

# A View from the Bridge

for the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge  
September 2019



## CELEBRATION ISSUE!

### Celebrating £3.14m National Lottery funding to help secure the Bridge's future



Photo: Northumberland CC LtoR: Jane Miller (Museums Northumberland); Ivor Crowther (National Lottery Heritage Fund) Cllr Glen Sanderson (NCC); Ann-Marie Trevelyan MP; Robbie Hunter (Friends); Cllr Gordon Edgar (SBC); Edward Cawthorn (Friends)



**The Union Chain Bridge's future has been secured by the award of a grant of £3.14million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to allow a major programme of repairs to get underway early next year.**

The successful bid also means that a comprehensive programme of community engagement and education activities will be launched throughout the area, designed to celebrate and explore the Bridge's historical and engineering importance, and potentially boost local tourism.

The success was celebrated on the 18<sup>th</sup> September with a visit to the Bridge by His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester. The funding bid was put together by Northumberland County Council (NCC), Scottish Borders Council (SBC), Museums Northumberland and the Friends, following serious concerns in recent years about the condition of the famous structure.

Both councils have committed match funding totalling £3.4m towards the scheme, and other fundraising activities are continuing in support of the project.

**Robert Hunter, our Chairman, said:** "We are all thrilled that The National Lottery Heritage Fund has made such a substantial grant to save this much loved and iconic piece of our engineering history. When it was completed in 1820, the Union Chain Bridge was the world's longest suspension bridge and it provided the catalyst for huge innovation in bridge design. I was reminded of this at our recent ceremony to mark the bicentenary of the laying of the foundation stone [see page 3], when we received congratulatory messages from a number of bridges around the world. These included the Clifton and Menai bridges in the UK and the Akashi Bridge in Japan, which is currently the world's longest suspension bridge. I am enormously grateful to our Friends, NCC, SBC and Museums Northumberland who have worked incredibly hard to get this outcome."

**David Renwick, Director, England: North, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said:** "We are delighted that through a programme of ambitious activities, our funding will provide exciting opportunities for people to explore the heritage and stories of the Union Chain Bridge, and hopefully inspire a new generation of engineers from communities on both sides of the Bridge."

**Councillor Glen Sanderson, NCC Cabinet Member for Environment and Local Services said:** "We are absolutely delighted to have secured this funding after two years of hard work to get to this point. We submitted an extremely comprehensive second round submission and we knew we were up against strong competition but were quietly confident of a positive result."

**Councillor Gordon Edgar, SBC Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure, said:** "This is a momentous day in the 200 year history of the Union Chain Bridge. Not only is the future of the Bridge now secured, but our partnership project will now take forward a number of initiatives which will aim to bring numerous cultural, heritage and community benefits, and could prove a catalyst for the local tourism industry."

**Rowan Brown, Chief Executive of Museums Northumberland, praised the project partnership which had secured the preservation of an incredible heritage monument. Museums Northumberland will use it as the catalyst for embedding science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and heritage skills across our communities on both sides of the border.**

**The full Press Release announcing the success of the bid and the Project partners' responses to it can be found on the News page of our website on [www.unionbridgefriends.com](http://www.unionbridgefriends.com)**

## Success celebrated in the Media

The success of the Heritage Lottery bid attracted widespread coverage on TV and radio and in the Press. We were particularly pleased by this affectionate editorial in *The Journal*, Newcastle, on the 19<sup>th</sup> September, reproduced with the editor's permission:

*The Journal*

### *A thing of beauty*

Today is a good day for one of the North East's hidden treasures. The Union Chain Bridge isn't really hidden, of course. At 449ft, it is quite a sight and when it opened 199 years ago it was the longest iron suspension bridge in the world.

However, by modern standards it looks to be quite a quixotic venture. Not quite a bridge to nowhere, but not really a bridge to somewhere either. And therefore it has existed in relative obscurity for most of its lifetime.

