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#### What's coming up

## Opinion

*Substantial initiatives to enlarge international consideration of industrial heritage and its current and future scope are rare enough for TICCIH to greet enthusiastically the new Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage (IICCH – formerly the Ironbridge Institute). The Director, Professor Mike Robinson, holds the Chair of Cultural Heritage at the University of Birmingham, UK, and was also founder and Director of the Centre for Tourism and Cultural Change.*

### **Researching industrial heritage futures: changing contexts – contexts of change**

Understanding the processes of change is always easier with hindsight. In the developed economies of 'the west', the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a dramatic period of de-industrialisation with its concomitant social and economic upheavals. In the middle of this, there was generally little in the way of any coordinated and strategic thought about what aspects of our industrial past we should preserve. Stories of opportune rescue, born out of passion, persuasion and pragmatism are far more common than those of prescience and policy. What we generally refer to as industrial heritage is symptomatic of a complex process of converging causes, events and social trends of which the actual closure of mines, steel works, manufacturing plants and the like was only one aspect. Notwithstanding longer histories, industrial heritage came into existence at some point in my lifetime. To be precise is to miss the point, but somewhere in the 1960s, with considerable acceleration in the 1970s and important recognition in the 1980s, industrial heritage was born. And now that it does exist, it too is open to the very changes which created it. Without getting bogged down in the mire of what we categorise as 'industrial', questions do emerge relating to curatorial and collecting decisions of the future and to ongoing preservation issues of the present. What will we be designating as industrial heritage in fifty years time?

Geographically, industrial heritage is a more pervasive phenomenon than ever, following the global wanderings of industrial activity and technological innovation from the developed west into the more transitory developing east. While still in the midst of incredible industrial production, China is already conscious of the industrial heritage model, with a mix of motivations which recognises historical and educational value but also associated tourism and leisure values. The geographies of industrial heritage also open up issues of how different cultures encounter and experience not only their own industrial pasts but those of other nations and cultures. New mobilities, the burgeoning global tourism 'industry' and the multi-cultural character of populations are all re-defining audiences for industrial heritage.