

Book review

Thomas Telford's Scotland

Chris Morris. Tanners Yard Press, Longhope, 2009, ISBN 978-09542096-9-8, £9.99, 80 pp.

Following a similar pattern to some earlier works by the same author, this book is a photographic portfolio that illustrates both the extent and splendour of Telford's works in Scotland. The focus of the book is visual imagery and the cover photograph of the magnificent Craigellachie Bridge sets the tone for the contents of the volume. An introduction by Neil Cossens and an overview of Telford's work in Scotland by the author is followed by a series of photographic essays divided geographically into three areas: The Borders, Lowlands and Islay; The Highlands, Great Glen and Mull; and The Far North and Skye. The book closes with a short essay (Telford: A Place in History) in which the author attempts to place Telford in the context of the profession in his time and in comparison with his contemporaries, Jessop and Rennie.

The photographs are outstanding and although several, in particular those relating to the Caledonian Canal, are repeated from Chris Morris' earlier work *On Tour with Thomas Telford*, this in no way detracts from their value. Of particular interest is the excellent coverage of the remaining survivors of one of Telford's lesser known accomplishments, the 32 Highland churches and 40 accompanying manses. Although the nature of the book means that text is limited, the photo captions are generally informative.

The book clearly illustrates the fact that anybody travelling around Scotland cannot proceed very far before encountering examples of Telford's work. The Scottish Highlands are particularly well represented in the book through coverage of the Highland roads and bridges, Telford's many harbour works, and toll houses, churches and manses. Cutting a diagonal swathe across the Scottish Highlands, Telford's most extensive Highland 'work', the Caledonian Canal, is well portrayed.

The book's photographic essay illustrates the fact that, from the 'first house in Scotland' (the toll house at Gretna in the Scottish Borders) to Wick Harbour in the far north and from Aberdeen Harbour on the east coast to the churches on the west coast of the Isle of Skye, virtually no part of Scotland was exempt from the influence of the great man.

As the book has no technical pretensions, the photographs are essentially 'scenic' representations of civil engineering works and give little insight into the technical challenges faced in many of the projects. However, given the illustrative purpose of the book it would be inappropriate to complain of a lack of technical content.

In the final chapter, putting Telford and his achievements in context with those of contemporary or near-contemporary civil engineers, the author comments on Telford's apparent reluctance to give 'appropriate' credit to William Jessop for his work on both the Ellesmere and Caledonian Canals and refers to the 'thought-provoking account' of this issue in Charles Hadfield's controversial book *Thomas Telford's Temptation*. As *Thomas Telford's Scotland* is not a biography of Telford and as it covers his works in Scotland only, reference to this matter may be thought to be inapt. However, the author does point out that Hadfield's conclusion 'that Telford wanted undivided glory' is 'dismissed by all modern authorities'.

Although the book's rich illustrations will delight many Telford enthusiasts, its relatively small size does somewhat detract from its impact. Perhaps the author might consider producing a full-size 'coffee table' version, possibly combining this book with some content from his previous works. Such a volume would undoubtedly find favour with the many admirers of Telford's works.

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