



Rowan Brown

Chief Executive Officer, Museums Northumberland

A passionate sector leader and industrial historian, Rowan's career to date has been defined by the twin desires to ensure maximum public benefit through innovative heritage practice. As CEO of Museums Northumberland, her role entails delivering excellence in audience engagement and collections development across the four Museums of Northumberland, guided by their mission to 'Share Northumberland's Stories to connect, enrich and inspire.' Previous roles include navigating the path of commercial and charitable practice as Director of the Alfred Gillett Trust as well as Directing operations at Scotland's best-preserved Victorian Colliery Complex as Director of National Mining Museum Scotland. A committed museologist, she serves on the Museums Association Ethics Committee, as a Board Member for the North East Cultural Partnership, the Science Museum's Locomotion Advisory Group and as a member of the Arts Council England Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest.



Matt Storey

Audience Development Manager, Museums Northumberland

Matt Storey is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the heritage, interpretation, and STEM content of the Union Chain Bridge project. His wider role is aimed at improving Museums Northumberland's institutional understanding of audiences, transforming the organisation's capabilities to respond to diverse audience needs. An experienced museum professional, Matt was previously Head of Transformation for Middlesbrough Museums Service and has also held roles at Sunderland City Council, Bede's World, Jarrow and National Glass Centre, Sunderland. He is a Trustee at Bailiffgate Museum and Gallery in Alnwick.

9. Union Bridge: *Crossing borders, inspiring communities*

Rowan Brown and Matt Storey on behalf of the Union Chain Bridge Project Board

Union Chain Bridge: Crossing borders, inspiring communities is an ambitious project involving the conservation of the internationally significant Union Chain Bridge, the preservation of its intangible heritage and an extensive programme of education and public engagement. Co-owned by two nations' local authorities, the Union Chain Bridge is symbolic of this uniquely collaborative project that comprises of a partnership between Northumberland County Council, Scottish Borders Council, Museums Northumberland and the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge.

Set in a beauty spot which was once a hive of engineering ingenuity, the Category A/Grade 1 Listed Union Chain Bridge majestically spans the River Tweed. Completed in 1820, it was then the longest span chain suspension bridge in the world (see table on page 15) and heralded a new era in bridge building in the UK. It was the first suspension bridge in Europe to carry wheeled traffic and remains the oldest still in use. Though little-known today, the innovative manufacturing and engineering techniques employed on the Bridge were hugely influential in the development of suspension bridges around the world. The project shall seek to position the monument in its historical and global context.

Today, the engineering and technology skills gap is a huge problem in the UK. Both Westminster and Holyrood

Parliamentary reports show that we urgently need to buck the trend of dwindling STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics] skills or face a significantly detrimental impact on our economy. We will use the world's oldest vehicular chain

link suspension bridge as a catalyst for change, offering a plethora of opportunities to pilot STEM engagement techniques and creating a methodology and set of resources that is replicable across the UK.

The Union Chain Bridge is extraordinary, not only in an engineering sense, but owing to the social context in which it was built. It unifies Scotland and England across the Tweed and, as it was constructed during the Radical War - at a time of social unrest and uncertainty for the union - the

risk of the venture has much in common with our contemporary context. Drawing on the inequity which sparked the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 and the Radical War in 1820, the historical context can be utilised as a platform for exploring contemporary issues such as identity, workers' rights, gender imbalance, economic drivers, access and transition.

The £8.6M project has received the generous financial support of the National Heritage Lottery Fund, as well as significant funding from the Bridge owners, Scottish Borders & Northumberland County Councils. The Friends of the Union Chain Bridge, many of whom have championed the cause for



The Project Logo

more than a generation, have been instrumental in garnering local and international community support, and securing the crucial project match funding.

The project has the following four strategic aims:

- To conserve and raise awareness of the internationally significant Union Chain Bridge and celebrate its historical and engineering importance.
- To provide impactful and sustainable STEM learning opportunities for young people inspired by the innovative engineering of the Union Chain Bridge.
- To develop sustainable cross-border heritage projects and partnerships between communities in the Scottish Borders and Northumberland.
- To promote the rich heritage of the Union Chain Bridge, its nearby attractions and the Tweed Corridor through a joint cross border approach.

