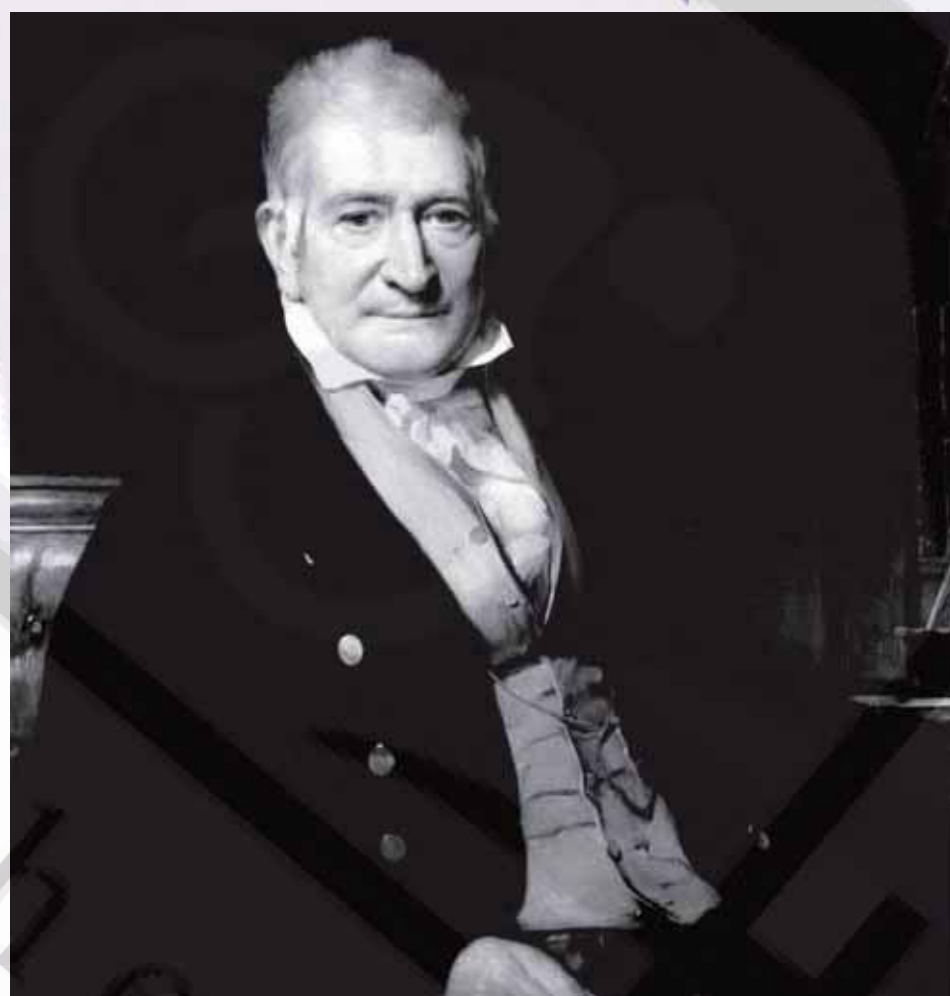




# “A most intelligent and enlightened man” “*Duine eanchainneil is comasach*”

*Pronounced: Doonya ennachenyal is komassach*



Thomas Telford, 1757-1834.  
“A most intelligent and enlightened man, his knowledge is general, his conversation very animated, his look full of intelligence and vivacity. He is eminently cheerful and the broad Scots accent that he retains rather becomes him.”  
Katherine Plymley, diarist and artist

The Caledonian Canal *Canal Cailleannach* beside you is just one of the many achievements of Thomas Telford.

Telford was a shepherd’s son from Dumfriesshire in the Scottish Borders. He began his working life as a stone mason at the age of 14 and learned architecture when working on the building of the New Town in Edinburgh *Dùn Èideann*. He later worked in London *Lunnainn* and Shropshire, gaining experience in town planning, bridge construction and canals.

