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BRIDGES A SPECIAL ISSUE

A NUMBER OF THINGS HAVE COMBINED to inspire the Newsletter's first-ever issue on a single topic. Least tangible is that it seems to have occurred to several people that while many of the various technologies and interests embraced by the field of IA have their own highly focussed specialist/enthusiast following and forum—railroads; mills; RR stations; steamboats; and others—bridges don't. This, despite the fact that there is a clear and widespread interest in those structures regarded by many as the most varied and interesting of all the engineering works created by man. Without doubt, bridges are the most visible element of our IA, and at the same time, perhaps the most structurally comprehensible, their workings generally being exposed fully to view.

Then too, the history of bridge engineering covers about as long a life span as anything with which we deal, and has involved nearly every structural material ever known, from stone through wood, all the ferrous metals, many of the artificial stones such as brick and concrete, and a huge number of combinations of these. It is a subject full of vitality and range.

There are two chronologic reasons for an all-bridge issue. This year signals the 100th anniversary of the practical incandescent electric light, in which we celebrate that essential bridge between night and day. And transcending all other considerations, 1979 also is the bi-centennial year of the construction of the world's first iron bridge, in itself more than enough to make appropriate devotion of this entire issue to bridges.

IRON BRIDGE BI-CENTENARY

In July 1779 the last of the great cast ribs was placed, completing the superstructure of the first civil engineering work in the world to be formed entirely of iron. The momentousness of the event was recognized at the time and has never been lost sight of. The Iron Bridge, crossing the River Severn in a small Shropshire village that was promptly renamed Ironbridge, has long been the most recognizable single artifact symbolizing the advent of the Industrial Revolution. While the steam engines of Newcomen and Watt often are cited as the physical devices that essentially represent that upheaval in man's relationship with his planet, the initial offering of neither inventor survives.

The Iron Bridge, fabricated by iron-founder Abraham Darby at his nearby Coalbrookdale works, is here and now, visually unchanged from the day it was completed. It alone is the primogenitor of the huge family of metallic framed structures that descended directly from it. Long may it stand.

The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust plans a mammoth series of



Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust photograph.

special events and publications in honor of The Relic's 200th birthday, extending not only over this entire year, but into 1981 in commemoration of the fact that the bridge actually was completed and opened to service in 1781. We will report on these as timely.