Museums Northumberland's role is to deliver the heritage, interpretation and learning components of this ambitious project, working closely with partners at Paxton House and the Chain Bridge Honey Farm, who will host the new semi-permanent exhibitions. For us, the project offered an immediate opportunity to support our principal funders, Northumberland County Council, and to realise our own ambitions to 'Share Northumberland's Stories, to Engage, Enrich and Inspire.' As the county's Museum Service, we have four museums and six historic sites in our care, as well as approximately 25,000 material culture items which testify to Northumberland's role in shaping modern day England. Our Scheduled Ancient Monuments include England's oldest gaol, England's first

planned barracks, and even the world's first museum dedicated entirely to bagpipes. The project presents the opportunity for Museums Northumberland to take advantage of our borderland status and to build on the work we have undertaken over the last couple of years in experimenting with both Scottish and English educational methodologies. As the first service to pilot a Scottish scheme, Heritage Heroes, with Ford First School, as well as the Arts Council England Scheme, Arts Award, with Scottish School Pupils, we relish the opportunity to pilot new educational trends and priorities to ensure our audiences, both real and virtual, have multiple routes to engagement.

Our Museums Service is rooted in the communities it serves, and thus, the project's origins – having been born through the determination and passion of our Friends – is of primary importance. As an early adopter of the Museums Association's Museums Change Lives campaign, it is vital that we seek to explore issues of contemporary and historic significance, and that



Rowan Brown (L) with Prof. Roland Paxton and Jane Miller, first Bridge Outreach Officer

we facilitate skills building and community cohesion initiatives at every opportunity. Union Chain Bridge: Crossing borders, inspiring communities will enable significant volunteering opportunities, as well as more formal apprenticeships and facilitated learning. Project participants will undertake community digs, archival research and co-curate the content which will form part of the project's legacy in loan boxes, touring exhibitions and online resources. Through partnership working with Live Borders, the leisure, sport and cultural trust for the Scottish Borders, we shall also seek to establish two permanent collections on each side of the border to preserve the historic elements of the Bridge which cannot be reused in the refurbishment.

Another key component of the project will see the development of a comprehensive online interpretive offer which will act as an overarching vehicle for visitors to access information both on-site and from remote locations. The digital offer will allow the many stories, strands and depths of information to be better explained,



The intricately detailed knitted Bridge project by the Horncliffe Hookers craft group

catering for different audience needs and interests. The use of digital technology will also allow a range of types of media such as audio, film, animation and interactives to be employed. This will enable the promotion of the Union Chain Bridge's vast history and heritage to reach new audiences locally, nationally and internationally.

At the time of writing, the project is facing several challenges owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this also provides us with an opportunity to reach new audiences online. Taking inspiration from the ingenuity employed in the construction of Union Chain Bridge, we will reimagine how we engage our audiences digitally, promoting the history and heritage of the Bridge and raising the aspirations of young people within our communities.

Through close collaboration with our partners, we aspire to demystify STEM, to support our audiences to find their own science, technology, engineering and maths talents, building both skills and confidence in our local and virtual communities. Emboldened by the 'Decolonisation' Agenda, which is transforming European Museums' interpretive approach, we look forward to placing the Bridge in its global historic context, acknowledging the many Eastern technological developments which are so regularly missed from Western pedagogy. We also look forward to rising to the challenge of cultural delivery across two nations, and to achieving respectful multi-partner delivery in the context of dual, and sometimes, competing legislative positions. We hope that this ambitious project will help to create a template for best practice cross-border delivery, and we look forward to working with our partners and funders to preserve our incredible monument and, in doing so, provide life-changing opportunities for our local communities.



*Presentation of National Lottery Heritage Fund cheque:
Left to right: Cllr Glen Sanderson, Northumberland County Council; Ivor Crowther, NLHF; Cllr Gordon Edgar, Scottish Borders Council*

Union Chain Bridge Project Board:

Cllr Glen Sanderson, Northumberland County Council

Cllr Gordon Edgar, Scottish Borders Council

Rowan Brown, Museums Northumberland

Ewan Doyle, Scottish Borders Council

Robert Hunter, Friends of the Union Chain Bridge

Paul Jones, Northumberland County Council

Wendy Scott, Northumberland County Council



Union Bridge 1933; salmon netsmen at Scotch New Water fishery

