of links between some elements accompanied by the disassociation or weakening of links with other elements is replicated in order to negotiate multiple obligatory passage points as the network forms.

At this early part of the development process the actors belonging to the local authority were able to organize the manner in which the network was assembled. Following problematisation key issues were identified that dictated the identities of other key actors in the network, which become organized through the use of intermediaries such as the planning policy documents and the conservation legislation. By ensuring a practical fit with these criteria, a group of actors were assembled that was able to negotiate the obligatory passage point that would dictate the eventual disposal of the site by the brewers.

## **6.7 Enrolment And Mobilisation**

At the obligatory passage point in the case study where the brewery site was sold a number of actors had been assembled together. Each of these actors both human and material had their own interests that they brought to the assemblage. It is through the combination of the actors and

the ability of some of those present to organize the other elements to elevate their own position while still retaining the support of the actors that enables a successful outcome. This alignment of interests, the process of *“multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks that accompany the interressements”* (Callon, 1986) is referred to as enrolment.

Through this process of enrolment the network is allowed to stabilise and the actors linked through intermediaries are connected together in a manner that potentially allows them to achieve their desired outcomes. In this case following problematisation a group of actors with specific interests and skill sets were identified. Brought together through a set of interactions they grouped together by being interested in what happens to the buildings vacated by the brewers. By the time the sale of the site was completed the formative actors in the emerging network, had been joined by a new set of potential actors. Through the process of interressement the interests of the new actors became allied to those of the original actors and in particular the developer and the hotelier became enrolled into the network. Referred to here as actors, the developer and the hotelier should be recognised as actor-networks in their own right, each representing clusters of other elements linked together to achieve specific outcomes. The joining together of these associations allows the stabilisation of the overarching network that was the development.

In this case again the responsibility of stabilising the network is transferred onto some of the material elements. Core to this are the

buildings that act as immovable objects at the network core which are fixed in place by contracts, policies, laws, plans, mission statements, drawings, press releases and numerous other non-human entities. With the network stable the actors that have been drawn into the configuration become representative of the network identity. This final element of translation, Callon (1986) describes as mobilisation. Originally part of an actor-network centred upon the production of beer, the process of translation has seen this network disband and reform retaining the central material actors while repositioning the status of some of the other components of the configuration. This reformation required the original actors that remained to identify and then recruit other actors into the nascent assemblage. Through this act of network building translation occurs. The Henley brewery is no longer a network that represents the ability to produce beer. The network of production has been cut and the remaining actors have been reconfigured into a new network where the Henley brewery is now representative of a hotel conversion and a residential development. Through this the actors that it represents are no longer those synonymous with the production of beer: brewery engineers, brewers, coopers, draymen and so on. The network has become a composition of hoteliers, developers, planners, architects, conservation consultants and builders.

To reach this stage the network had to pass through many obligatory passage points as each stage of the development unfolded. This required the constant reconfiguration of the assembled network.

Throughout the development process different actors were drawn into or expelled from the assembly to meet the requirements of the network. This constant reconfiguration required not only that different actors become enrolled into the network but it also meant that existing actors became mobilised in different ways as the development progressed. Following the pattern of the development process it is possible to see that for each of the major stages of the process there are obligatory passage points that need to be negotiated. There are some stages in the process that immediately appear to be obligatory passage points within the development process. One of these already identified is the sale of the brewery site while probably the most obvious was the planning decision itself. While these stand out as obligatory passage points throughout the history of the development there were many more equally important obligatory passage points.

Some of the obligatory passage points could be directly referenced to a particular occurrence. Fixed to a specific moment in time like the sale of the site or the granting of planning permission. Others though are not so easy to attribute temporally. One such obligatory passage point that needed to be negotiated was that relating to the problem of parking. As described in Chapter Five it was necessary for all the actors involved in the development to find a suitable solution to providing adequate parking provision for the development. To negotiate this problem the actors involved had to undergo a prolonged period of "*multilateral negotiations*,

*trials of strength and tricks that accompany the intersements*” (Callon, 1986) in order to gain agreement on a mutually acceptable solution.

The difficulty in finding an appropriate solution for the social actors was imposed by the limitations of the physical elements involved in the development. The need for the hoteliers to find adequate service and parking provision was matched by the desire of the residential developer to provide parking for the residents. The desired and the eventual solution of providing underground parking allowed them to do this and still provide maximum space for the provision of residential accommodation. By arguing that without this the whole development would fall through allowed the developers to assert pressure onto the local authority to accept the solution as the most suitable available. In this way the local authority staff were enrolled into the parking dependent sub-network that was able to stabilise sufficiently to negotiate that particular obligatory passage point.

Throughout the development process there were many similar points where the actors were forced to repeat the processes of translation in order to subtly reconfigure the network to take into account the demands of one or other set of actors. As the development progressed particularly through the period between the sale of the site and the submission of the application for approval there were many adjustments of the network configuration as different sets of actors sought to enrol the other actors in a manner that would allow them to reach the outcomes that they desired.

## 6.8 Conclusion

Using actor-network theory in this way provides a different way of looking at the development process. Through the use of this methodology it is possible to identify specific points in the development process where key decisions are made. The phases of translation outlined in this chapter show the way in which these obligatory passage points are negotiated. By examining the phases of problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation it is possible to see how different sets of actors come to interact and interlink in shifting network configurations. These phases of translation are located upon obligatory passage points that determine if a network is able to stabilize or disband. It is the successful negotiation of particular passage points that allow actor-networks to stabilise and acquire the characteristics necessary to achieve particular outcomes. From this chapter it is reasonable to make the conclusion that the examination of how networks form to enable the development process increases the understanding of how the roles of the actors involved, both human and material influence the development process. However, by focusing on the stages of translation and obligatory passage points it still serves to conceal the complex nature of the relationships and the interactions that exist around these network points, because of this the interaction of the material with the social is not fully drawn out.

Even the limited application of an actor-network theory approach as applied in this chapter restricted to identifying obligatory passage points and the phases of translation that accompany them, demonstrates that it



would be possible to use the methodology to create an alternative description to that narrated in Chapter Five. Apart from demonstrating that using such an approach requires consideration of the case study in greater detail than normal, it fails to make much of an improvement on a more traditional approach becoming little more than an over-complicated form of critical path analysis. While in this chapter the importance of the material elements in the development process has been recognised and it has been suggested that the non-humans could be actors in the process, these roles remain largely unexamined and the status of the material remains largely subordinate to that of the humans. The next chapter will address this by looking further into the composition of some aspects of the actor-networks, initially that were described in Chapter Five, and considering the nature of the interactions between the social and the material.

# Chapter Seven: Composition and Configuration

## 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced actor-network theory as it is considered in this thesis and took the first steps towards using it to examine the case study. Used in this way it is possible to question the way that heterogeneous elements become associated and organized and how in doing so networks are then formed to achieve a certain purpose. This process of translation, the convening of heterogeneous entities into a single representative identity, is described by reference to Callon's (1986) stages of translation. Though the examination of these stages it is possible to trace how network building occurs and how the various actors, following the initial phase of problematisation, pass through the stages of interessement, enrolment and mobilization in order to achieve network stability. Network stability is dependent on the successful negotiation of obligatory passage points. If the actors assembled in the network are unsuccessful in negotiating the obligatory passage points the network stability is lost and the network is forced to reconfigure or completely disband. Using the point of sale and the issues surrounding the provision of parking it was possible to see how the phases of translation and the notion of obligatory passage points can be applied to developments of the historic built environment represented by the case study.

Although used in this way actor-network theory provides an interesting way to view the case study, the view offered still remains limited. Presenting what occurs in terms of phases of translation

punctuated by obligatory passage points continues to encourage a chronologically driven approach similar to that utilised in Chapters Four and Five to determine the structure of the narrative. Using a chronological approach is an inevitable result of setting out a process through stages or phases, unfortunately this means that an actor-network theory examination retains some of the problems that the methodology was employed to avoid. Not least is the arbitrary simplification of the process to fit the defined stages. As highlighted earlier, Latour (1996) points out that it is difficult to define what the phases of a project are and in what sequence they occur. This is exasperated by the realisation that for the majority of projects there will be disagreement between observers not only of what constitutes a phase but also where and when the phases, if they can be identified, begin and subsequently end. This possibility was also recognised by Callon (1986) who, while setting out the phases of translation, suggests that in reality they may overlap and are therefore not distinct stages. Because of the possibility of confusion inherent in this kind of actor-network phasing, ultimately the view remains a simplistic one that continues to hide the complexity within the relationships that enable the development. Applying a narrative form that adheres to the phases of the translation and therefore constructs arbitrary boundaries to the location of where a stage begins and ends, has the effect of creating another simplistic linear chronological description of the type, that the thesis sets out to avoid. It may be suggested that the adoption of this approach does expose some of the complexity hidden in the relationships being studied but that it does not go far enough. It is possible to accuse an approach

based on tracing the phases of translation and the identification of obligatory passage points of offering nothing more than a slightly confusing and difficult to follow variation of a critical path analysis.

If actor-network theory has any value as an alternative methodology for examining interactions and relationships concerning the historic built environment, it needs to offer something more than just being another method of saying what happened and when. The original precept of using actor-network theory as a means of examining the case was that it elevated the material elements involved to the same status as the human elements. It is this application of what Callon (1986) refers to as the principle of generalized symmetry that allows actor-network theory the opportunity to make a contribution to how we view issues regarding the redevelopment of the historic built environment. It is this radical ontological perspective that suggests humans and non-humans are capable of being actors that the rest of this chapter sets out to demonstrate. This will be done by examining in more detail the role of non-human elements in defining the identity of the brewery network.

