

“Well-building hath three conditions – Commodity, Firmness and Delight”

Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639)

A View the from Bridge

for the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge



December 2020

Season's Greetings to all Friends



Christmas 2003: Frances Robson of Chain Bridge Honey Farm sledging with Kit and Maddy Cawthorn of Chain Bridge House

We send all Friends these Season's Greetings

in lieu of a separate Trustees' Christmas card this year with an assurance that their support is as valued as ever in these troubled times. The Trustees wish all Friends a Happy Christmas and an early return to safe normality in 2021.

Welcome to Spencers!

We were delighted to welcome The Spencer Group when they arrived in September to establish their operational base as main contractors for the Bridge restoration and we express our thanks to them – site agent Dave Taylor, his staff, workforce and sub-contractors - for the way in which they have integrated within the local communities. We know that this is as exciting a project for them as it is for local residents and Friends and we look forward to having them amongst us for the next twelve months.

See also page 6.

2020 has been a difficult year for us all, due to the pandemic, but one piece of Good News is that the work to restore the Union Chain Bridge has started in earnest. This is something that the local community and Friends have worked hard for with our project partners for some years and it is a great relief to see the restoration now happening.

We had planned to mark the Bicentenary on the 26th July with a symposium of lectures given by delegates from around the world and a concert at Paxton House in the evening. These unfortunately had to be cancelled or postponed. However, all was not lost; the lectures were collated and we produced a splendid publication "*Spanning the Centuries*" which has ensured that we had something to celebrate in July. The concert will hopefully go ahead in July next year as part of the Paxton Music Festival. Museums Northumberland are co-ordinating the educational and community outcomes so do follow the updates and join in on www.unionchainbridge.com

The momentum and support for the project continues to build and 2021 promises to be an exciting and fascinating spectacle as the Bridge is dismantled, restored off-site and re-assembled.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Edward Cawthorn, our Secretary, on being nominated the 2020 Tweed River Champion which was richly deserved for the work he has done to promote the cause.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy Christmas and New Year.

Robert Hunter

Chairman of the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge



Links in the Chain: “White Hat” Willis, the Cutty Sark and the Union Chain Bridge

With our thanks to Fay Waddell of Eyemouth, who has very kindly contributed this article

Jock “White Hat” Willis, the owner of John Willis and Son shipping company, and the world famous tea clipper, ‘Cutty Sark’, was born in Eyemouth in 1816. In 2015 I was researching Jock’s family and career for an exhibition in Eyemouth Museum to celebrate the bicentenary of his birth. Jock’s parents, John and Janet Whillis (nee Dunbar) were born in Eyemouth, married in 1815 and lived there until 1826. They would have been aware that in 1820 Captain Samuel Brown had designed and built an innovative suspension bridge over the Tweed. In 1827 they would hear that the same Captain Brown had bought Netherbyres estate in Eyemouth.



John senior, a very enterprising sea captain, was away from Eyemouth for long periods of time commanding sailing ships that traded between London and the sugar plantations of



Demerara in South America. Once Jock, the eldest of six sons, was old enough to go to sea, the family moved to Wapping on the Thames. As early as 1830 John senior began buying shares in ships he captained and later formed his own shipping company, John Willis and Son whose house flag is shown above. He decided to anglicise his name by dropping the ‘h’. His company motto was “Where There’s a Will is a Way”. By the 1850s John owned many ships, all of which benefitted from the anchor chains and rigging invented and patented by Captain Brown. Meanwhile Jock proved himself to be a



very capable captain, opening up trade with India and the Far East. When John senior died in 1862 Jock left the sea to run and expand the family business. 1869 was a special year: Jock bought a huge mansion, Cardigan House, on the Thames at Richmond and ordered three new sailing ships – ‘Blackadder’, ‘Hallowe’en’ and the one that would become his favourite, the beautiful ‘Cutty Sark’. Jock never married and

died in 1898. I was interested to know what he did with his wealth. I was able to get a copy of Jock’s will and was surprised to find, listed among the properties he owned in the London area, Bank Head Farm and New Water Boat House, Chain Bridge, Loanend, Northumberland. How had Jock come to own these properties? I knew that both father and son never forgot their connection with the Borders. Both men had had named many of their ships after local places - Lammermuir, Whiteadder, Blackadder, St Abbs, Borderer, Berwickshire and - John senior’s favourite ship - The Tweed. But there had never been any suggestion that Jock had an interest in farming or any link with Loanend!

