



Labour of love: architect Jim Soper outside the rebuilt pub



Museum piece: the Red Lion, moved brick by brick to Crich, Derbys, in its former location, Stoke-on-Trent, in the 1960s

Architect took a pub home in the back of his car

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By NICK BRITTEN

WHEN the Red Lion pub opened its doors for business last night Jim Soper had more reasons than most to relax with the first pint.

Mr Soper, an architect, had knocked down then rebuilt the pub brick by brick 50 miles from its original home.

He hand-cleaned every one of the thousands of bricks before reconstruction started and last night he was able to drink a toast to the completion of a 30-year dream.

Mr Soper, 67, stepped in after the 170-year-old Red Lion faced demolition when it stood in the path of a

road scheme in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs, in 1973.

Along with other regulars there, he decided the ornately glazed and tiled building would be perfect for the Victorian street scene at the tramway museum in Crich, Derbys, where Mr Soper is a volunteer.

So they had the pub taken down brick by brick, crated and freighted to the Crich Tramway Village.

It remained stored in a field until 1986 when Mr Soper began the enormous task of ferrying the bricks to his home in Wetherby, West Yorks.

Each week for four years Mr Soper, a tram enthusiast, packed his

car with bricks and took them the 100 miles home where he painstakingly cleaned them and glued broken ones back together.

He said: "It was just lying in the field gathering moss. I thought that if we didn't make a start on it, it would never get done. So I started taking the bricks home myself to clean them."

"I don't think it did the Audi much good - but they are meant to be quite strong cars."

"I don't know how many bricks I must have done, it runs into thousands, never mind the tubes of Araldite. It was a mammoth task, but I'm an optimist, so I never gave up." Mr

Soper then started to rebuild the Red Lion with the help of volunteers in 1991 and the external shell was finished 18 months ago.

The interior was completed just in time to be opened this Easter - complete with a lifsize terracotta lion.

Winstan Bond, the Tramway Village treasurer, said he had often wondered if the Red Lion project, which cost £500,000, would ever be finished.

"But when Jim started making these epic journeys up and down from Crich to Yorkshire, we were able to start to build."

The money to pay for the restoration and rebuilding was funded by

visitor entry payments to the Tramway Village. As well as restoring the bricks Mr Soper also made the pub's stained glass windows by hand.

Now visitors to the Tramway Village can enjoy a bar which serves food downstairs, and a full carvery upstairs.

Mr Bond said: "It is a tremendous feeling to see it back in one piece. It adds so much to the village, not only visually but as a place where people can enjoy a drink and a meal."

Mr Soper added: "I feel very, very pleased. I have to admit I was never quite sure we would finish it. But you have to have a vision or you would never start anything."