

# Panel for Historical Engineering Works Newsletter

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## Kenneth Campbell McCrae 4 June 1915 – 8 September 2007 by Professor Roland Paxton



Ken McCrae cutting Telford 250<sup>th</sup> birthday cake on 9 August 2007 © Roland Paxton

Kenneth McCrae FICE passed away suddenly but peacefully, in a chair with a book on his knee, on 8 September. I have been privileged to know Ken, a former Depute County Engineer for Water and Drainage in Dumfriesshire, since he retired from this post more than 25 years ago.

During this time Ken has given invaluable help in recording and promoting historical engineering works in Dumfries and Galloway for the Institution of Civil Engineers as a member of the Scottish Group of its Historical Engineering Works Panel and of its national Panel in 1997–1998.

Ken played a key role in promoting engineering history locally through visits, lectures and leaflets, in siting and resiting the Telford Memorial at Bentpath and, in serving on the committee which tastefully refurbished the Westerkirk Parish Library, originally funded by a Telford bequest.

I was fortunate to be present at the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Telford's birth at Langholm on 9 August when 92-year-old Ken did the honours in great style by cutting the cake and proposing the toast to Telford. It could not have been a more fitting tribute.

## 'Spirit of Telford' Award for Brian George

by David Greenfield



Quentin Leiper (l), Brian George (r) © ICE South West

Brian George joined PHEW in 1979, as the member for Devon and Cornwall. Although he has now officially 'retired' as a PHEW member, he continues to play an active role in PHEW matters as a corresponding member and as my invaluable 'helper' and comrade in ICE SW. Readers of the *Newsletter* will of course be familiar with his long-running 'HEWs in the News' column. For a number of years he has also regularly contributed articles on historical engineering topics to the ICE SW quarterly magazine, *Fulcrum*. His article in the autumn 2007 issue of *Fulcrum* is appropriately titled 'Thomas Telford in the South West'; appropriate not just in view of the Telford 250<sup>th</sup> celebrations, but also because Brian himself is pictured on another page receiving a well-earned 'Spirit of Telford' Award from Quentin Leiper.

comprehensive exposition of the significant amount of work carried out by Brunel in South Wales. In addition to his work on the Taff Vale Railway and the South Wales Railway the sheer volume of his other commissions on branch lines, docks and links to the SWR will be unknown to many. All are fully documented and the book is very well illustrated with many historical photos of these various railways with which Brunel was associated and traces the history of the many interwoven links between them. The volume is very readable and certainly informative and is an important addition to an understanding of the work of this great man in Wales, an area of his many undertakings that is often overshadowed by his involvement elsewhere but is none the less impressive by its sheer volume and complexity and deserving of wider recognition.

Stephen is now working on Volume Three, *Links with Leviathans*.

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from Brian George

**Lord Rolle's Canal by Susan Scrutton. Published by the Author, New Street, Great Torrington, EX38 8BY. 118 pages, 107 illustrations. Price £12.50**

Variously known as the Torridge, Torrington or Rolle Canal, this canal of 1824 was overtaken by a railway in 1872. Parts of the original bed still remain, however, particularly the entrance lock, the aqueduct over the river Torridge (HEW 384) and the Town Mills at the upstream end, now used as a hotel.

Susan Scrutton had done a service to North Devon history by assembling a fine collection of photographs and extracts from maps to illustrate the text. Even a photograph of a Bude Canal tub-boat, formerly in the now defunct Exeter Museum, shows how the canal's engineer, James Green, applied his experience at Bude to installing an inclined plane to reach his final level now partly occupied by the railway route, which is itself removed but is used by cyclists and pedestrians on the Tarka trail.

## HEWs in the News

by Brian George

The *Eskdale and Liddesdale Advertiser* 16 August devoted a page to Thomas Telford when it recorded a meeting at his birthplace, Glendinning, in the parish of Westerkirk near Langholm, on 9 August. The occasion was the unveiling of a cairn by Gordon Masterton, PPICE, which commemorated the memory of Telford on the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. The cairn had been built by drystone dyker Eric Boyce, and Peter Rae of Annan had carved the memorial stone. Margaret Sanderson, who chaired the Langholm and Westerkirk Thomas Telford anniversary group introduced farmer Lorraine Luescher who spoke of Telford's early life. Later, in the Buccleuch Centre, an anniversary cake was cut by Kenneth McCrae, a 92 year old member of the Institution, well-known to Panel members, who sadly died on 8 September.

Roland Paxton noted in *NCE* 6 September that the BBC documentary *Telford – the Man that built Britain* – on 12 August was generally well crafted and enjoyable. But viewers were told by the programme that Telford's proposed 600ft span iron arch replacement for old London

Bridge over the Thames in the first decade of the nineteenth century would have collapsed and been a failure. Paxton said that this was an assumption too far and that Telford's design was based on sound structural principles. The last newsletter noted the visit of Institution and American Society of Civil Engineers to Craigellachie Bridge (HEW 24). Both the *Herald* and the *Scotsman* of 5 July reviewed this visit, noting that the construction of this 150ft span was in cast iron.

The Scottish *Evening News* 4 July carried a two page article on the construction of the Forth railway bridge at Queensferry (HEW 71). Jennie Meldrum of the Queensferry History Group believes those who lost their lives during the construction should be remembered. A memorial, a venture between a local business and sculptor Hamish Gilchrist was opened by First minister Alec Salmon, the previous day. Also the Forth Bridge Memorial Commission have plans to install two stone memorials on either side of the Forth some time next year. These memorials which have been designed by local man Gordon Muir, will bear the names of all 71 men and boys who died during the seven-year creation of the rail crossing.

In *Newsletter* No.103, September 2004, I reported on works being carried out and projected for Lydney harbour, near the Forest of Dean. A visit in August revealed that all is completed and the site offers visitors a pleasant car park and a fine view of the Severn estuary.

A five-day festival at Calstock began on August 8 to celebrate the centenary of the completion of the railway viaduct over the river Tamar (HEW 595). It was featured on local television and *Rail* 15–28 August tells us that it was two years behind schedule and over budget. But that does not matter now. Designed by W R Galbraith and W Church using precast concrete block construction, there were 12 semi-circular arches of 60ft span, the soffits of which are 108ft above ground level. Below ground in-situ concrete foundations are taken to a maximum depth of 47ft to the sandstone surface. The width of the viaduct is 14ft between parapets and the piers are 17ft 6in by 7ft 6in at the top and taper downwards and outwards. The contractor was John Charles Lang. The viaduct connects Gunnislake in Cornwall to the old LSWR railway line at Bere Alston station to provide a route to Plymouth. The celebrations are particularly welcome as there are proposals to rebuild the line from Bere Alston to Tavistock to assist commuters to the city.

Engineers floated in the inner lock gates for the Sharpness Tidal Basin in early July (*NCE*, 19 July) to complete four months of emergency repairs. The lock gates allow freight and leisure vessels to move between the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal (HEW 466) and the River Severn via the tidal basin. On March 9 the north inner gate anchor failed and subsequent inspection for client British Waterways discovered cracking within the gates. *NCE* 19 July tells us that in May contractors Morrison floated the 1960s gates away to be repaired at Sharpness dock but by 12 July the £225,000 emergency repair was completed, saving a cost of £5000 per boat movement.