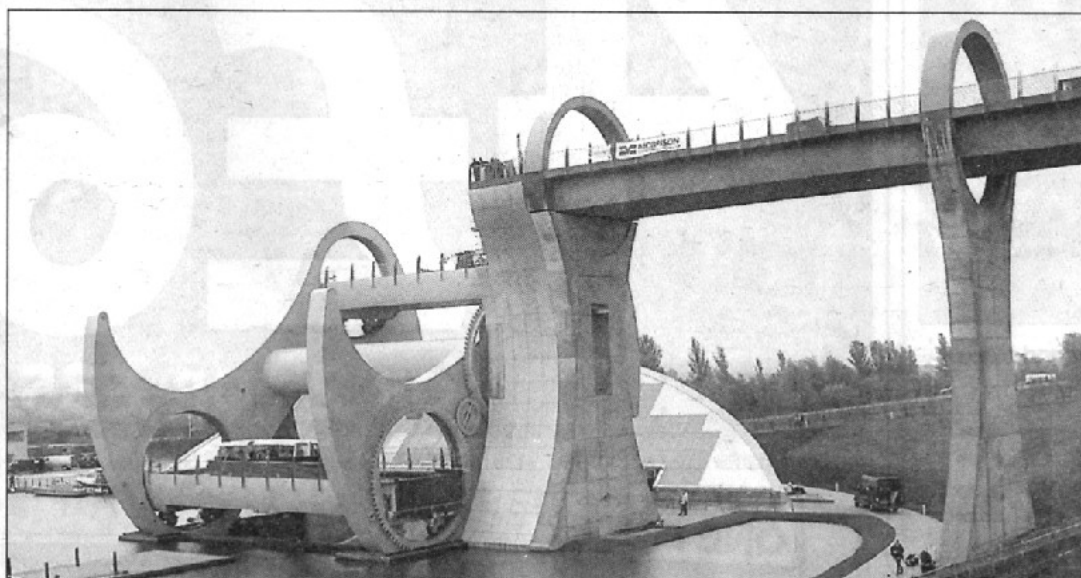


Firm gets a big lift with wheel award



Wheel of fortune: Nick Cooper receives the award for his company's work on the Falkirk Wheel from Zara Lamont

A ROTHERHAM firm's innovative design for a world first Millennium Project that has become a major Scottish tourist attraction has won recognition in the Structural Steel Design Awards - along with another project involving the firm.

Whiston-based Bennett Associates drew on past experience of work with tunnelling machinery and under sea oil extraction to come up

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with its revolutionary design for the world's first rotating boat lift, the visually stunning, award-winning Falkirk Wheel.

And, the company was responsible for the conceptual mechanical and electrical design for another award winner - the Gateshead Millennium Bridge.

The Falkirk Wheel allows canal barges to be lifted high into the air so that they can be transferred from one waterway to another and incorporates a novel gearing

system that keeps the water filled gondolas carrying the barges stable throughout the process.

Award judges were full of praise for Bennett's ingenuity, hailing the design as being "reminiscent of the engineering feats of the past" and highlighting the fact that its apparent simplicity hid complex engineering and fabrication that had been devised to allow the wheel to be built and operated safely.

Rewarding

Nick Cooper, managing director of the firm which was set up 16 years ago and employs 25 people, said: "It is very rewarding to have your efforts in such a project recognised in this way.

"Very few people who see the Wheel working will ever realise just what has been achieved and the problems that have been overcome by the engineers, designers and fabricators. What was so unusual about this whole project was that everyone involved was working in relatively unknown territory. It is the first ever rotating boat lift that has been designed and as such nobody had any prior experience of building such a machine.

"We had to come up with solutions for watertight lock gates and their associated controls as well as the mechanism that drives the whole wheel and also keeps the gondolas stable."