While both the human and the non-human elements have a part to play in defining the network identity these roles are not set and through consideration of some of the elements in the case it is possible to see how changes at the periphery of the network led to the destabilization of the brewery's local network with a resultant change in status for some of the elements from actor to intermediary. The chapter will then move on to

describe how with the network forced to reconfigure, some of the material elements recovered their actor status and became instrumental in directing the way in which the development subsequently occurred. As well as considering the influence of the material on the immediate local network it is also possible using the case study to show that this network is an assemblage of a number of other subsidiary or satellite networks that are enrolled and expelled as the brewery network stabilizes and reconfigures as it passes through various stages in the development. The final part of the chapter considers certain aspects of the development and the roles played by the various actors, material and human, as particular obligatory passage points were negotiated.

## **7.2 The Material Actors' Influence In Configuring Identity**

The process of translation outlined in the previous chapter ends with the phase that Callon (1986) identifies as mobilization. This is achieved when the network becomes stable enough for the heterogeneous element from which it is composed to take on the identity of the network. This identity, the means by which it is recognized, is a contextually specific construction and like the 'scientific facts' that were the subject of the early actor-network theory studies of laboratory life, identities are influenced by the situations under which they are created (Holtorf, 2002). This is evidenced by the way that the historic built environment is referred to. The identities of the buildings being considered are dependent on network configurations bringing together heterogeneous elements and translating them into something that is recognizable as a

specific entity. Any network that forms within the historic built environment cannot be regarded, whilst being mindful of Strathern's (1996) criticisms, without consideration of the larger network configurations that it also is an essential component of. These include networks formed around the individual locations and also broader 'global' networks of which the individual examples are constituent elements. This membership of local and global assemblages can be demonstrated through reference to the Henley brewery.

Numerous combinations of social and material actors became embodied in the buildings that comprised the brewery. The form that the buildings took was the culmination of an evolution over hundreds of years of changing network configurations. This set of relationships coalesced into an entity that links a number of non-human features, geology, buildings, and vessels, to a set of human actors, brewers, customers, and engineers to produce a human and non-human hybrid. Viewed in this manner an entity such as a brewery is not merely a social construction comprised of owners, brewers, customers, and shareholders. Although the successful combination of these human agents is crucial, the beer cannot be brewed without the co-operation of non-human elements. A brewer cannot brew without the assistance of the appropriate artifacts of brewing technology such as; a good water supply, pumping engines, mash tuns, fermenting squares, barrels, drays and so on. It is the combination of all these independent elements, human and non-human that created the space and place that is recognisable as a brewery.

This association of elements that has collectively become the brewery then creates its own identity. It ceases to be independent elements. No longer is it X the brewer and Y the mash tun, aided by the pump Z and so on. When these elements combine together in a certain place they become the brewery. The way the combinations occur, in which certain actors are selected and enrolled, results in a network specific to each individual brewery. While the basic process dictates that all breweries need to exhibit similar examples of the various elements that contribute to the process. The reality is that in each configuration the exact formula of the recipe that makes a brewery will differ for each specific case. Similarly the beer produced in the breweries is not a generic commodity, the differences in brewery network assemblages, results in different tasting brews. It is this difference between outputs of the different network configurations that became the differentiating factor between rival brewers. With the rise of the common brewer, brewing for the wholesale market (Hayden, 2001) and the need to provide an ever increasing volume of beer identifiable to a particular producer, this interrelation became evermore important. While the brewer was a key constituent in the production process without the interaction between the human element and the science and technology that were the tools of the trade, it would not be possible to produce beer.

The importance of the relationship between the human brewer and the non-human brewing plant is demonstrated by the design of the

brewery buildings. This interdependence between the human elements and the buildings that they occupied is verified by Pearson (1999) who recognises that many of the specialist brewery architects were originally employed as brewery engineers and therefore were more interested in the way the brewery operated than how it looked as a building.

Unlike the breweries of the twentieth century where chemistry and computerisation control the process, the traditional brewery was representative of a strange combination of science, old wives tales, magic and tradition. This manifested itself in a variety of ways. For example, traditionally every Christmas a bunch of mistletoe was hung from the gables of the canopy over the brewery yard at the Henley Brewery to ensure the continued success of the brew. This tradition was upheld to the closure of brewing operations and following the closure of the brewery this tradition was continued by the hotelier. The influence of tradition was also apparent when the license to brew Brakspear beer was eventually sold to Refresh a specialist brewer of traditional ales. It was claimed that it was critical to the taste of the product to use the same vessels and therefore it was necessary that they bought as much of the original brewing equipment that they had capacity to house as possible.

The interdependence of the human and non-human means that in reality breweries can be regarded as a hybrid combination. Even the look of the building is the result of the way that the elements within the building interrelate. This interlinking of form and function is crucial not only to the



identity of the material elements of the assemblage but also to the human components. The brewers are dependent on the correct functioning of the material elements to ensure their own social existence. The assemblage of elements or network, which developed an identity as the Brakspear brewery, existed as a means of organizing actors in a specific format to transform raw materials into a particular and recognizable product. The successful production of this output enabled the organization to become the dominant brewers in the South of Oxfordshire by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Although the network remained outwardly stable, over the course of its history closer examination of the exact configuration of the assemblage would indicate that it was subject to a process of continuous transformation and reconfiguration. At the most immediate level of reconfiguration the human actors within the alliances changed, with new humans becoming involved reflecting changes in the company's staff. To an extent the impact of these changes were tempered by the traditional practice of recruiting from within the same families with it not uncommon for successive generations following each other into the business. The familial experience of employment was most obvious in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century within the Brakspear family, but it was not the sole reserve of the owning family. Even in the modern era when the brewery closed many of the brewery staff were related to other employees and in many cases had followed previous generations into the brewing trade. These family ties encouraged enrolment and alliance and had the effect of stabilising and

strengthening the relationships between the human and the not so transient material elements of the composition.

### **7.3 Instability And Dissolution**

Despite the stabilising effect of retaining family patterns of employment both the human and material elements from which the brewery network was configured remained subject to alterations. Many of these alterations were driven by changes at the periphery of the network. Changes at the farthest extent could cause a reconfiguration of the composition of the elements closest to the immediate network. Many of the change were driven by societal changes that resulted in varying demand either in terms of type or volume of the product that the network existed to produce. A significant example of this was the construction of the new brewhouse in the nineteenth century. This reflected the increase in demand for beer brought about by changing employment and leisure practices of wider society and the responding improvements in brewing technology and methods, necessary to supply the increased demand (Hayden, 2001).

A further demonstration of how changes at the 'global' extent of the network can influence the composition of the actors within the immediate network is provided by examining the way in which changes in the nature of the national industry in the late twentieth century resulted in a reduction in demand for the regional brewers. Brakspear as a regional brewery was subject to this fall in demand and as a result the local network was forced in

to a period of reconfiguration. As a result of these new alignments ties between local actors were weakened, the brewery closed its in-house bottling operation and the links between the staff and the machinery they had operated were severed. Yet equally as a result of this the width of the network was extended as stronger ties were forged with the external actors to whom the bottling was outsourced.

As well as the major alterations that the network underwent, it was also subject to countless other minor changes to the material elements. These minor alterations would all directly influence the manner in which they co-existed with the human components of the assemblage. From the installation of stainless steel vessels to minor changes in the buildings fabric dictated by the need for new power supplies or light switches. No matter how minor the change it would have either been the result of or resulted in a shift in the nature of the relationship between that particular element and the other actors contained in the network. The ability for the human and the material elements to reconfigure and adjust to these alterations in the network relationships is crucial for while the material and the social retained symmetry the brewery network was able to maintain stability.

The decision to cease brewing at the site came about because of a period of in-balance between the material and the social. It was no longer possible for the elements encapsulated within the brewery premises to remain enrolled and profitably brew beer. It was no longer possible to

create a profit from that particular combination of elements and therefore the ability of the brewery owners to keep the other actors engaged in the network and to achieve the continued translate of independent elements into a profitable brewery was lost.

This loss of cohesion was brought about because many of the material elements, such as the brewing vessels and the buildings themselves, were the embodiment of network decisions taken at a time when demand from the cohort of human actors referred to as consumers was far greater. As a result of this their form was designed for them to function at an optimum capacity far beyond that needed to supply the demands of the current cohort of customers for the product. The resulting imbalance, with the size of the material being far in excess of the demands of the social, meant it was no longer possible for the network to maintain itself. Without symmetry the bonds between the various elements of the composition start to loose cohesion and with this weakening it became inevitable that it was necessary for the network to reform. The dissolution of the existing network left behind a complex arrangement of material elements that would influence the way in which any subsequent network was able to reform.

#### **7.4 The Influence Of The (Past) Material On The (Present) Social**

Networks dependent upon people's interactions are particularly fragile (Strathern, 1996). When these relationships break down it is the

material objects like Law and Mol's (1995) tank traps that remain. This is particularly relevant to actor-network studies of the historic built environment, where the material elements left behind following the disintegration of a network assembly retain their ability to act long after their human compatriots leave the network. While the buildings may, as Brand (1994) suggested, be the embodiment of previous decisions and repositories of memory and are always connected to the past they are equally as able to influence the present, and therefore by association the future. It could be argued that even in their absence the buildings on a development site have a power to act that is at least equal to that attributed to some of the other elements. This is an issue that besets brownfield development sites, even when completely cleared of all existing super-structures, elements of the previous networks still remain and influence the nature of the network assembled after them. The shape of the plot, the ground conditions and the interfaces with neighbouring properties are all material elements dictated by previous network configurations and will therefore have a much stronger influence on subsequent development than that usually awarded them by their human associates.

