

INTERENGAGEABLE STRUCTURAL MEMBERS

This invention is concerned with novel structural members and a process for manufacturing same.

Co-pending International patent application
5 number PCT/AU89/00313 describes a method for formation of structural members wherein a single strip of metal is continuously roll-formed to provide a central web with a hollow flange extending along each longitudinal edge. Although the central web is usually planar it may be
10 contoured in a transverse direction. The hollow flanges may be formed in any suitable cross sectional shape such as circular, rectangular, triangular or the like and they may be of the same or different sizes.

In a further co-pending Australian patent
15 application number PK2531 there is described a substantial improvement in the method and structure of the structural members disclosed in earlier co-pending International patent application number PCT/AU89/00313. This further co-pending application describes the
20 formation of structural members comprising at least one web having at least one hollow flange extending along a longitudinal edge thereof.

The improvement described in the further co-pending application relates to the continuous fabrication
25 in roll forming machines of structural members formed from a multiplicity of separate metal strips. This improved process enables the manufacture of structural members having a web (or webs) and a hollow flange (or flanges) wherein the web and flange components may be
30 comprised of differing metal thicknesses and grades depending upon the requirement of the structural member. In addition, the improved process enables structural members to be formed in a wide variety of configurations.

The present invention relates to new and
35 improved structural members and novel uses therefor, the new and improved structural members being fabricated generally in accordance with the processes of the

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abovementioned co-pending applications. Accordingly, the disclosures of co-pending patent applications PCT/AU89/00313 and PK2531 are incorporated herein by way of cross reference.

5 According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided a structural member comprising:-

10 a first hollow flange and a second flange extending longitudinally of an intermediate web, said first flange including a slotted aperture extending longitudinally thereof in a direction parallel to a longitudinal axis of said first flange.

15 The second flange may comprise a solid element although preferably the second flange is hollow. If required said first and second flange may be hollow and both of said first and second flanges may include a slotted aperture extending longitudinally thereof.

20 Suitably said first flange is adapted to receivably locate within its interior a flange of an adjacent structural member comprising at least one web element and at least one flange element extending longitudinally of an edge of said web element, said web element extending through said slotted aperture when said at least one flange element is receivably located within
25 the interior of said first flange.

Suitably, the second flange has a cross sectional area less than the cross sectional area of the interior of the first hollow flange.

30 The first and second hollow flanges may have the same or different cross sectional shapes.

Preferably the cross sectional shapes of said first and second flanges are similar or identical.

35 Most preferably first flange may be adapted in use to receivably locate a second flange of an adjacent substantially identical structural member.

The intermediate web member may be substantially planar or alternatively it may be contoured



transversely of a longitudinal axis of said structural member.

5 If required, the web and the first and second flanges may comprise the same grade and thickness of metal or differing grades and thickness of metal.

Suitably the slotting aperture may be in the same plane as the intermediate web or in another plane inclined thereto.

10 The slotted aperture may be of a width such as to substantially restrain relative rotational motion about a longitudinal axis between said first flange and a flange receivably located therein or alternatively the width of said slotted aperture may be such as to permit at least limited rotational motion between said first
15 flange and a flange receivably located therein.

According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a composite structure comprising:-

two or more structural members having an intermediate flange and a spaced parallel side flanges,
20 at least one of said side flanges comprising a hollow flange having a slotted aperture extending longitudinally thereof, said hollow flange receivably locating a side flange of an adjacent structural member.

Suitably at least one of said structural
25 members includes a slotted hollow side flange adopted to receive two or more side flanges of adjacent structural members.

The composite structure may comprise a plurality of structural members each interconnecting with
30 an adjacent structural member to form a substantially planar or non planar open composite structure.

Alternatively the composite structure may comprise a plurality of structural members each interconnecting with one or more adjacent structural
35 members to form a single closed composite structure or a composite structure comprising open and closed portions.

The composite structure may comprise a rigid



structure wherein relative movement between adjacent structural members is restrained by limiting relative rotation between a hollow flange having a slotted aperture and a flange of an adjacent structural member receiveably located therein.

Alternatively the composite structure may comprise a flexible structure wherein at least limited rotational movement between adjacent structural members is permitted.

According to yet another aspect of the invention there is provided a method of manufacture for a structural member comprising the steps of:-

fabricating a structural member having an intermediate web and side flanges extending longitudinally of said web, at least one of said side flanges comprising a hollow aperture extending longitudinally thereof, and;

forming a slotted aperture longitudinally of a wall of said at least one side flange.

