



## QUEENSFERRY HARBOUR – A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

### 1. History

That some sort of harbour or haven existed from medieval times at Queensferry can be inferred from early records. During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Queensferry was a thriving seaport, its prosperity reflected in the number of substantial buildings, the former Royal Burgh being recognised since 1977 as an Outstanding Conservation area.

In 1694 George Hill, the Sea Bailie, and his fellow skippers had borrowed money to build a harbour. In order to pay back the loan he invited the Burgh Council to impose anchorage charges and shore dues and in return, the harbour and the dues would be given to the 'common good' of the Burgh.(see later).

The piers of Hill's harbour, of which the wall and corbelled stone corner are perhaps the only remaining features, formed the basis of further construction and repair works following storm damage in 1763 and again in 1789. In the late 1790's Rev. John Henderson reported that after years of neglect "the harbour will be in a complete state of repair, which is of importance not only to the town, but also to the public."

The present harbour was constructed in 1817-18, by which time the east pier, having suffered from a storm in 1814, was considered to be "in a very bad state". The harbour generally was considered "unsafe in either easterly or westerly gales".

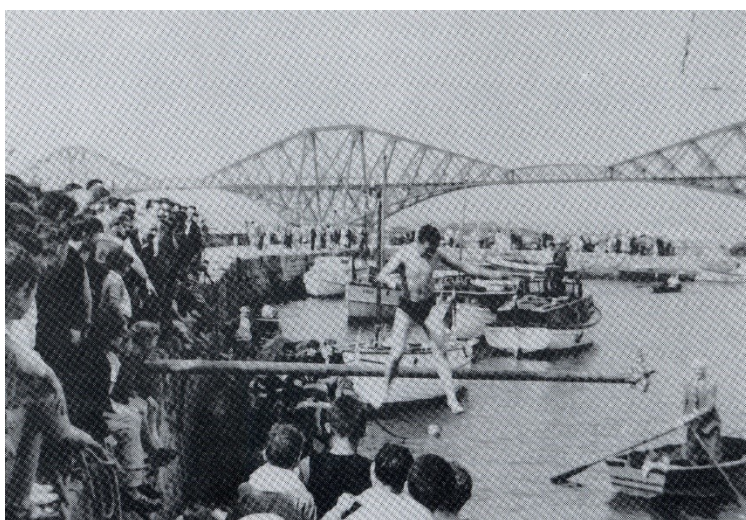
In 1815 Robert Stevenson, in his capacity as advisor to the Convention of Royal Burghs, paid a visit to Queensferry and later that year while in Dublin, prepared a report for the magistrates with observations, recommendations, specifications and costs for the repairs, extensions and rebuilding work. This report is still extant.

Hugh Baird, Engineer designer of the Union Canal, also involved in Queensferry's new water supply, was invited to oversee the harbour works to be carried out by the successful tenderers – local builders, John Forsyth, and Hugh Russell. (Forsyth carried out the work for John Rennie on behalf of the Ferry Passage Trustees in 1810). To support the investment, a grant of £400 from the Convention was obtained on the condition that the work would be inspected and approved by Robert Stevenson's engineer, James Roberts.

## 2. Significance

The harbour has been at the centre of the town's commercial life over the centuries, as well one of the landing places for the ferry passage. In the early years, the harbour was the means for extensive trade with Europe and Scandinavia, involvement in the whaling industry and later for import and export of materials to support the local industries of soap-making and distilling. The fishing industry arrived at Queensferry harbour in 1793 and up until the 1950's 'garvies' were still being landed. It has always been a vital element of the town's economy and to some extent, remains so today.

Now as a busy recreational harbour it has, like many old harbours, become a visitor attraction and the location for many a wedding photograph. As a 'B' listed structure of historical and cultural importance, it provides a landmark from both the shore and the water, and a vital part of the townscape associated with the Forth Bridge, a World Heritage Site.



*The greasy pole at the Annual Regatta, 1950's.*

## 3. Harbour Management

Responsibility for the Harbour transferred with re-organisation in 1974, from Queensferry Burgh Council, to Edinburgh District Council, now City of Edinburgh Council. Since 1975 the day-to-day management of the harbour has rested with Queensferry Boat Club, established in 1957. For a lease of £200 pa, the Club manages the berthing arrangements and collects the harbour dues, currently £5 per foot, each year. This income is accounted for separately as the 'Harbour Fund' and is the means whereby various repairs, necessarily of a minor yet urgent nature, have been carried out over recent years.