Associated with this is the location of the site itself. Positioned in the Henley Conservation Area the relationship of the existing buildings with their neighbours was one of the major causes of contention through the development process. The brewery buildings and their contribution to Henley's *genius loci* was a crucial consideration making the buildings

stronger actors within the network. Equally the relationship of the surrounding buildings to those that were planned became more of a consideration than may otherwise have been the case. The position of the plot also enrolled it into a wider economic network concerning the value of land and property in the local area. With the affluence of the surrounding area and the desirability of the plot in the Conservation Area the brewery building's status was further enhanced. This it could be argued had a major influence on the type of conversion that would be acceptable on the site. This allowed the local planning authority the opportunity to be more proactive upon their insistence on a mixed-use site as even with high conversion costs compared to wholesale redevelopment the site provided an attractive proposition. This in turn strengthened the position of the main building group as an actor as its essential yet profitable position in the Henley Conservation Area ensured that potential developers had to work with the existing structure.

The architects, planners, developers and future users find that the options open to them are decided by the relationships that they can develop with the existing structures. Buildings originally built to satisfy the requirements of one set of social/material relationships, in this case the brewing of beer, will severely constrain the options available for alternative uses. Conversion within the field of the historic built environment is dependent upon the continuing existence and indeed conservation/protection, of the existing material elements. By awarding 'historic' recognition to the existing structures it further strengthens their

position as actors within the emerging network. Through this strong actor position the existing material elements ensure that previous network configurations continue to influence the way that other elements can be engaged, enrolled and mobilised together and be re-assembled to create a stable new formation. A traditional non actor-network theory approach to studying the development would either wholly ignore or at the very least sideline the influences of the previous configurations. When earlier configurations of buildings are taken into consideration in the development literature the focus of the attention is often directed to the economic considerations of conversion rather than how the development is influenced by the previous use. Yet in regard to the development at the centre of this case, the issues that influenced the final form of the development were as much due to the character and identity of the buildings on the site and their relationships with the other elements of the development as the economic cost of completing the conversion.

The most obvious manifestations of the previous configurations lie in the form of the buildings themselves. The type of incremental alterations to buildings that Brand (1994) focused attention on, can be attributed to the changing formations of the networks that the buildings are part of. This particular site changed continuously through its history in answer to the technological and social demands of the industry. These changes may have been from something as small as a new hole in the buildings fabric for a cable run or on a more significant scale the creation of a new distribution yard by demolishing the later buildings at the rear of the

Mineral Water Factory. All of these decisions taken in the past have the ability to directly influence the course of the development.

In the first instance they presented the developers with problems of how to work within the physical constraints that were presented by the site. In this way past decisions influenced what needed to be done to convert a space that had been designed to house nineteenth century brewing technology into attractive and profitable hotel accommodation. How do you work with these material actors in such a way as to provide residential accommodation that provides profit for the developer while being acceptable to the other parts of the development? Apart from the physical characteristics of the networks there are other remainders of previous configurations scattered across the development that surface at regular intervals enrolling and influencing the current actors and their networked relationships.

## **7.5 Roles And Stability**

In its previous incarnation as a functioning brewery the development site had a very specific identity. This identity was the product of the various actors involved in the process interacting together in a relatively stable configuration that had gradually evolved over the course of the site's history. For the most part this had established itself as a stable network. The changes that did occur within the network were relatively minor and continued to facilitate the translation of raw materials into beer and hence into revenue for the company. Various actors involved in the



process may have changed over time, human and non-human, as staff left and machinery was altered or replaced. However despite the relative stability of the overarching network as the company expanded or retracted its operations over the course of its history some elements of the network, for example the Mineral Water Factory, underwent periods of more significant change. While these changes were significant to individual elements within the network, the changes did not alter the network's historical *raison d'être*, its core competency remained the commercial brewing of beer. With the changes at the peripheries of the network the centre of the network underwent a period of instability. No longer able to produce beer profitably the adhesive binding the network together no longer had the strength to hold the elements into the configuration. The decision by the company to withdraw from brewing resulted in a loss of symmetry between the elements that had been enrolled and mobilised into being the 'brewery'. This loss of symmetry and the accompanying instability was inevitably followed by the dissolution of the incumbent network.

With the dissolution of what had previously been a stable assemblage the brewery network became immersed into a phase of radical reconfiguration. Despite the buildings and some of the other non-human elements remaining in place the social components of the network were forced to disengage. Although faced with extensive reconfiguration the retention of the physical elements ensured that core elements of the network remained. The result of this need to reconfigure engaged a new

set of heterogeneous actors into the processes of problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilization. The progression of the existing elements together with the new elements through the phases of translation would ensure that a new set of stable relations could form allowing a network to form and thereby enable the development. As a network is simultaneously local and global changes at the centre are reflected in changes at periphery. This required not just the reconfiguration of the brewery network, but also a shift in the numerous other assemblages of which the brewery network was itself an actor.

## **7.6 Local And Global**

The Henley brewery was an element in countless networks, in some it was an actor in its own right, in others it had the role of an intermediary. These networks had always been through periods of reconfiguration, as the local incarnation of the networks adapted to alterations to the global extent of the network. The stability of the network at any given time dictates the dynamism of the changes, determining whether or not the actors remain enrolled or if they are forced to negotiate new obligatory passage points that may or may not require that the process of problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation is once more set into action.

From Chapter Four it is possible to trace the wider connections of the brewery network that join it to international brewing conglomerates, political ideology and changes in the way that society socialises. Changes

in the configurations of actors at the extreme of the connections caused a destabilisation of the assemblages at the epicentre of the Henley brewery network. Throughout the brewery's history it had always been an element amongst many that contributed to the association of entities that formed a greater Henley orientated network. While the brewery was still in operation particularly in the periods when it was commercially strongest, the stability of its own network elevated it to a prominence within this larger set of associations. The political and economic importance of the company locally and therefore its status as an actor became embodied in its landmark town centre brewery.

The closure of the brewery signalled the demise of this particular configuration. Despite their continued physical presence, the buildings were no longer capable of performing their established role. Emasculated through loss of functional status their position in the network was undermined. From being an integral part of a powerful actor-network able to organize less powerful actors and intermediaries, with the capacity to influence other subsidiary actor-networks, the brewery buildings themselves became the subject of translation. Detached from other elements of the actor-network, for a transitional period they became intermediaries, subject to the organization of other actors rather than being the organizing bodies themselves. As such they became subject to the intentions of stronger actors, tasked with determining the future of the town as a whole rather than focusing on the requirements of the brewers.

The buildings became a problem for all the parties involved. The buildings were a key feature of the historic Henley landscape, occupying a prominent position at the heart of the Henley conservation area. The local authorities, both the district and the town council, were keen to ensure that the significant buildings on the site were not lost and replaced by a modern development. Yet despite wishing to ensure the retention of the buildings they were unable to intervene in a way that would have kept the brewery operational. No longer able to profitably brew beer at the site the brewers were keen to ensure its profitable disposal, but with the historic elements of the site being protected from unsympathetic development finding a buyer with the skills and expertise to satisfy the needs of the vendors and the desires of the local authorities would prove a difficult task.

Anybody wishing to develop the site would not only need to take into account the physical limitations of the site, limitations reinforced by the legal considerations of conservation legislation, they would also have to deal with the social issues that arose from the buildings' previous existence as a brewery. As the Brakspear brewery the buildings over the course of their history had become linked with Henley to such an extent that the two had become synonymous. More than any of the other more peripheral parts of the site this connection was strongest with the buildings around the old brewery yard. The process of brewing requires that there is an intimate connection between the material elements such as the plant and the building that houses them and the humans that work with them. This connection is all the more intimate as the product of this union,

traditionally brewed beer, is also a living thing and one that has had and continues to have a considerable role in the culture not only of Britain but of many Northern European countries (Hayden, 2001). To the local community the brewery could have been regarded as not just a collection of buildings but also tangible evidence of the town's history. This linking of the buildings history and human history was particularly evident in that generations of some Henley families had all been employed at the brewery (Sheppard 1979).

Any developer prepared to take on the brewery would be faced with these 'social' issues as well as the physical problems of the building. The relationships embodied within the buildings are an essential part of the history of the area and because of this the buildings have an intangible worth beyond their value as property, being representative of the consciousness of the people who worked in them or lived near them (Hareven and Langenbach, 1981) It is this set of relationships that situate the physical and prevent them from being just an abstract collection of bricks and other construction materials. This relationship not only covered the way that the local public thought about the site, but there were a number of wider issues that extended beyond the immediate relationships. The buildings' current form was dictated by the need to house the production plant and the people who worked with it. Through this union of people, plant and place a particular product, Brakspear's beer was produced. The product of these shorter network links lengthened the extent of the network's influence to include a wider more geographically

dispersed selection of actors. The success of this local network assemblage, critically if not economically, meant that the wider drinking public, as represented by the CAMRA membership, were also concerned over the future of the site and what this would mean for the long term survival of the company, its pub estate and the product (CAMRA, 2002).

Despite the protestations by CAMRA and other such groups the relationships they had with the site were external to the process and would not overly concern any potential developer of the site. However there was one social relationship with the site that could not be discounted. This was the relationship between the site and the local planning authority, South Oxfordshire District Council. Any development that occurred on the site could not help but be influenced by this. This association between the parties existed in both formal and informal ways. As the planning authority it would be responsible for consenting as to whether or not any proposed development could or could not take place. While this decision would finally lie in the hands of the elected members of the planning committee it would be down to the authority's professional officers to ensure that any proposals submitted adequately accounted for the physical, legal and social elements that have been introduced above. The control exercised by the authority extended beyond the physical but also to the social elements. To an extent the social elements were translated from an ephemeral being into a more tangible existence through the codification in those policies requiring that the site should have a mix of uses, some of which should be employment generating rather than be developed solely

for housing. The interpretation and facilitation of these professional duties would also be influenced by the previous interactions between the 'authority' and 'Brakspear'.