By 1793 Telford was one of the leading civil engineers in Britain. In 1801 the British government asked him to look at improving the poor transport and communications in the Highlands *A' Ghàidhealtachd*. He recommended a canal to link the east and west coasts and provide an alternative for shipping which used the dangerous northerly route around Cape Wrath *Am Parbh*. He also drew up plans for a network of new roads, harbours and bridges.

The result was a huge programme of public building works across the north of Scotland which Telford planned and supervised.

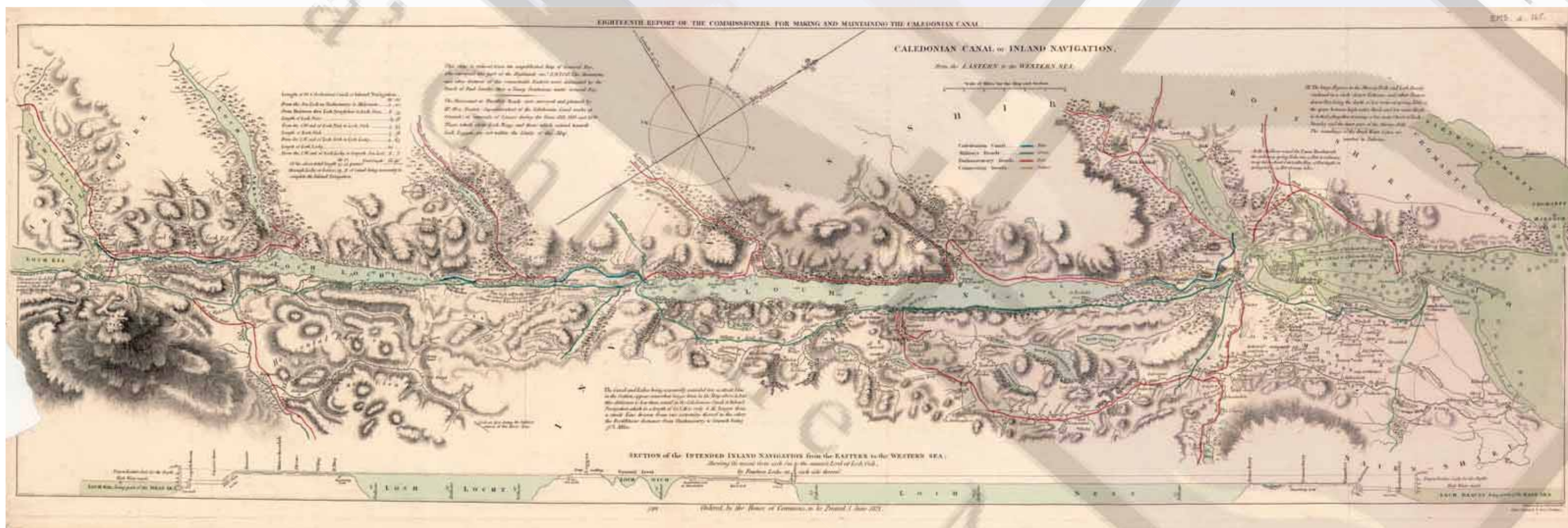
The Caledonian Canal, with its 34 kilometres (22 miles) of cuttings and 28 locks in difficult terrain, his greatest achievement, is still being admired and enjoyed today.

## Did you know ...?

Telford’s vision did not stop at the Caledonian Canal and roads networks. He also drew up designs for planned towns (such as Pulteneytown in Caithness) and “parliamentary” churches and manses (so-called because they were funded by the government).



Croick Church, near Ardgay (Sutherland) - one of 19 Telford churches and manses built in the Highlands.



Map of Caledonian Canal, 1821. Although regarded as a major achievement nowadays, there was substantial opposition to the canal in its early days - on the grounds of cost and practicality - not to mention 19th Century “not-in-my-back-yard” attitudes.