

Panel for Historical Engineering Works Newsletter

Number 110 June 2006

Contents

Royal Recognition for Brunel's Balmoral Bridge

Opening of Brunel Exhibition, Swansea

Brunel Celebration Plaques

Brunel Celebrations, Portsmouth

Hawksley Connections – An Engineering Family

Historic Bridges of Ribble Valley and Bowland

Letter – The Melledgen Press

Henry Cort – 1740–1800

HEWs in the News

Editor's Note

Royal Recognition for Brunel's Balmoral Bridge

by Roland Paxton

On 29 May with snow on Lochnagar, and between blustery showers of sleet and sunshine, HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, unveiled a PHEW initiated Brunel bicentenary plaque on Balmoral Bridge (1856–1857) at a public ceremony in the presence of the media, tourists and local people.

The event was impeccably organised by Ewan Wallace, until recently ICE East of Scotland Region Chairman, and Donald Macpherson, both on the staff of Aberdeenshire Council, now custodians of the bridge. Provost Raymond Bisset spoke of the care and attention taken by the Council in making their eight A-listed bridges suitable for modern traffic and invited Prince Philip to unveil the plaque. He also invited the Prince to speak, but he humorously declined with, 'It's somebody else's turn to say a few words!'

This Royal cue was my command, and I talked briefly on the Institution's policy and practice relating to plaque provision and features of Brunel's distinctive practice at this bridge, regarded as one of Brunel's more modest masterpieces, the appearance of which is reputed not to have pleased Queen Victoria! Having a fund of hard won experience of plaquings over several decades, I was impressed by the smoothness of the arrangements and enthusiasm shown by everyone for this one!

Of my contribution the *Aberdeen Press & Journal* reported, "Roland Paxton, vice-chairman of the Panel for Historical Engineering works, also gave a short talk about design aspects of the bridge. In particular he described how Brunel carefully incorporated umbrella shaped flanges into the girders top and bottom so that the rain would run off the iron rather than corrode it, preserving the structure for generations. *'I think you would have to agree that so far it is doing rather well'*, he added".



Angus and Brenda Buchanan and Roland Paxton being introduced to HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh by Ewan Wallace © M Taberner

I concluded by conveying to His Royal Highness and the distinguished gathering, the apologies for absence of ICE President Gordon Masterton, who was on Institution business in Canada. He was very much with us in spirit, thought the plaque a fitting tribute to the great Brunel, thanked everyone for their support and wished us a wonderful day.

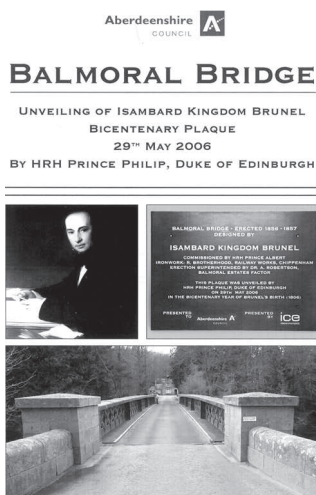
In conversation Prince Philip clearly enjoyed talking to civil engineers. He referred to his Honorary Fellowship of the Institution and among several questions asked about the plaque and where it had been made. Afterwards the plaquing party adjourned to Balmoral Castle for tea and to see the informative exhibition on Brunel and the bridge, including his note book borrowed from Bristol University Library, set up by Donald Macpherson for visitors to the Castle. This exhibition enhanced the whole event.



Donald Macpherson setting up plaque © R Paxton

Donald, with whom I had the pleasure of erecting the plaque about an hour before the event, followed in the best tradition of earlier plaquings by producing a high quality commemorative brochure, copies of which will continue to be available to visitors to the exhibition throughout the summer. It includes, 'Royal connections', details of the design, construction and completion of the 125ft span iron-girder bridge with a masterly Geoffrey Hay drawing courtesy RCAHMS, Brunel's career, the Council's heritage bridge practice and, the following mention of PHEW:

'The Panel for Historical Engineering Works (PHEW) was formed by the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1968 in order to "foster a proper interest in engineering heritage". The Panel has functioned primarily as a recording and knowledge promotion body but from the 1980s, as its record database and expertise grew, it has taken an increasing interest in the assessment of historical engineering works and their authentic conservation. The Panel is now generally recognised as the leading authority on the civil engineering heritage of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.'



Title of commemorative brochure © D Macpherson

Scotland's Brunel Bicentenary Lectures

In addition to the Balmoral plaque event, the Scottish Group of the Panel also initiated a lecture on the life and work of Brunel, even though he only engineered one structure in Scotland.

This lecture was prepared and delivered in style by Dr Jim Shipway to appreciative public audiences at Dundee and Edinburgh. At the Edinburgh lecture in James Clerk Maxwell House a fulsome vote of thanks to Jim was given by Alasdair Cullen Wallace, former partner of Crouch & Hogg.



Roland Paxton, Jim Shipway and Alasdair Cullen Wallace at Brunel Lecture in Edinburgh on 5 April 2006

Opening of Brunel Exhibition, Swansea

by K J Thomas

The first event in the Brunel anniversary year in Wales was the opening of the exhibition on Brunel in South Wales at the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea on 5 April, part of the cost of which is being met by ICE Wales. After an introduction and welcome from Stephanos Mastoris, Head of the Museum, the exhibition was opened by Denys Morgan, Manager for Wales, supported by Stephen K. Jones, the author of the recently published book on Brunel in South Wales.



Denys Morgan (left) and Stephen K Jones

The exhibition which is located in the foyer of the museum shows examples of Brunel's work and is open until 25 June after which it will be toured around other museums and exhibition sites in South Wales.



Continuing a Brunellian Tradition

By coincidence the West Glamorgan Brass Ensemble were playing in the foyer at the time thus fulfilling a Brunel tradition. He always had a brass band at his opening ceremonies.

Links – www.museumwales.ac.uk and www.herian.org for information on Brunel events throughout the year.