Brakspear the company and the Brakspear family had had considerable influence within Henley and its immediate environs to the extent that during the most prosperous periods of the company's history the family had been representative members of the Council and other local bodies (Sheppard, 1979). The size of the company's widely spread and diverse property portfolio, which included a large pub estate and holdings around the town as well as the brewery itself, meant that they were not only one of the area's largest employers but also one of its principal landlords. Unsurprisingly considering the political and economic influence that they had in the local vicinity, the company had not always enjoyed a harmonious relationship with either South Oxfordshire District Council or the Henley Town Council. Over the years a number of disputes had occurred between the company and the planning authority with the result that many of the planning proposals applied for by the company had either been approved against the officer's recommendations or only granted following appeal. A level of distrust between the two parties developed that was well known locally, to the extent that one of the parties interviewed during the course of the research described the relationship that existed between the Council and the brewers in the following manner;

*"Brakspear had a chequered career with South Oxfordshire DC. In planning terms their reputation for dealing with things sensitively wasn't*

*good and they never got planning permission, I don't think the poor things ever got a planning permission straight through it was always on appeal"* (Interview; Developer's Planning Consultant, 2005)

The relationship between the two parties had deteriorated over the ill-fated 2000 planning application for the Mineral Water Factory and the antagonism was fuelled further by *"A wonderful spat over the cricket ground"* (Interview: Brakspear Property Director, 2005). Originally the home of the company team but which the Henley Cricket Club, had latterly used, Brakspear had decided to sell the cricket ground a decision that had caused some bad publicity in the local press. The existing poor relationship between the local authority and the company was not helped by what was regarded as a unilateral final decision to withdraw from brewing and to offer the site to developers. In direct contrast to the goodwill normally factored in to the sale of a successful going concern, any buyer prepared to purchase the site would automatically become the heir to this hostility, obtaining the lack of trust and suspicion as part and parcel of the brewery buildings. The implications of this previous relationship were not lost on the eventual developers whose planning consultant who made the following comment on the situation:

*"I think there was a lot of bad blood between Brakspear and this planning committee because of previous violations and things that they had attempted to do. We as the new owners of the site had to break through all of that..... When we brought the site we knew that there was bad feeling between Brakspear directors and the*



*planning authority and not only with the planning authority but with the town council so we had to be the new boys on the block and sweep all that under the carpet and start again and that's how we approached it" (Interview; Developers Planning Consultant, 2005)*

But how did the eventual developers become the ones who would have to adopt the strategies necessary to deal with these complicated social and physical 'relationship issues'? For by the time that the planning permission was formally applied for, all the actors involved; the humans, the buildings and various other elements, had been involved in a number of alliances and networks that in the end would shape both the application as it was submitted and the material form that the application would eventually shape.

For this to occur the site and its buildings had to temporarily relinquish their strong actor roles and become intermediaries around which actors would organise themselves in a bid to achieve their desired outcomes. Around them new assemblies of actors were drawn into the process of translation and transformation. Rather like Callon's researchers identifying the need to get the scallops to attach themselves to the lines, here the various interested parties, potential developers and the local authority needed to identify ways in which the existing buildings could be converted or adapted in a way that would satisfy the equally demanding criteria of profitability and conservation.

## 7.7 Satellites And Subsidiaries

Problematization was followed by interessement. A group of actors became drawn together, united around the common problem of the successful redevelopment of the brewery site. This new overarching network could be considered to be the amalgamation of a number of subsidiary elements. Some of these subsidiary elements were individual actors in their own right while others could be regarded as composite actors. These composite actors, such as the hotelier or the developer or the brewery, are single identities that are representative of sub or satellite networks composed of associations of material and social elements. A mixture of stable and fluid relationships these individual satellites would all contribute in some way to the overall success of the emergent network, although some would remain a part of the new network for longer periods than others.

One of the multiple identity actors was the hotel company. This umbrella organisation represented a number of otherwise heterogeneous elements upon which its complete identity was created. A single entity in the larger development network it represented its own sub or satellite network into which human and non-human elements had been successfully enrolled and mobilised. In order for the hotel network to exist, stable relationships had been created that aligned the human actors such as the company founder, the architect, building craftsmen and guests into a co-dependent relationship with numerous material elements such as rest of the group's hotels, the fittings, cigars and menus. Through the

relationship between these and countless other elements the owners of the hotel group had the opportunity to translate their ideas of hotel keeping into a highly regarded business. This in turn provided them with a further opportunity by which they could use the reputation embodied in their existing network as a method of becoming engaged and enrolled into the current project.

The reputation created by the strength of the bonds within the hotel group were enough to ensure that not only were they strong enough to create stability within their own network but this strength also acted as cohesive force within the overall development network. All the parties in the development were keen that the 'hotel actor-network' remained enrolled and mobilised within the greater development network. This ultimately occurred with the hotel becoming a key component of the eventual stable configuration.

This was not the case with all the satellite actor-networks. Some like the selling agency would be involved in a more fluid manner. The agents had links through one of the partners with the brewery before it closed. Originally a social link, the brewers sought an outside professional view of its development plans. By engaging the agents formally the links between them and the brewery became more stable, and the ties between them stronger. The enrolment of the selling agents into the development network as one of the stronger actors was relatively short lived. But although the agents no longer played one of the leading roles their

influence still remained in the project particularly through the sales brochure, which encapsulated many of the policies relating to the building. As the project lengthened the involvement of the selling agents gradually decreased as the site evolved from the brewery complex identified in the sales brochure into a hospitality and residential complex with its own separate identity. Despite a loosening of the bonds tying the agents into the development network the selling agents remained a strong network in their own right, which would again become engaged into further networks with some of the main actors in the current development, once again reinforcing the importance of the building of stable relationships between various actors.

This stability of organisation combined with fluid involvement is a common feature of the human actors involved in the development process. The process requires the involvement of professionals who through the codes of their professions and the scale of the development being considered are by necessity, established operators; architects, surveyors, planning consultants etc. Their professional identity requires them to be members of a larger network that requires them, as identified by Latour (1999b), to align themselves not only with other human actors engaged in the same profession but to be involved with non-human articles; drawing packages, surveying instruments, account books etc. Without these essential non-human elements they would not have the power to translate the requirements of their professional institutions into practice, and complete the tasks they were contracted for.

## 7.8 Reconfiguration And Resurgence

Through the process of intersement the various actors concerning the development came together and subsequently passed through a series of obligatory passage points where they either joined or were expelled by the network. As this process occurred the network started to become more stable. A key point in this stabilisation process could be considered the sale of the site. At this point a set of associations starts to become established. The developer and the hotelier have realised that the alignment between their interests would enable them to achieve their required outcomes. Although at the point of the sale the network starts to stabilise and the links between the parties become strengthened the network is not able to achieve its most stable configuration until planning permission is finally granted.

The process of alignment is reinforced by the previous experiences of both parties who have networks that extend to cover similar types of non-human elements. The networks associated with the lead developer demonstrated his experience of the re-development of industrial buildings, particularly the brewery at Marlow, and in a similar manner the hotelier's reputation and identity is inextricably linked with the sympathetic conversions of character buildings into successful hotels.

When the predominant network in which the buildings were situated as a central component of the brewing process started to disband, the

buildings lost their authority as actors and were forced into an intermediary role in the development policies of the local authority. By being organised by documents such as HEN 6, the role they had previously played as part of a strong organising network became subsidiary to a new role in which they were the organised. In the policy centred networks being created by the local authority, the buildings became a subject by which the other actors could achieve the ambitions that they were creating for the future of the town as a whole.

This is illustrative of Callon's (1991) suggestion, that the distinction between intermediary and actor is not always clear cut. A single element may be a constituent part of more than one satellite-network assemblage. A role as intermediary in one sub-network does not prevent an element from having a role of actor in another albeit connected, satellite configuration. In one of the configurations the element may have a weak intermediary role, while in the other it may have a more central role as a strong actor. This was the case with the brewery buildings, although taking a more passive role as intermediaries in the local policy networks they were already beginning to take an active role in the configuration of the network forming around the development site.

With the stabilisation of the relationship between the prospective developer and the interested hotelier, the nature of the part played by the site and its buildings changed once more. From their recently realised

positions of intermediaries being organised by others they re-emerged as leading actors in a newly forming network.

## **7.9 The Buildings as Actors**

If an actor is something that has the ability to organize others (Murdoch, 2005) it is necessary to explain further how buildings can be awarded this ability. As considered earlier as a functioning brewery the buildings were a key component in the way in which the production processes, its operatives and machinery were organised and ordered within structures formed to house a specific function. In section 7.4 it was demonstrated that the buildings had an ability to organize space and influence the way in which the space that surrounded them was considered and used. The ability of the buildings to act should not be limited to influencing the way that the humans enrolled in to the network can act. The buildings' influence is more critical than this and as can be seen from the examination of this case the buildings have an essential part to play in deciding which of the human actors are recruited into the phases of translation and are able to pass through the stage of intersement to eventually become enrolled into the network.

