

ICE NEWS

SCOTLAND

Curtain falls on Forth Bridges Visitor Centre after 20 years

By Antony Oliver

The Forth Bridges Visitor Centre Trust charity will be wound up next month after more than 20 years informing the public about the heroic engineering achievements of constructing the iconic Forth Rail and Road Bridges.

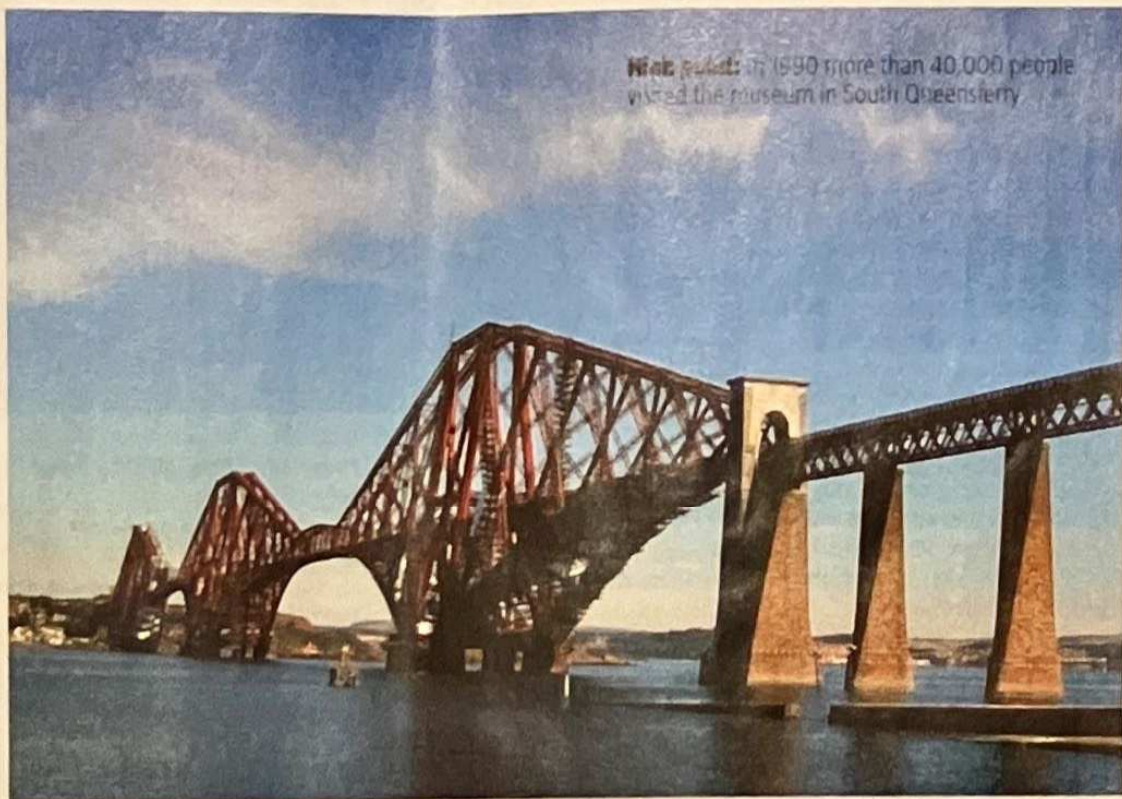
The Trust lost its permanent home in the Queensferry Lodge Hotel around four years ago after the hotel was redeveloped.

Since then has relied on its web presence to disseminate information about the Victorian Forth Rail Bridge and the 1964 suspension road crossing to the public with exhibition material and historical artefacts placed into storage.

Herriot Watt University professor and engineering history expert Roland Paxton has chaired the Trust for the last 12 years. He explained that, although the Trust had been offered new premises by the Forth Estuary Transportation Authority to host a museum and exhibition, funding was not available to update the material.

"We needed around £100,000 to modernise the 20 year old exhibition but despite a huge fund raising effort couldn't find sufficient financial support," he explained. "The trustees decided that the most sensible course of action would be to wind up the charity and pass on the assets."

Paxton said that all of the assets of the Trust – which amount to



Not quiet: In 1990 more than 40,000 people visited the museum in South Queensferry

over 300 historically valuable artefacts and around £10,000 from the sale of Forth Rail bridge rivets – will be handed over to the ICE Scotland Museum, based at Herriot Watt University in Edinburgh.

Other assets include the portrait of Forth Rail Bridge engineer Sir William Arrol, painted in around 1890, as well as a specially commissioned picture of around 50 of the key personnel involved in the construction of the iconic original crossing of the Forth.

The Trust was established leading up to the 1990 Forth Rail

Bridge centenary celebrations, during which over 40,000 people visited the exhibition when it was first established in South Queensferry. The visitor centre was then moved to the Queensferry Lodge Hotel a few years after.

Since losing the space at Queensferry Lodge the visitor centre has maintained only an on-line presence.

"We feel that the purpose of the Trust can now more effectively be carried out by others," explained Paxton, pointing out that information about the bridges was readily available online and

so did not warrant replication by the Trust.

Paxton had last year signalled his intention to retire this year and former bridge master Alistair Andrew was due to step in the role. Trustees include former ICE presidents Gordon Masterton and Paul Jowitt.

Plans for a new physical visitor centre, funded by Transport Scotland and Network Rail, have been discussed to celebrate and explain the construction of the Forth Replacement Crossing but so far no firm plans have been agreed.