Ownership of the Harbour still lies with the 'Common Good' now listed together with the Rosebery Hall and land at Mid Terrace, on the Edinburgh Common Good Asset Register. The March 2017 Council accounts declare an associated Property Maintenance Fund of £1,887,000.

The Hawes and Longcraig Pier Users' Committee which meets 3 times a year, was set up by Lothian Region in 1978. (The Harbour and Port Edgar belonged to the District). Income generated by commercial activity at the Hawes Pier provides the means to carry out repairs and maintenance on these facilities. However the Harbour is excluded from this budget and has only benefited occasionally from whatever was available.

#### **4. Queensferry Harbour Trust**

The Trust was set up in 2001 as a charitable body (SC033687) with the aim of taking over the lease of the Harbour and making an application to Historic Scotland for grant funding. Dialogue with CEC officials stalled in 2006 but later progressed to the point, in 2007 where:

1. Written confirmation had been given that the Trust would obtain a 25-year lease from the Council.
2. The Council would apply for a judicial review to release the harbour from the Common Good.
3. The Council would set up a maintenance budget for the Harbour
4. Applications for grant funding would be made to Historic Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund.
5. The Council would continue to insure for Public Liability.

It was noted\* that a previous grant application submitted by the Council to Historic Scotland resulted in a proposed funding package of: Historic Scotland 40%, Heritage Lottery 40%, Council 20%.

Progress once again seems to have come to a halt. Even the £15,000 which was to be made available from the Hawes budget was not used in 2008.

Constitutionally, the Trust lapsed several years ago. An attempt to re-constitute the required membership (7 residents of Queensferry, of whom 4 are berth-holders) was made in 2013, without success. However, the Trust is still recognised by OSCR, albeit, in a 'dormant' mode at present.

*\*Letter from Mike Lowry, CEC Estates Surveyor to M Meredith, QHT, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2007.*

#### **5. Maintenance and Repair**

The physical condition of the harbour has been the subject of various surveys, investigations, and reports. These are listed in Appendix A.

The work involved in restoring the structure and making repairs is adequately described in the Council Inspection Report dated May 2005, (Appendix B) The costs involved are itemised in Appendix D/1 to the above report. (Appendix C). The value equates to £700,000 in 2020.

In Sept 2006, the Council reported: "At the present time there is no immediate danger to users. In the event that deterioration continues unabated or arises as a result of storm damage and this presents a danger to public safety, the harbour or piers will (be) closed off for use."

Over the last few years both the Council and the Boat Club have been able to rectify storm damage to the outer wall. In March 2010 CEC provided emergency funding of £7,300 to carry out storm damage repairs to the outer wall (£4,500) and sett repairs to the slips (£2,800). In 2011/12 CEC were asked to contribute match funding for further repair work, primarily to steps. No funding was forthcoming, and the work was carried out by QBC with £7,300 from the harbour fund. Further storm damage repairs were made good by QBC in March 2013 costing £830. Replacement steps for the north pier were acquired a few years ago but have yet to be installed.

#### **6. Conclusion**

It is a credit to the design skill and workmanship of the Engineers and Contractors who built it, that the Harbour has remained largely intact for the last 200 years.

But without the essential investment and a sustainable future, there is an ever-increasing risk of Queensferry Harbour “falling into a ruinous condition through age and the disability of the town to repair it” to quote a description from the 1780’s.

The Harbour represents more than an asset to be enjoyed by a group of boat-owners. It clearly plays a significant part within the physical and historic and cultural landscapes of Queensferry (as recognised by its ‘B’ listing), but it also provides a focus for local people, tourists and visitors who come to admire one or all three of Queensferry’s magnificent bridges.

Michael G McDowall

November 2020

For and on behalf of Queensferry Boat Club  
Queensferry and District Community Council  
Queensferry Heritage Trust



QUEENSFERRY  
HERITAGE  
TRUST

Promoting and protecting the  
heritage of Queensferry

The purpose of the **Queensferry Heritage Trust** is to advance greater public knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the heritage of Queensferry and to encourage the protection and improvement of the Queensferry Conservation area and its environs, for future generations.