The structural member may be formed by any suitably fabrication process but preferably is formed in a roll forming operation from a single strip of metal or from a plurality of strips of metal.

The slotted aperture may be formed by any suitable process of metal removal. For example the metal in the region of the slotted aperture may be removed by abrasion with a grinding wheel or a strip of metal may be removed by cutting wheels, shears or the like. Alternatively a strip of metal may be removed by a gas plasma metal cutting apparatus or a laser cutting apparatus.

The slotted aperture may also be formed by a roll forming process wherein the hollow flange is formed from a strip of metal leaving the free edges of the strip separated. Alternatively the slotted aperture may be formed by a roll forming process wherein a hollow tubular member is initially formed followed by an inward



deformation of the tubular member to form a double walled hollow flange with a slotted aperture extending longitudinally thereof.

5 In order that the various aspects of the invention may be more fully understood, preferred embodiments will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings in which Fig 1 shows schematically the development of cross sectional shape in a roll formed structural member formed from a single strip of metal.

10 Figs 2-4 show typical work station roller profiles to develop the cross sectional shapes illustrated in Fig 1.

15 Fig 5 shows schematically the welding of the free edges of the hollow flanges of the section illustrated in Figs 1-4.

Fig 6 shows schematically cross sections during the roll forming of a hollow flanged structural member fabricated from separate strips of metal.

20 Fig 7 shows schematically a roll forming apparatus to produce the roll formed section of Fig 6.

Figs 8-15 show schematically typical profiling stations in the roll forming apparatus of Fig 7.

Figs 16-18 show alternative forms of attachment of hollow flanges to web sections.

25 Figs 19-23 illustrate a non-exhaustive array of alternative cross sectional profiles of structural members.

Fig 24 shows schematically a composite beam structure.

30 Fig 25 shows a cross sectional profile of a structural member according to the present invention.

Fig 26 shows a further cross sectional profile of a structural member according to the present invention.

35 Fig 27 shows another cross sectional profile according to the invention.

Fig 28 shows yet another cross sectional



profile.

Figs 29 and 30 show enlarged cross sectional views of interengaging hollow flanges.

Fig 31 shows a non-exhaustive array of composite structures according to the invention.

Figs 32 and 33 show schematically alternative methods for forming hollow flanged structural members.

Fig 34 shows a composite structure according to yet a further aspect of the invention.

Fig 35 shows schematically a further method for forming a structural member with one or more slotted hollow flanges.

Fig 1 shows schematically a typical development of a cross sectional profile from a single strip of metal according to the process described in co-pending application number PCT/AU88/00313.

As shown in greater detail in Figs 2-4 a planar strip of metal is progressively deformed to produce a cross sectionally arcuate intermediate web 1 with hollow flanges 2 having a generally circular cross-section extending longitudinally of web 1. Although deforming and shaping roller sets 3, 4 and 5 as shown co-operate to produce hollow flanges 2 of identical cross-sectional diameter, it will be clear to a skilled addressee that with appropriate modification, roller sets 3, 4 and 5 may be adapted to produce hollow flanges 2 of differing cross sectional diameters and/or shape.

Fig 5 shows schematically the continuous welding of the free edges of hollow flanges 2 to the central web 1 to form a structural member having immense structural integrity and fluid tight hollow flanges 2.

Welding of the free edges of flanges 2 is suitably effected by a high frequency electrical induction or resistance welding apparatus shown generally at 7. After welding, the central web 2 may be reshaped by further deforming or shaping rollers (not shown) to produce a web 2 having a planar or profiled cross



sectional shape.

Fig 6 shows schematically the development of a structural member from separate strips of metal according to a process and apparatus described in co-pending Australian patent application number PK2531.

At stage 1, metal strips representing web strip 10 and flange strips 11, 12 are fed into a tandem station roll forming apparatus or alternatively flange strips 11, 12 are passed through separate roll forming mills while web strip 10 passes therebetween.

Strips 11, 12 are progressively deformed to produce hollow side flanges 13, 14 having elongate slotted apertures 13a, 14a respectively as shown at stage 4. The hollow flanges 13, 14 are guided towards web strip 10 until the free edges of web strip 10 are located within slotted apertures 13a, 14a. The free edges of flanges 13, 14 are then urged into contact with web strip 10 as shown at stage 5 by opposing rollers in the region of a welding station wherein the free edges of flanges 13, 14 are welded to web strip 10 to form an integral structure.

