

Book review

William Hazledine – Pioneering Ironmaster

Andrew Pattison. Brewin Books, Warwickshire, UK, 2017, ISBN 978-1-85858-562-8, £13.95 (paperback), 142 pp.

Those familiar with the early use of cast and wrought iron in civil and building engineering in Britain will be familiar with the following impressive list of structures: Ditherington Flax Mill, Shrewsbury, England (1797); Chirk Aqueduct, Wrexham, England (1801); Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, Wrexham, England (1805); Bonar Bridge, Scotland (1811–1812); Waterloo Bridge, Bettws-y-Coed, Gwynedd, Wales (1816); Craigellachie Bridge, Fochabers, Scotland (1812–1814); Menai Suspension Bridge, Wales (1819–1826); iron roof for Customs House Quay, Dublin, Ireland (1822); Mythe Bridge, Tewkesbury, UK (1823–1826); Aldford Iron Bridge, Eaton Hall, Cheshire, UK (1824); Conwy Suspension Bridge, Wales (1824–1826); Cleveland Bridge, Bath, UK (1826); Laira Bridge, Plymouth, UK (1827); Nantwich Aqueduct, Cheshire, UK (1830); Marlow Suspension Bridge, UK (1832); and Stretton Aqueduct, Staffordshire, UK (1832–1833). The name of Thomas Telford will immediately spring to mind for most of these, as well as Charles Bage (Ditherington Mill), John Rennie (Dublin Customs House Quay), John Rendell (Laira Bridge) and William Tierney Clark (Marlow Bridge). In fact, these pioneering structures are united by one name – William Hazledine, who supplied the iron for these many other works. Although based in the Shrewsbury area throughout his life, his various iron components were transported for use in projects throughout the UK and even for lock gates on Telford's Gotha Canal in Sweden.

William Hazledine (1763–1840) was one of four brothers and son of another William (who collaborated with John Raistrick), all of whom supplied iron for

engineering projects (hence much confusion in attribution). All were trained as millwrights and were pioneers in the transition from the traditional materials of timber and stone to the new materials – wrought and cast iron. This book is a long-overdue first biography of William Hazledine, whose contribution to the introduction of iron in construction clearly stands alongside those of Telford, Raistrick and Rennie, and even William Fairbairn, the greatest ironmaster of the nineteenth century.

The author, a retired general practitioner from Shrewsbury, brings his knowledge of the region, passion for its history and study of local archives into the book. Of the twelve chapters, six are mainly biographical, two devoted to canal and bridge works generally, and one each focusing on three of his most important projects – the flax mill at Ditherington, where cast iron beams were first used in a building; the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, then the longest and highest such structure in the world; and the Menai Suspension Bridge, then the longest bridge span in the world. Running through all Hazledine's works is the testing and research into the manufacturing techniques for wrought and cast iron, and how they were improved to deliver better and better quality iron in terms of both strength and consistency.

Apart from details of the subject's life and his contribution to early iron engineering, Pattison's book also provides a wonderful overview of civil and building engineering in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

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