



## **Heather Thompson**

*(formerly Robson) of Chain Bridge Honey Farm; inaugural Chair of the Friends of Union Chain Bridge*

**H**eather Thompson grew up at Chain Bridge Honey Farm - a stone's throw from the Union Chain Bridge - where she is now a Partner, making and selling honey and beeswax skincare products. As someone who studied History and Geography as a school pupil and went on to study Geography at the University of Edinburgh, she takes a keen interest in the continuing story of the Union Chain Bridge. Heather petitioned her local MP over the year-long closure of the bridge in 2007.

She instigated the first leaflet about the bridge with information from the late Gordon Miller of Paxton and design work by Bristol-based historian Adrian Andrews (author of a book on the Clifton Suspension Bridge). In 2014, she was a co-founder of the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge with Martha Andrews and Georgina Home-Robertson. Heather is married to Alan and has two children, Will and Beth. She lives just outside Paxton and has, for the last year, been learning to play the diatonic accordion.

## 10. Union Bridge and its future: A personal perspective by a local resident

*Heather Thompson*

Have you ever had cause to wonder what makes people care about buildings and places? I have had cause to wonder in the case of the Union Chain Bridge. I feel that our special buildings and special places reassure us. They tell us about who we are. They represent our culture and our endeavours. We identify with them.

I grew up at Chain Bridge Honey Farm. I spent my childhood roaming the banks of the river, particularly around Bank Head Farm. This – then - abandoned farm, up above where the bridge is, was a great playground for a child. I would, on occasion, get through the fence and down to the top of the bridge on the English side where the chains are attached to the cliff. This was a lovely, quiet spot, albeit precarious.

I spent my summers on the River Tweed's banks around the bridge. We would swim in the river or wade into it with a jar for catching minnows. In the winter we came down the bank on the Scottish side on our sledges. A Sunday morning, for our family, was 'a walk to the bridge' with our friend Tom Edgar.

In 2007, the bridge was closed without warning, and I realised I had taken it very much for granted. Although it was closed to cars at the time, you were still able to walk across it. I looked up and noticed the inscription with the rose and the thistle: '*Vis Unita Fortior 1820*' (photograph overleaf). I thought to myself, with some amazement, the bridge is 13 years away from being 200-years-old; I didn't know anything about its history. In turn, I

went to see Gordon Miller, who had cases and filing cabinets full of information on the bridge. I am so pleased he compiled it all into a book, and that Steve Jones supplied his exhibition and also contributed to the book.

Today, I've been asked to say something about the future of the bridge. I feel that the key to the future of the bridge lies not only in its physical restoration but in our encouraging of people to care about it. The first step is encouraging people to see it, walk across it, cycle across it or drive across it. They may take a picture of it. If they pick up a *Friends of the Union Chain Bridge* leaflet, even better. If they have attended this Union Chain Bridge Symposium – then even better still!

The first person to promote the bridge, and to understand the importance of *impressing* it upon the imaginations of those gathered at its opening on this day 200-years-ago, was its creator Capt (later Sir) Samuel Brown. He crossed the bridge in his curricule followed by heavily loaded carts, to demonstrate the strength of his great new achievement, creating a spectacle which made headline news.

With this in mind, we can all tell people about the Union Chain Bridge. And in knowing about the bridge, like myself, as a child, they can come to *care* about it. In doing so, I am hopeful its future will be secure.



*The cast iron plaques bearing the inscription "Vis Unita Fortior" ("United Strength is Stronger") were removed from the railings in the centre of the Bridge (see page 13) at an unknown date (but possibly 1871) and placed in their present locations high on the English and Scottish towers*

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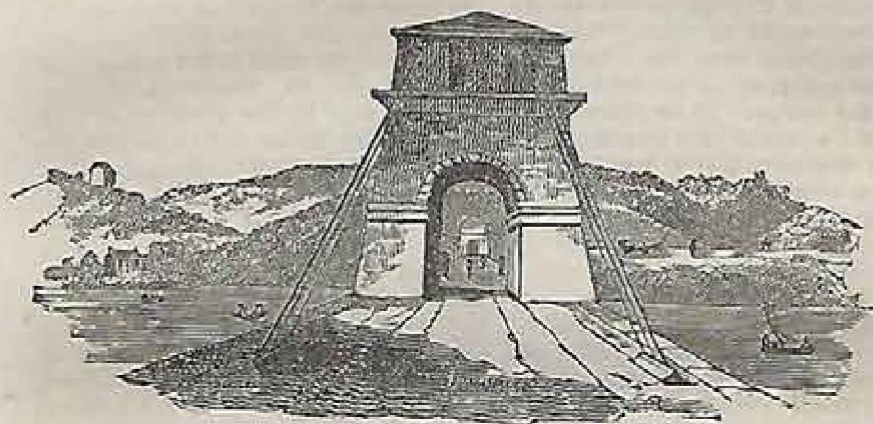
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## Iron Suspension Bridge over the Tweed.



*The Union Bridge featured as the main article in the March 1st 1823 issue of The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction published by John Limbird (1796?-1883) of 355 Strand, London, described in an obituary as "the father of our periodical writing". The unattributed article, perhaps by Limbird himself, extends to two and a half pages of detailed text, describing "one of those extraordinary results of mechanical science which peculiarly distinguish the age in which we live".*