In an effort to clear up this mystery I first consulted the census records for Horncliffe and found that, from 1851 to 1881 Bankhead Farm had been owned by a John and Mary Dunbar, and John had been born in Eyemouth. I knew from the Whillis family tree that Janet Dunbar (Jock’s mother) had a younger brother, John, and discovered that he had married a Mary Thompson in 1837. Luckily, I was given sight of the title deeds for the Boathouse at Chain Bridge and discovered that Mary Thompson and her sister, Ann, had inherited ‘Bankhead Estate’ from their father Robert Thompson (around 1835) who had inherited it from his uncle, Henry Richardson. The sisters and their husbands (Dunbar and Noble) decided to split the ‘estate’ (map 1) and in 1844 John and Mary Dunbar went to live on the northern half of the estate (Map 2) where the farmhouse stood overlooking the Tweed. With only eighty-one acres the farm was small and the estate had been heavily mortgaged. Making a living would have been a struggle but

in 1856 John managed to buy an extra piece of land where the New Water Boathouse stood (a much smaller house than now), complete with ferry and fishing rights. John Dunbar continued to farm at Bank Head until he died in 1886. Mary died in 1876 and they had four children: Mary Thomson Dunbar (1838-1917), James Dunbar (1840-1913), Robert Richardson Thompson Dunbar (1842-1924) and Janet Willis Dunbar (1845-61). The farm was only sold after Robert Dunbar’s death in 1924.

The Willis and Dunbar families, despite living hundreds of miles apart, kept in touch throughout the nineteenth century and no doubt the Willises travelled north to Berwick to visit their relatives from time to time. Jock would be familiar with Bank Head Farm, and the Boathouse, and no doubt marvelled at the impressive Union Chain Bridge, designed and built by a fellow sea captain. The Boathouse title deeds gave evidence of mortgages and loans on the



Map 1 property over the years, and more specifically loans

from Jock Willis in the 1870s. In 1878 Jock took on the mortgage of the two properties and he was given the title deeds. But twenty years later Jock made provision in his will to return the title deeds to his cousins, James and Robert Dunbar. Mystery solved!



Now I'm wondering why Captain Samuel Brown decided to buy Netherbyres estate in 1827 and kept it until his death in 1852... Map 2 (left)

15 local schools, both Scottish and English, are signed up to our STEM learning programme and currently are working on "STEM Person of the Week". STEM, an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths., suffers from the myth that one has to be a "spod" or a "swot" to pursue careers in these subjects. SPotW, designed in partnership with NUSTEM at Northumbria University, aims to



dispel that, thus raising local children's career aspirations. Feedback on this has been superb, with one headteacher telling us: "the resources ..are such good quality and that makes the difference. The children are loving them – they are definitely overcoming some of their initial stereotypes – ie that you have to be a clever man to be a scientist."

Update from the Project Partnership Learning and Outreach Team.

"Year's end, all corners of this floating world, swept."

Matsuo Bashō



Carol Whinnom, Learning and Outreach Officer, writes

Before we sweep 2020 into memory, it'd be salutary to reflect on the positive things we have achieved in the half-year the learning and outreach team has been in post.

Firstly, we'd like to express our gratitude to the Trustees of the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge for welcoming the three of us so warmly into our new roles. Beginning new jobs during the first Covid-19 lockdown has been challenging but your dedication, enthusiasm and energy have helped us to find our feet quickly. This has enabled us to achieve far more than we anticipated would be possible in such a difficult year.

For example, creating a Bicentenary film wasn't in our original plan to mark the bridge's 200th birthday. A full celebration on site was impossible, so with some lateral thinking we devised the idea of showing the bridge through time, using an actor in Georgian, Victorian, then modern-day dress as a visual shorthand to express the passing of two centuries.

