

Panel for Historical Engineering Works Newsletter

Number 147 September 2015

Contents:

Historic Landmark Award for Edinburgh & Glasgow Union Canal

Keith J Thomas CBE BSc CEng FICE FCIHT

Chairman's Column

Book Notice

HEWs in the News

PHEW AGM (London) 2015

Letters to the Editor

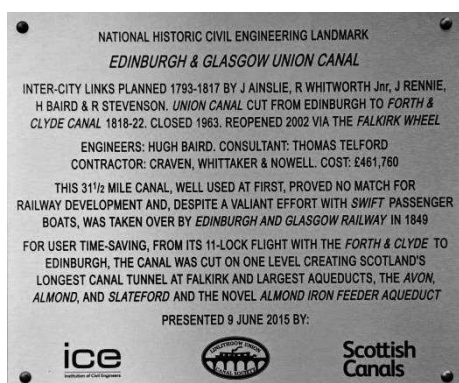
Editor's Notes

donation to the Society's Museum of a 1st edition of Telford's first report (1815) supporting the canal as its consulting engineer. The event closed with an enjoyable boat trip under the expert guidance of former LUCS chairman Mike Smith.



Professor Roland Paxton, Paul Jowitt and Provost Tom Kerr
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Historic Landmark Award for Edinburgh & Glasgow Union Canal By Roland Paxton



© David Shirres

On 9 June this canal was awarded **National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark** (NHCEL) status, by the Institution, at a well-attended plaque unveiling ceremony at Linlithgow Canal Basin. It was an ICE Scotland PHEW initiative to exemplify and promote to the public our profession's contribution to society, with valuable support from *Linlithgow Union Canal Society* (LUCS) and *Scottish Canals*.

As co-host I introduced Tom Kerr, Provost of West Lothian and canal long-boat owner Professor Paul Jowitt CBE PPICE who performed the ceremony with style. Following refreshments, LUCS Chairman Duncan McIntyre, thanked everyone for coming and for my

The earliest plaques organised by PHEW, with ASCE for internationally significant works such as the Tay (1987) and Forth (1990) Bridges, were briefly worded and of little information value. This shortcoming was addressed in later plaques particularly those for the Forth & Clyde Canal, Menai and Conwy Bridges, Caledonian Canal, Melville Column, Titan Crane, early Scottish railways, Bell Rock Lighthouse and Union Canal, by mentioning the engineer, contractor, context and significance.

This plaque, duplicates of which are planned for other visitor locations, inform that the canal costing £481,760 was made from 1818–1822 to unite Edinburgh with the Forth & Clyde Canal near Falkirk at a terminal 11-lock flight. The locks were closed in 1933, the canal in 1963, and the whole reopened in 2002 by means of the *Falkirk Wheel* boat lift. The canal's engineers were Hugh Baird and Telford and the contractors Craven, Whittaker and Nowell [Lindsay, J. *The Canals of Scotland* 1968, 66–85].

The 31½ mile canal, well used at first, proved no match for railway competition and despite a valiant effort with *SWIFT* passenger boats was taken over by *Edinburgh & Glasgow Railway* in 1849. For user time-saving, from its lock flight to Edinburgh, the canal was cut on one level 242ft above sea level resulting in Scotland's longest canal tunnel at Falkirk and largest aqueducts, the Avon, Almond and Slateford and the novel Almond iron feeder aqueduct [Paxton & Shipway *CEH Scotland* 2007, 173-].

This event, attracted coverage in the *Inland Waterways Association Bulletin* (mid-June) and the *Linlithgow Journal & Gazette* (12 June 2015), which concluded, "Duncan McIntyre for the Linlithgow Union Canal Society is delighted by the Institution's national recognition for the

canal and for organising the plaque which will help visitors enjoy the experience even more at Linlithgow Basin.”

