

'A View of the Iron Bridge'

Shane Kelleher
Museum Archaeologist
Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust

In 1979, Stuart Smith, then Deputy Director and Curator of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, published 'A View from the Iron Bridge', which was produced to accompany and coincide with an exhibition of the same name held at the Royal Academy, and, the bi-centenary of the construction, in 1779, of the 'first iron bridge in the world'. This book, which contains a panoply of artistic impressions of the landscape of an area, by artists drawn to the area by the bridge or the industrial wonders taking place there, that was seven years later to become the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, pictorially places the Iron Bridge firmly in its local historical context, and reveals the area now described as the 'Birthplace of Industry'.

Whilst 'A View from the Iron Bridge' did include a number of historical artistic depictions of the Iron Bridge, its primary focus was the surrounding landscape and industry. Conversely, this paper will concentrate on the fantastic portfolio of artistic interpretations and representations of the Iron Bridge itself and describe how these have helped and assisted us as archaeologists, historians, curators, and engineers understand how and why it was built and influence how we manage and care for one of the key symbols of the Industrial Revolution.

Theme: Poetics of the Bridge