

## Editorial

David J. Greenfield PhD, CEng, MICE  
Taunton, UK

So, the job is complete and the structure is operational again. You feel good about the outcome. The team worked well together and came up with some cleverly engineered solutions. The clients and sponsors are happy; the local community is happy; the local press and TV have followed progress with unaccustomed interest and have been sympathetic and supportive, for a change; you got a good write-up in the technical press. In all, a result to be proud of. Now, wouldn't it be nice to get some recognition from your peers for a job well done, before the team breaks up and everyone moves on to their next project? Oh, and by the way, we're talking about a strengthening project on an old bridge.

This was the archetypal scenario in the minds of the team who initiated the Historic Bridge Awards in 1998. Impending European legislation aimed at increasing the permitted weights of goods vehicles had prompted the UK Government to instigate a national programme to assess and strengthen highway bridges. Highway bridge owners predicted that government funding for the programme would be woefully short of their requirements; consequently, pressure was put on bridge managers to devise 'economical' strengthening schemes.

Having seen a number of insensitive modifications made to important historic bridges within the first few years of the national programme, the ICE's Panel for Historical Engineering Works (PHEW) felt that the incentive of a prestigious, well-publicised annual award scheme would encourage highway bridge engineers to produce high-quality, innovative schemes. Following discussions with English Heritage and the UK's largest bridge-owning organisations, the scope of the proposed awards scheme was widened to include all repair, strengthening and conservation projects affecting any bridge or aqueduct over 30 years old, in England and Wales. The stated objectives of the scheme were to 'recognise, encourage and celebrate excellence and innovation in conservation'. The subtext was to get bridge engineers thinking about affective, economical and sensitive alternatives to the clumsily over-engineered botches, inappropriate quick-fixes and needless replacements that were all too common. Having successfully devised and employed these better alternatives, it would be hoped that the bridge engineers would then to pass them on to their colleagues.

PHEW ran its first Historic Bridge Awards in 1998, with the sponsorship and backing of the County Surveyors' Society (now the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT), representing local authority

technical directors), Railtrack (now Network Rail), British Waterways (now the Canal & River Trust), English Heritage and New Civil Engineer magazine (NCE), all of whom have continued to support the scheme to the present time. In 2002 the scheme was broadened to include Scotland, and its remit was enlarged to embrace all civil engineering conservation projects pertaining to transportation, including tunnels, retaining walls, canal locks, wharves and large station roofs. To reflect the broader coverage, the scheme was re-titled the Historic Bridge and Infrastructure Awards (HBIA) (ICE, 2014a).

Well-publicised awards schemes of all shapes and sizes clearly have the potential not only to raise the profile and improve public perception of the heritage conservation industry, but also to inform, enthuse and encourage fellow practitioners. HBIA specifically targets the physical conservation of transportation-related civil engineering heritage. In contrast, the Colin Crisp Awards, Australia's premier award scheme for 'excellence in engineering heritage projects', extends its terms of reference far beyond 'hands-on engineering' to include historical research, recording, documentation, education and awareness-raising, reflecting the functions of the multi-disciplinary Institution of Engineers Australia. In the UK there is a wide range of award schemes that include civil engineering heritage conservation within their remit. Probably the nearest equivalent approach to that of the HBIA is the National Railway Heritage Award scheme, which embraces 'buildings, structures and signalling installations associated with railways and tramways'. In other instances, such as the British Construction Industry Awards, the Institution of Structural Engineers' Awards and the Saltire Society Civil Engineering Awards (Scotland), 'heritage' is a specific project category. The inclusion of conservation projects is also implicit within the terms of reference of other schemes; for example, the ICE's regional Project of the Year Awards. As well as these, there is the multiplicity of environmental, sustainability and built environment schemes, such as the Green Apple Awards, Civic Trust Awards, Nostra Awards and Dorothea Awards, whose areas of interest may include civil engineering conservation.

The Historic Bridge and Infrastructure Awards differ from the majority of these other awards because the judges' view is that size does not matter. In fact, nominations are particularly encouraged for small projects and well-defined sections of major projects. Consequently, in spite of the apparently restrictive target topic, the nominations are immensely diverse in terms both of type and scale. They range from the truly massive, such

as the recent Forth Rail Bridge refurbishment work, through preserved railway restoration and early concrete bridge strengthening, to diminutive pack-horse bridge and canal lock renovation. Somewhat controversially, awards have also been presented for ‘virtually strengthening’ bridges that were apparently understrength. In other words, by undertaking an intelligent appraisal of the existing structure it could be demonstrated that they were not understrength and that no structural intervention was required – surely, the ultimate in conservation.

The HBIA judges are empowered to make as many awards, commendations and ‘special mentions’ as they feel are appropriate, bearing in mind the number and types of nominations. These are presented by the ICE President at the ICE headquarters in London, in the presence of an invited audience including engineering conservation professionals, academics and bridge managers. Soon after the event, NCE announces the winning projects, accompanied by images and brief descriptions; comprehensive descriptions are later published in the PHEW newsletter (ICE, 2014b). The event organisers take care to ensure that proper recognition is given to individuals

who played a crucial role in award-winning projects, no matter what their level within their firm.

Each project nomination for the HBIA requires a written submission, which is, in effect, a mini case study, and the organisers encourage candidates to develop their submissions for publication in *Engineering History and Heritage*. Occasionally (too occasionally) this encouragement leads to a paper (e.g. Slade, 2011), in which case, the HBIA organisers consider that everyone is a winner.

#### REFERENCES

- ICE (Institution of Civil Engineers) (2014a) <http://www.ice.org.uk/topics/historicalengineering/HBIA> (accessed 22/09/2014).
- ICE (2014b) <http://www.ice.org.uk/topics/historicalengineering/Panel-for-historical-engineering-works> (accessed 22/09/2014).
- Slade G (2011) Paddington station: span 4 refurbishment and strengthening. *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers – Engineering History and Heritage*, **164(1)**: 35–54, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1680/ehah.900019>.