

OLD WORLD

MUSEUMS

Money for Monuments

A GOVERNMENT grant of £200,000 a year to assist in the purchase of museum objects of industrial and technological interest is recommended by the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries in a report published last week. It is recommended that the money should be spent in circumstances where at least 50 per cent of the cost of preserving the particular object can be obtained from other sources (*The Preservation of Technological Material*, HMSO, £0.365).

The money would be administered by an advisory committee to be set up by the Department of Education and Science and supported by a secretariat in the Science Museum, with an assistant keeper at its head, which would also offer assistance to other bodies on all aspects of the preservation of all types of technological material.

The working party says that the Department of the Environment, which has responsibility for *in situ* historical monuments in England, should spend more on their preservation while the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales should also endeavour to do the same for monuments in their respective countries.

The working party to investigate the problem of the preservation of technological material was set up in 1970 by the previous government following a decade of mounting concern about the relics of technological developments in Britain. Several monuments have been lost in recent years—in several instances because

there was not enough money available to purchase them in the limited time before they were to be destroyed. As typical examples the Sudbrook Engines that were used until 1967 by the Great Western Railway and then British Rail to pump the Severn Tunnel were at that time due to be scrapped. British Rail offered to preserve them *in situ* for a sum of £70,000 but as the money was not available they were destroyed.

At the moment there are some monuments that have been saved but which need a lot of money to restore them to their original condition. The SS Great Britain is now in a Bristol dry dock where she was built in 1843 and there are frenzied efforts in progress to raise money to restore the ship to her former glory. All the money so far has been obtained from a private benefactor and in spite of the interest shown by the iron and steel industry in preserving the ship there is still a need for more money.

There is an even more pressing need for financial contributions to save other relics of the Industrial Revolution. The Iron Bridge, in the village of that name in Shropshire, the first cast iron bridge in the world, is in need of funds to rectify the subsidence of two of its abutments. Unless money is available soon, it will not prove possible to preserve the section of the Menai Bridge that was badly damaged by fire in 1970. Temple Meads railway terminal, Bristol, designed by Brunel is the oldest remaining main line rail terminus in the world. It has three times in recent years been given a lease of life—the last time earlier this year when British Rail were refused permission to build an office block on the site of the terminus.

The secretariat to administer the

£200,000 would be concerned with industrial monuments, relics of industrial social life, ships and relics of the shipbuilding and merchant shipping industries, art connected with industry and archives, including photographs and sound and film archives. The secretariat would consist of representatives of museums, Department of the Environment, as well as individuals who have knowledge of the history of technology. The working party recommends that the secretariat should have help when necessary from representatives of other bodies, such as the Public Record Office and the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts.

SPACE

Britain Bows Out

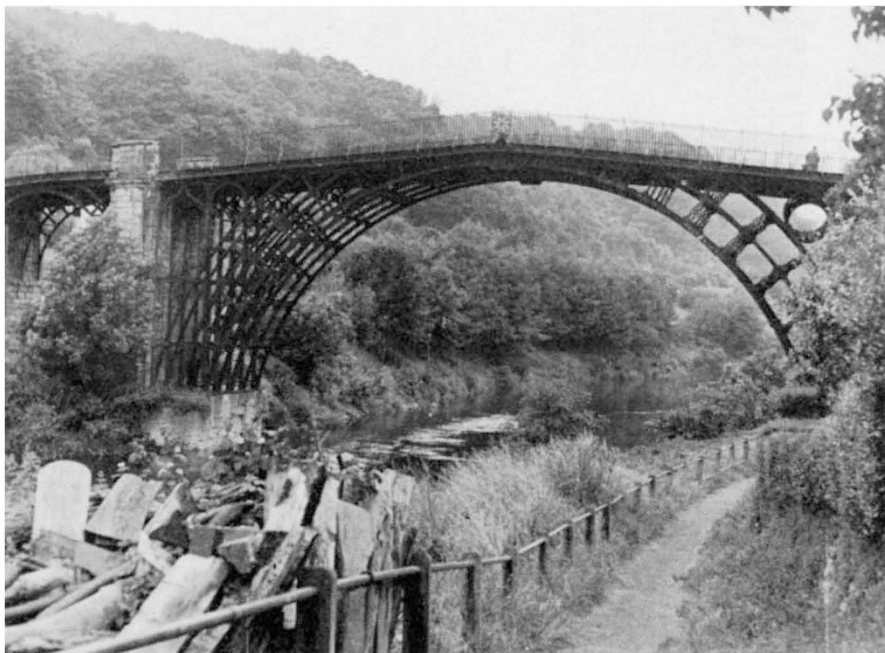
BRITAIN'S request to withdraw from the European Launcher Development Organization (ELDO), made in Paris last week, means that Britain no longer has even a nominal interest in launcher development. The decision to withdraw is the logical result of the announcement in 1968 that Britain would not support an extension of the ELDO programme and would limit her financial commitment to £11 million from January 1, 1969.

The decision ties in with the scrapping of Black Arrow earlier this year (see *Nature*, 234, 4; 1971) and underlines Britain's belief that the launcher needs of European space programmes can best be met by buying rockets from the United States. Britain is confident that American Scout rockets will be available whenever needed for her own satellite programme, and only last month the US State Department agreed in principle to provide launch facilities for the member countries of ELDO.

Other European nations, notably France and West Germany, are less happy to rely on the Americans for launchers and feel the development of a European rocket to be a necessity. The consistent failure of the Europa I launches, however, followed by the spectacular failure of Europa II last month does suggest that the development of a hybrid multinational rocket may not be a realistic possibility.

Britain's withdrawal, which due to ELDO's constitution will not become effective until January 1973, does not affect Hawker Siddeley Dynamic's contract with ELDO to supply Blue Streak, which forms the first stage of both Europa I and II.

Now that the United Kingdom is free of the shackles of a European rocket that does not work and a national one that was not sufficiently powerful, the £19 million spent on civil space in 1970-71 can be used for such things as satellite developments, both nationally and within Esro.



The Iron Bridge at Iron Bridge, Shropshire