



ISSN 2753-6998

# A View from the Bridge

for The Friends of the Union Chain Bridge

April 2023

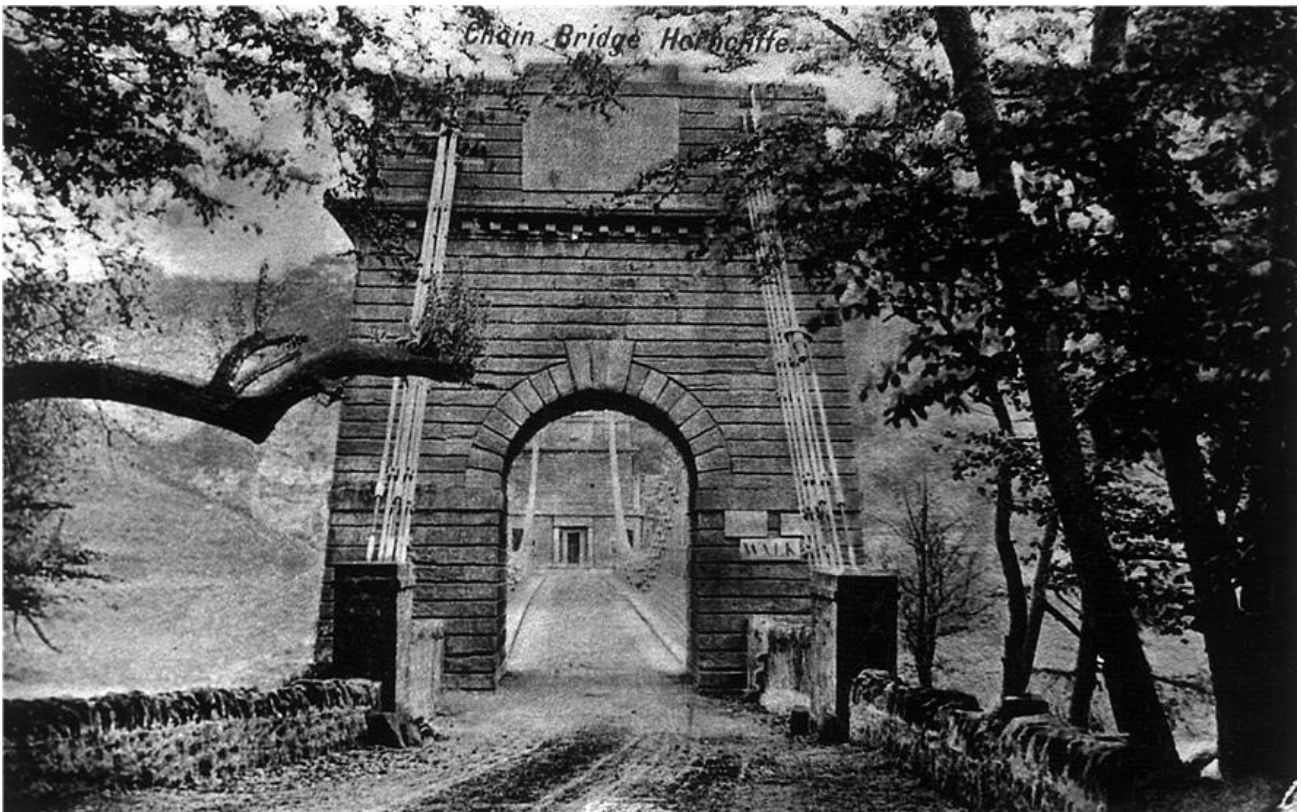
## BRIDGE ABOUT TO RE-OPEN



**Some thirty months after it was closed to all traffic at the start of a major restoration which involved its complete dismantling and re-assembly, we understand that the Union Chain Bridge is set to re-open to traffic in mid-April with a formal opening event on the 6<sup>th</sup> July.**

The photograph above, by Jim Gibson, shows the re-modelled Scottish approach to the Bridge with concrete paving and granite-sett crossing points with tactile approaches and a buff tarmac surface leading on to the Bridge. The new narrow carriageway - at 7ft wide, the width of the re-set bollards – is flanked by widened pedestrian walkways. On the left is an upgraded path leading down to the riverbank and Scotch New Water shiel. The stone boundary walls have been restored by master masons, with the original stile on the southern wall allowing access to a re-formed grass bank adjacent to the ancient south-side track which also leads to the riverside.





**Spot the difference!** The image above shows the same view about 130 years ago, in or around 1890, before the additional wire ropes were installed in 1902-3 with the intention of supporting the decking in the event of a catastrophic collapse of the chains and hangers. The rope was removed as part of the 2020-3 restoration and, as it was shown to have served no useful purpose, it has not been replaced.

