6 - Cultural Significance

6.1 - Basis of Assessment

The identification of cultural significance in this section is an assessment based on the recommendations in James Semple Kerr's *The Conservation Plan* (1996) and the general guidelines in the Heritage Lottery Fund's *Conservation Plans for Historic Places* (March 1988). It permits judgements of significance to be tailored to a place, individual structure, feature or large complex object, by applying the most appropriate criteria. These have developed out of a thorough understanding, rather than by employing a formulaic check-list. It is a logical progression from the previous sections on understanding the ship and the site.

The system employed here is the result of extensive collaboration and debate between Matthew Tanner, the Curator of the *Great Britain*, and Jo Cox. It assesses the elements of the ship and site on the basis of their ability to demonstrate philosophies; customs; designs; functions; techniques; processes; styles; their formal and aesthetic qualities and associational links for which there may be no surviving evidence in the fabric.

The assessment is a different approach to that of statutory protection. Listing, for example, gives blanket protection at a particular grade to a whole building or structure and its curtilage. Judgements about the relative merits of individual elements only come into play for listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments when physical changes are proposed. They are then decided on a case-by-case basis at the point of prior advice or in the act of giving or refusing consent. Neither listing nor scheduling provides an owner or manager (or anybody else with a *locus* in the process) with much detailed information on what kind of merit different parts of a building or structure might be considered to have. This is both their strength (the assessment of merit changes with time and allows consent for change to be given or refused on the basis of knowledge/opinion when the change is proposed) and a weakness, since managers can be left in the dark about how to retain significance and where limited resources should be spent on conservation.

The evaluation has been rendered here first as bullet point general statements. These summarise, in a form intended to be brief and relevant, the cultural significance of the ship and site, as an *aide memoire* to decision-makers and managers.

The general statements are followed by a more detailed table of graded elements. This has the intrinsic imperfection of any inventory. It does not cover every item of fabric. This does not mean that fabric that is not mentioned is not significant. It tends towards losing sight of the wood for the trees by plucking out elements that make up the whole. This is mitigated by a separate grading for grouped elements and recognising that the whole, in some cases, is more than the sum total of its parts.

The system is designed to assist positive priorities - retardation of fabric decay, the focus of limited budgets, presentation issues - on this site. It is not a manifesto for change, or intended to put at risk elements assessed as having 'some' or 'little' cultural significance. It has no legal weight and is not intended to supersede or challenge statutory or other existing systems for evaluation. Well-established systems already operate for the buildings on the site. When completed, the National Historic Ships Committee Research Project at the University of St Andrews, which is looking at models for ship and ship project evaluation, will give a broader and more comparative context for the *ss Great Britain* and the *ss Great Britain* Project (see Appendix 2). This Conservation Plan is very different and intended to be useful in a site-specific context.

The limitations of the system were felt to be substantially outweighed by the usefulness of an exercise which applied a demanding and relatively sophisticated set of criteria to the structures in order to identify significance as closely as possible. This should mean that the policies and strategies that ensue can be justified, generate good quality debate and make the best possible use of energy and funds.

6.2 - General Statements of Significance

The *Great Britain* is of exceptional significance because of

- the combination of technical innovations in the original design of the ship: principally the iron hull; her size; the screw propeller; watertight bulkheads.
- the seminal influence of the design on modern ship-building.
- the unique physical connection between a preserved ship and a place built for her design and construction.
- the strong association with I K Brunel who engendered and collaborated on her design and construction.
- her status as a monument to the boldness of early 19th century problem-solving
- the beauty and fineness of her original lines as a fast ship.
- the way in which she and the other first phase elements of the site - the dock, dock office and steamship factory remains, are part of Bristol's maritime history.
- the richness and complexity of information of different periods in her fabric.
- the variety and breadth of commercial and national histories associated with her.
- the variety and breadth of personal human histories associated with her.
- the way in which her fabric expresses risk and danger.

It is difficult to categorise or analyse the emotional impact of the ship on visitors, many of whom may have only a fleeting interest in her engineering story. As a piece of sculpture, her impact is breath-taking and, combined with her battered appearance gives her an intrinsic quality that is not amenable to tabulation. The heroic project to resurrect her from the Falklands (illustrated in photographs displayed on board) is also a great emotional pull on site.

