FRED DIBNAH – INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGIST



Fred Dibnah has died [Link] [Picture Link – BBC]



Steeple Jack turned uncanny acolyte of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, he knocked down chimney remnants of Victorian industrial England with a style and passion matched only by his love of steam engines. Now industrial archaeology is dogged by rather geekish character types who love brass fittings and steel pistons, or even just the hum of a diesel electric engine, over life itself. (I still have a small manual entitled “British Motive Power” that I found in one of my archaeological trenches at the castle in Newcastle UK. The top of the still-standing keep overlooking the Central Station is a favorite vantage point for train spotters. The manual listed the serial numbers of all engines run by British Rail. Well over half of the thousands of numbers were lovingly struck out by a finely ruled line of a ball-point pen.) Fred was not of this type. He managed to communicate the very aura of industrial steam power and engineering – something that is at the root of a fascination for industrial archaeology. The matter and materiality of a bygone Victorian hey-day. He made great TV.

In recent years he had clashed somewhat with his neighbors in Bolton, Lancashire. Not content with a steam traction engine, he had begun sinking a mine shaft in his back garden!