The film embodies two of our major priorities. By using local residents Lauren Dixon and Gordon Mclean as narrators, we kept the film firmly rooted in its surrounding community. Its protagonist starts the film in 1818 passively longing for a way to cross the River Tweed, but by 2020, she's in hard-hat and hi-viz and holds the plans for the bridge's conservation. Thus she provides a visible role model of a woman in construction. Described by a BBC producer as "breathtaking," the film can be found at unionchainbridge.org/bicentenary-celebrations/bicentenary-film/. We'll be adding to the website as the project progresses so please keep visiting to keep up to date with progress.

The project website is also live, and holds information about the bridge and its context, Captain Brown, the conservation itself, the key role the Friends have played in making that happen, and information about ways in which people can become actively involved.



We are now looking for archive research volunteers to help us uncover untold Union Bridge stories. Using digital or physical documents held at Berwick Record Office, Paxton House, National Records of Scotland and online, volunteers will read, transcribe and interpret these sources to contribute to exhibition materials at Union Chain Bridge website, the Honey Farm and Paxton House. Their work will also feed into educational materials to be used in schools and contribute to a legacy archive for the Project. If you are interested in helping us with this important task, please get in touch. Our email is ucb@museumsnorthumberland.org.uk We look forward to collaborating with yet more Friends in 2021.

Matt, Becki and Carol at Museums Northumberland

Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering "It will be happier".

Photos: Top: Film-maker Anderson West and costume interpreter Tracey Barnes filming earlier in 2020. © Andy Davis; Above: Trustee Martha Andrews working with documents to broaden our knowledge about the Bridge. © Jim Gibson

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.

Registered as a charity in England (No 1162687)

and in Scotland (No SC046208)

A Charitable Incorporated Organisation under the Charities Act 2011.

Chain Bridge House, Horncliffe, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 2XT.

Tel 01289 382541

e-mail: unionbridgefriends@gmail.com

www.unionbridgefriends.com



The Bicentenary – July 26th 2020

Although the ravages of the pandemic meant that we - and our Project partners - had to cancel most of our planned events, we were still able to mark the Bridge's Bicentenary, on and around the 26th July, in some shape or form and the silver lining to the cloud was that, as the restoration contract was delayed by Covid-19, the Bridge was still open to vehicular traffic and pedestrians on the special day.

Bridge on the Bridge



Clockwise from left: John Home Robertson, Ian McCreath, Christine McCreath and Catherine Home Robertson, all from Paxton To set off the celebrations in quirky fashion, and incurring the wrath of only one irate motorist, four Friends attempted a game of "Bridge on the Bridge" on the 21st July. We don't plan to make it an annual tournament. In the background is a Bicentenary banner, eight of which were displayed around the area; only one disappeared.

Horncliffe in Bloom



L to Rt: Graham Ambrose; Gwynneth Radcliffe; Sue Worth; Nicola Coulter; Steve Clarke; seated on ground Rona Lackenby; not present: Kathryn Stones; Jaqueline Dansie; Kath Ambrose and Anne Guiver.

In celebration of the Bicentenary and in anticipation of Horncliffe Memorial Hall hosting the planned Symposium of international speakers assembled by our Patron, Prof Roland Paxton, the Horncliffe in Bloom Committee had specially made and planted-up planters to mark the occasion, with roses and thistles. Graham, Ambrose made the planters and benches, Sue Worth designed and painted

the motifs (*below*) and Rona Lackenby planted them. All to no avail? Certainly not. While the Symposium did not take place in the Hall, the village and local communities benefited from the craftsmanship, artistry and floral skills; and the

Friends record their appreciation of the efforts of the Committee in marking the Bicentenary and enhancing the entrance to the Hall for what would have been a very special occasion had it not been for the blight of Covid-19.