The site of the Great Western Dockyard as a whole is of exceptional significance because

- it includes the remains of the first purpose-built integrated steamship works in the world
- it is the birthplace and present setting of the *Great Britain*
- it is a demonstration of Bristol's maritime and industrial history
- of its industrial textures and materials and the pleasing simplicity and fitness for purpose of the designs of the buildings
- it gives historic meaning to the Floating Harbour and *vice versa*

The Great Western Dock is of exceptional significance because

- it is the birthplace of the *Great Britain*.
- the fabric of the ship and the fabric of the dock were designed for and influenced by one another.
- it is one of the major surviving elements of the first purpose-built integrated iron steam-ship works in the world.
- it is associated with I K Brunel, who advised on its construction
- it is associated with William Patterson, as the ship-builder of the *Great Western* and the *Great Britain*.

- of the pleasing contrast between its vernacular character and the high-tech character and ironwork of the ship.
- it is a surviving example of a 19th century vernacular dock.
- it is a surviving example of one of Bristol's City Docks.
- For its association with particular Bristol-built ships.
- For its association with the neighbouring Albion Dock.

The factory is of exceptional significance because
- it is the birthplace of the *Great Britain* and her engines.
- of the influence of the research and construction within its walls have had on modern shipping.
- it is one of the major surviving elements of the first purpose-built steam-ship works in the world.
- it has archaeological potential.
- for its association with I K Brunel.
- for its association with a series of Bristol industries, tanning, tobacco, and grain warehousing.

The dock office is culturally significant because
- it is a rare survival of a what must have been a commonplace building type.
- of the way in which it demonstrates paperwork as well as manufacture as an essential part of the dockyard operation.
- its front to the Floating Harbour demonstrates the relationship between the dockyard and harbour.
- the pleasing way in which the oriel window expresses the function of the drawing office.
- its interesting interior contrasts between functional and fancy detail.

The Jefferies range is culturally significant because
- it is representative of the buildings required by a small-scale ship-repair outfit of its date
- it is a visual demonstration of the altered status of the dockyard in the early 20th century
- of its pleasing industrial character and textures
- it reveals the adaptability of simple buildings to different functions

The range of buildings north of the dock is culturally significant because
- it is representative of the buildings required by a small-scale ship-repair outfit of its date
- it is a visual demonstration of the altered status of the ship-yard in the 20th century
- of its pleasing industrial character and textures
- it defines an historic boundary between the dockyard and the towpath and Floating Harbour
- it reveals the adaptability of simple buildings to different functions

Timber yard buildings, excluding the factory and dock office. The timber yard buildings have cultural significance because
- their use, at the time of writing, is a reminder of the importance of the timber industry to the Floating Harbour.
- They contribute to the industrial character of the site.

Fences, walls etc, delineating existing boundaries

The south boundary wall of the timber yard is culturally significant because

- its east portion is probably part of the first purpose-built iron steamship works in the world
- the use of Pennant stone links it to the dock and factory
- for its archaeological potential
- as signifying the value of what lay inside during the active dockyard era of the site by providing security

6.3 - Tabulated levels of Significance

The grading system employed here is as follows. An upper case letter indicates an overall grade for a major element or area. These are sub-divided into smaller elements which are given lower case grades. There is not a mathematical relationship between the grading of smaller elements and larger elements or areas of which they may form a part. Post-1970 re-created elements are not usually included in the system, since they are judged to have no cultural significance relative to that of fabric from the pre-heritage life of the site and ship. This does not necessarily mean that they are intrusive. Where they are listed, it is where it is suspected that genuine confusion might arise regarding what is post 1970 and what is not, and they are not graded. Where they are intrusive and it would be desirable to remove or amend them, they are noted as 'int'.

A*	Elements of international significance
Aa	Elements of exceptional significance
Bb	Elements of considerable significance
Cc	Elements of some significance
Dd	Elements of little significance
int	Elements that are intrusive
det	Elements that have a level of cultural significance but detract from elements of greater significance.
( )	Brackets are used for explanations where considered necessary.

Although tabulated and based on as full an understanding of the site as could be gleaned in the available time, it should be underlined that the degrees of significance are open to review and it is expected that they will be reviewed. Elements that are recognised as relatively poorly understood at the time of writing and await more information turning up, better interpretation and/or archaeological recording have generally been assumed to have a high degree of significance until it can be proved otherwise. This is a safety net.

The site as a whole with the ship	A*				
The ship as a whole	A*				

The *Great Britain*

Associational Links

The Great Britain has extensive associations, some demonstrated in physical evidence, some not. She is associated with:

I K Brunel and via him with the Floating Harbour, Clifton Suspension Bridge and Temple Meads Station in Bristol;

the *Great Western* and *Great Eastern*, as I K Brunel's other two ships;

Thomas Guppy; William Patterson; Marc Brunel; Robert Stevenson; James Nasmyth;

personal and clique networks in engineering and business;

Coalbrookdale

transatlantic passenger liners and communications;

emigration to and the development of Australia, including the impact of the gold rush;

the Crimean War;

the Indian Mutiny;

Liverpool as a maritime city;

Falkland Islands culture;

Prince Albert & Queen Victoria.