Queensferry Heritage Trust is a Registered Charity no SCO45644

[www.queensferryheritage.org.uk](http://www.queensferryheritage.org.uk)

## **Appendix A Reports**

Storrar, David D., South Queensferry Harbour. Historic Buildings Council for Scotland. File no HFL/B/LA/353. 21 Dec 1999.

Wren & Bell, Engineers, Survey Monitoring Report, 2001

Wren & Bell, Engineers, Report on Ground Investigation, June 2002 AND Nicholson, Site Investigation (Bore Hole) Report. Project no 192035, May 2002.

Arch Henderson, Engineers, North Pier, Preliminary Report on General Condition. 28 Feb 2003.

Arch Henderson, Engineers, North Pier Report on General Condition. 18 June 2003.

City of Edinburgh Council, Extract of Minute, Executive of the Council, 23 Harbours and Piers at Queensferry, item 3.1a, 15 Feb. 2005.

City of Edinburgh Council, Queensferry Harbour and Piers. File HY605/011/9. Job No 634488, May 2005

City of Edinburgh Council, Harbour and Piers at Queensferry. Report no. E/259/06-07/CD, 26 Sept 2006.

McDowall, M. Queensferry Harbour – a sustainable future. Report presented to QDCC, Oct. 2008. Update 2010.

**Appendix B Work Required** (extract from City of Edinburgh Council, Queensferry Harbour and Piers. File HY605/011/9. Job No 634488, May 2005)

Firstly, the access steps within the harbour need to be completely refurbished. The most recent repairs were poorly executed, the new treads appear to have been simply laid on the existing steps without having been properly keyed into the surrounding masonry or the handrail adjusted to the proper height. Whilst the new steps are constructed from the highest quality of stone available, they are inappropriate for (the) situation. The stone is of the wrong colour and the treads are too smooth for here, paradoxically the stone steps are too good for the location and their installation actually poses a hazard to users. The associated metalwork also needs attention.

In addition to the safety repairs, work is required to arrest the gradual and steady deterioration of the Harbour due to the lack of a structural maintenance programme or regime. Work is required to stabilise the structure, particularly the north pier. Further work is required to repair and restore the structure to a condition desired by Historic (Environment) Scotland and worth of the environment and setting. This further work includes the removal of the concrete surfacing and replacement with flagstones.

Other work that should be considered are new lighting (including associated electrical work), a new electrical outlet (for owners working on their boats) although the question of ownership and payment may need to be resolved first, and ladders, in addition to the existing steps, for access.

It would also be prudent to carry out low pressure grouting of the north pier to guard against possible future loss of the fine material infill. The grout should be cementitious but should also be low strength. Not only would this grouting stabilise and retain the infill material, (but) it would also compensate for the absence of the clay blanket on this section of the harbour.

## Notes

New lighting work was carried out.

The final paragraph (not included here) relates to the hand operated derrick crane on the end of the east pier. This was obtained by QBC in 1976 from HMS Reward for lifting out boat engines. The Council agreed to manage it with regard to testing and certification.

## Appendix C Estimate of Cost of Repairs

Underpinning of pier			
	Set up		£5,000
	25 piles/anchors (5m long)	125m	£80
			£10,000
Masonry (underpinning) repairs		30sq m	£1,000
			£30,000
Repair Scour		50m	£100
			£5,000
Rake and re-point joints		130sq m	£30
			£3,900
Repair/replace masonry		100sq m	£1,000
			£100,000
Reinstate steps		5 sets	£10,000
			£50,000
Metalwork/Railings			
	Barrier at steps	50m	£150
			£7,500
	Handrail	75m	£70
			£5,250
	Fence	60m	£150
			£9,000
Low Pressure Grouting North Pier			Allow
			£50,000
Flagstone Surfacing		2500sq m	£30
			£75,000
Lighting Columns		10no	£1,500
			£15,000
Electrics for Lighting			£2,500
Ladders		5no	£1,000
			£5,000
Renew Electrical Outlet			£2,000
Remove Hand-operated Derrick			£2,500
	Total for Site Work		<b>£377,650</b>
Allow for tidal working		5%	£18,883
Preliminaries		15%	£56,648
Contingencies		5%	£18,883
Design and Supervision		7%	£26,436
	Total		<b>£498,498</b>

### Notes

Lighting Electrical work, Ladders, and the Removal of the Derrick (£27,000) can be excluded. The value in 2020 equates to £700,000 approx.