Flanges 13, 14 may then be shaped to any desired shape as illustrated at stages 6-8 by shaping rollers located downstream of the welding station.

Fig 7 shows schematically an apparatus used to produce the structural member of Fig 1.

In Fig 7 the apparatus comprises separate let-off stations 30, 31, 32 each supporting separate coiled rolls 33, 34, 35 of sheet steel, each of the same or different thickness and width if required. Strips 36 and 38 issuing from rolls 33, 35 respectively are directed to roll forming mills 39, 40 to form hollow members 41, 42 respectively of predetermined shape and cross sectional area. As illustrated at stage 4 in Fig 6, the respective pairs of free edges are slightly separated to form continuous slots which face a respective edge of central strip or web 37.



In the region of welding station 43 the free edges of web 37 are guided by rollers 44 into the respective slots in adjacent hollow members 41, 42 to a respective distance equal to the respective wall thicknesses of members 41, 42. Nip rollers 45 compress members 41, 42 to urge their respective free edges into contact with upper and lower surfaces of web 37 immediately prior to welding by high frequency electrical induction or resistance welding units 46. Rollers 47, 48, 49 and 50 initially support web 37 and subsequently the integral structure 51.

The structure 51 is then severed into predetermined lengths by a flying saw (not shown) or the like.

Suitably roll forming mills 39, 40 are laterally movable to accommodate differing widths of web 37.

Figs 8-15 show schematically typical rolling stations which may be employed in rolling mills 39, 40 in Fig 7 to produce the hollow flange members 13, 14 shown at stage 4 in Fig 6.

A number of significant variations may be made to the method and apparatus of the invention to achieve a wide variety of structural members.

Fig 16 shows, for example, that the system of Fig 7 may be adapted such that in the process of welding the lips 60 of a slotted tubular member to the opposing surfaces of a web member 63, a free edge 61 of the web member may be guided fully into either or both of the tubular members 62 until it engages the inner wall of the tubular member. If required the free edge of the web 63 may be additionally welded to the interior of the tubular member 62 by high frequency induction welding to form a hollow flange divided into separate fluid tight compartments.

Fig 17 shows an alternative configuration wherein lips 60 are welded to opposing faces of web 63



adjacent its edges.

Fig 18 shows yet another configuration wherein a free edge 64 of web 63 is welded to the outer surface of a hollow flange 65 having a slotted aperture 66 extending longitudinally thereof diametrically opposite the attachment point of web 63. Slotted aperture 66 is formed by leaving the free edges 65a of flange 65 separated and maintaining the separation at a predetermined spacing during the shaping process by projections 67 on outer rolls 68.

In other variations the central web may include pre or post formed apertures or it may include a longitudinally or transversely extending profiled shape in the form of deep or shallow channels, ribs or the like. In the case of transversely extending contoured profiles, the inwardly facing regions of opposed hollow flanges include planar faces arranged perpendicularly to the edges of the web to facilitate welding of the components of the structural member.

Figs 19-23 and 24 show a non-exhaustive array of flange shapes and composite structures according to the invention disclosed in co-pending Australian application number PK2531.

Fig 24 in particular shows a composite structure formed in accordance with the inventions disclosed in both co-pending Australian applications PCT/AU88/00313 and number PK2531. In this structure the lower portion comprising flanges 70, 71 and web 72 is formed from a single strip of metal in accordance with co-pending application PCT/AU88/00313 to which is subsequently added web 73 and hollow flange 74 (formed from separate strips of metal) in accordance with the invention described in co-pending Australian application number PK2531.

Reference to Figs 1-24 and the disclosures of co-pending Patent applications PCT/AU88/00313 and number PK2531 is for the purpose of a clearer understanding of



the present invention and it should be understood that the disclosures of these co-pending applications are incorporated herein by way of cross reference and the configurations, shapes and fabrication processes of structural members are applicable to adaptation in accordance with the present invention.

Fig 25 shows a cross-sectional configuration of a structural member 80 formed in accordance with the present invention. The structural member 80 comprises a web 81 having an arcuate stiffening rib 82 formed therein. A hollow flange 83 has its free edge 84 welded to web 81 to form a fluid impervious conduit.

A second hollow flange 85 is formed on the opposite side of web 81 and the free edge 86 of flange 85 is also welded to web 81. A slotted aperture 87 is formed in the wall of flange 85 in the same plane as web 21.

The outer diameter of flange 83 is slightly smaller than the inner diameter of flange 85 whereby adjacent structural members 80 may be interconnected to form a composite structure by lengthwise slidably engaging small flange 83 of one structural member within a large flange 85 of another structural member.

