

Historical Highlight

Isometric Drawings

The Reverend William Farish generally is accepted as the person who systematized the use of isometric drawings. William Farish was born in 1759 in England and was a brilliant mathematician and professor of chemistry at Cambridge University. Farish refined what was known about isometric projection at that time. He used isometric projections to create pictorial drawings of mechanical devices to supplement his lectures at Cambridge (Figure 1). Although he called his drawings “isometrical perspectives,” they are in fact isometric drawings based on orthographic projection and not perspective. The term *perspective* often was used loosely to describe any type of drawing which was pictorial.

Figure 2 shows in great detail the use of ellipses in isometric drawings. Farish’s isometric drawings method languished for many years, hidden in the *Cambridge Philosophical Society Transactions* manuscript. Slowly the technique began to be used, especially in architectural drawings. Although Farish is acknowledged as the first person to systematically deal with isometric drawings, there is evidence of isometric drawings being used as early as the fifteenth century in both the Western and Arabic worlds.

Excerpted from *The History of Engineering Drawing*, by Jeffrey Booker, Chatto & Windus, London, England, 1963.