

The Contractors

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About the Book

Fully illustrated in colour, *The Contractors*, is the first history of the challenges and adventures faced by British civil engineering contractors from their emergence with canal construction in the late-eighteenth century to the present day. Extraordinarily ambitious, largely unrecognised men who built the world's infrastructure – its roads and railways, canals and bridges, docks and harbours, lighthouses and breakwaters, sea works and flood defences, water supply and irrigation, urban drainage and sewerage, gas works and power stations, and buildings of all shapes and sizes – these contractors took considerable risks, many failed in the process but others thrived and developed into some of the most powerful and influential industrialists of their day.

Including profiles of many of the key figures and organisations in the industry through the ages, *The Contractors* explains what the business is about and where it comes from, sharing with a wider audience the exploits of these adventurers, characterised by their inspiring leadership, sheer hard work, a strong constitution and perseverance in the face of adversity. Over time, the contractor has changed: from the great Victorian contractors, towering men whose business was their personal affair, through the twentieth century which has seen the rise of the corporate contractor, specialist contractors and the blurring of the distinction between consulting engineers and contractors, to the larger firms of recent years becoming larger through merger and acquisition but, as the examples in this book demonstrate, there is still room for the entrepreneur with vision, leadership and drive to become a highly successful contractor.

The Contractors is a compulsory read for all those working in the industry, including civil engineers, those interested in the industry and its impact on the world, and the wider public. Readers will experience the boom of the canal and railway eras, working at home and abroad, the difficulties and opportunities brought by wars, the equipment used and the specialists and sub-contractors of today, fully illustrated with unique material from ICE and the firms themselves.



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