The Hull

The hull is of international significance, demonstrating size and the use of metal that made the ship a watershed in design. The wrought iron plating is wasted and repaired in places since 1970 with fibreglass and steel and the frames are also wasted and patched. A proper measured survey will enable a more refined discrimination between individual plates and frames to be made than is contained in this schedule.

The hull	A*				
plating (excepting fibreglass and steel repair)	a				
frames (excepting post 1970 repair)	a				
double bottom (although a replacement of the Phase 1 fabric, this preserves the design of longitudinal strength critical to the development of ship size)	a				
keel (added 1852)			c		
docking keels	a				
stern post	a				
stem post	a				

The transverse bulkheads

These are mostly compromised by the extent to which they have been re-created since 1970

focsle bulkhead		b			
forward boiler room bulkhead		b			
after engine room bulkhead		b			
bulkhead aft of the lifting propeller space	a				

Forward

Forward of the focsle bulkhead

The area forward of the focsle bulkhead is of especial interest for the survival of Phase 1 & Phase 3 fabric that is rare elsewhere on the ship, along with rare and significant domestic fittings. There is visual public access to the focsle, but the lower tiers are accessible only via ladders and hatches.

Forward of the focsle bulkhead	A				
The Focsle	A				
wrought iron stanchions to deck-head	a				
angle iron beams to deck-head	a				
king beam (post 1970 replacement)					
diagonal struts to deck head	a				
timber stringers to port and starboard	a				
iron plate brackets to the renewed shelf stringers	a				
bulkhead to upper deck			c		
bulkhead to WC ('heads) area		b			
hawsepipes (first phase)	a				
hawsepipes (1882)			c		
breasthook brackets and plate over		b			

The wc ('heads') area	A				
timber bow lining	a				
both timber seatings to hawse pipes with their straps and bolts		b			
timber beam in floor forward of the bulkhead (one of a series of timber transverse beams, probably Phase 1, demonstrating that the ship was both timber and iron)	a				
The Lower Focsle	A				
diagonal struts to the deck head	a				
timber stringers	a				
flat shelf stringers to port and starboard		b			
diagonal struts from flat shelf stringers to beams		b			
wc pipes		b			
angle iron beams	a				
king beam	a				
hammock hooks		b			
The Focsle Store	A				
diagonal struts to the deck head	a				
timber stringers	a				
flat shelf stringers		b			
deck planks			c		
angle iron beams	a				
king beam	a				
The Fore Peak	A				
diagonal struts to the deck head	a				
iron plate tank top		b			
angle iron beams	a				
king beam	a				
The Fore Peak Tank	A				
iron bar breasthooks	a				

Focsle Bulkhead to Forward Boiler Room Bulkhead

This section of the ship has not been restored, with the exception of the upper deck. It remains, relatively speaking, as when the ship was rescued from the Falklands apart from some archaeological losses and some new steel beams fitted for access to the hull. It is therefore far easier to read the historic fabric and structural detail than amidships or above the after saloon deck. As it stands it is a spectacular space, giving an impression, through the missing portions of the decks, of the scale of the hull in a way that cannot have been paralleled even when the ship was under construction. It is also a moving reminder of the deterioration of the ship and the wear and tear she has undergone. The space is accessible to the public from a viewing platform at the forward boiler room bulkhead at promenade deck level. There are difficulties of close access to the hull, especially at the level of the saloon deck.

Focsle bulkhead to forward boiler room bulkhead	**A**				
Lower cargo deck	**A**				
remains of iron deck	a				
remains of angle iron diagonal struts to former deck head and iron plate behind	a				
slender wrought iron stanchions standing on keelsons		b			
stanchions welded to tier above (compromised by post 1970 alterations)			c		
angle iron beams	a				
steel beams (post 1970)					
timber mast partner		b			
timber packing pieces round foremast housing			c		
Upper Cargo Deck	**A**				
diagonal struts (although possibly not Phase I fabric, but later replacements, this has yet to be proved and these preserve the design of the Phase I strengthening system to the decks)	a				
iron stanchions (demonstrate in their two-tier form the removal of the saloon deck for additional cargo space, 1881/82)		b			
iron web stringers to deck head	a				
cargo hatch		b			
flat shelf stringers to port and starboard		b			
steel braces to frames 143 & 141				d	
Forward Saloon deck	**A**				
diagonal struts (see Upper Cargo Deck)	a				
stanchions supporting deck head		b			
flat shelf stringers to port and starboard		b			
angle iron beams	a				
Butterley beams		b			
housing of foremast in deckhead		b			
Forward Promenade Deck	**A**				
angle iron beams	a				
diagonal struts	a				
flat shelf stringers to port and starboard		b			
box stringer		b			
tripartite bulb beams (so far as is understood, these were customised for the ship at a time when patent bulb beams were available. They demonstrate technology adjusted to the ship and probably incorporate Phase I angle iron fabric)	a				
cargo hatch		b			
forward stoke hatch		b			
viewing platform (preserves deck level)				d	

