

# Purton Hulks

Sharpness, Gloucestershire



**Changing Perspectives**  
Abandoned Architecture

## 'Friends of Purton' Heritage, Resources and Education Centre

### Changing Perspectives / Abandoned Architecture

The site is located in South Gloucestershire, along the vicious currents of the River Severn. My chosen site is a 1.4km walk adjacent to the Gloucester and Sharpness canal. The canal has significant importance in regards to Gloucester's trading history, at one point of time being the main import route into the Midlands.

With such a significant canal and trading route, there was the usual influx of housing to react to supply and demand of trade, expanding the sailor town of Sharpness.

However the canal was threatened by natural erosion upon the thin banks. So to protect the trade and livelihoods of the community, an equivalent to an S.O.S. was sent out for any retiring boats to be abandoned and protect the frail canal.

After being abandoned to save the canal; after 1 year and 1 day; these fantastic maritime wrecks became public property.

However some people are selfishly forgetting our maritime heritage and our national pride by destroying and stealing from the site.

Workings closely with 'The Friends of Purton', we have devised a plan of action, to give these war veterans the respect they have earned.

The main aim is to change people's views. The public visit this site for a majority of reasons, from public performances, bird watching, memorials to old sailors of these vessels, dog walkers, cyclists or just to enjoy the natural harmony and beauty of the site. However not all intentions of visitors are positive, there have been souvenir hunters stealing relics from the vessels, vandals; spraying their mark on the boats; arsonists, people stealing materialistic values from the site; timber or iron; to the drinkers who litter on the site.

The way forward I believe is to change people's views through education, and prevent thefts and other crimes being committed upon the site through necessary precautionary methods.

So my proposal is to build a **Heritage Centre**, within which people will learn the history and to how it became that these giants were buried with their treasures, buried amongst the river.

I am also proposing a **large scale elongated urban design project**, with small outbuildings being abandoned along the length of the canal. The forms of these outbuildings will be of fragments of the boats history, some with sharp corners, and others with curvaceous designs. So in retrospective, these boats were abandoned to save the people and their livelihoods, now my designs will save their memories, almost acting as a gravestone and memoir of their positions and importance along the river.

Visiting the site, I have seen 'The Friends of Purton' at work, and I have seen them head back to their cars for sandwich's at lunch. These are the unsung heroes of our national heritage, trying to protect our history and hold onto the memories of what made us the country we are today. And meeting with Paul Barnett (Friends of Purton Chairman) in his office, and seeing the vivid publications, photographs, documents of work he has collected over the years, there is so much information about this site, and so much ongoing work. So I'm proposing a **resources centre** and **library** for use of Friends of Purton, and others upon request. This would have adequate space for all collections of work about the site, space for meetings with various organisations that I know they have, and a much needed staff room!

*"We understand that timber and scrap metal will not last forever, but we want their memory preserved. Preservation through documentation, publications, photographs."* –Friends of Purton.

People have their own interpretation and experiences of the site. And as this is going to be a lasting memory of the site in 100 years, the idea is poetic. '**Message in a bottle**', peoples fragile personal experiences, written down and remembered in history. They bring their own bottle (all shapes and sizes) to within which they write down their personal experiences of the site, or memories, poems, child drawings, anything. The bottle is then placed on a wall, and remembered in history. The fragility of the site is portrayed in the glass bottle, but the wall itself shows the powerful impact that the site has had upon people's lives.

Changing perspectives is what I have titled this project, for two reasons; I want people to learn about the site, as I think this is essential; but after viewing Hamish's kite photography, there are so many unseen views of this site. Viewing the site from height, or from the other side of the river you see a completely different perspective of the site. So I want to incorporate new viewpoints into the site, using height, and portholes to show the site in new light.

## Summary

So as a summary I'm proposing to give people education so they understand and respect these war veterans of the sea, and allow users never before seen views of the relics. Provide The Friends of Purton a resources library from within which they can work from, and catalogue all further research. But most importantly, these wrecks of timber and iron will not last forever, but preservation of their memory is the most vital documentation for our maritime history, and this is to be achieved by using 'Message in a bottle' memorial.