

LINKS

the bulletin of the
Newcomen
Society

No 198 June 2006

marking the bicentenary of I K Brunel's
birth and the conference celebrating his
work and the work of all engineers
present and to come.

6 - 7 JULY 2006

Highlights from this special commemorative issue

'It is wholly appropriate that the Society should be taking a major part in a conference to celebrate the role of engineering in ensuring a civilized world.' — Julia Elton, president, The Newcomen Society



Links, in its usual format, has a full-colour wraparound with, on the front cover, a message from the president, seen above with her husband James Sutherland, a former president of the Society. The back cover gives a brief roundup of the estimated 300-odd events nation-wide, which have taken place or are in progress, celebrating the 200th anniversary of IKB's birth. Inside the covers is an illustrated map of the Brunel Trail of Bristol showing the harbour and the points of interest.

Professor Angus Buchanan, former president of the Society, discusses the premiss: 'IKB — The Greatest Engineer?' He argues that Brunel started life with three advantages but would not have been remembered without his colossal engineering achievements. He reviews his work in marine engineering, harbours and bridges, railways and in the engineering profession, concluding, 'Brunel has my vote.'

Dr Michael Bailey, former president, catalogues some of the problems which Brunel faced with the Great Western Railway; problems like unreliable locomotives, *North Star's* underperformance, which was blamed on the



broad gauge, track engineering, which was held responsible for passenger discomfort, and attacks from opponents. The author reminds readers of how close Brunel came to resigning as Engineer of the Railway.

Professor David Perrett, vice president of the Society, looks at some of the footprints that Brunel left in London. The engine house by the Brunel tunnel is now a museum; piers of the Hungerford bridge now form part of the Golden Jubilee bridges; the Wharncliffe viaduct carries the mainline from Paddington to the West; timbers close to the Thames are believed to be part of the *Great Eastern* launch site.



A party from the Society visiting the Thames Barrier first heard a history of flood defences. In January 1953 disastrous floods in the Low Countries, the Thames Estuary, Canvey Island and other low-lying areas claimed more than 300 lives. Work on the barrier began in late 1974 and it became operational in October 1982. It was first used in February 1983.

The party descended inside the barrier to a depth equivalent to a seven story building and appreciated the complexity of the hydraulic equipment which moves the gates. In places there are two standby systems.

Activity in the Society's branches

A feature concentrates on the Society's branches, leading with the **Western Branch**, which this year is organising the Society's exhibit at the Bristol celebrations. The **Midland Branch** reported audiences pushing 100 and the **North Eastern Branch** operates in an area with a rich industrial heritage. The **Southern Branch** was formed in 2004 and the **North Western Branch** has close links with the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester. The **Scotland Branch** and **East Midlands Branch** aim to resume full activity shortly.

Reports of branch activities featured a talk on 100 years of Isle of Man TT racing (Midland), blast furnace blowing engines (North Eastern) and the restoration of the Basingstoke canal (Southern).