The structural member 80 may be formed from one or more strips of metal as generally described above and the slotted aperture is formed after the free edge 86 of flange 85 is welded to web 81. The slotted aperture is formed continuously by a gas plasma or laser cutting apparatus and the strip of metal removed is discarded as scrap.

Fig 26 shows an alternative configuration of a structural member 90 wherein web 91 is formed as a channel-like section. Flange 92 is of a smaller diameter than flange 93 whereby after slotting flange 93, flange 92 may be slidably located therein.

Fig 27 shows a similar configuration to Fig 26 except that a much thicker strip of metal is employed to



fabricate the structural member 90.

Fig 28 shows yet another embodiment of a structural member 97 comprising a channel shaped web 95 and a pair of hollow flanges 96 of equal diameter having large slotted apertures 98, 99, the purpose of which will be described with reference to Figs 29 and 30.

Fig 29 is an enlarged cross sectional view of a small flange 92 of the structural member 90 shown in Fig 27 engaged in a slotted aperture 100 of flange 93 of an adjacent structural member 90. Slotted aperture 100 is of a width greater than the thickness of web 91 to allow it limited pivotal movement between flanges 92 and 93.

Fig 30 shows an enlarged cross sectional view of the interengaging flanges 92 and 93 of Fig 29 engaged within a slotted flange 96 of structural member 97 shown in Fig 28. Relative pivotal movement between flanges 92, 93 and 96 is permitted to at least a limited degree.

Fig 31 illustrates composite structures permissible with the structural members illustrated generally in Figs 27, 28 and 29.

Figs 31a, 31b and 31c show cross sections of hollow columnar structures which may be utilized as structural columns, free standing poles or box beams. These structures may be hollow or filled with reinforced concrete (with or without pre-stressing steel reinforcing bars) or other reinforcing material such as carbon, synthetic or glass fibres in a resin matrix. If required, the columnar structures may also include post-stressed tendons.

Fig 31d shows a composite structure comprising interconnected structural members shown generally in Figs 26 and 27. This composite structure may be utilized in an upright manner as a structural barrier such as a wall for a building, marine piling, shuttering for earthworks or the like.

In a horizontal configuration, the interconnected structural members may form a reinforced



support for concrete slab floors, mine wall and roof reinforcing barriers or even as horizontal walling on a structural frame.

5 Fig 31e shows yet another structural configuration comprising a combination of structural members illustrated in Figs 26, 27 and 28 wherein the structural members of Fig 28 form spaced columns or box beams 101 to provide additional upright or transverse reinforcing to a barrier-like structure.

10 A structural member 102 interconnected to a junction 103 of adjacent interconnecting structural members 104 and arranged perpendicularly thereto may form an alternative form of structural support or reinforcing to a composite structure according to the
15 invention.

Fig 32 shows an alternative method of fabricating structural elements according to the invention.

The structural member 110 is fabricated by
20 continuously forge welding flange strips 111, 112 to a web 113. Forge welding is a well known process for fabricating I- and T- beams and is generally described in US Patent No 3,713,205.

25 Downstream of the forge welding station is a roll forming mill which deforms flange strips 111, 112 away from web 113 to form hollow flanges 114, 115. Hollow flange 114 is formed as a closed integral member by fusing together the free edges of flange strip 111 by high frequency electrical induction or resistance
30 welding. Hollow flange 115 may be formed in a similar manner by fusing together the free ends of flange strip 112 and then subsequently forming slotted aperture 116 by removing a strip of metal by, say, a gas plasma or laser metal cutting apparatus.

35 Alternatively, slotted aperture 116 may be formed by roll forming flange strip 112 such that its free edges are spaced to form aperture 116.



Fig 33 shows a variation of the process described in Fig 32.

5 In this variation flange strip 111 is deformed towards web 113 and the free ends of flange strip 111 are fused to the sides of web 113 to form a hollow flange 114 which is internally reinforced by the edge portion of web 113.

10 The free ends of flange strip 111 are fused to web 113 by high frequency electrical induction or resistance welding.

15 Fig 34 shows a composite structure comprising a plurality of structural members 120 each comprising a web 121 with a closed hollow flange 122 extending along one side of web 121 and a larger hollow flange 123 extending along the opposite side of web 121.

20 Hollow flange 123 includes a slotted aperture 124 extending longitudinally thereof and parallel to the plane of web 121. The internal diameter of flange 123 is chosen to accommodate an opposite smaller hollow flange of an adjacent structural member.