It is the part that the buildings play in the recruitment of the human actors into the network that reveal the strength of their credibility as actors. Two of the main satellite configurations of actors that become involved, those formed around the lead developer and the hotel developer, are present as a direct result of the power of the buildings to recruit or enrol others into a network. As part of the industrial, historic built environment

the buildings are distinguishable through a particular set of characteristics. These characteristics demand that the developers had the capability to connect symmetrically with the features inherent in the building's character. The eventual developer combination reflected this need for the creation of a symbiotic development network. The property developer's team had experience in dealing with similar historic sites and in particular, through the Marlow brewery, had an understanding of the local issues surrounding such a conversion. This when melded to the reputation of the Hotel du Vin group for the sympathetic yet successful treatment of character buildings ensured that the development team displayed the desirable characteristics required to fill that role. The hoteliers had been looking actively for a site in that area for a period of time and had already looked at other potential sites. The decision to establish a hotel in that particular location as opposed to a local alternative was driven by the availability of that particular site. It presented them with the development opportunity they were looking for and in return they were symmetrically enrolled into the project, having a suitable skill set to match the building.

Having been instrumental in the initial recruitment of the main groups of human actors this role spread further. The buildings as non-human material actors had been participants in various network alignments over the course of their history. In these previous assemblies they had interacted with various different human actors, representing different configurations as the network adapted over the course of time to different local and global eventualities. During the course of these changes



the buildings remained at the core of the networks surrounding them. The buildings provide a fixed shaft from which all the human actors, from different periods of time, could be considered as radiating. The continued material existence of this shaft serves to embody the decisions and connections of the various humans attached to it over the course of its history. By providing this stable core upon which previous occurrences of problematisation, interessement, enrolment, mobilisation and negotiation of obligatory passage points are etched, the buildings facilitate the means by which temporal boundaries may be transgressed. It is the ability to step across these boundaries that allows actors in the past to become engaged and enrolled into the current configuration of the network.

In this case this enrolment took two main forms. First of which was the direct recruitment of earlier actors from the building's more recent history. The most notable of these actors was the conservation consultant hired by the development team. As described in the main case study the conservation consultant had extensive knowledge of the buildings and their recent development history. He had previously been employed by the local authority as their building conservation officer and at the time of the previous proposal when the brewery were seeking to develop office buildings and a visitor centre on the site had played an important role in the configuration of the network as it had been at that time. This earlier scheme presented by Brakspear had passed through phases of problematisation, interessement and enrolment and had passed successfully, if not smoothly, through a series of obligatory passage

points resulting in it being granted conditional planning approval. Unfortunately the network had not been able to stabilise sufficiently for the complete mobilisation of all the actors to occur. The result of which was the disbandment of the network, as weak actors at the centre of the network (the brewers) were unable to react sufficiently to stronger elements at the network periphery (changes to the structure of the industry). After the collapse of this earlier scheme, the conservation officer left his position with the local authority and moved to a private company of planning consultants as a conservation specialist. Having moved as a consultant over to the developer's side, his intimate knowledge of the building, and in particular of the issues that had been prevalent during previous development proposals, meant that he was the ideal candidate to provide conservation support to the development team. Thus even though now aligned in a different satellite network to the one he was part of before, his status of actor was 'reactivated' despite having been disconnected from the network core for a period of time.

The involvement of elements from previous network assemblies was not restricted to the human actors alone. It is the participation of other material elements that demonstrates the second way through which previous network configurations and actors were enrolled into the current assembly. This material participation can be illustrated using two examples; the influences of materials such as texts in the form of plans and documents and of course the overriding influence of the built form.

Texts and plans had been created throughout the building's history ranging from Ordnance Survey maps of the site, the detailed records and accounts of the brewers, plans and surveys drawn up for particular purposes, through to a history of the company. These all provided material resources for the human actors engaged in the development network described here to draw upon. By comparing different documents drawn up over the course of the buildings history the intertextuality (Fairclough, 2003) between them becomes apparent. This was especially the case with the documentary evidence prepared by the conservation consultant. This evidence drew on a number of existing sources, including previous surveys, brewery histories and Ordnance Survey maps, to compile and support the arguments for the retention or demolition of specific buildings, submitted in support of the application

Some of these documents become actors in themselves, organizing the social elements of the network in the way that the development was undertaken. One such actor document was the building's list description. The list descriptions attached to the development site were characterised by their ambiguity. At the start of the process only two of the buildings on the site, the brewery office and maltstore, were specifically listed. This qualification was instrumental in the manner in which other actors interacted with the site. Not only did this influence the direct recruitment of the human actors but the progression of the development was dependent upon the relationship between the list, the buildings it named and the other buildings on the site. The previous chapter outlined how the main brewery

site had been divided following the sale into two main components. The hotel conversion of the buildings gathered around the original courtyard and the structures around the New Brewery Yard behind the Mineral Water Factory, which would be the subject of the residential development. Both of the listed structures were located in that part of the site covered by the hotel proposal, but by virtue of their listed status they were able to assert influence over the development of the rest of the site.

One of the ways that this influence was asserted is that a number of new actors became engaged in the process. The arguments that occurred over whether the remaining buildings were within the curtilage of the listed buildings or were worthy of listing in their own right were resolved by referring the case to English Heritage. A team of inspectors evaluated the buildings and came to conclusions which agreed with those of the conservation consultant that the main brewery range around the courtyard should be listed, but the Mineral Water Factory buildings did not merit listing. This qualification of certain parts of the site as opposed to others strengthened the network ties between the elements configured around the old courtyard with the newly listed status reinforcing the glue combining the elements together. At the same time the ties binding together the elements surrounding the New Brewery Yard were weakened allowing the network concerned with that part of the site to disband and eventually reconfigure as a residential development.

Both portions of the development should be regarded as being satellite assemblies of the larger overarching brewery development network. For the development to progress successfully the relationships between the two constellations of satellite actors under this umbrella network needed to stabilise. Crucial to the formation of these relationships and relevant to all aspects of the development, was the influence that the form and structure of individual buildings would have on the other elements.

## **7.10 The Hotel Conversion**

The influence of building form was most critical concerning the hotel part of the development. The forming of stable strong relationships between the buildings that would be the centre of this and other actors, material and human would be crucial to the success of the development. The material embodiment of a network to translate raw ingredients into profit through the creation of beer, the buildings had a very different set of characteristics to that required for a hotel. How to create one out of the other was the issue subject to problematisation by the various interested parties. The part of the site that would be the subject of the hotel conversion provided a challenge for the hotel development team in that it was not a single building. Grouped around the old brewery courtyard was a collection of buildings that had evolved over a number of centuries.

These buildings ranged in size and scale from single storey storerooms to the spacious brewhouse and domineering brew tower.

Faced with creating a boutique hotel the human actors such as the hotelier and his architect had to work within the boundaries imposed upon them by the material elements such as the buildings and the list description. Neither the low range of storerooms nor the expansive brew house lent themselves to the needs of a boutique hotel. The listing of these buildings subsequent to the sale further increased the need for the hotel developers to work in sympathy with the existing form of the buildings. The issues concerning the conversion of the brewhouse, described in Chapter Five, provided the architect with problems in how to sub-divide the space in an efficient way while working within the restraints imposed upon the site by the buildings themselves. The shape of the existing structures dictated the shape that the hotel could eventually take, the buildings as they stood, their material form, had the effect of organising the other actors, the architect, the hotelier, the hotel staff and eventually the guests in the way that they would use the hotel's space.

Section ten of Chapter Five dealt with the problem of how to provide enough parking for the development. This single issue provides an excellent example of one of the obligatory passage points that had to be negotiated in the course of the development. This one component of the development required the alignment of numerous other elements and interests. The physical form of the buildings defined the limited space available in the courtyard further and imposed the negotiation of a narrow entrance. With the overlooking buildings having the most character and

architectural significance the expectations of guests and the corresponding image of the hotel precluded on site parking.

To find a solution to the parking problem which would satisfy the requirements of all the parties, local residents, the hotelier, the developer, the conservation planners, the residential developer, the town planners and the district planners required that all their different interests be negotiated into configuring a network that placated the various demands. The eventual solution of an underground parking area beneath a deck in the residential part of the development was the material manifestation of the way in which the needs of the various actors were reconciled and negotiated. This solution also provided a way in which the issue of providing a service access for the hotel could also be met. This issue (described in section 5.10) had many of the same characteristics and constraints of the parking problem and were both considered as being of equal importance in ensuring the successful operation of the hotel.

Although these two subject areas attracted influences from a variety of actors it was the form of the buildings that were most able to bring pressure to bear on the argument. All of the human actors representing the diverse arguments had to amend and reconcile their individual wishes in order to provide a solution that provided the best fit with the existing physical form. This not only applied to the existing form of the buildings as was the case with the hotel buildings, but it also applied to the buildings that had not yet been built. The influence of the planned buildings for the

residential section and the form they were intended to have would be a major factor in the development process.

### **7.11 The Mineral Water Factory And New Brewery Yard**

The problem facing the human actors regarding the hotel conversion was how to work with the existing material elements to achieve a solution that achieved their requirements. This was significantly different to the issues facing the actors concerned with the new build component of the project. Although the main cast of human actors remained constant across the two parts of the development, the two sub-networks shared similar roll calls of planners, developers, and consultants. What differentiated the network assemblies were the existing material entities.

The issues that surrounded the development of the New Brewery Yard and the Mineral Water Factory buildings illustrate this. On taking over the site the developer was faced with the problem of how to preserve the Mineral Water Factory buildings while generating a suitable profit. With the buildings having such a prominent and instantly recognisable profile on New Street, demolition or significant changes to the façade was not an option. The history of the site and its town centre location had led to planning policies that required that it should retain a mix of different uses, rather than a purely residential development. Though designated as being within the town centre, New Street was considered to be out of the town's main retail area, centred upon the market square, making retail uses unviable. The surplus of vacant office space, which had triggered the



closure of the brewery, meant that a large-scale commercial development was also unlikely to be successful.