Amidships

This part of the ship is very varied in character and in the level of restoration it has undergone. The boiler room, currently inaccessible to the public, is the best space in which to grasp the transformation to a sailing ship with the introduction of stanchions and Butterley beams to make up for the loss of the boilers in an otherwise largely empty space. The engine room, containing the impressive re-created engines, visible from above, has been much altered to accommodate them. Decks flanking the engine space at saloon deck level contain on-board lavatories (port side) and a service area for functions (starboard side), the latter inaccessible to the public. The upper boiler space, now the Hayward Saloon is the least ship-like space on the *Great Britain*, re-designed without visual access to the hull and used as a conference/social room. At promenade deck level, the space forward of the engine is used as an exhibition area, with displays of objects, most of which could be displayed as well elsewhere. Visitors can look down on the engine while leaning against the rail around the engine space. Fund-raising boards obscure parts of the hull.

Amidships		B			
Lower Boiler Space		**B**			
iron web stringers to deck head	a				
4 Butterley bulb beams		b			
restoration phase beams over former cargo hatch					int
angle iron stringer		b			
stanchions (excepting post 1970 stanchions)		b			
trunking for modern services					int
salvage repair of crack in starboard side					int
Engine Room		**B**			
stanchions (compromised by mostly having been moved since 1970)			c		
Butterley bulb beams		b			
longitudinal bulkheads, post 1970 and obstruct access to the hull					
The Hayward Saloon and flanking decks (saloon deck level)			**C**		
diagonal struts	a				
stanchions		b			
Butterley bulb beams		b			
Butterley bulb beam with patent stamp (to date this is the only Butterley patent stamp that has been noticed)	a				
re-created footprint of funnel (post 1970)					
Promenade Deck Level amidships		**B**			
iron web stringers to deck head	a				
diagonal struts	a				
tripartite bulb beams	a				
box beams		b			
box stringer		b			
stanchions		b			
boards listing donors to the restoration					int
railings round engine space				d	

Aft

The tank top area (inaccessible to the public) has had little cosmetic change since 1970, but a good deal of structural alteration (e.g. 1880s stanchions moved to accommodate the planned recreation of the screw shaft and to ensure structural stability.) The shape of the space with the convex frames aft is striking. There is intrusive service trunking associated with functions on board. A number of important features survive: a casting in the stern and a massive housing under the iron floor adjacent to the after engine room bulkhead. The saloon above is wholly re-created, with no historic fabric visible. The promenade deck over has re-created cabins (obstructing access to the hull) but the deck head with angle iron beams is intact and there are pleasing views aft to the restored transom windows. Behind the false cabin partitions there is a service room on the port side and a 'back door' out onto the dock as an emergency exit and for use of staff involved with functions. .

Aft	A				
Tank top from after engine room bulkhead to stern	A				
diagonal struts	a				
stanchions (compromised by having been moved since 1970) - exclude post 1970 stanchions			c		
Butterley bulb beams		b			
steel beams				d	
plating to tank top	a				
3 transverse timbers (unless it can be established that they are not Phase 1)	a				
timbers against hull in stern	a				
mounting under double bottom with curved frames and timber housing	a				
casting in stern (probably part of the Phase 1 stuffing box)	a				
service trunking					int
Saloon (leaving aside the A* structure of the hull, there is nothing pre-restoration visible in this space. However, stanchions & Phase 1 angle iron beams survive).	A				
Space for lifting propeller	A				
timber posts projecting through deck (until better understood).		b			
Promenade deck including ladies' boudoir	A				
flat iron plates to deckhead	a				
diagonal struts	a				
angle iron beams	a				
transomed windows to stern	a				
carlings and coaming of 1882 hatch		b			
curved trimmer for round skylight	a				

The Upper Deck

The upper deck is largely a re-creation but is a critical part of the character and, in the re-created rigging, the external form & aesthetics of the ship. The open space allows visitors to move about freely and there are prized views of the surrounding site, the harbour and Bristol. This is probably

the space where visitors can feel most 'on-board'. While the form of re-created elements is faithful to research, the lifeboats and joinery are let down by bland textures.

