

Celebrating the Bicentenary Year of the World's Oldest Vehicular Suspension Bridge

A View from the Bridge

for the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge

Restoration Progress Supplement – No 1 – October 2020

As most Friends will now know, the Contract for the restoration of the Union Bridge was let to The Spencer Group of Hull in July and the Company moved on to the site in September, since when they have been engaged in preliminary works on both sides of the Bridge, and the construction of a base at the Chain Bridge Honey Farm, with extensive office and classroom buildings as well as facilities for the repair and restoration of the Bridge components.

We intend to issue these Newsletter e-supplements on a regular basis throughout the 50+ weeks of the Contract, to keep Friends – especially those further afield who are unable to visit the site - informed of progress.



The Spencer Group

Spencers are a relatively young company, having been established in Hull in 1989 by Charlie Spencer OBE, now Executive Chairman. The Group employs over 400 people across the UK and specialises in large engineering projects ranging from the design and build of green power stations, working across the UK rail network and building, maintaining – *and restoring!* - complex suspension bridges, including the Forth, Erskine and Humber bridges. In 1999 they restored the historic Horkstow Suspension Bridge over the River Ancholme in Lincolnshire. At that time our Patron, Prof. Roland Paxton, was the chairman of the Institution of Civil Engineers' Historic Bridge and Infrastructure Awards Panel who were sufficiently impressed by the work to award it a Commendation.



Spencers began constructing their main site compound (*left*) at Chain Bridge Honey Farm, conveniently located about 0.5km from the Bridge, in early September. The large two-storey building comprises spacious offices etc on the first floor and classrooms

for the on-site learning and activity opportunities envisaged in the Lottery Award, on the ground floor. The extent of the Covid-19 restrictions will affect the use of this facility.

It is unlikely that the dismantling of the Bridge itself will start before the turn of the year but considerable preparatory work needs to be completed before then. Specialists from a French company are expected to arrive at the end of October/early November and, after quarantine, will install a cable between the two sides of the river, by means of which the Bridge will be dismantled.

The first plans (described in the 10-stage drawings in the April 2019 issue of *A View from the Bridge* and in *Spanning the Centuries*) envisaged the work being undertaken from below, from a pontoon anchored in the Tweed but the Contractors' preference, dictated in part by the Covid-enforced late start of the contract, provides for most of the work to be carried out from above the



Bridge. Early site works have therefore included the construction of a large hard-standing in the field above the English tower (*right, 6th Oct and above, 16th Oct*) and similar foundations on the Scottish side, together with foundation bases to accommodate the pylons from which the cables will be suspended. In addition to the cable support works and accommodation works on the Scottish side, a subsidiary compound is being formed in a field adjacent to the Bridge and part of the ancient farm track which led from the old Berwickshire turnpike tollhouse, under the Bridge towards Scotch New Water shiel, has been transformed into a wide access track capable of accommodating heavy vehicles (*below, left, 17th Oct; and right, 20th Oct*)





The photographs above show the two concrete drums (arrowed) which will be used as foundations/anchors for the cable apparatus; one on private land on the English side (*left, 23 Oct*), the other on the riverbank footpath on the Scottish side (*right, 21 Oct*)
Work continued on the Scottish side operational area on the 21st October (*below*) on land forming part of Fishwick Farm, and the old track (arrowed) leading under the Bridge to Scotch New Water.



Spanning the Centuries

Not long before the Bridge closure, Jim Gibson, who has supported the Friends from their formation with a series of photographs for our publications and archives, took three stunning images of the Bridge, two of which we have used on the cover of the second impression of our bicentenary publication, *Spanning the Centuries*, arranged, co-authored and edited by our Patron, Prof Roland

Paxton. The panorama shown *below* features on the back cover and the *bottom* photo appears as part of a “spanning the centuries triptych” of images from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries on the front cover. The book, the first edition of which was distributed to all Friends as a bicentenary remembrancer, is available from the Friends for £7.50 plus £2 postage (e-mail unionbridgefriends@gmail.com for details). It would make a good Christmas gift for anyone interested in the history and heritage of the Bridge and its influence on later generations of suspension bridges.



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