Keith J Thomas CBE BSc CEng FICE FCIHT

by Stephen J Jones



Keith Thomas at Holyhead railway station in 2009 introducing the subject (the engineer Robert Stephenson) being commemorated by the PHEW plaque about to be unveiled
© S J Jones

In taking over from Keith Thomas as the new Wales member on the ICE Panel for Historical Engineering Works, I understand one of my first tasks is to provide a profile of the outgoing member which I am of course, pleased to do. When Keith asked me take over his role I only agreed on the proviso that he would act as a source of advice and support to me and the Wales team, so knowing I can rely on Keith's wider knowledge in these matters is a great relief! I first met Keith when he was involved in the planning of the bicentenary celebrations of the historic journey of Richard Trevithick's Penydarren locomotive in 2004. Since then I have worked for Keith as part of his small team of helpers which included Tony White in south Wales and Bob Daimond in north Wales. This invitation therefore came as a great honour. There is another connection in that Keith and I were brought up in the same part of Cardiff but our paths never crossed as he is a few years older!

Born in Cardiff in 1939 Keith was educated at Cardiff High School and the University of Wales where he obtained a first class Honours Degree in Civil Engineering in 1963. He started his engineering career in 1956 as an Engineering Student with the British Transport Docks Board in South Wales, was Resident Engineer in 1966–1967 on a major wharf development at Newport and in 1967 was Design Engineer for the Swansea Car Ferry Terminal. In 1969 he became part of the Civil Service working for the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (later Property Services Agency) and worked in Wales, then the Regional Office in Germany on airfield and other

military work. Back in Wales he headed the Regional Civil Engineering organisation before moving to the maintenance side of PSA covering both Defence and Civil Estates. In 1985 he was promoted to Deputy Director, Southern Region based in Reading. In 1988 he returned to Wales to head the Highways Directorate in the Welsh Office, managing the development and maintenance of the Trunk Road Network in Wales. He retired from the Civil Service in December 1999. Keith is a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers and was Chairman of the local association in 1997–1998. He is also a Fellow of the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation. In June 1999 he was awarded the CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours' List.

The late Owen Gibbs, who I had the pleasure of knowing and supporting on an ad-hoc basis for PHEW, persuaded Keith to take over from him as the Wales member of the ICE Panel for Historical Engineering Works. Owen was one of the original team who established the south Wales Historical Engineering List in the 1970s and 1980s. Keith established a small team of helpers and in 2002 assumed responsibility for the all-Wales list taking over the north Wales HEW's from Paul Dunkerley. He 'inherited' a mass of material from Owen Gibbs just before he died which he sorted and catalogued and began the programme of regular revisits to the Welsh HEW's. Most of the revisits were completed in the 5-year target and the second round of revisits is well advanced. Highlights of his period as Wales member include the organisation in 2002 of a visit to north Wales by the American Society of Civil Engineers Historical Group. This was part of their visit to UK and the presentation of commemorative plaques on the Menai Suspension Bridge, Britannia Tubular Bridge and Conwy Suspension Bridge, as well as a two day tour of north Wales sites. Through his previous association with the National Assembly for Wales he was able to arrange sponsorship for a formal evening reception for the group in Llandudno. As part of the annual PHEW programme he organised the Harlech meeting as the Wales AGM and meeting in 2008. This included visits to a number of HEW's – old and not so old – finishing at the Menai Bridge Visitor Centre (Canolfan Thomas Telford). Keith also initiated the series of putting plaques, and later information panels, to mark the importance of our engineering heritage on particular historical engineering sites and with the financial support of ICE Wales Cymru, some 33 plaques and information panels have been placed at sites throughout Wales. He was one of the first three authors of the new series of *Civil Engineering Heritage* and his *CEH Wales* volume was published in 2010.

At the beginning of this year Keith decided that after 15 years on the panel he would step down – leaving behind a great legacy. I have been fortunate to have been involved with him over the last ten years and it was a great honour to be asked to take over but he will be a hard act to follow – however, I know I can rely on his invaluable experience and advice to support the Panel's future work in Wales.

Chairman's Column by Gordon Masterton

Memories of the PHEW AGM in London (reported elsewhere) remain fresh and my sincere thanks go to Clive