

Iconic bridge officially named after Welsh war hero

The official ceremony, held on Monday 21 January, Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport Lee Waters unveiled the Jack Williams Gateway Bridge plaque in front of 12 members of Jack's family, including his granddaughter Ann Page.

Representing the Royal Welsh Regiment was Major (Retd) Derek Adams, who was joined by a serving officer and four soldiers.

Transport Minister Ken Skates and principal contractor Costain, who is delivering the A465 'Section 2' dualling scheme stretching 8km from Brynmawr in the west to Gilwern in the east, called on the community for nominations at the end of last year.

Three names were clear favourites:

1. Jack Williams Gateway Bridge
2. Clydach Gorge Gateway Bridge
3. The Bevin Boys Gateway Bridge

Voting on the shortlist, the local community decided to honour Victoria Cross recipient John Henry Williams, who lived in the community in which Costain has worked for the last three years.

Decorated four times for his bravery during the conflict that was to become known as The Great War, local man, John – who was better known as Jack – was born in Nantyglo in September 1886.

A Welsh colliery blacksmith, he enlisted in the 10th Battalion, South Wales Borderers (part of the 38th (Welsh) Division) in November 1914 and was promoted to company sergeant major on 2 October 1917.

In October 1918, he single-handedly saved his company and an entire village from almost certain destruction. For this selfless act of bravery, he was awarded the Victoria Cross. Previously he had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, French Médaille Militaire and the Military Medal and Bar.

The Victoria Cross is the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces. That, along with the other honours he received, makes Jack Williams the most decorated Welsh non-commissioned officer of all time.

Dominating the most westerly part of Clydach Gorge, the largest of the structures on the A465 'Section 2' project is a 118-metre span, thrust arch bridge, crossing from north to south, with the A465 split-level carriageway below. The new bridge also crosses the Gorge, which is considered one of south Wales' most important environmental and ecologically sensitive areas.

Senior Project Director, Costain, Bruce Richards said:

“We are extremely proud to have delivered this impressive structure for the residents and road users in the area. We are particularly pleased that Welsh Government and the public have chosen to name the bridge after local hero Jack Williams allowing his memory to live on in the communities for years to come.”

Jack’s granddaughter, Ann Page said:

“The family is immensely proud of Jack Williams VC and very grateful that the people of Blaenau Gwent share our pride and help to keep his memory alive by supporting memorial events. Naming this spectacular bridge after him will hopefully generate an interest for future generations to explore the reasons why and to understand why his courageous actions during WW1 should always be remembered along with the sacrifices made by so many young men and their families. Jack and all Victoria Cross winners have a special place in our history – as the bravest of the brave.”

Economy and Transport Deputy Minister, Lee Waters said:

“Jack Williams was a true hero and naming such an iconic bridge built in the area he lived after him is a fitting tribute to a man whose name should never be forgotten.

“This connection with Jack will create a lasting legacy for generations to enjoy. That we can do it in the same year Jack received his Victoria Cross from the King in Buckingham Palace – and marking almost exactly 100 years since Jack acted so bravely – is moving.”