

BRUNEL'S OTHER BRIDGE NEWS

APRIL 2025



FLOOD DEFENCE THREATENS CAPSTAN

In March this year we rediscovered an amazing hydraulically-powered capstan at the Western tip of the Knuckle (or it is 'The Tongue'?). It is in relatively good condition, and complete with its operating lever still in the pit!

The capstan is driven by a three cylinder hydraulic 'motor' originally supplied with water at 750 psi (50 Bar) from Underfall Yard. Three cylinders are needed to provide a 'push' every 120 degrees ensuring that the motor can always start automatically. The crankshaft drives a 'layshaft' (that's the one with the big gear on it) to increase the torque for pulling ships. Finally the layshaft drives the capstan itself, which has a ratchet arrangement to prevent the ship from pulling the capstan in reverse.

Unfortunately the new flood-defence planned around this area threatens the capstan's existence. It should be restored and put on display above ground.

NATIONAL BRUNEL NETWORK

The Brunel Swivel Bridge Group is now a member of the National Brunel Network set up in 2018 to increase knowledge and share expertise on Brunel's life and legacy. For a list of members and further information click [HERE](#)

The network meets three times a year at a members' site, most recently at the SS Great Britain on 16th March. Sixteen people representing a dozen organizations learned about each other's activities, plans and problems. Geoff Wallis gave a ten-minute illustrated presentation by about BOB. We look forward to a fruitful association with others who care for and about Brunel's legacy.

ENGLISH HERITAGE RESTRUCTURING



In 2015, English Heritage was divided into two: Historic England inherited the statutory and protection functions, and a new English Heritage Trust to care for over 400 properties and sites owned by the state. The new charity received £80 million to help establish it as an independent trust, although the historic properties remain in the ownership of the state, but it no longer relies on regular funding from DCMS to care for the National Heritage Collection.

Now restructuring proposals will see an estimated net reduction of at least 7% (189) in their current workforce of 2,535 employees, and shorter opening hours for around 10% of the 400+ sites, including winter closing for 21 smaller sites. The English Heritage Trust cares for a number of industrial sites including Cantlop Bridge, Derwentcote Steel Furnace, the Ironbridge, Sibsey Trader Windmill, Saxted Green Post Mill, Stott Park Bobbin Mill, and Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings.

English Heritage noted that: 'The pandemic and its aftermath led to lasting changes in visitor expectations and behaviour, both domestically and internationally, while many of our visitors and members are facing challenges with the cost of living. High inflation has increased the cost of conservation work at our sites but significant and ongoing expenditure is still required if the condition of the sites in our care is not to deteriorate.' Read the full EH statement [HERE](#)

BATHURST BASIN SWING BRIDGE RESTORATION



The old bridge will be closed for up to two years, depending on its condition. Road traffic and pedestrians will use Commercial Road Bridge, the newer bridge that runs alongside the old (green) Swing Bridge, under traffic light control allowing contra flows. Signals will be manually operated at peak times. Restoration work will include repainting metalwork and renewing road surfaces.

These works are part of Bristol City's £16 New Cut bridges restoration programme, funded by the UK government through City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, secured by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority.
See: www.bristol.gov.uk/newcutbridges.

PADDLE STEAMER WAVERLEY AT CLEVEDON



This year the world's last sea-going paddle-steamer is celebrating the 50th anniversary of going into preservation. She will be visiting the Bristol Channel between 28th August and 1st September. Please click [HERE](#) for details.

On Friday 20th June a group of local heritage enthusiasts, including some from BOB, will be sailing from Clevedon at 7.30p, cruising around steep Holm and Flat Holm, returning to Clevedon at 10.00pm, all for just £40. Come and join us for a lovely sea breeze, the smell of steam and hot oil watching the magnificent steam engines, and enjoying the onboard restaurant or bar in good company, whilst also supporting a good cause.

This excursion is also a fund-raiser to support the restoration and return to sea of the MV Balmoral, moored outside 'M' Shed in Bristol City Docks. This 1947 passenger ship is in good order after a recent hull repair in Albion Dockyard, but there is a lot of work to do to get her back to sea. Join Geoff Wallis and the other friendly volunteers on the ship every Tuesday and Friday.

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT

PLEASE NOTE: There is a report of each workday on www.brunelsotherbridge.org.uk and on Facebook. Do check it out, share, comment & support us on social media.

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