Note the absence of width bollards, a wider carriageway and narrower walkways; and the classical portico of the toll cottage – demolished in 1955 – at the English end; and the Bridge approach seems to be on a distinct curve. “WALK”, orders the sign to the right of the arch; and the board above it carries the following instructions:

UNION BRIDGE  
N O T I C E

No Vehicle shall pass over this Bridge except at a walking pace. All Bodies of Troops or other persons walking in procession shall break step in crossing, and no crowd of persons shall stand on the Bridge. Not more than 4 Carriages or Carts shall pass over at one time. Drovers and others in charge of Cattle or Sheep are directed not to allow any large number of animals to be on the Bridge together.

*By Order of the Trustees*

**The Notice relates to Regulations recommended by the Surveyor to the Tweed Bridges Trust on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1887** “...I beg to recommend that a Notice should be fixed at either end of the bridge giving specific regulations as to the number of persons or cattle, weight and speed of vehicles which may be allowed upon the bridge.....I do not think that these limitations will cause any great amount of practical inconvenience and I am of opinion that they should be enforced as apart from all considerations of the safety of the public, there is no doubt that the continued occurrence of excessive vibration has a distinctly injurious effect upon iron.”

*Yours faithfully, H F Sneyd Kynnersley, Moot Hall, Newcastle*

*March 24<sup>th</sup> 1887*

**Mr Sneyd Kynnersley’s calculations of the Bridge’s load-bearing capabilities provided for a maximum moving load of 28 tons. The weight limit on our newly-restored Bridge is to be increased from 2 tonnes to 3 tonnes.**

## “Farewell.....and Hail”

### Trustee changes at our AGM

The ninth Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Union Bridge was held in Horncliffe Memorial Hall on Saturday March 4<sup>th</sup>.

A gathering of some 30 Friends, in person and by zoom, approved the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022 and received Chairman Robert Hunter’s report on the Friends’ activities during the year.

Five of the Charity’s twelve trustees retired at the meeting – Martha Andrews, Christopher Baglee, John Hamilton, Georgina Home Robertson and John Home Robertson. Martha Andrews, Georgina Home Robertson and John Hamilton were re-elected for a further three-year term, but Chris Baglee and John Home Robertson did not stand for re-election.

**John Home Robertson**, a descendant of William Foreman Home of Paxton House, one of the subscribers to the Bridge and Chairman of the Berwick and North Durham Turnpike Trustees who commissioned it, has been a stalwart supporter of the Friends since its inception and was a founding Trustee. We have greatly benefitted from John’s wise counsel over the past nine years but have no doubt that he will maintain a close interest in the Friends’ affairs.

**Chris Baglee** joined us in 2020 on his retirement from the post of Conservation Architect for the Bridge Project. His encyclopaedic knowledge of all aspects of the Bridge structure, masonry and artefacts has been of invaluable assistance to the Trustees. In an earlier Newsletter we published a small selection of Chris’s extensive library of Bridge postcards through the ages, which he collected, along with other Bridge memorabilia, during his connection with it.

We shall greatly miss the wise and enthusiastic contributions of both John and Chris and wish them well in their retirement as Trustees.

**In their place, we welcome as Trustees Carol Jones and Clive Simpson, both of Horncliffe.**

Carol is Chair of Horncliffe Parish Council and is nominated by the Council as their Trustee on the Charity; while Clive, who also has extensive Parish Council experience, joins the Trustees in his own right. A native of Horncliffe, he has had a life-long interest in the Bridge and its construction.

## Our own Bridge Bards

Friends who have visited the Bridge over the past two years may have seen, pinned on telegraph and other posts in its vicinity, from time to time, cards with printed verses reflecting the various vicissitudes of the Project, always in good humour, and - until recently, when he identified himself as “John” - always anonymous. Here is the latest:

### SUSPENSE!

Please spare a thought now for Spencer,  
As the situation becomes ever tenser:  
Will they get the work done  
Before autumn’s begun  
And the mists round the Chain Bridge grow denser?

**And from Norway, our Friend Hans Seland has sent this AI Chat GBT-generated verse**, based on minimal information fed to it:

“Write a classical sonnet on Union Chain Bridge crossing River Tweed. It was almost falling down but has been restored to former glory”.

Amidst the Scottish borders, there does stand  
A bridge, a link of iron and steel so grand  
Spanning o’er the Tweed, it once seemed lost  
To time and age, its fate was almost tossed,  
Yet hope and skill, they joined in hand  
To save the Union Chain, once doomed to land  
The task was great, the challenge steep  
But they did not falter, nor did they weep  
They toiled and laboured, with love and care  
And slowly, the bridge began to repair  
The rust was scrubbed, the chains made new  
And now, the Union Chain stands tall and true  
A testament to strength, and toil, and might  
A bridge restored, a glorious sight.

Cringingly McGonagalese, perhaps, but not bad for a machine?