Sunday July 26th 2020

Although the Covid-19 restrictions meant that the events organised by the Friends and the Project Board were cancelled, and no community activities were held at the Honey Farm, the Friends set up their booth at the toll-house site, with Bicentenary items on sale for anyone who came to the Bridge to pay their respects to a special friend. Many people visited during the day, from near and far, and at precisely 12 noon, 200 years to the minute after William Molle of the Turnpike Trust had formally opened the Bridge, Friends chairman, Robert Hunter, proposed a toast "to Samuel Brown and the Union Bridge" and Soo Underwood, a Friend from Alnwick (*pictured below*), provided impromptu musical accompaniment.



At noon precisely, Friends' chairman Robert Hunter proposes a toast to Samuel Brown and Union Bridge, properly spaced from Willie Robson of the Honey Farm and a passing cyclist.

Perhaps the most disappointing casualty of the restrictions was the cancellation of visits by prominent engineers from the US, Japan and Norway, as well as the UK, and the presentation of the International Historic Landmark Plaque to the Chairmen of Northumberland and Scottish Borders Councils, which was mentioned in our July Newsletter. The plaque is now on temporary display in the Berwick Visitor Centre pending completion of the restoration, when it is hoped that it will be permanently sited in close proximity to the Bridge.



“Well-building hath three conditions: firmness, commodity and delight”

In his review of our Bicentenary book, *Spanning the Centuries*, Professor John R Hume, Scotland’s “father of industrial archaeology” introduced us to this declaration, which we have included above our masthead. It’s from Vitruvius’ *De Architectura* (around 30BC, (attributed more recently to Sir Henry Wotton in 1624). In modern parlance: “The ideal building has three elements: it is sturdy, useful and beautiful”, and we agree with Prof Hume that a more appropriate summary of the qualities of Union Bridge would be difficult to compose. And, biased though we may be, these engineering qualities, coupled with the landscape in which they are set, fully justify Edward Grierson’s claim in his *Companion Guide to Northumbria* (1976), that “ the Tweed is a beautiful river throughout its length and the scene at Union Bridge is nothing less than idyllic”

We still have copies of Prof Hume’s little booklet on the Bridge which he very kindly produced for the Bicentenary, based on his survey notes of 1976. It is available free of charge (while supplies remain) on receipt of a 2nd class stamp.

We also have limited supplies of John W Burrows’ booklet on the Union and Menai bridges, which he produced for us at the Bicentenary. Again, it is available free of charge on receipt of a 2nd class stamp.

Poets’ Corner

The restoration of the Bridge, and its Bicentenary, have inspired Friends to verse, and we are pleased to print two poems below.

The first, from an anonymous Friend (the only clue to his/her identity is an evident classical bent) was pinned to posts on both side of the Bridge just as the first preparatory tree-felling took place in March and we are pleased that we took a transcription before they were subsumed in the works:

ADMONISHMENT

***When you see the Chain Bridge vanish
Thoughts of disaster you must banish;
Please do not call the Friends in panic-
They’re one and all gephuramanic! *
*gephuramanic: “mad about bridges”***

The second verse came to us from Stephen Smith, a Friend of the Bridge, at the Bicentenary:

***The Union Chain Bridge
Spanning the Tweed –
the Union Chain Bridge....
a lasting monument
to a triumph of engineering
on the border between two nations.***

***Its platform deck –
still taking the traffic
of today’s world....
feels like a thin sliver, suspended
in clear air, above the river.***

***Dramatic sight –
with massive chains, rivets,
eye-bars and stone piers...
after two centuries, inspiring
respect and breathless admiration.***

***An outstanding
landmark achievement
in a time of wonders
when a great feat was accomplished...
an impossible dream became real.***

Many Thanks to both contributors.

A Hillfort above the Bridge

The archaeology reports commissioned for the restoration works serve as yet another reminder that this is an ancient and strategic place. Lying directly to the north east of the Bridge, in the field above the English tower currently occupied by Spencers, this is a hill fort recorded as a cropmark on aerial photographs. The enclosure is formed by three substantial curving ditches 4-10m apart which back on to the escarpment, containing an area of 0.35ha. The corresponding banks are now ploughed down. Elsewhere, the enclosure is protected by the steep natural slopes running down to the river. The location of an entrance to the fort is unrecorded although on an aerial



photograph taken in 1977, the scar of the rampart between the outer and middle ditches appears to turn outwards at the apex of the curve and might indicate a former entrance

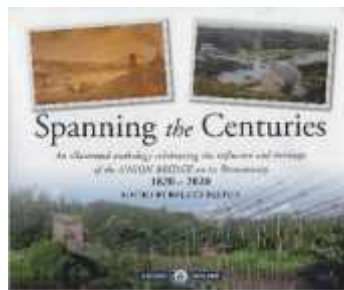
at this location. It is possible that the defences are multi-period, but the site is undated.

