

Thomas Telford

Thomas Telford was born in Scotland on 9th August 1757. He lived on a hill farm in Eskdale, Dumfriesshire. His father died soon after he was born and he was raised by his mother in poverty.

When he was 14 he got a job as an apprentice to a stonemason. In 1782 he moved to London where he worked on building additions to Somerset House. He later found work at the Portsmouth dockyard. Thomas was at this time mostly self-taught but he progressed with his talents to the specification, design and management of building projects.

His links to Shropshire began in 1787. Through his patron William Pulteney, Telford became Surveyor of Public Works in Shropshire. He was involved in the renovation of Shrewsbury Castle and the town's prison. Whilst planning the prison building work he met the prison reformer John Howard.

He worked on the Church of St Mary Magdeline, Bridgnorth and St Michael's Church in Madeley. In 1788 he was called to advise on a leaking roof at St Chad's Church in Shrewsbury. He warned that the church was unsafe and could collapse at any time. His warning proved to be accurate when the roof collapsed three days later, although he was not the chosen architect for its replacement. In 1790, as County Surveyor, he designed the bridge at Montford. This bridge carried the London-Holyhead road over the River Severn. The bridge was the first of 40 bridges he built in Shropshire,

As his reputation grew, in 1793 he designed and managed the construction of the Ellesmere Canal. The canal linked the ironworks and collieries of Wrexham via Ellesmere with Chester, making use of the existing Chester Canal and then the River Mersey.

One of Telford's most famous projects was the Pontcysylte (pont-cuss-ulth-tay) Aqueduct over the River Dee near Llangollen. He used a new method of construction consisting of troughs of cast iron plates fixed in masonry. The aqueduct spanned 19 arches over 1000 feet with a height of 126 feet above the valley floor. The aqueduct was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009. Telford eventually worked all over the U.K. and Ireland.

During his later years Telford used his talents on many road projects. His nickname became "Colossus of Roads". In 1820 he was appointed the first President of the Institution of Civil Engineers, a post he held until his death. He died on 2nd September 1834 aged 77 in Westminster. He was buried in the nave of Westminster Abbey and a statue was erected to him nearby in St Andrew's Chapel.

The town of Telford in Shropshire was built in the 1960's and 1970's as a designated "new town" to revitalise industrial land merging from the old towns of Wellington, Oakengates, Madeley and Dawley.