Published by The Trustees of the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge ©  
Registered as a charity England (No 1162687) 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 opinions and views expressed by contributors to this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Trustees



## Jim Gibson's Photo Gallery for February and March



23<sup>rd</sup> February – the new Scottish-side road and footpath configuration takes shape, with the parking layby prominent, centre-right.



A drone's eye view of the top of the Scottish tower, showing the restored roller mechanisms, now redundant after the removal of the 1902/3 wire ropes, left and right; the four chain inspection covers are also prominent.





27<sup>th</sup> February – under an ominous sky, dismantling of the Spencer depot begins, with the removal from site of the paint shops.



Scottish-side Bridge approach, with new road and footway configuration, restored stone walls, site compound bottom right, and the entrance to the north-side riverside footpath – yellow fence – middle left. The parking layby is just visible adjacent to the half-constructed fence bottom left.





2<sup>nd</sup> March – Engineers work on the top of the English tower, bottom left, while painters carry out snagging work from a cherrypicker and the footway.



2<sup>nd</sup> March A painter working from a cherrypicker inspects a chain link assembly prior to remedial painting, while colleagues work on lower-level snagging from the Bridge decking.





27<sup>th</sup> February – Paving of the surface of English tower in course of completion, with the restored *Vis Unita Fortior* plaque below; also below.



27<sup>th</sup> February – “United Strength is Stronger” Hands clasped in friendship across the border surmounted by entwined rose and thistle emblems; these cast crests were removed from the railings on the centre of the Bridge to their present locations on the two towers at some time during the late C19th





21<sup>st</sup> March – A hive of activity on the English approach as contractors lay distinctive buff tarmacadam. Samuel Brown peers out from behind the Spencer sign.



2<sup>nd</sup> March – An early morning photocall at the depot as the Spencers' rearguard prepare for what looks like a stormy day ahead. The two-storey office and workshop complex, removed three weeks later, also accommodated classrooms for visiting schoolchildren but they were never used as such because of coronavirus restrictions.





Spencers' Simon Rotherforth, on site throughout the project, oversaw the final stages of the restoration work.



27<sup>th</sup> February – Within the next month, this site, which has been the hub of Spencers' activities since Sept 2020, will be cleared. Between the site and the Bridge are the Chain Bridge touring caravan site (unoccupied in February) and the Honey Farm; Paxton House is just discernible in the woods above the bend in the River Tweed, with the Border hills beyond. Can Spencers hope to occupy a more idyllic construction base?



## **FRIENDS' ADMINISTRATION OPPORTUNITIES**

Vacancies will shortly arise for two unpaid volunteer posts within the Friends' organisation.

### **HONORARY SECRETARY**

Our Trustee Edward Cawthorn has held the position of Honorary Secretary of the Friends since the Charity's formation as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2015. He is intending to retire as soon as a successor can be appointed.

The Honorary Secretary's role includes:

Providing an administrative service to the CIO (the charity)

Specifically, ensuring that the charity operates in accordance with the terms of its Constitution.

Maintaining a register of Trustees and making annual returns to the Charity Commission and the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator.

Preparing Agendas and Minutes of Trustee meetings. These have been held monthly before and during the restoration but the frequency is expected to reduce to quarterly following completion of the works.

Ensuring that an Annual General Meeting of the charity is called in accordance with the terms of the Constitution and charities law; and maintaining Minutes of all such meetings.

Maintaining (through the membership secretary) a register of all members of the charity.

Conducting the general correspondence of the charity and dealing with enquiries received by the charity.

Keeping the charity's membership informed of the work of the Friends through newsletters (but see below!)

With such trustees as may be nominated or appointed to deal with such matters, managing the charity's publications and other media.

### **EDITOR of the Friends' Newsletter**      **The View from the Bridge**

The roles of Honorary Secretary and editor of the Newsletter have been combined over the past 8 years but the Trustees would be happy to separate the roles if necessary. Until recently the Newsletter has been printed and distributed to Friends up to four times a year (with more frequent e-Newsletter restoration updates) but it is now circulated online and, following completion of the restoration work, it is planned to reduce publication frequency to twice-yearly, online. The Trustees also intend to prepare a print "On-the-Spot" visitor guide to be available at or near the Bridge, to assist visitors to interpret the Bridge and to identify the landscape features and natural history of its immediate surrounds. It is expected that this guide would need to be updated only infrequently.

Articles – serious, newsy and light-hearted - on wide-ranging topics connected with the Bridge and its heritage are contributed by Trustees, Friends and others; and while much space has been devoted to the restoration work over the past 3 years, with extensive photographic coverage, it is expected that the content will naturally be reduced, "going forward".

\*\*

We would be pleased to discuss, entirely without commitment, the roles of Honorary Secretary and Newsletter editor with anyone (Friend or otherwise) who could be interested in taking them on, separately or combined. Edward Cawthorn can be reached on [unionbridgefriends@gmail.com](mailto:unionbridgefriends@gmail.com) or on (01289) 382541