

A View from the Bridge

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge

December 2017

Hurrah!

*“Now England and Scotland are connected together;
We visit each other whenever we please:
In summer and winter, and all kinds of weather,
We’ll pass the Chain Bridge with safety and ease”*

An extract from a long poem written by William Molle, one of the principal promoters of the Union Chain Bridge, and recited by him at a Salmon Kettle given by Capt Brown “in a tent pitched near the spot” in August 1819 to mark the laying of the Foundation



Stone.*, taken from **Gordon Miller and Stephen K Jones’ newly-released book on Samuel Brown and Union Chain Bridge**, published

by, and available from, The Friends. 300pp 138 illustrations inc 3 full colour plates; £17.50 (special Friends price to 31st December 2017: £15) *but *plus ça change* ...The *Berwick Advertiser* of the 7th August 1819 reported that “on Friday night the bottle containing the coins now current, and which had been cemented into the foundation stone of the Union Bridge, was taken away with its contents. The robbers have not yet been detected.” Nor were they ever.

Picture: Alexander Nasmyth: Union Bridge courtesy Paxton Trust

.....and Hooray!

The long-awaited bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to safeguard the future of the Bridge was submitted on the 1st December. Pupils from Norham St Ceolwulf’s First School and Swinton Primary were joined by Robbie Hunter, Chairman of the Friends, and Councillors from both sides of the border on December 4th, to mark this historic occasion. It is hoped that a HLF grant will deliver numerous cultural, heritage and community benefits as well as securing the primary objective of the



local communities – the repair and restoration of a cherished and invaluable local amenity.

Cllr **Gordon Edgar**, Scottish Borders Council’s Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure, said: “This is a significant moment for the Union Chain Bridge and the campaign to safeguard its future and provide various benefits to the community. The importance of the bridge is highlighted by the various letters of support the HLF bid has received from across



Celebrating the HLF bid submission – pupils from Norham and Swinton schools with representatives of Northumberland County and Scottish Borders Councils and the Friends

the world, including Canada, Japan and Norway. Both Scottish Borders and Northumberland County councils are fully committed to this project, and have each pledged £1million to the overall costs.”

Cllr **Glen Sanderson**, Northumberland County Council’s Cabinet Member for the Environment and Local Services, said: “We’re delighted to have reached this major milestone in this project. So much work has gone on behind the scenes on both sides of the border and I appreciate everything that’s been done so far to allow us to submit a strong bid”.

Robbie Hunter, Friends’ Chairman added: “I have been very impressed by the level of support we have received from the local community but also internationally, particularly from bridge engineers. It would be a tragedy if we cannot start the restoration of the bridge in time for its bicentenary in 2020.”

The HLF bid focusses on conserving and raising awareness of the internationally significant bridge and its nearby attractions, providing sustainable learning opportunities for young people inspired by the bridge’s innovative engineering and developing meaningful cross-border heritage projects and partnerships. If the project passes the HLF first round (the decision is due in March 2018), it will move into a one-year development phase to progress the scheme further, ahead of a second round submission in March 2019.

Online and onsite surveys

In the last Newsletter, we asked Friends to complete and return to the HLF consultants an online survey about the Bridge and its importance to the local communities. The consultants received 107 replies from Friends and 645 from a general survey, both very encouraging responses, demonstrating the strength of support for the project in both communities and further

afield. In addition to the online surveys, on-site traffic and visitor surveys were conducted in September, helping to build up a useful picture of both regular “commuter” use and visitor interest. The daily traffic count during the weekend 9th and 10th September produced the following results between 10am and 5pm

Sat 9th

Vehicles 126: Pedestrians: 82 Cyclists:21

Sun 10th

Vehicles 95 Pedestrians 90 Cyclists 35

And, interestingly, in a separate survey on Saturday September 16th, of 65 vehicles crossing the Bridge between 10am and 1pm, no fewer than 16 needed to reverse to allow oncoming traffic priority in crossing the Bridge; the requirement for such regular manoeuvres has traffic management, road safety and environmental implications.

Visitors from Japan

The Friends of the Union Chain Bridge hosted a visit by two prominent Japanese bridge engineers on the 12th October. Professor Hiroshi Isohata, a civil engineer now Professor of Civil Engineering at Nihon University, Tokyo and Dr Kitagawa, a research consultant, formerly of the Agency of Culture of the Japanese government, were in the UK on a study tour and met Friends' trustees and patrons for a briefing on the progress of the restoration project. Both had previously visited the Bridge and Professor Isohata, who published an article on the Bridge's plight in the Japanese *Bridge and Foundation Magazine* in



Dr Kitagawa, Gordon Miller, Prof Isohata, Robbie Hunter and Friends' Patron Prof Roland Paxton of Heriot-Watt University

2015, is instrumental in promoting a project to recognise the Bridge internationally on its bicentenary in 2020. Friends' patron, Gordon Miller, briefed the visitors on previous restoration works and on a controversial proposal to remove the wire supporting ropes added in 1902, as part of the forthcoming restoration.

Earlier in the week, the Friends' chairman, Robert Hunter, had met Rachael Hamilton MSP, and shadow cabinet secretary for culture and tourism at Holyrood, who confirmed her support for the project

“A souvenir from the Union Bridge”

In the second part of the nineteenth century, small ochre-coloured wooden boxes and other items appeared for sale in holiday resorts, decorated with scenes of the resort, rather like the pottery jugs and cruet sets so popular in the 50s and 60s. These are *Mauchline ware*, made by W & A Smith of Mauchline

in Ayrshire, much favoured as holiday souvenirs by Victorians. At its peak some 400 people were employed in that small town, producing these souvenirs and they are now much sought-after. Chris Baglee, of Spence and Dower, the conservation architect on the Bridge Project Team, is collecting Union Bridge memorabilia

and has acquired two rare examples of Mauchline Ware decorated with Bridge scenes. The first is a sewing egg, the second, a treen money box with a good image of

the old inn in the foreground. Thanks to Chris Baglee for permission to use the images.



What, where, when, why? Friends will recall that, in the last Newsletter, we identified this strange



object, just off the verge a few yards from the Bridge on the Scottish side, as a Browning machine gun base. Stephen K Jones, co-author of our book on the Bridge, begs to differ. It is, he says, a Blacker

Bombard spigot mortar base similar to one that covered Ely Bridge outside Cardiff. It was the heaviest weapon issued to the Home Guard, capable of firing a 20lb projectile like a rugby ball with fins.

The Friends of the Union Chain Bridge

Registered as a Charity in England and Wales (No 1162687) and Scotland (No SCO46208) and a Charitable Incorporated Organisation constituted under the Charities Act 2011. Our **Trustees** are Robert Hunter (Chairman) Martha Andrews Robert Bulling (Hon Treasurer) Edward Cawthorn (Hon Secretary) Tommy Cockburn Georgina Home Robertson John Home Robertson Alex McGregor and David Osman; **Membership Sec:** Helen Newlands. Our **Patrons** are Gordon Miller, Prof Roland Paxton and Brian Whittle. Our **corporate sponsors** are Chain Bridge Honey Farm - Cheviot Trees - J G Greenwood & Co - Hutton Stone - Paxton South Mains Farm - R C Reed and Simpsons Malt We are mutually affiliated with **sustrans** **Contact us** at unionbridgefriends@gmail.com or 01289 382541 We are on facebook instagram and twitter and our website is www.unionbridgefriends.com