Upper deck			C		
bulwarks (compromised by extensive restoration)		b			
windlass		b			
bilge pumps			c		
forward cargo hatch	a				
capstans	a				

Items removed from the ship and stored on the dockside, in the dock or under cover in the yard. The following grades apply until they have been individually assessed. The significance of some larger items, below, is partly understood					
built lower masts (dates still uncertain)	a				
Trotman Patent anchor	a				
1857 rudder & lifting screw frame	a				
WC bowls from 'heads'		b			
bilge pumps (until date is established)			c		
plating removed during restoration		b			
iron tiller		b			

Land-Based Buildings

The Dock

Associational Links

The dock is associated with:
the *Great Britain;*
the *Great Western;*
I K Brunel;
William Patterson;
the *Demerara;*
gun and mortar boats built for the Crimean war;
numerous ships built in her (research here still needs to be done);
the Floating Harbour and the Corporation's involvement with it;
Charles Hill and the Albion dock;
Prince Albert;
World Wars I & II;

The Dock	A				
masonry of the cradle-shaped profile	a				
slots in wall at W end including timber stubs in one of the slots	a				
masonry & flat flooring associated with kink (until it is understood better)		b			
concrete cladding and concrete alterations to masonry walling				d	
timbers to dock floor	a				
caisson of 1928			c		
pump house				d	
timber steps set in east end			c		
culvert			c		
platform				d	
dock furniture (critical to an understanding of the dock as a place of work)			C		
berthing blocks			c		
bollards (until the sequence has been established)			c		
timber posts (probably Phase I cut-down scaffolding)	a				
railings round dock				d	
mooring rings			c		
Scotch derrick on south side of dock			c		
pair of small derricks on north side of dock			c		
fittings for swing bridge			c		

The Factory

Associational Links

The factory is associated with:
I K Brunel & is the place where he and the other members of the building committee of the *Great Britain* researched technologies that were included in her design;
Nasmyth;

the French navy via Dupuy de Lôme;
civilian and naval iron steamship works;
local Bristol industries, e.g. tanning; tobacco, grain storage, timber;
the Great Western Railway;
the Harbour Railway;
the Floating Harbour;
Prince Albert;
World War II in Bristol.

The Factory	A				
exterior masonry walling	a				
interior crosswall	a				
breeze block patching (the breeze blocks are intrusive as a material, the archaeological evidence may be for a former opening, which is significant)					int
blocking of front doors			c		
bullnose brick detail			c		
tannery floor (While this has some significance as part of the tannery phase history, it detracts from the value of what it may be concealing)			c		det
Lower floor level in factory (at N end)	a				
Belfast roof trusses				d	
Roof covering				d	

The Dock Office

Associational Links

The dock office is associated with:
the Floating Harbour;
The GWSSC?;
William Patterson;
dock offices as a building type;
other surviving 19th century offices in general.

The dock office		B			
W block			c		
E block		b			
S side lean-to to east block			c		
sash windows		b			
high transomed windows			c		
roof covering		b			
chimneys		b			
flag poles				d	
drawing office, including all joinery, chimney-piece and oriel window	a				
E block joinery excepting drawing office		b			
E block c1905 chimneypieces			c		
E block c.1905 screen/parquet flooring			c		

The Jefferies Range

Associational Links

The Jefferies range is associated with:
small-scale ship repair.

Jefferies Range			**C**		
brick office including front lean-to			c		
former fitting shop east of office			c		
modern panelled door with Gothick detail to former fitting shop					int
fuel tanks against former fitting shop				d	
brick platform (excluding replica lifeboat) against former fitting shop				d	
smith's shop			c		
Bristol Blue Glass workshop			c		
shed at east end of range				d	
lavatory at west end of range					int

Range of Buildings North of the Dock

Range of buildings north of the dock			**C/D**		
the entrance-cum-shop				d	
post 1970 canopy on north side					int
the cafeteria (this has particular formal merit)			c		
flower bed and planting west of cafeteria					int

Timber Yard Buildings

The following schedule covers buildings above ground. There is potential for below-ground archaeology in the timber yard, especially below sheds 4 & 5.

Timber yard buildings				**D**	
timber sheds against south boundary wall of timber yard				d	
5 timber stores (formal merits of staggered layout)				d	
incinerator and associated brick structures off store no 2 (counting from W to E)				d	
boundary and gateway W of store no 1					int
portacabin					int
n.b. section of walling projecting off boundary wall dealt with under boundaries					

Small structures on site

Bristol Dock Company boundary posts			c		
bollard on the west side of the former factory (until better-understood)		b			
iron latrine			c		
garages					int
viewing pulpit					int