However the location of the building in the Henley Conservation Area and the unusual large open floor area with interesting columns and roof details meant the developer had to seek a suitable way of converting the building. The solution they originally devised was to convert the Mineral Water Factory buildings into live/work units this would create 'studio' type office space intended to appeal to creative people working from home. This proposed solution to the problem was dependent upon the successful engagement of the key actors into the network aligning them with the ideas of the developer and the characteristics of the building. Although this solution had the support of many of the actors the network enabling the live/work units was unable to stabilise sufficiently. Despite providing a possibly profitable and sympathetic reuse of the buildings, a use that would enable the developer to satisfy the requirement for mixed use, the network remained unable to enrol the support of some actors representing the local authority. This lack of support came about because the network could not, in the eyes of the local authority, guarantee that it would remain strong enough to keep future actors mobilised to translate the demands of the mixed use policy into reality. It was feared that the ties binding the actors together would not be strong enough to insist that the units would remain used for work purposes and that following their sale they would lapse into normal dwellings, losing their status as places of employment.

With this rejection of the solution a re-problematisation of the issue was required. How could the building be profitably be converted and engage the support of the local authority? To provide a solution to this, the network underwent a reconfiguration as a result of which the developers reduced their influence. This allowed the demands of the other actors to take precedence over their own. By increasing their exposure to risk through the re-branding the proposed conversion to studio business units and forgoing the residential component (although without drastically altering the designs), they prompted a slight re-configuration of the network. This slight alteration in the balance between the actors involved was enough to stabilise the relationships in place allowing the Mineral Water Factory proposal to progress through its own obligatory passage point. Having successfully negotiated this sticking point, the network assembled around this sub-proposal and the Mineral Water Factory was endowed with a new identity that would enable it to take on a new role as an actor able to influence the overarching planning application.

Overall the development scheme could not progress until all the material elements were successfully enrolled into the overarching network. Despite the planning authority's desire to see a comprehensive proposal for the development of the whole site, evidenced in particular by policy HEN 6, they did not welcome the scheme presented. In particular they were unwilling to engage with that part of the scheme submitted by the developers that related to the New Brewery Yard located behind the

Mineral Water Factory. The various parties, both material and human, connected with this section of the development had to repeatedly go through the process of problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation as networks were populated that either stabilised or reconfigured. The formation of the networks in relation to this part of the site was influenced by the way that certain material elements provoked responses from the human actors.

At the centre of this disputed space were the existing buildings particularly those adjoining the listed brewery buildings that would form the hotel conversion. The scheme submitted called for the demolition of these later ancillary buildings. This result of this would mean a severing of the network associations between the two parts of the building. The demolition of the existing structures would make way for a new housing development encapsulated in a set of drawings and sketches. The designs captured in the sketches and plans were considered by the planning authority, who was unable initially to engage with them sufficiently to allow them to become part of the overarching network. The design was considered inappropriate for the site and it was feared that they would compromise the existing visual relationship between the older buildings and their surrounding environment. Yet for the overall development to occur, a desire shared by all parties, a reconfiguration would need to occur which would permit demolition and enable the new buildings to be translated from two-dimensional images into three-dimensional realities. This was

only possible following the submission of the planning application to committee for approval.

## **7.12 Approval**

The whole development was interdependent on all the heterogeneous elements being brought together and assembled into sets of supporting relationships. The developers were aware of the synergic strength of the relationships contributing to the network. The success of any part of the development depended in part to it establishing a strong relationship with another of the elements of the overall development. Although some of the sub or satellite networks that had been configured were stronger than others, there still remained an element of interdependence. The hotel proposal though strong in its own right, successfully welding the desires of the human actors to the material elements, could not stand alone in the desired format without the support offered by the new build in terms of access and parking. Equally for the less desirable, from a planning view, new build to occur it needed the hotel to be dependent upon it.

The interdependent nature of these relationships together with their importance to one another meant that throughout the negotiations there was constant adjustment and subtle re-configuration of the network. This repeated pattern of negotiation and adjustment allowed various entities to come together and pass through obligatory passage points concerning

particular aspects of the development where the adhesion connecting them was tested. If the glue binding them together was strong enough these sub-networks became material actors in their own right, the Mineral Water Factory, the new build, the hotel etc. The formation of or the re-representation of these identities (for the Mineral Water Factory had already had an identity) allowed them to come together in symmetry with the social actors, planners, developers, and councillors to influence the negotiation of the application through the approval process.

The final application represents a network that had come together over the period of time leading up to the sitting of the planning committee. For the network to assemble many smaller points of contention had needed to be considered and negotiated. Following the completion of the negotiations concerning the satellite networks they were enrolled into the larger overarching network assembly. This network although theoretically comprising actual physical elements, namely humans and buildings at this point in reality only existed in two dimensional form on bits of paper and as blocks of memory in a computer program. The collection of plans, elevations and supporting documents that was the application was an abstract project, a collection of ideas contained in a material form far removed from the objects they represented. Yet without existing first in this form it would be impossible for the project to progress through to completion. It is necessary for the elements to be translated into this form to enable the processes of configuration, negotiation and reconfiguration to occur.

*“In the beginning, there is no distinction between projects and objects. The two circulate from office to office in the form of paper, plans, departmental memos, speeches, scale models, and occasional synopses. Here we’re in the realm of signs, language, texts. In the end, people, after they leave their offices, are the ones who circulate inside the object.” (Latour, 1996)*

This describes the progression of the building through planning well. The buildings and the plans are indistinguishable. The arguments between the planners, conservationists, developers, builders and hoteliers move backwards and forwards between their respective offices. Every passage from one office to another representing a point of negotiation each one an obligatory passage point through which the idea must pass and be rejected or accepted. The eventual passage of the proposal through committee once again resulted in a further re-configuration of the network components.

The planning officers recommended the scheme finally submitted by the developers for refusal. This recommendation, a representation of their combined professional opinions, was a result of their dissatisfaction with the development of the New Brewery Yard. Although they were generally supportive of the hotel proposals they were reluctant to support the planned residential components, which they felt would not fit in well with the existing brewery buildings and the other elements of the conservation area in which they were located. The planners like the

surveyors, architects and other professionals already mentioned in effect represented elements in a wider professional network. The decision they presented was based upon the associations and codes developed within this professional practice. Yet the decision to not reject the recommendation was taken by the planning committee, a democratically elected body without membership of the professional planning network.

The result of which was that the final decision was based upon the strength of the immediate local development centred network. A network where the strong relationship between the developer, the hotelier and the buildings was interpreted as being able to mobilise the various elements and deliver a completed assemblage that would be of immediate benefit to Henley. The developers were able to offer a stronger network presence than that offered by the professional networks of the planning officers. Although having been dislodged to an extent within the network they still retained a strong enough network presence following the granting of approval to continually force subtle re-configuration and adaptation. To an extent this presence became codified through the conditional granting of approval requiring the developers to comply during construction with the embodied wishes of the profession.

With the eventual granting of the planning permission the network achieved its most stable state. It is only at this point that all the various interests become aligned. As both sets of developers are able to mobilise various network components to achieve their desired ends. The granting

of permission marks the moment when the site reconfigures from brewery into a construction site.

### **7.13 Conclusion**

This chapter set out to take the development originally described in Chapter Five and by utilising the actor-network theory introduced in Chapter Six examine it in greater depth. This methodology provides an alternative to the traditional simplistic and linear chronological perspective normally applied to describing the development process. By using the methodology to trace the phases of translation it is possible to describe in more depth the manner in which actors in order to resolve an issue or to facilitate a particular occurrence need to engage the interests of other actors and intermediaries and enrol them into a mutually coexistent network where their identities become analogous to that of the network. While this certainly provides a method of describing the manner in which the actors come together and of locating crucial points in the network life span, examining the development process in terms of phases of translation alone does not examine in enough depth the complexity inherent in the relationships that exist between the actors and particularly relationships that bridge the divide between the material and social elements of the network.

This ability to chart the phases of translation is not the main advantage that the use of an actor-network methodology has for the consideration of the historic built environment. The principle of generalized symmetry, demonstrated in this chapter, allows the nature of the



relationships that comprise the networks to be considered. It is the ability to investigate the nature of the relationship between the material and human elements that make actor-network theory useful within this field of study. The built environment is an essential component of the social world but without the application of an ontological perspective that allows non-humans an active role in forming relationships the true place that they occupy in the relationships cannot be assessed. Actor-network theory provides this perspective. In this Chapter it has been possible to investigate the role that some of the non-human elements have played and examine the way that they have been able to influence the way that the human actors have behaved and directed the decisions that they have taken.

This application produces a richer and more complex view where the material elements are awarded symmetry with the human aspects. The use of actor-network theory in this way can serve to make the process more difficult to follow and by bringing attention to the interactions and relations between the actors blurs the boundaries where actions begin and end. Throughout the actor-network narrative the central actor remains the brewery buildings, which themselves are a collection of satellite networks, composed of what are sometimes independent and sometimes connected material actors. These actors represent a central axle passing through time to which all the other actors become attached. The strength of these attachments dictates the stability of the whole network and determines its ability to retain its form over time. As stability waxes and wanes the

network reconfigures in response to issues either from peripheral actors, such as the government legislation affecting the brewing industry, or from immediate actors, such as the planners involved in the subsequent redevelopment. At each reconfiguration of the network negotiation occurs between the actors creating an obligatory passage point that determines whether the network is capable of stabilising or if it will go through another process of configuration and consolidation.

