

# Developing Bridges, Bridging Development

By Benjamin Carey FTS

ON 5 July 2015, UNESCO inscribed The Forth Bridge as Scotland's sixth World Heritage Site, a remarkable achievement for a small country, when there are only 1031 such sites in the whole world.

The first of the three great bridges that span the Firth of Forth (the estuary of the River Forth), The Forth Bridge opened in 1890, 125 years ago, and carries two hundred trains every day.

Begun in 1883, it was the first all-steel bridge in Britain and is a monument of Victorian engineering and icon of Scottish tourism. The following century, the Forth Road Bridge was added; officially this was in response to the growing popularity of cars (24 million per year), but aficionados know that really it was to give visitors a better view of the world's most elegant and iconic bridge!

To celebrate its 50th birthday, 2014 tickets were put on sale last summer to take a short tour to the top of the bridge; it was a sellout and every superlative applied is justified. Standing on top of a structure created out of 40,000 tonnes of steel and 125,000 cubic metres of concrete and held together by graceful cables spun out of 30,000 miles of high-tensile steel wires is simply phenomenal.

In our century, the Queensferry Crossing is being delivered by the Scottish Government ahead of schedule and below budget. At a height of 207 metres, 50 metres taller than the Forth Road Bridge, the new bridge will open to motorway traffic in 2016, whilst the old road bridge will become a low carbon transport corridor for pedestrians, cyclists and public buses. The Forth Road Bridge will also remain the best viewing platform for The Forth Bridge.

There is a fourth bridge across the Forth that is older than the others. The mediaeval crossing fell out of use in 1964 after almost nine hundred years as the main route



across the Forth. The original Queen's Ferry was established by Queen (later Saint) Margaret c.1070 for pilgrims travelling to Dunfermline Abbey. The Ferry gave its name to North and South Queensferry, which have emerged as attractive tourist destinations and will be starting points for magnificent bridge experiences being planned for The Forth Bridge and Forth Road Bridge.

Along with Iron Bridge (England), Pontcysyllte Aqueduct (Wales) and Giant's Causeway (North of Ireland), it is the fourth 'crossing' in the UK to become a World Heritage Site. It is fitting that crossings should feature so prominently, because bridges are the essence of world heritage.

Occasionally people misunderstand the role of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, thinking that its primary function is the celebration and preservation of old buildings and picturesque landscapes. In fact its *raison d'être* is the promotion and preservation of peace, and its tools are dialogue and interpretation, which typically means 'heritage tourism'.

Founded in 1945 after WW2, UNESCO declared:

*"That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed; That ignorance of each other's ways ... has ... all too often broken into war; ... That the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man ...; ... peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind ..."*

It is a call for a celebration of the diversity of humanity that enriches



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our lives. It is all about bridges.

This most obviously applies to the 48 sites on UNESCO's 'Heritage in Danger' List: these include Bamiyan, Jerusalem, Palmyra, Samarra, Sana'a and Timbuktu.

The opportunity is to bring together people from different traditions and competing perspectives, so that they

create substantial destination clusters that will support a viable visitor economy, offering alternative livelihoods especially to women and young people.

But the principle applies equally to any destination cluster, whether it is encouraging Israelis and Palestinians to work together in Jerusalem, different Hebridean islands to support a single visitor centre as a focus for St Kilda, or North and South Queensferry to co-operate on the creation of a new Forth Bridges Area.

For tourism to succeed, it must make an enduring difference to host communities – custodians and interpreters of heritage. Celebrating heritage as a driver of sustainable social and economic development is essential. Embracing heritage as part of their identity enables communities to harness the power of their 'local distinctiveness' to develop markets across new bridges.

■ Benjamin Carey FTS is managing director of Dunira Strategy and a former chair of Tourism Society Scotland.



## Media Masterclass Monday 5th October Bloomsbury Hotel, London

Our annual media masterclass in association with TravMedia is a chance to speak to the trade papers and travel journalists and gain an insight into how to develop the strongest relationship with them. It is the perfect event for PRs and is now in its 11th year. The panel will include the trade press, digital, broadcast and national press, and Henry Hemming of TravMedia UK will be in his traditional role of chairing the evening, drawing the best out of the speakers.

Come armed with plenty of questions to find out how journalists are making the most of new media, how they like to hear about new stories, and how to get yours to the top of the pile. Bookings are now being taken - on the strength of the last ten years it is fair to say that it will be a fascinating evening of discussion and networking.

Speakers include:

**Henry Hemming (chairman)**

**Alison Rice** - travel journalist and broadcaster

**Michael Turtle** - award-winning travel blogger (Time Travel Turtle)

**Outline programme:**

6.00pm - doors open; registration

6.30pm - introductions, presentations and Q&A

8.15pm - networking with light refreshments

9.00pm - close

Tourism Society members - **£25.00**, Non-members - **£39.00**

Networking refreshments included.

For full details and to book, go to <http://bit.ly/1Np3ZRm> or call the Tourism Society on 0203 696 8330.

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The Forth Rail Bridge illuminated at dawn.