

A View from the Bridge

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge
September 2018

A Diary Date

Friends' AGM

11th October 2018

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge will be held in the Horncliffe Memorial Hall on **Thursday October 11th 2018 at 7pm.** Apart from the formal business of this, our fifth annual meeting, we are very pleased to have three short talks about the Bridge. The first two, at 7pm, will be by **Chris Baglee** of Spence and Dower, the conservation architects retained in connection with the Heritage Lottery bid and **Jane Miller** of Museums Northumberland. Chris will talk about the processes that the conservation architects manage, in order to secure statutory approvals and then supervise the work on site, through to completion; including all of the investigation surveys that will be happening during the present closure period. He will bring along his archival material for Friends to inspect. Jane will also discuss heritage activities and the opportunities for Friends to become involved. At the close of the Meeting, **Stephen K Jones**, who has studied the Bridge for over 40 years and contributed a fascinating chapter on the Brown Lenox chainworks to *Samuel Brown and Union Chain Bridge* will speak about Brown's association with the company and its role in the supply of ironwork for the Bridge construction.

We hope that as many Friends as possible will be able to attend this important meeting in the run-up to the second part of the Heritage Lottery bid.

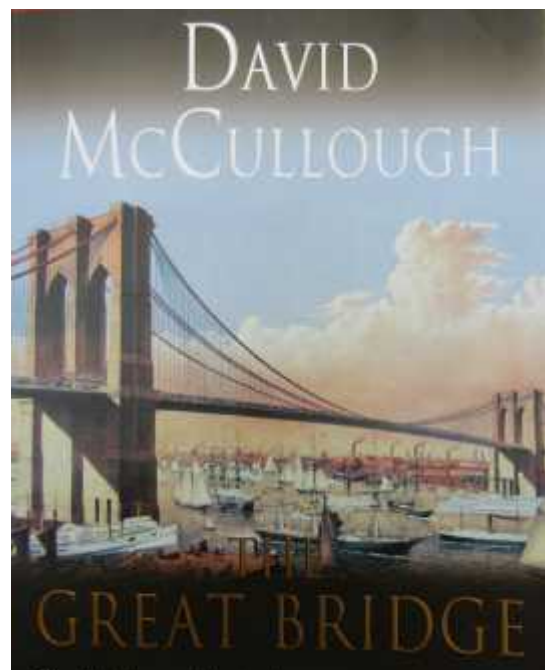
The AGM Agenda accompanies this Newsletter and the Annual Report and Accounts can be found on the Home Page of our website www.unionbridgefriends.com

Trustee Nominations

Subscribing Friends of the Bridge who would like to become a Trustee, promoting the interests of the Bridge in accordance with the Trust Deed, are invited

to stand for election at the Annual Meeting. Nomination forms, which include a brief summary of the objectives of the Trust and of the duties and commitments of Trustees, are available on request from the Honorary Secretary on 01289 382541 or by e-mail at info@unionbridgefriends.com.

The Great Calumny!



The American author, David McCullough, has twice received the Pulitzer Prize for literature and his 1972 work on the "epic story of the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge", **The Great Bridge***, running to 636 pages, is without doubt a "definitive book on the event" (*Newsday*) but in seeking to extol the achievements of John A Roebling, the bridge's builder, he commits a slur on the genius of Samuel Brown, which undermines the integrity of the book. Explaining a distrust of suspension bridges in the latter half of the nineteenth century, McCullough writes that "so many of them had come crashing down over the years, often with tragic consequences." He cites the collapse of a suspension bridge in England under the feet of marching troops and attributes the bridge to Brown "whose suspension bridges came down about as fast as he put them up, one

after another – at Berwick, Brighton, Montrose and Durham.”

That three-line denunciation is all we hear of Brown from McCulloch but the slight is exacerbated a little later when he credits “the brilliant Scottish engineer Thomas Telford” with the completion of “the world’s first great suspension bridge” nine years later, in 1825, in Wales – the Menai Bridge which was, he says, the proptotype of all the great suspension Bridges to come. Apart from the reference to the bridge at Berwick, there is no mention of the Union Bridge in the entire work.

We can only assume that, in telling us that Brown’s Berwick bridge fell down almost as soon as he put it up, McCulloch fell into the trap of confusing the Smith Brothers’ Dryburgh wire suspension bridge of 1817 (which did indeed fall down quickly) with the much more robust iron chain bridge further down the river, about to celebrate its bicentenary! He is not the only one to be misled or confused by this; and in telling us that the bridge that fell under the boots of marching troops was the work of Brown, he overlooks the persuasive argument that that bridge – at Broughton near Manchester, over the River Irwell – was more likely to have been the work of Thomas Cheek Hewe, a local millwright. That is Gordon Miller’s view and it is repeated in a *Wikipedia* article. The collapse was caused by the failure of a bolt in one of the stay chains, which, according to a report in the *Philosophical Magazine (1831)* had been badly forged. “With Brown’s reputation for high quality iron and forging”, says Gordon Miller, “it seems unlikely that his firm manufactured the components.” (*Samuel Brown and Union Chain Bridge* p101).

Let Hans Seland, retired Norwegian Bridge engineer, a student of Brown’s bridges, and a Friend, have the final word: “Roebing was a second generation builder of suspension bridges. He could not have achieved what he did without the daredevil attempts into “uncharted terrain” that the pioneers achieved.”

*The Great Bridge by David McCulloch 1972 is published by Simon & Schuster.

...The Surveys Continue

The Bridge has been closed to vehicular traffic from 11th September for four weeks (as part of a number of closures during the autumn) to allow a series of surveys in preparation for the HLF Stage 2 bid, which is due to be lodged in March 2019. Some minor repairs to the highway at both entrances to the Bridge are also being undertaken and surveyors will be continuing their inspection of the Scottish tower, suspended during the May closure because of the presence of nesting birds. For the approval of English Heritage, they

will be erecting small example sections of safety fencing required to comply with health and safety regulations.



Surveyors check the masonry on the English tower during the current Bridge closure; 21st September

Heritage Open Days – 8+9 Sept

The Friends again participated in the English Heritage Open Days event on the 8th and 9th September. Our information desk on the site of the old Toll Cottage attracted 104 visitors over the two days; and for statistic collectors, 300 people in total visited the Bridge and 220 cars crossed it during the 5-hr periods each day (10am-3pm) when the desk was staffed. Visitors to the desk came from all parts of the UK and beyond; including an American cyclist whose arrival at the Bridge marked the end of a journey begun in Gibraltar in early June and a gentleman from Sheffield making his first visit to the spot where his father, a steelworker, used to fish with his friends almost every weekend some 60 years ago.

Riverside footpath from Paxton

One of the most popular visitor approaches to the Bridge on foot is the attractive riverside footpath from Paxton House. Unfortunately, a combination of an uneven surface – in parts dangerously close to the Tweed – and water run-off from the adjoining field, make it a difficult and often muddy experience. Following discussions with Scottish Borders footpaths office, our Hutton and Paxton Community Council trustee, Alex McGregor, has arranged for the affected parts of the path to be upgraded with duckboard walkways which will improve walking conditions. The Trust is contributing towards the cost of materials.

We look forward to seeing Friends on the 11th October!