

The Britannia Bridge

An engineering masterpiece of the world, was opened to the public in 1850

Do you know who the men were who built it?

Were any of your ancestors stonemasons, brick makers, sailors, contractors, clerks, engineers, foundry workers, riveters, carpenters?

My name is Julie Stone and I am researching the building of the Britannia Bridge.

Much has been written about the technical construction but less is known about the people who were involved in the day to day building operation.

If you have anything to contribute to my research or have any ancestors who might have been involved then please get in touch with me or leave a note at the Telford Centre, Menai Bridge.

I should be very pleased to hear from you.

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So far, I have begun collecting the names of anyone involved with the building of the bridge (held for viewing at the Two Bridges Exhibition, Telford Centre, Menai Bridge).

The Memorial

Some workers died during its construction and there is a memorial in St Mary's Churchyard, Llanfairpwll. Here too we find the names of the contractors for the masonry.

The Engineers

The bridge was built to carry the Chester and Holyhead Railway across the Menai Straits and provide a through route from London to Dublin. It was of course the brainchild of Robert Stephenson and there are many names in the engineering field attached to its construction.

The Sailors

The stone for the masonry was brought by sea from Penmon, Moelfre and from further afield at Runcorn. There were therefore many sailors involved in this process, as well as those responsible for floating out the huge iron tubes into position for lifting into place on the towers.

The Railwaymen

For the initial testing Robert Stephenson drove the first engine across the bridge accompanied by key personnel. Thereafter the railway employees took the powerful engines through the tubes.

The Workforce

The iron tubes were constructed with skills learnt in the shipbuilding industry and men came from the London shipyards to work on the bridge.

The masonry contractors were from Dewsbury in Yorkshire and stonemasons and brick makers came with their families to work.

Irish 'navvies' were also employed.

But over half the workforce came from the local area. Unemployed farm workers and copper miners saw an opportunity to earn some money, as did the farmers who loaned out their horses.

The Public

People turned out in their thousands at the opening ceremony and more than 700 passengers were taken over the bridge on the first crossing. A toast was given to the ladies for their bravery!