

## Panel for Historical Engineering Works Newsletter

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### Panel Meeting, Newcastle 2009 and Denis Smith's Retirement by The Editor

The Panel's autumn meeting was held at Newcastle University's Castle Leaze site on 9 and 10 September 2009. Aply organised by PHEW's North East representative Professor Iain Moffat, the meeting was arranged to coincide with part of the ICE North East's commemorations of the death of Robert Stephenson (see also subsequent article).

The Panel's business meeting was an opportunity for Panel members to renew acquaintance with Bob Rennison, longstanding NE PHEW representative before his relatively recent retirement and for the Chairman, Brian Crossley to present Denis Smith with an historic print to mark his retirement as London representative from the Panel. Denis has been greatly involved in Panel activities since joining in April 1988. He edited the London and Thames Valley edition of the *Civil Engineering Heritage* series, organised a very successful Panel meeting and has over the years both in publications and lecturing made a substantial contribution to the understanding of engineering history and heritage. He remains involved as author of the next regional volume for London.



*PHEW Newcastle, September 2009*



*Denis Smith's Retirement Presentation*

Following the meeting, Panel members joined other guests at a Civic reception, before attending a very well received lecture delivered by Michael Bailey on 'Robert Stephenson – The Eminent Engineer'. An enjoyable supper was held at the Northumbrian University's Officer Training Corps Mess. The following day the Panel boarded the river boat *MV Coventina* for a trip on the Tyne to view river side sites of interest and the multiplicity of river crossings, including Stephenson's iconic High Level Bridge.

com/groups/hews/ Membership is free, although to keep a free account active, you need to log into it every fortnight. The flickr HEWs group, administered by corresponding panel member Tom Swailes, has at the time of writing 57 members and over 400 photographs. In captioning photographs it is easy to link to other websites, such as Engineering Timelines, for detailed descriptions, or to refer to the relevant volume of the *Civil Engineering Heritage* series. *Newsletter* readers are welcome to join the flickr HEWs group, to post photographs, or to comment on photographs posted by others.

I have created 3 galleries of truss girder bridges on flickr, various kinds, 54 pictures in total, each photograph by a different flickr member (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tom-swailes/galleries/>). These galleries are separate to the flickr group for HEWs.

## Hoover Dam's 75th Anniversary History Symposium

ASCE's History and Heritage Committee (HHC) will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the completion of Hoover Dam's construction with a moderated history symposium in Las Vegas on Thursday and Friday, 21 and 22 October 2010, preceded on Wednesday afternoon (20 October) by a half-day tour of Hoover Dam, ASCE's Monument of the Millennium dam. The engineering associated with the design and construction of Hoover Dam and its performance over the last 75 years will be the theme of this history symposium.

Further information from Carol Reese, Staff Contact, HHC ([creese@asce.org](mailto:creese@asce.org)), ASCE, 1801 Alexander Bell Drive, Reston, VA 20191, 703-295-6240; or Richard Wiltshire, HHC Symposium Organiser ([rlwiltshire.pe@comcast.net](mailto:rlwiltshire.pe@comcast.net)), 8053 S. Zephyr St., Littleton, CO 80128, 303-978-1994.

## Book News

### BOOK REVIEWS

**Newport Pagnell's Bridges – The Tickford Iron Bridge in Context** by D C Mynard, P Woodfield and R Bailey. Phillimore & Company Limited, 2009. 4to [25x18cm], pp.xi, 100, 44 photographs, maps and plans. Illustrated d/w, hardback. £17.95. ISBN 9781860776038.

This book provides a welcome chronological account of the building and subsequent history of the North (1809) and Tickford Iron (1810) Bridges at Newport Pagnell on both of which, notably, Henry and John Provis worked. Tickford Bridge designed by Thomas Wilson is, probably rightly, claimed to be 'the oldest surviving cast-iron bridge in the western hemisphere still carrying everyday traffic on a main road'.

That Tickford Bridge has survived the vicissitudes of two centuries in use is a remarkable testimony to the determination of local people and engineers to save it and it is pleasing to read of their efforts to this end and to be

informed of other little-known local and technical detail supported by some excellent illustrations.

The account concludes with a brief mention of the carbon fibre strengthening of the Tickford Bridge ironwork, which has appropriately preserved the bridge in use. Some readers may recall that the application of this state-of-the-art technique won for the project our PHEW-initiated Historic Bridge Award in 1999. In 2000 the bridge's significance was recognised by English Heritage with an up-listing to Grade 1.

The reliability of the iron bridges data furnished as a context for Tickford Bridge leaves something to be desired, but this is more than outweighed by the usefulness of the main thrust of the book in shedding new light on and promoting a landmark iron bridge.

Roland Paxton

***The Grand Western Canal, a brief history*** by Helen Harris. Newton Abbot: Forest Publishing, Peninsula Press, 2009. 48pp, 31 maps and photographs, softcover. ISBN 9781872640587. £3.99.

Generally regarded as the standard work on the subject, Helen Harris's first edition of *The Grand Western Canal* was published in 1973. The second edition, which provided an update on restoration development, came out in 1996. The fine quality of her research was evident in the notes and acknowledgements she made to her helpers. Both editions are now out of print and the author has written this abridged version to provide quicker reading, whilst still retaining the vital historical facts.

In this latest work, the author has vastly reduced the text, yet has produced a comprehensive description of the history of the construction of two separate but adjacent lengths of canal, one in Devon and the other in Somerset by two different civil engineers during a period of thirty years. The text is supported by delightful photographs and clear maps and plans.

The author describes how in 1769 a route for an inland waterway to connect the north and south coasts of England's south-west peninsula had been proposed by James Brindley. By 1807 John Rennie had been consulted and in April 1810 a 2½ mile length at the summit of James Brindley's route near the county boundary was commenced with a 9 mile branch to Tiverton. Undoubtedly the need at that time for lime to condition the soil was uppermost in people's minds and extensive limestone deposits were available on this route.

However, apart from limestone for lime and for roadstone, trade on the canal fell short of expectations and the need for completion of the canal to Taunton became apparent. The increase of altitude of 262 ft from Taunton to the county boundary presented difficulties, but, in 1830, James Green proposed just one inclined plane and seven perpendicular lifts to carry 8-ton boats and work soon commenced to join with the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal, and this was completed in 1838.