Perhaps this has been for the best, The beautiful but delicate bridge could not possibly have stood up to the rigours of 21<sup>st</sup> century traffic. Its creator Samuel Brown was working at the cutting edge of the technology of the time. Sadly, several other of his creations around the country were either destroyed by the elements or had to be demolished. But the Union Chain Bridge, tucked away in the far north of England and the far south of Scotland, has survived.

However, the point had come when the maintenance regime had to be stepped up. But the days when you could build a mighty bridge for less than £8,000 are long gone.

So well done to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Northumberland County Council and Scottish Borders Council for finding the millions that will restore this classic piece of early 19<sup>th</sup> century engineering to its very best self.

And perhaps we might make a nice fuss over this rather overlooked jewel in our crown when it turns 200 on July 26 next year.

## Friends' Merchandise



**Samuel Brown and Union Chain Bridge** by Gordon Miller, with a chapter on Brown Lenox's chainworks by Stephen K Jones – the definitive history of the Bridge and its designer and engineer. 300 pages; 138 illustrations. **£17.50**



**A pair of fine porcelain mugs with contemporary prints showing, on one, the Scottish side of the Bridge, and on the other, the English side. £15 per pair**



**Our 2019 Christmas card with a Bridge snow scene by local artist Peter Knox; with or without cover greeting "Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year". Greeting inside "With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year" £1.25**

These items are available from the address at the foot of page 4 (please phone before calling) or in person from Chain Bridge Honey Farm during trading hours. Cheques should be made payable to The Friends of the Union Chain Bridge. Postage for book; mugs; or 10 cards: £3.75.

## Duke of Gloucester visits the Bridge

HRH The Duke of Gloucester paid a visit to the Bridge on 18<sup>th</sup> September, under the auspices of Northumberland County Council during a series of engagements in the County and, coincidentally, on the same day as the Heritage Fund grant was announced. He was accompanied by the Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland (The Duchess of Northumberland) and Anne-Marie Trevelyan, MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed.



Photo: Northumberland CC L to R: Ivor Crowther (National Lottery Heritage Fund); Jane Miller (museums Northumberland); Cllr Gordon Edgar (SBC); Cllr Glen Sanderson (NCC); The Duke of Gloucester; The Duchess of Northumberland; Robbie Hunter (the Friends).

The Duke, a qualified architect who practised until he succeeded to the dukedom, took a considerable interest in the Bridge, its history, its *raison d'être* and its construction; and in the restoration plans which that day were given the green light to proceed.

The Duke expressed some initial surprise that the Bridge's "chains" were not as he had expected, of the traditional type as exemplified in the famous picture of Isambard Kingdom Brunel posing against a background of chains for the *SS Great Eastern*, [below] forged at Samuel Brown's Brown, Lenox works at Pontypridd, South Wales.

He touched on an interesting point: we are regularly asked "Well, where are the *chains*?"! In fact, of course, a chain is simply a



number of things connected in series and they need not be links or rings passing through one another, as many visitors expect to see at the Bridge. And indeed,

the Bridge was initially referred to as an "Iron Bar Bridge of Suspension" without reference to chains although, at the ceremony to mark the laying of the Foundation Stone in 1819, there were several references to a chain bridge in the poem [see the next item] recited by William Molle, the Chairman of the Turnpike Trustees. Photo: Friends archive. **Isambard Kingdom Brunel against a background of traditional chains forged by Brown Lenox for the *SS Great Eastern*.**

## Friends receive £30,000 Landfill Fund Grant

We are delighted to have received a £30,000 grant from BCCF Environmental, the Borders agency for the Scottish Landfill Communities Fund, towards our target restoration contribution.