25 The composite structure so formed provides a sheet-like structure reinforced by hollow flanges 122 and 123. The width of slotted aperture 124 may be chosen to permit a relatively rigid composite structure or at least limited co-axial relative rotation between engaging flanges 123, 124 to permit an arcuate or contoured structure rather than the planar structure illustrated.

30 Such a composite structure may be employed as a structural support/lining for tunnels, bridge construction etc. In thin gauge metal, such a structure may be employed as roofing or wall cladding. In heavier gauges, the structure may be employed as piling or shuttering in earthworks.

35 In Fig 35 a structural member 130 having a hollow flange 131 may be formed from a single metal strip by a process described in co-pending application no PCT/AU90/00313 or from a plurality of metal strips by a



process described in co-pending patent application number PK2531.

5 The hollow flange 131 is then deformed in a continuous roll forming operation to flatten the flange to form a double walled planar flange 132 extending longitudinally of an edge of web 133.

10 Planar flange 132 is subsequently deformed by roll forming to produce a generally hollow double walled flange 134 with a longitudinal slot 135 extending therealong. While hollow slotted flange 133 is shown as generally circular in cross section it should be appreciated that the cross-sectional shape may be roll formed to any suitable cross section.

15 This variation of the process according to the invention may be employed to provide a reinforced hollow flange where the use of a thicker flange strip may not be possible or otherwise where the use of a thin flange strip is advisable for economic or process efficiency reasons.

20 It will be readily apparent to a skilled addressee that many modifications or variations may be made in the products and processes according to the invention without departing from the spirit and scope thereof.

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CLAIMS

1. A structural member comprising:-
a first hollow flange and a second flange each extending longitudinally of an intermediate web, said first flange including a slotted aperture extending longitudinally of said first flange in a direction parallel to a longitudinal axis of said first flange.
2. A structural member is claimed in claim 1 wherein said second flange is hollow.
3. A structural member as claimed in claim 2 wherein said second flange includes a slotted aperture extending longitudinally thereof.
4. A structural member as claimed in any preceding claim wherein said first flange is adapted to receivably locate within its interior a flange of an adjacent structural member comprising at least one web element and at least one flange element extending longitudinally of an edge of said web element, said web element extending through said slotted aperture when said at least one flange element is receivably located within the interior of said first flange.
5. A structural member as claimed in claim 4 wherein said slotted aperture is of a width such as to substantially restrain relative rotational motion about the respective longitudinal axes of said first flange and a flange receivably located therein.
6. A structural member as claimed in claim 4 wherein said slotted aperture is of a width such as to permit at least limited relative rotational motion about the respective longitudinal axes of said first flange and a flange receivably located therein.
7. A composite structure comprising:-
at least one structural member according to any preceding claim; and,
a further structural member having an intermediate web and spaced parallel side flanges extending longitudinally of said intermediate web, said





further structural member being interconnected to said at least one structural member by a side flange located within the hollow interior of said first flange.

8. A composite structure as claimed in claim 7 wherein at least one of said at least one structural member and said further structural member includes a slotted hollow side flange adapted to receive two or more rested side flanges of adjacent structural members.

9. A composite structure as claimed in claim 7 or 8 wherein a plurality of structural members are interconnected to form a substantially planar or non-planar open composite structure.

10. A composite structure according to claim 7 or claim 8 wherein a plurality of structural members are interconnected to form a single hollow closed composite structure.

11. A composite structure according to claim 7 or claim 8 wherein a plurality of structural members are interconnected to form a composite structure comprising open and closed portions.

12. A method for manufacturing structural members according to any one of claims 1 to 6, said method comprising the steps of:-

fabricating a structural member having an intermediate web and side flanges extending longitudinally of said web, at least one of said side flanges comprising a hollow member with a hollow aperture extending longitudinally thereof; and,

forming a slotted aperture longitudinally of a wall of said hollow member.

13. A method according to claim 12 wherein said structural member is fabricated from one or more strips of metal in a continuous cold roll forming operation.

14. A method according to claim 13 wherein said slotted aperture is formed removal of metal from said wall of said hollow member.

15. A method according to claim 13 wherein said



slotted aperture is formed from a strip of metal leaving the free edges of the strip separated.

16. A method according to claim 13 wherein the slotted aperture is formed by initially forming a hollow tubular member which hollow tubular member is subsequently deformed by an inward deformation to form a double walled hollow flange with a slotted aperture extending longitudinally thereof.

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