

**Book Review**

**Bridging the Eastern Cape: The Life and Work of Joseph Newey, 1846-1907**

Dennis Walters. Coral Tree Press, East London, South Africa, 2014, ISBN 987-0620-594783, £28.00, 136 pp.

*Bridging the Eastern Cape* by Dennis Walters is the first full-length biography of the English civil engineer Joseph Newey (1846-1907) who, having accepted a temporary position as "bridge erector" with the Cape of Good Hope Colony Government in 1872, stayed on, and retired as Chief Inspector of Public Works of the Cape Colony 33 years later. During that time he was involved in almost every road bridge project in the Eastern Cape. Dennis Walters is a Consulting Civil and Structural Engineer in the Eastern Cape, with a professional and personal interest in Newey's career and works, and this book is the result of his extensive research in the UK and South Africa.

The first chapter explores Newey's origins. He was born in 1846 in the London Borough of Poplar, the fourth of 11 children of George Newey, a boiler-maker from the West Midlands. Shortly after, his father moved to work on the Britannia Bridge at Menai, and by the early 1850s the family had relocated back to the Black Country. In 1854 George Newey formed a partnership with Thomas Fleet, fabricating and erecting a substantial number of wrought-iron bridges, most of them under an agreement with the Crown Agents for the British Colonies, in honour of which they named their premises the Crown Works. Joseph Newey was articled to the firm in 1861, and just a year later his father died.

Having completed his three year apprenticeship Newey accompanied the firm's senior bridge erectors around the UK and abroad. Chapters two and three cover this period up to 1872, during which time the firm built bridges in various parts of the UK, Brazil, Mauritius, Jamaica, New Zealand and elsewhere abroad. Newey was probably involved in many of these projects, and was certainly responsible for two large lattice girder bridges on the railway approaches to the Mont Cenis tunnel.

In 1873 Newey moved to East London, South Africa, with his wife and youngest son, and the remaining nine chapters describe in detail his subsequent career and works in the Cape Colony. Immediately on his arrival he took control of the erection of a wrought-iron double-Warren or single-lattice girder road bridge of two 90ft spans, each span being incrementally launched on rollers over the Buffalo River at King Williams Town. During the next 20 years he went on to supervise the construction of over 50 large iron and steel bridges, mostly of the lattice configuration. He was also responsible for designing and constructing several handsome multi-span stone arch bridges, a 200ft span suspension foot-bridge and many road improvement schemes.

In 1893 Newey was promoted to the post of Chief Inspector of Public Works, which required him to relocate from the East Cape to Cape Town. He was elected MICE in 1891, and twelve years later he was a founder member of the Cape Society of Civil Engineers (now the South African Institution of Civil Engineering). He retired in 1905 and died two years later, aged 60.

All Newey's masonry bridges and most his wrought-iron bridges are still extant. Yet today, even in the East Cape, he is virtually unacknowledged as having contributed greatly to the development of the Colony. Dennis Walters has published a very creditable piece of research into the life and work of this unassuming man, covering both the personal and the technical aspects. He has incorporated numerous supplementary anecdotes, mini-biographies and explanatory asides which provide relevant and interesting background to the main topics. Nevertheless, a summarised historical geography of the Colony and its neighbourhood would have been a useful adjunct, to clarify some aspects of the story for readers who are unfamiliar with the region; for example it is difficult to appreciate the causes, the scale and the devastating consequences of river flooding to which the region is prone, and to understand the origins and disruptive effects of the Frontier and other wars during Newey's tenure.

This attractive book is lavishly illustrated with modern and historical colour and black-and-white photographs. Newey was an accomplished self-taught painter in watercolours and oils; a dozen of his charming portraits and landscapes bring a sense of intimacy to the narrative. The A4-landscape page format certainly enhances the presentation of the illustrations, but might prove to be an awkward size for some readers' book-shelves!

Dr David Greenfield