## Celebrating the Bicentenary of the Bridge's Foundation

Two hundred years ago, the *Berwick Advertiser* reported an unique ceremony at Tweedhill, on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1819, when the foundation stone of what was described as "the Iron Bar Bridge of Suspension" was laid by William Molle, WS, of Maines, Chirside, the chairman of the Berwick and North Durham Turnpike Trustees, in the presence of the Commissioners "and of a vast concourse of people from both sides of the Tweed, who were anxious to behold the commencement of this interesting work". That was something of an understatement, as the Bridge - formally named "the Union Bridge" at the ceremony - has attracted the attention of engineers and engineering historians across the globe during its 200 year



Photo: *Jim Gibson*. **L to R: Alistair Birkett, Brian Whittle, Robbie Hunter and Marcus Paine of Hutton Stone who supplied the stone and carved the inscription**

history. The Commissioners had obtained parliamentary authority to build what was to become the Union Bridge, the first modern suspension bridge in the world and the oldest such bridge still open to vehicular traffic, and they commissioned retired naval captain, Samuel Brown, who had pioneered the design and strength of wrought iron rigging and anchor chains, to apply his patents to a revolutionary new design of bridge.

Exactly 200 years later, to the day, the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge commemorated the original event by organising a ceremony at Horncliffe House, on July 26<sup>th</sup> 2019, when a new Stone, specially commissioned from local stonemasons and carvers, Hutton Stone, was unveiled by Friends' Patron, Brian Whittle, a retired civil engineer specialising in the construction and restoration of suspension bridges.

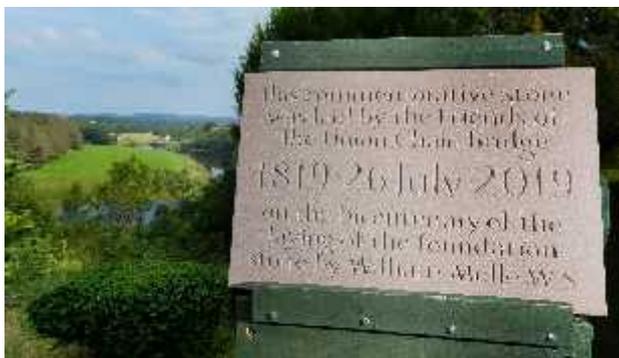


Photo: *Jim Gibson* **The Bicentenary 2019 Stone**

The original Stone had been anointed with corn, wine and oil, and "the blessing of God invoked on the work". The new Stone was blessed by Alistair Birkett of the Paxton-based Gateways organisation, who himself crosses the Bridge several times daily. It is expected that it will be installed next to the Bridge following its anticipated restoration in 2021.

Friends' Chairman, Robert Hunter, read congratulatory telegrams and letters received from the Akashi Straits bridge in Japan - currently the world's longest suspension bridge - and the Menai Bridge, which succeeded the Union Bridge as the longest, on its completion in 1826. And a delightful poem composed by William Molle and recited at the ceremony on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1819 can be found in the Bicentenary Programme on the Friends' website: [www.unionbridgefriends.com](http://www.unionbridgefriends.com)

## Celebrating the Brown Lenox Connection

*Stephen K Jones writes: On Friday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2019, in a ceremony synchronised to coincide with the Bicentenary celebration at Horncliffe*, the Institution of Civil Engineers Wales Cymru marked the establishment of a famous engineering works - the Brown Lenox Chainworks at Pontypridd, and the bicentenary of the start of work on the Union Chain Bridge. Brown Lenox was a multi-stranded business covering the development of iron chain cables, the early suspension bridge and more, and played an important role in the industrial history of south Wales and beyond.

Brown Lenox began operations at Pontypridd (Newbridge) in 1818 after Captain Samuel Brown (1774–1851) had taken a lease of the site of the site the previous year. Following adaptations and building work to an existing nail factory on the site, the Newbridge Chainworks opened, sometime in 1818. Brown's first purpose-built chainworks had been established at Millwall on the Thames as Samuel Brown & Co., but the company name soon changed to reflect the input of his cousin Samuel Lenox. Led by Samuel Brown and his Welsh-born works manager and smith, Philip Thomas, the Newbridge works manufactured iron chains for the anchoring, mooring and, as an experiment, the rigging of ships. The chainworks produced the chain cable for every Royal Navy ship



from the 1820s to the First World War and many merchant and passenger ships such as Brunel's *Great Eastern* steamship through to the Cunarder *QEII*, the latter marking the last

chain cable order for Pontypridd in 1969.

