



Thomas Telford and Telford town in Shropshire

People may not be aware that the relatively new town in Shropshire, Telford was named after the Scottish born engineer Thomas Telford. He was born in Westerkirk, Dumfries in August 1757, started work as a stone mason and self educated became an architect. In 1786 aged 29 was appointed public works surveyor for Shropshire. He became famous for building roads, bridges and canals .Three of his bridges spanned the River Severn at Montford, Buildwas and Bewdley. He designed a bridge over the River Tay at Dunkeld in his native Scotland, also the granite Bridge of Don in Aberdeen. Two other famous bridges in Scotland were a cast iron bridge over the River Spey in Moray and the Sligachen Bridge in Skye.

One of his best known canals was the Caledonian Canal which I have sailed down on a ferry from Inverness. The canal goes from Inverness in the east all the way to the west coast at Corpach near Fort William. The middle section being Loch Ness, I have made several trips along the Loch but no sign of Nessie the fabled Loch Ness monster. Mind you with all the souvenir shops and cafés loch side the local inhabitants are only too happy to keep the myth alive. Or is it a myth, who knows?

Another Telford canal of which I have personal knowledge is the Ellesmere back in Shropshire, also known as the Llangollen. It was planned to provide a link between the Severn and Mersey rivers. I knew of it as my first branch when I joined Lloyds in 1955 was the Ellesmere Branch. The canal was never fully completed but the Ellesmere section has a famous aqueduct built in 1805.

In total Thomas Telford constructed 875 miles of roads, 1117 bridges, 40 harbours, 32 churches, 40 manses and many other projects. For regular rail travellers between

Birmingham and Wolverhampton you will be familiar with Smethwick, Galton Bridge station. The bridge, built in 1829 by Thomas Telford, was to carry a road across the Birmingham Canal which was in a deep cutting. He died in London in 1834 aged 77 and his remains are in Westminster Abbey showing with what esteem he was held.



Telford the town came into being under New Town Acts of 1963 and 1968 and was developed mainly in the 1970s, when I worked in Shropshire in the 1950s there was no such place and the main football team was Wellington Town, later to be Telford United. It was thought the new town was to be called Dawley New Town, an already an established small town. The new town kept growing and incorporated Dawley, Madeley, Wellington and Oakengates. Some high-tech companies are there now. The old Roman Road of Watling Street runs through Wellington to contrast with the now named Telford after the aforementioned Thomas Telford. The population is 155,570 (2021 census) compared to Shrewsbury 76,000. And the parliamentary constituency is called Telford but until 1997 was the Wrekin, the only constituency named after a large hill or geographical feature.

I hope that, dear reader gives you some idea of how creative Thomas Telford and how appropriate to have a new town named after him.

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