[Based on information at <http://hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk/records/EN0553>.

The location of the hillfort is identified by the arrow (above) and, the photograph below shows the site of the fort, well protected by topsoil at the far end of Spencer's site above the English tower



Acclaim for our Bicentenary book



Our anthology of essays celebrating the influence and heritage of the Union Bridge, published as a record of the talks that were planned for the Bicentenary Symposium organised by our Patron,

Prof Roland Paxton, is now in its second print, with a new and eye-catching cover. The book, which was supplied to all Friends in membership in July, has been well received. Critical acclaim has come from engineers, historians and architects:

"A fine scholarly tribute to this remarkable structure...I was impressed by the range of international contributors" (Prof Sir Tom Devine); ".....it puts the Bridge so handsomely in its context, world-wide" (Prof John R Hume); "It is a beautiful book....I see how much effort you have spent in conserving and preserving the Bridge"(Yukiko Shibuya, Japanese Society of Civil Engineers); "... each article gives insights I had not known of" (Ben Tindall, Benjamin Tindall Architects).

Spanning the Centuries is available from the Friends at £7.50 plus £2 postage; or from Grieve's Bookshop in Berwick.



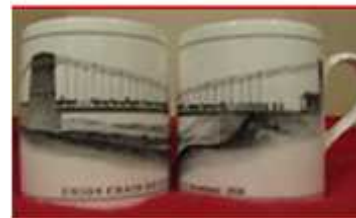
Friends' Secretary wins Tweed Forum Award

Friends' Secretary, Edward Cawthorn, was "surprised, honoured and embarrassed" to be selected to receive the Tweed Forum River Champion Award for 2020. At a brief presentation ceremony at the Bridge in early November, Edward accepted the

Award on behalf of his fellow trustees, The Friends worldwide, partners and funders who have given their time, expertise and generous financial assistance to ensure the survival of this exceptional engineering landmark. The

Tweed Forum River Champion is chosen from nominations received from the public and from groups and organisations involved in the management of the river on both sides of the border. Tweed Forum Chairman, James Hepburne Scott, said " In making the Award, we are recognising the huge efforts that have gone into saving a Borders landmark that will maintain important community. *Photo: Paul Dodds*

Christmas Gift idea



Our matching pair of fine porcelain mugs showing the English and Scottish sides of the Bridge, from an 1820 engraving, would make an ideal Christmas gift at £15 a pair plus £3.50 postage (see our address

box on page 3 for details) or collect from Chain Bridge House by arrangement.

Restoration News

Spencers started work on site in September, building a large and well-equipped office, classrooms and workshops on land at the Honey Farm and then constructing accommodation works on the



field above the English tower (with a cable anchor) and a Scottish-side compound and accommodation works adjacent to the Scottish tower. Telecom services were diverted from under the Bridge via concrete caisson-type structures and, after enforced quarantine a team of French ski-lift

engineers erected a gantry, towering above the Scottish tower (above), to accommodate the apparatus for dismantling and then re-assembling the Bridge components. As this Newsletter goes to press, a similar structure is in course of construction adjacent to the English tower. Meanwhile, another team is engaged in painstakingly removing the Bridge decking. Where appropriate, the work is carefully monitored by archaeologists and ecologists. Our monthly Newsletter e-supplement, sent by e-mail to all Friends for whom we hold a current e-mail address, is devoted to restoration reports and photographs. Please ensure that we have a valid e-mail address so that we can keep you fully up-to-date.



A group of the Bridge team make their way back to the Honey Farm base on a misty autumn afternoon.

A Happy New Year to all our friends at Spencers!