



An Appreciation of Leamington Lift bridge

The Union canal was cut to provide transportation of coal from the West Lothian and Lanark coal fields to Edinburgh . Originally the canal was provided with 62 exquisite stone bridges and a few, like Leamington Lift bridge, altered to accommodate heavy steam road trains, carrying tons of coal (about two canal barge loads) to the coal yards at Haymarket.

In 1893 the steel built electric lift bridge was installed. This allowed the flow of steam trains on top and the barges below to continue and show the amazing new force of electric power in action but this was not popular with pedestrians who had to wait. So in 1907 the decorative lattice foot bridge was added to allow people to cross when the lift was in operation. In 1922 the main basins were closed and Canal traffic dwindled so that the lift bridge was redundant and was finally moved from Fountainbridge to Gilmour Park to replace another wooden drawbridge.

The steel of the time was vulnerable to corrosion unless frequently painted and maintained but with a little TLC was virtually indestructible. In 1965 the British Waterways Board closed the Union canal and locked and welded the liftbridge in the down position removing its engine workings and that could have been the end of the story. But while the canal got dirtier and more run down and there were calls for it to be filled in, Forth Canoe Club saw it as an invaluable resource for their sport and while digging out various stretches and using the limited navigable stretches of the canal they proposed a plan to make the bridge work again.

The Millenium project in 2000 saw the opening of the canals and the bridge reopened and painted but now with a hydraulic mechanism.

It worked, it inspired. It is a monument to the industrial revolution that people could see and use . It is the perfect complement to the wonderful new Falkirk wheel that links the Union to the Forth & Clyde canal for the first time in over ninety years.

As an artefact it is an Icon of the canal and surrounding community. It is an exemplar of Victorian engineering know how and design and most importantly - people like it. That is why FCI chose it as our logo.

The popularity of the FCI history panels on the towpath; the beautiful renovation of the Rubber Factory offices by Edinburgh Printmakers supported by Heritage Lottery funding; and the way the liftbridge has become a local attraction and central image for the annual Canal Festival shows that the industrial history of the canal is important to local people and visitors alike. FCI has campaigned since 2011 to ensure that development plans for Fountainbridge would include the community, and the history of our area, at every step of the way.

There has to be urgent action from Scottish Canals to retain and maintain this important landmark.

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