# Chapter 8 Conclusions

## 8.1 Introduction

From the introduction to this thesis it can be seen that the conservation of the historic built environment is of an ever-increasing interest to the public. From its early elitist roots and a preoccupation with monumental and ancient buildings, the interest in historic building preservation has expanded to include more mundane examples of built history including examples of industrial, vernacular and modernist structures. In Chapter One the proposition was made that, despite this popular interest, the implementation and execution of historic building conservation is entrusted to a limited number of professionals and specialists. Previous work on the implementation of conservation practice by Hobson (2000, 2004) focuses on the variation in the way that planning professionals interpret policy and flags the need to investigate what influences the manner in which the individuals themselves approach the subject. This thesis originally set out as an attempt to fill that gap and explore what influence individuals had on the way that the redevelopment of a listed building was approached. Yet following an examination of the literature set out in Chapter Two, ideas started to form that required that the original conception of the research be reconsidered.

The majority of the literature examined set out a dualistic interpretation of the built environment that either concentrated on the physical or the social aspects of the subject area. Studies of the subject

area had a tendency to either promote the physical attributes of the built form or the social attributes of the building. Those that focus on the physical concentrate attention on the architectural, technological or construction merits of a particular structure, whereas those studies that have a social focus tend to separate the social from the physical and merely use the built fabric as a backdrop in front of which the human actors play out their roles (Jenkins, 2001).

An alternative view to this is provided by Dovey (2008) who suggests that rather than a backdrop the built environment is a frame that helps us to determine how we understand and organise the world. The work of Ellin (1999) also suggests that the physical and the social are inextricably linked and that the form of the physical world is determined by a set of social practices. This linkage is visible even when the two sides are presented as opposing parts of the same debate. This is demonstrated by Weiner (2004) and also by Kezer (2004) who discuss cases where the memory of a building's social existence were erased in favour of promoting the physical attributes. Both of these studies suggest that in order to achieve the maximum instrumental value from conservation orientated development it is necessary to separate the desirable physical attributes of the buildings from some of the less appealing aspects of their social pasts. The fact that in some circumstances it is deemed imperative that the buildings' history be hidden to ensure its economic survival further highlights the reality that a building's physical form and construction is dependent on the need to facilitate a particular set of social functions.

When faced with functional redundancy (English Heritage 2008) the survival of the physical attributes of all but the most monumental of buildings become dependent upon the instrumental relationship between development and conservation (Pendlebury, 2001), a relationship that relies upon the ability for adaptation to alternative economically successful social uses.

Taking the stand-point that a division between the social and the physical is a false dichotomy then it became necessary to engage with an alternative methodological stance to that originally envisaged. The adoption of actor-network theory to provide an alternative methodology, one that would recognise the contribution made by the physical attributes to the decision making processes of the human actors, required that the original aims of the research needed to be reconsidered. The human centred line of questioning proposed in section 3.2 would, recognising the importance of the material actors, have required an unacceptably anthropomorphic approach. In reply to this problem it was decided to use the questions outlined in section 3.5 to guide the direction of the research.

The adoption of actor-network theory to look at conservation and redevelopment in the historic built environment is in its self a radical and untried use of the methodology. The major contribution offered by this thesis is an assessment of its methodological suitability. In order to make that assessment the following sections of this chapter will first revisit those

questions and examine what conclusions can be drawn from them. The following sections of the chapter will address other issues regarding the research including research design and consider whether using this methodology could make any contribution to practice.

## **8.2 Answering The Questions Posed In Chapter Three**

The previous chapter takes key aspects of Chapter Five and uses actor-network theory to explore some of the underlying complexity that remains hidden in the more conventional narrative approach utilised in Chapters Four and Five. The application of a traditional narrative approach allows the identification of the key actors that was set out as an aim in Chapter Three. However, by viewing the case using an actor-network theory methodology it is possible to question the nature of the answers returned. The conventional approach draws the focus onto particular individuals, the developer, the hotelier, the planning officer etc. But once the complexity that lies beneath this approach is exposed these human actors are joined by other material entities. These material or physical actors also have an influence on the way the development occurs. This is apparent through the various examples described in Chapter Six. Used in this way actor-network theory provides the opportunity for a greater understanding of the extent that the built environment influences the actions of the humans that inhabit it. For while there may be a number of possible ways that redevelopment of the brewery site may have occurred, an examination of the network configurations that the buildings were a part of suggested that certain outcomes were more probable than others. The physical attributes of the building, not just its form, but also its prime

location in the Henley Conservation Area, made it necessary that a particular set of human actors with a defined set of skills and experience were needed to implement the conversion. This makes it possible by examining not just the way that the humans interact with each other but also the way they interact with the buildings, plans, documents and other material elements to see that the human actions are influenced by the material elements. The form of the physical elements determines that the human elements behave in specific ways. It is this ability to organise the way that the humans act, that according to the view of Murdoch (2005) introduced in section 6.2 that allows the buildings to be awarded actor status. Furthermore, it is demonstrable that the buildings in their capacity as actors have a role restraining or enabling the eventual course of actions available to the other actors.

As well as making it necessary to consider the set of non-humans alongside and therefore equal in influence to their human counterparts, it also provides another means by which the status of the human actors can be explored. The buildings in the case exist as the embodiment of particular network configurations, an assemblage of heterogeneous elements granted a physically identifiable identity as an actor in its own right. In much the same way the human actors are also representative of networks that have configured around them. The human actors would not be able to influence the formation of the overarching network if their identities were also not the embodiment of their own sub-networks. It is the amalgamation of these 'satellite' assemblages that enable the eventual

formation of the main network that characterises the development. Therefore by using actor-network theory to look at the way that these networks have assembled, it is possible to see that rather than identifying key individual actors what you are actually seeing are the figureheads of a number of contributory human centric network configurations.

These contributory networks have different levels of stability, with some of the relationships only strong enough to bind a particular element or satellite network into the overall configuration for a short period of time. Alongside these transient elements there are other key elements that remain enrolled into the network for a much longer period of time creating the stability necessary to enable the network to gel in such a way that the processes of translation can occur. In this case, the ability of the redevelopment to take place was dependent on the formation of a strong network that enrolled the hoteliers, architects, developers, buildings, plans, policies, councillors, cars and laundry deliveries into a stable combination. Only when this combination and its numerous supportive sub structures stabilised was it possible for the transformation of the brewery to take place. Until actors like the developers and the hotelier had sufficiently enrolled the other actors into a stable configuration was it possible for them to translate their plans into reality.

The use of actor-network theory to look at the case does show that the individual actors do have an influence in the way that the historic built environment is conserved and developed. Rather than consider that the



actors involved are merely homogeneous groups, architects, developers, planners or even buildings, it shows that in reality these are actually satellite or sub-networks that are recruited because they are able to offer specific sets of characteristics. Although an obvious facet of the development process it is not one always recognised by the literature relating to the historic built environment. The continued failure to recognise the contribution of specific elements is promoted by the constant separation of the physical attributes of the topic from the social elements exposed in Chapter two. What this body of research has shown is that the physical elements have an essential role in enrolling the human elements into the networks.

### **8.3 The Application Of Actor-Network Theory To The Study Of Conservation Led Redevelopment**

One of the aims of the study, suggested in the introduction was to assess if actor-network theory is an appropriate methodological tool for the examination of the historic built environment. The use of this methodology as described in Chapter Six shows that by doing so it is possible to reveal hitherto concealed levels of complexity. However, this is not without some associated problems. The issue of how to present this alternative complex view while retaining clarity of the narrative is an issue that was originally addressed in Chapter Three and led to the initial presentation of the case using the traditional linear approach that was a feature of much of the accepted conservation literature of the type that supports Chapter Two.

This traditional narrative approach applied to studies of the historic built environment while easy to follow can be lacking in sufficient detail. However, it was necessary to adopt this approach to describe the story of the site and the development in Chapters Four and Five to allow the reader to follow the story. This method initially enables the reader (who through the act of reading becomes joined in a distanced and unstable way to the overarching network configuration) to become familiar with the roles and identify some of the elements that are combined within the network and is a convenient method of identifying some of the nodes of interaction.

Through this particular form of presentation it is possible to see the basic form of the interrelations, but it is also likely that in using this method the complexity that surrounds and supports these relations, interactions and configurations will remain hidden. The application of actor-network theory as a methodology provides an opportunity to move beyond this initial surface level of description and provide a means of recording a deeper and richer description of the storyline. Using this richer text it is possible to gain an insight into what would otherwise be the unseen intricate meta-narratives that create and support the main story.

However, one criticism that could be levelled at this approach is that actor-network theory provides nothing more than an alternative method of relating the narrative of the process rather than any new insight. What actor-network theory does is provides a method for following the story and

allows some sort of order to be applied to help the reader understand the nature of the relationships between what are frequently otherwise heterogeneous elements. It could be construed that the labelling of certain phases of the process is neither new nor indeed different. Similar process positions can be identified in other fields of literature, particularly organisational behaviour an example would be that proposed by Tuckman (1965). However, although the act of classification of particular stages in the process may not add much as an act in itself it is possible using the terminological framework that the theory provides to locate particular stages in the process. The identification of these stages allows the composition of the configurations at those points to be examined. By ascertaining at which points what actors become involved, where networks become stabilized or conversely where, when or who causes their eventual dissolution it is possible to gain a deeper insight into what influences conservation led regeneration projects.

