



# The Institution of Civil Engineers

## Panel for Historical Engineering Works

### NEWSLETTER

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### Spring Panel Meeting ... The Editor

Cooperation between the two senior engineering institutions was evident in a small way when the Panel met on 1 April in a room at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers Headquarters just across the side street from the Civils. James Sutherland of the Institution of Structural Engineers History Group and Bob McWilliam from the Science Museum attended as guests, and Ken J Marchant, Director Member Services and Ann Thompson of Thomas Telford Services Limited, were also present.

Much of the discussion was on the subject of conservation. Suggestions for future consideration included the awarding of prizes for conservation projects and the encouragement of sponsorship. It was important, however, that the Panel should be confident of the worthiness of a structure before supporting its preservation. Grade A (or I) structures would always be worthy of our full backing, but the Panel should not oppose a local authority at a public inquiry about lower-graded structures without the agreement of the Chairman and the Technical Secretary. Inverfarigaig bridge was mentioned as an example; a letter is being sent to the Forestry Commission urging them to preserve it, but the Panel will not campaign strongly. The Panel may need to pay sometimes for expert advice about preservation.

Attempts were being made to retain the St Katherine's Dock footbridge as originally constructed, and to save the Laigh Milton viaduct on the Kilmarnock & Troon Railway. The small museum at Starcross Pumping Station of the South Devon Atmospheric Railway was, regrettably, likely to close at the end of the year. Exeter Maritime Museum had officially closed, but had been re-opened by volunteers, although nobody knew for how long. Three former railway viaducts had been sold through the efforts of the English and Welsh Viaducts Committee: Smardale Gill, Burnstones and Holsworthy.

Exhibitions are being arranged to commemorate John Smeaton in July this year, the Thames Tunnel in March next year, and Thomas Hawksley later next year. The American Society of Civil Engineers are to fix a plaque on Smeaton's Eddystone Lighthouse, and the North Western Group of PHEW hope to commemorate the centenary of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1994.

The Chairman introduced a 'Five Year Plan', to be considered at the next Meeting, and Paul Dunkerley introduced the new PHEW Handbook, although the section covering Sites and Monuments Records had yet to be issued. He suggested that PHEW record forms could well be sent to County Sites and Monuments Records Officers' (without waiting for them to ask when particular cases arise), but the Technical Secretary

timber roof structure, the mechanics of which gave rise to much discussion. On the way back to the M54 and Birmingham the coach called briefly at the third of Telford's churches, a very similar octagonal design at Malinslee, also now appropriately situated in the town named after the great Engineer.

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## The Chairman's Column ... Roland Paxton

Professor Skempton feels that the time has now come for him to retire from the Panel and it is with great reluctance that we accept his decision. However, he has very kindly agreed to help and advise occasionally on an informal basis and this is much appreciated. His advice has been given in the matter of his successor and we are both very pleased that Bryan O'Loughlin has agreed to be the next Vice-Chairman. Professor Skempton became the Panel's Chairman in 1981 and for nearly eleven years his contribution and authority as an eminent engineer and leading engineering historian have proved invaluable. THANK YOU SKEM FOR YOUR OUTSTANDING STEWARDSHIP!

Following an approach to the Spring Meeting of Local Association Chairmen regarding PHEW representation on their committees, in the few cases where this does not already occur, it is pleasing to note that John Carter has now been invited to join the Yorkshire Association Committee. Perhaps I could suggest to him and other members that the opportunity of Smeaton's bicentenary on 28 October 1992 offers an excellent opportunity to promote knowledge of the 'father of civil engineering' and thus our profession. Locally this could take the form of a joint or even a public lecture and, where appropriate, a site visit next Spring. A programme of Smeaton events is in hand in Scotland.

The Panel's first venture in encouraging the formation of a Trust to safeguard and conserve an outstanding historical engineering work is continuing in connection with Ligh Milton Viaduct in Ayrshire. Two worthwhile meetings of the prospective Trustees have been held under the able chairmanship of Mr William Barr. The challenge, which has so far defeated all-comers, is immense, but there is plenty of goodwill and a way forward is actively being sought.

In the important matter of the Panel's publications, good progress is now being made with 'Civil Engineering Heritage' Volume III - the Southern Counties and there seems to be a realistic prospect of publication in 1994. On the subject of publications, I have recently received from the Japan Society of Civil Engineers four annual volumes of well-illustrated papers published by their Committee on Historical Studies in Civil Engineering (Volumes 8-11, 1988-1991). Michael Chrimes has also received copies for the Library. The 1991 issue includes papers on French masonry bridges, Osaka bridges,

Central Park - New York, flood control, Japanese suspension and steel-arch bridges, Osaka Loop Railway, canal and hydro-electric projects and Brunton's various works in Japan.

Since the last *Newsletter* I have been able to appreciate some local PHEW activity at first hand when lecturing on Telford to ably-organised and well-attended meetings at Birmingham and Ellesmere Port. The opportunity of attendance at the latter was taken to visit the Britannia bridge display area with its 28ft. high slice of tube which is of outstanding historical engineering significance. Readers may recall that the dilapidated condition of the site featured in NCE last year. Mr Wynne Jones of Gwynedd County Council, Roy Hughes and myself, all felt that the display would be much better appreciated if it was relocated at a more publicly accessible site. This possibility is being investigated.

My contacts with Professor Alan Prasuhn have continued regarding the American Society of Civil Engineers visit to England from 11 to 21 July and the International Historic Landmark plaque to be fixed inside the Eddystone Lighthouse now on Plymouth Hoe. The plaque dedication ceremony will be conducted jointly by Mr Michael Cottell, Vice-President of ICE and Mr Chuck Pennoni, President of ASCE.

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## HEWs in the News ... Brian George

The influence of the Corps of Royal Engineers in the development of civil engineering and building technology during the middle of the nineteenth century was recorded in *NCE*, 13 February 1992, in a shortened version of a paper given to the Victorian Society by Dr John Weiler. Weiler described how from the mid-eighteenth century recruits first entered the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in their early teens; they got a mostly theoretical education in the mathematics and sciences, and starting from 1812 graduate cadets on receiving commissions were sent for one year to the Royal Engineers Establishment at Chatham where they had some practical training in building.

The Corps of Royal Engineers had an extraordinarily varied range of professional, managerial and administrative appointments in military and civil practice. They were everything from builders of fortifications and military specialists in war, to civil servants, staffing public works departments in all parts of the empire, right up to being colonial governors. Perhaps the best known of these was General Gordon.

They ran the works departments for the Admiralty dockyards (earlier operated by civilians) and were inspectors of railways and dams for the Board of Trade, surveyors-general of prisons for the Home Office and architects to the Science and Art Department.