Pontypridd was also the source of suspension chains for Brown's chain bridges, Brown being the first to erect iron suspension bridges for vehicular traffic in this country and the Newbridge works produced the majority of chainwork for Brown's suspension bridges. All chainmaking came to an end in 1969 with a change of ownership and the introduction of new products. Part of the site was sold off in 1987 and the last part of the works closed in 1999 and is occupied today by a supermarket.

Amongst those present at the ceremony in Pontypridd with Friends' Trustee Stephen K Jones were Jeremy Lenox, representing the Lenox connection in Brown Lenox and John Vignoles, a descendant of Charles Blacker Vignoles, a near contemporary of Samuel Brown and an eminent bridge engineer.

*The Photo, above, by Stephen K Jones, shows L to R: Stephen K Jones (Friends Trustee); Jeremy Lenox and John Vignoles.*

## Celebrating Menai Bridge's Bicentenary

The dual celebration at Horncliffe and Pontypridd on the 26<sup>th</sup> July was followed, on 10<sup>th</sup> August, by the bicentenary of the laying of the foundation stone of the Menai Suspension Bridge, on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1819. The bicentenary event was organised by the Menai Bridge Community Heritage Trust. The Friends sent a message of support and were represented at the ceremony by Trustee, Stephen K Jones. There was no direct Brown connection with Menai, the bridge engineer being the more famous Thomas Telford and the suspension chains being supplied not by Brown Lenox but by Telford's favourite contractor, William (Merlin) Hazeldine of Upton Forge on the Shrewsbury Canal. Gordon Miller\* speculates that a serious disagreement must have arisen between Brown and Telford for the order to have been lost to Hazeldine but no records have been traced to explain it.

The Menai Bridge succeeded the Union Bridge as the longest vehicular suspension bridge on its completion in 1826.

*\*Samuel Brown and Union Chain Bridge by Gordon Miller and Stephen K Jones; published by the Friends in 2018*



Photo: BBC The Menai Bridge

## The Two Nations Runs 2019



Photo: Mark Kinghorn photography The start of the 7k run

The fourth annual Two Nations Runs, over 7k and 1.8k courses in and around the Paxton estate and the Union Bridge were organised by the Friends on the 28<sup>th</sup> July when 108 runners took part. Graham Simpson of Wooler was first home in the 7k run and Lyall Roberts led the field in the 1.8k. As it is expected that the Bridge will be closed for restoration in July 2020, it is unlikely that the Runs will be held next year. The Friends are grateful to The Paxton Trust, Norham Running Club and the team of marshals for their invaluable help in organising the event; to our friends at Hutton Stone and Tom and Lynne Stark of Scotch New Water for sponsorship and of course to the participants, several of whom have been entering since the Runs started in 2016.

## Heritage Open Days 15 & 16 September

Again this year, the Friends participated in Berwick's Heritage Open Days, promoted by English Heritage, on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>



September. The Friends' booth at the Bridge attracted 57 visitors from throughout the UK and in total 256 people and 63 cyclists visited the Bridge between

11am and 3pm on the two days. The Project Board predict that the restored Bridge will attract some 14000 visitors annually.

## From our Archive...September 2013

Exactly one year before the Scottish Independence Referendum, on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2013 BBC2 broadcast its *Newsnight* programme from a field on the Scottish side of the Bridge. During the afternoon before the programme, technicians installed a temporary lighting rig which produced this spectacular view of the Bridge that night. We hope that arrangements can be made, during the restoration, for a lighting installation which could be used to similar effect on special occasions.



Photo: Friends Archive The Bridge illuminated on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2013

## Trust Annual Meeting – October 30<sup>th</sup>

The sixth Annual Meeting of The Friends of the Union Chain Bridge will be held in Paxton Village Hall on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at 7pm. This will be a formal statutory meeting but we hope to organise a Friends informal general meeting early in 2020, when details of the proposed restoration works are available.

*The opinions and views expressed by contributors to this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Trustees. The Newsletter is published by The Trustees of the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge ©*

The Friends of the Union Chain Bridge.

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