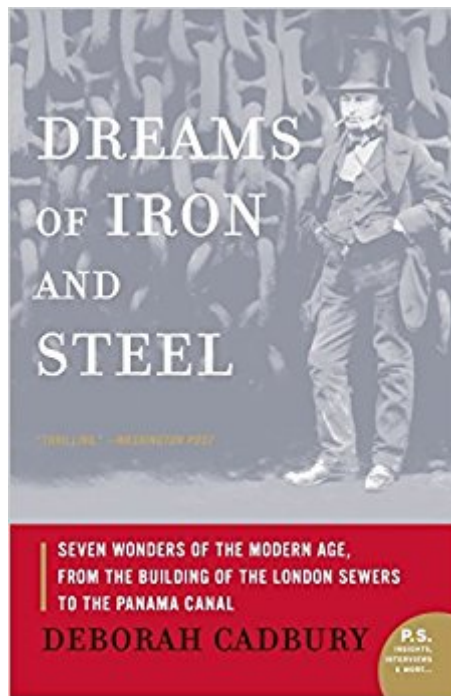


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# Dreams Of Iron And Steel: Seven Wonders Of The Modern Age, From The Building Of The London Sewers To The Panama Canal



## Synopsis

A world that had changed little from the Middle Ages was altered beyond recognition by the pioneering genius of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In *Dreams of Iron and Steel*, acclaimed historian Deborah Cadbury tells the heroic tale of the visionaries and ordinary workers who brought to life seven great wonders of the world that still have the power to awe and inspire us today. Fueled by Deborah Cadbury's characteristic scholarship and insight, this extraordinary chronicle re-creates the human odyssey of how our modern world was forged not only with rivets, grease, and steam but also with blood, sweat, and extreme imagination. This P.S. edition features an extra 16 pages of insights into the book, including author interviews, recommended reading, and more.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you haven't discovered Deborah Cadbury yet then she is one of the best and sharpest writers around. Her text is spare, her research impeccable, and her ability to draw out threads without resorting to tabloid sensationalism makes for satisfying reading. In this, her third book, Cadbury covers the seven wonders of the industrial world, putting the feats, their makers, and the events into context of the time and what they have meant in history. This is the GREAT industrial revolution. The 7 wonders are The Great Eastern (the largest boat of its time a double hulled steel boat by Brunel), The Bell Rock Lighthouse, the Brooklyn Bridge, The London Sewers, The Transcontinental Railroad, The Panama Canal and the Hoover Dam. What I love about Cadbury is that she has not only picked 7 extremely diverse items, (dams, lighthouses, sewers, railroads, bridges, canals, and boats) but she manages to put them into the context of the history of that particular engineering feat,

but also in context to the events of their own time. Her research takes her right into the building as well - for instance with the building of the Great Eastern she talks about the need for large numbers of young boys who were employed inside the boat, working in appalling hot and cramped conditions and juggling white hot rivets. There were dreadful accidents but a steady supply of labour meant that new workers were never a problem. The sheer volume of workers however never even made it into the day book though, they were never considered important enough. She relates this sheer volume of workers back to all these structures. They were all built through the enormous supply of labour available.

Since I retired four years ago I have had the time to read a LOT of books, at least a lot for me. One of my favorite books this summer was something a little out of my usual realm - the history of technology. Deborah Cadbury, in *Dreams of Iron and Steel*, provides a brief, readable and captivating synopsis of the construction of what she terms the "seven wonders of the modern age." Having seen, during my lifetime, the first space flight, the first moon walk, the development of a jet that can cross the Atlantic in four hours and the invention of the wonders of the internet, I can sometimes get jaded when viewing the technical accomplishments of the nineteenth century. However, this book stimulates the awe that is appropriate when considering engineering projects such as the Brooklyn Bridge, the Panama Canal, the Transcontinental (US) railroad, or the London sewer system. Take, for example, the construction of the Bell Rock Lighthouse. Located eleven miles offshore of Scotland, Bell Rock is a reef that is exposed for only 2 hours at each low tide (twice a day for you landlubbers). In 1807, Robert Stevenson won the commission to build a 100-foot-tall lighthouse that could withstand the 60' waves that regularly lashed the outcrop and sent 70 ships to the bottom of the sea in a single storm in 1799. Many of the ships went down because their captains refused to head into a safe port because of the dangers presented by Bell Rock. In four years, Stevenson completed the construction of the granite lighthouse without the benefit of power tools, dynamite or steam powered ships. Working during the summer season only at low tides, crews rowed to the island from a mother ship, put in their shift, and rowed away as the rising tide covered the reef.

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