By addressing this through an actor network theory approach resulting in the illumination of what are otherwise darkened links to obscured network components it may be also be possible to alter perceptions of the importance of the individual stages in the process. This can be exemplified by the way in this case, that the previous redevelopment proposal for the brewery was to have a major impact on the final conversion. Even though this earlier proposal was ultimately not enacted, it was of crucial importance in relation to the recruitment of many of the actors both human and non-human that would eventually come

together to form the network that enabled the conversion to take place. While it is likely that this phase in the process would be identified by a normal description of the conversion history it is possible that the importance of this application to the overall process would not be as evident.

The exposure of the underlying detail also enables the influence of other more remote assemblages on the conversion process. The network is allowed to form and stabilize because of the characteristics of the elements that are brought together at that particular juncture. This is evidenced by the willingness of the planning officers in this particular case to engage and become enrolled into a network with the hotelier. The hotelier's successful translation of other character building networks into successful and applauded hotel configurations provided the credentials necessary for them to be considered as the sort of developer that was likely to be sympathetic to the desires of the planning and conservation officers at the authority.

By following the actor-network theory threads that illuminate the importance of the various actors and their histories it shows how through this initial application various human actors were enrolled into the final network and how non-human actors came to assert their influence on the final composition.

It is the ability of actor-network theory to promote the physical attributes of the historic built environment to the foreground of the debate in symmetry with the social side that allows the complex nature of the relationships between all the heterogeneous elements combined in a network configuration that is the main contribution of this approach.

#### **8.4 Actor-Network Theory In Relation To Policy And Listing**

The application of actor-network theory to the study of the historic built environment raises a number of issues that have implications for the formulation and application of policy in this area of planning practice. First is the role of policy itself. In the introduction to this thesis attention was drawn to Hobson's (2004) work, which suggested that differences exist in the way that policy is interpreted and applied between different authorities and practitioners. It could be argued that these differences in interpretation are because of the ambiguous nature of conservation led planning policy, when compared to more formulaic planning policies, such as that relating to issues of housing provision or the percentage of brownfield development. Being more qualitative in nature it is harder for planning officers to apply, as absolutely, conservation policy. However, using actor-network theory as a tool to review the complete process of conservation led redevelopment, the nature of the relationship between the planning professionals and planning policy can be viewed from a different perspective.

Policy documents and the statements that they contain when viewed are an integral part of the network configuration of each development. Rather than being weak in nature these policy documents are an essential component in enrolling other elements into the network and also in enrolling individual building or project centred networks into a wider network of schemes and policy enactments nationwide. The ability of different actors, either planning officers or developers, to apply and interpret policy documents in different ways allows different network configurations to form in order to unite different combinations of actors as necessary.

The act of listing, the granting of the protection of the state, to a building can be seen through an actor-network perspective as a significant act. Listing alters the entire composition of a building's associated network and the process steps passed through as the network forms. This can be seen from the case study by examining the way that different human actors are enrolled into the network, and the importance of the roles that they have in the act of translation. For a listed building to undergo conversion, to undergo translation from a redundant structure into a viable building, actors such as English Heritage inspectors and specialist contractors become much more prominent in the network assemblage, than they would be in a non-listed network. By being placed on the list of protected buildings the non-human elements recorded in the listing description are stabilized. Their position as potential intermediaries that link other actors together becomes overridden and replaced with the ability

to become strong actors, able to recruit or alienate other actors and intermediaries into networks around them. If this process of recruitment and selection is unsuccessful, and a positive network is unable to form, it is likely that the result will be the eventual appearance of the building on English Heritage's at risk register.

What both of these issues highlight is the integral nature of planning policy decisions on the formation of networks that configure around conservation-led regeneration programmes.

## **8.5 The Implication For Practice**

The above points have implications for the way that we view conservation-led regeneration. The complex view of the process allowed by actor-network theory highlights and supports otherwise commonsense views of the process. While it is possible to suggest that a listed building can be considered as a resource that it is possible to utilise in support of planning or regeneration objectives able to contribute the benefits identified in some of the conservation literature e.g. through attracting inward investment, tourism etc (see Section 2.3). While policy may exist that supports these objectives the actual success of such opportunities is dependent upon effective networks being able to form at a suitable time. Only through the processes of interestment and enrolment that form a stable network of mobilised actors, where buildings, policies, developers, planners, architects and users all engage in a manner which allows

translation of the historic building into a useable viable space can these benefits be experienced. Therefore a consideration not only of the attributes of the building but also of the histories and reputations, skills and experience of the human actors is necessary.

This is a process that occurs naturally in some developments. In the case study this can be evidenced in a number of ways in which the combinations of those involved were recruited in to the project. The use of actor-network theory after the event does however give us the opportunity to apply a framework that supplies a rationale for the way that the actors are selected. The recognition of such a framework would allow parties involved in prospective redevelopment projects to consider the network configurations of previous examples. An examination of which may provide some guidance as to the nature of the skill sets and attributes required for success. However it would be unwise to use this particular set of research findings and expect to create a generalised set of rules or behaviours that should be complied with in such projects. While Latour acknowledges that there are *continuous paths that lead from the local to the global* (Latour, 1993: 117) in reality all that can be presented by the researcher is the researcher's view of how a particular network looks. This may not be a view recognised from an alternative vantage point.

## **8.6 Limitations Of The Study**

The constraints that limit the application of actor-network theory become more tangible when they become illustrated through the



application of the methodology to a particular case study. To follow all the threads of a network would require extensive resources. The extent of the resources required would be far in excess of those available to this research project. Chapter Three explained the way in which the case was selected and some of the issues that accompanied this. In particular was the need to find a case study that had occurred within a recent timeframe that would enable access to the actors involved. The ideal research scenario would have been to have accessed the case study early on in the process and follow through the project as part of the team engaged in participant observation, noting the occurrences of critical negotiations and assemblages. This ethnographic dream is immediately confronted by research realities. Problems such as identifying when would be early enough? When would be a suitable time to disengage from the research process? Not to mention the more economically challenging considerations of being available for the duration of such a research project, in terms of time, location and funding.

### **8.7 Further Possibilities For Research**

While this research has been interesting and informative the opportunity to expand it further would be very useful. The ideal scenario would involve a long period of ethnographic research based upon participant observation of several sectors of professionals involved in conservation led redevelopment projects. This would provide the opportunity to further examine the manner in which actors were enrolled into project centred networks. If the opportunity arose it would also be

interesting to have the opportunity to follow a case in an area with a less positive set of circumstances. The case at the centre of this thesis could on the whole be regarded as a successful conversion of an industrial building to an alternative function, this is particularly relevant in terms of the conversion of the listed portion of the site into a hotel. The examination of a case that was not so successful may provide an interesting area of research. In the chosen case the various human actors, helped by a set of favourable material elements and circumstances, were able to combine in an effective manner. This meant that at the various obligatory passage points where the network failed to stabilise sufficiently, rather than disbanding completely the strength of the actors ensured that reconfiguration rapidly took place and new elements were quickly enrolled into the network to ensure that continued mobilisation of the core actors. Further research may show that in areas where there is not the economic or social network to complement conservation-led redevelopment, the obligatory passage points are not negotiated as successfully and the networks are not able to reform and have to disband completely.

If resources were available it would also be interesting and informative to engage in a larger research project. Such a project may see the increased level of ethnographic involvement suggested above but with a number of researchers placed in different sub or satellite networks clustered around a project. For instance using this case as an example, it would have been useful to have researchers conducting participant

observation from with the planning authority, the developers, and the hotel company for the duration of the project.

Actor-network theory has been used to study other areas of the built environment (see Jenkins 2002, Jacobs 2007) but both of these studies are based upon existing buildings. It would therefore be interesting to see what actor-network theory can show of the way that new build developments occur. Do the networks that take shape around greenfield projects differ in the way that they configure to those that evolve around existing buildings?

## **8.8 The Final Conclusion**

This thesis set out to examine if actor-network theory could provide a suitable methodology for looking at the conservation-led regeneration of the historic built environment, which could bridge the gap in the conservation literature between the physical and social components of the subject area. The execution of this case study research and the conclusions that have been drawn from it show that actor-network is capable of doing this and is useful and tool for examining the historic built environment. The principle of generalised symmetry, which requires that the material actors are afforded the same consideration as their human counter-parts provides a means to escape the divide that separates the physical aspects of conservation from the social aspects that is a criticism of some of the existing conservation literature. In doing so it also provides an effective means to build upon the work of authors such as Dovey

(2008) and Ellin (1999) to examine the manner in which the built form is capable of influencing the way that humans act and also the way that humans combine with other network elements to achieve their own goals and objectives

It is the ability to cross this divide and show that the buildings are more than a backdrop in front of which the human actors perform that is the major contribution of the methodology. The use of the methodology shows the extent to which buildings are an essential element of determining how the redevelopment process occurs. This can be seen by an examination of the networks that surround the buildings, this type of examination reveals that networks are configured from material and social elements that embody both past and present decisions and influences. This research shows that it is the specific configurations taking into account both local and wider actors and sub-networks that specify not only what type of outcome is possible but also which is likely to be probable as determined by whether the configuration is able to stabilise or not. This is demonstrated by the application of actor-network theory to the case which made it possible to show the manner in which the development was as dependent on materials elements such as the buildings, plans and documents as it was on the human elements for the phases of translation to occur (Callon, 1986). This ability to illuminate the multifaceted nature of the relationships that enable development within the historic built environment, and the influence they have on the process, means that despite any anthropomorphic reserves that are a possible consequence of

considering non-human entities as actors, the chosen methodology is able to make a definite contribution to the knowledge and understanding of how conservation led redevelopment occurs.

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