

EEN 12.10.1993

NATIONAL DISGRACE: How part of our heritage is simply rusting away

EXACTLY six months after the Evening News launched the hard-hitting "Paint Our Bridge" campaign, Railtrack has been forced to bow to public pressure. [full HSE survey ordered]

● The key advice we received was:

Although not in danger of falling down, rust was gaining hold and the proposed £500,000-a-year painting maintenance was not enough to guarantee the structure's long-term future.

We said in our front page editorial that day: "There is no longer any doubt. The future of Scotland's most famous landmark is under severe threat . . ."

We called for Railtrack – which inherited the bridge from British Rail – to be relieved of responsibility and for an independent trust to be set up.

That received almost unanimous backing – even embattled Railtrack, while insisting there was no threat to the bridge's structure in its hands, said it would welcome such a trust.

But we had started the ball rolling.

Our expert team included leading engineers, Heriot-Watt University Professors Roland Paxton and Paul Jowitt.



By James
McGhee
CAMPAIGNING
WRITER OF
THE YEAR

Prof Jowitt summed up a nation's fears on the Maid of the Forth that day: "This is a fantastic structure, but it looks awful and its appearance does not encourage a lot of public confidence in the long-term future of the bridge."

Prof Paxton said: "I think the problem will get worse if they carry on at the present rate of spending."

At that time Railtrack said it would not even start painting the bridge's main supports for seven years, spending its £500,000 budget on more crucial latticework metal. With more than £1 million to be spent this year and a pledge to paint the main tubes at the same time as latticework, today's revelation is a clear victory.

But it took sustained campaigning, backed particularly by Prof Paxton and MPs Eric Clarke (Midlothian) and Tam Dalvell (Linlithgow).