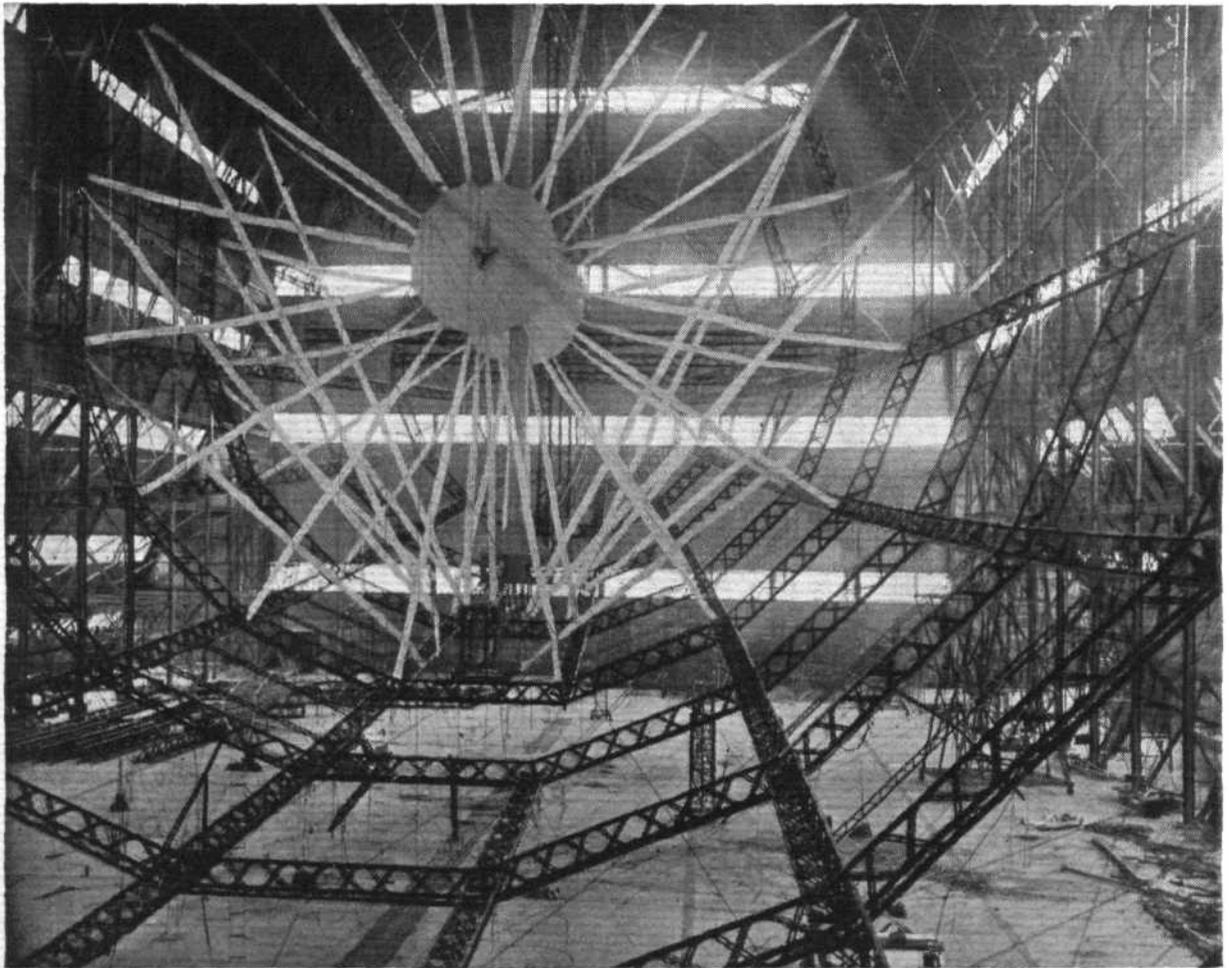


Breaking up R.100

MEMORIES of many pleasant visits to Pulham, Howden and Cardington were awakened by the journey to the Royal Airship Works on Thursday, December 3, to witness the destruction of R.100 by the workmen of Messrs. Elton, Levy & Co., Ltd. All previous visits to airship stations were characterised by a spirit of hope and progress. A band of enthusiasts, full of belief in their own craft of the air, and extremely convincing in the arguments by which they supported their belief, always made the visitor very welcome, especially if the said visitor was prepared to take an intelligent interest in the subject of airships. A more delightful set of hosts it would be impossible to imagine, and the arguments which they used, if still not proved by practice, are still unrefuted. It was true that on those visits one sometimes had to say good-bye to a particular airship which had made a name, but had outlived its usefulness. Gallant old R.33 comes first to the mind; and the wisdom of breaking her up when we had no other airship in which to train and practise crews is still in question. Regret was felt, too, when the doom of R.36, with her passenger saloon, was pronounced. No tears were shed over the unfinished framework of R.37, or the interesting little R.80, or the two surrendered Zeppelins, all of which went to the airship knackers. In those days one was always looking forward to something bigger and more advanced. R.100 seemed to fulfil those expectations. It is true that she was experimental, and at the utmost only pointed the way to better things; but still she did fly the Atlantic twice with ease, and she survived the dreaded ordeal of a storm with violent rising air currents. She accomplished a good deal, and at the same time she asked a lot of questions which could only be answered by further trial and experiment. Admittedly the nation is too poor at the moment to pursue those investigations, but one wonders, is it

really so poor that it could not have afforded a small number of men to keep the framework in order until such time as the experiences of Germany and the United States should have enabled us to decide definitely whether it would be worth while to carry on or to close down? Is the nation so poor that the price received for some 50 or 60 tons of scrap duralumin was a consideration sufficient to deprive the future of the chance of making a free decision?

As I entered the shed at Cardington last Thursday the sound of hammers at work came to my ears. Then, passing through the offices into the main shed, the skeleton of the great airship met my eyes. The breakers had been at work for a week, and they had already made considerable havoc. The main longitudinals and transverse rings were still in place, slung from the roof. Wooden props supported the passengers' coach and the control car. The passenger quarters were being rapidly dismantled. The gangway from the nose to the quarters had been removed intact. Mr. Elton, with whom I travelled down from London, said that there might be some use found for that, and it would be a pity to break it up. I was surprised to find what a pleasant companion Mr. Elton is. I had expected to find him a sort of Jack Ketch; but actually he seems to consider his vocation in life is the beneficent one of preventing waste. He had many interesting stories to tell of how he had retrieved metal from all sorts of unlikely places, where others thought that it would be no good for anything, and had made it available for the further service of mankind. I suppose that it had never occurred to him that anyone might have a sentimental affection for R.100 and feel it a desecration to see the axes at work on her once beautiful duralumin structure. He reckoned that the work of converting the ship to scrap would take some three months. The bays



Inside the frame of R 100, looking aft: it will be noticed that sections have already been cut away. The white fabric discs and strips are an experimental device to prevent parts of the gas bags wrapping round wires. The bay enclosed by these discs will be kept for experiments. (FLIGHT Photo.)