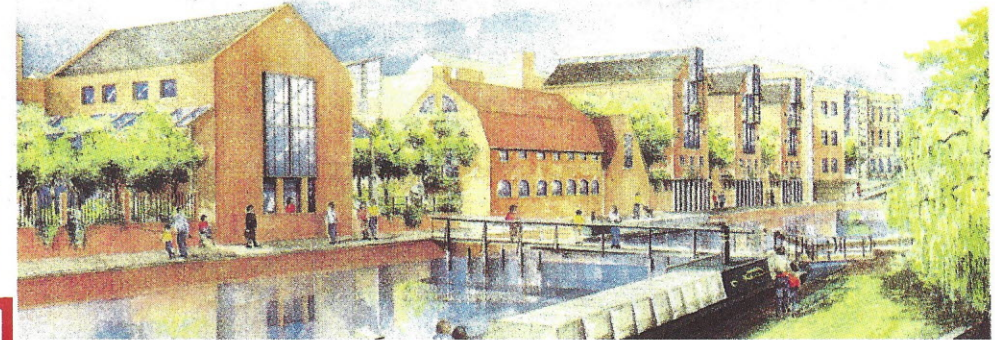


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Historic brewery building lost in blaze



- Left: The blaze at its height.
- Below: an artist's impression of the plans for the Bridge Street site with the mansard roof of the fire-damaged building a key central feature.



AN HISTORIC listed building which was to have been restored as the key feature in the redevelopment of the former Bridge Street brewery site at Reading has been virtually destroyed in a major fire.

Town centre traffic was thrown into confusion as four fire crews using a hydraulic platform fought for two hours to control the blaze in an old maltings building, last used by the Courage building department.

Nearby roads were closed as dense black smoke swept across the carriageways. At one stage the much valued mansard roof of the building collapsed under the intensity of the blaze, completely wrecking floors below.

The day after the fire, as the gutted hulk of the building still smouldered, planners met with Courage managers to assess the extent of the damage.

John Dewar, manager — Courage property, described the fire damage as "a tragedy" and said the building was probably the best on the 1.5 acre site, part of the centuries-old H&G Simonds brewery and later the headquarters of Courage (Central) Ltd.

The two-storey building at the heart of the proposed Bear Wharf development site stands beside the newly-revitalised Kennet & Avon canal. With its attractive twin-pitched Mansard roof the building was to have become a focal-point of the canalside development, being incorporated into a courtyard inn.

Features

"We thought it was the best way to preserve the architectural features of the building," said John Dewar. "Now the roof has been totally destroyed. We are having discussions with Reading Council and we will, after proper inspections, be able to decide how best to rebuild. We should be able to restore the existing external features, but at this stage I do not know if it is possible to recreate the internal features."

The courtyard inn development is the centrepiece of plans for the site which includes homes, offices and leisure uses which make the most of its setting beside the Kennet. Another listed building on the former brewery site, the old three-storey malthouse, is earmarked for community use.