

PRESS RELEASE

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HISTORIC CHESHIRE BRIDGE GETS IN THE SWING AGAIN, THANKS TO £300,000 REPAIR BY CANAL CHARITY

Britain's first electrically-operated floating swing bridge, Northwich Town Bridge, is swinging again, thanks to a £300,000 repair by the Canal & River Trust charity.

The waterways and wellbeing charity, which cares for the grade two listed bridge and 2,000 miles of waterways, has carried out vital repairs to re-balance the original cantilever rotary mechanism – enabling the 122-year-old bridge to swing open again for boats.

For the last four years, the two lane road bridge has struggled to open and close successfully, and has recently had to remain fixed in position to carry road traffic over the River Weaver Navigation, as part of the busy one way system around Northwich Town Centre.

Designed by the Weaver Navigation Company's engineer Col J.A. Saner, the 1899 black and white, steel lattice girder bridge originally had wooden decking and weighed about 300 tons. Over the years there have been several modifications to the original design, including the addition of a tarmac road, which means the rollers and foundation piles are now having to support a moving deck of 460 tons – more than 50% greater than they were designed for.

Simon Harding, project manager with the Canal & River Trust, said: "Town Bridge and its sister structure Hayhurst Swing Bridge in Northwich used ground-breaking technology when they first opened at the turn of the last century. The Weaver Navigation was in constant use by coastal steamers and barges transporting salt, coal and other goods to the River Mersey, Liverpool Docks and beyond.

"River transport was massively more important than road traffic, which was still dominated by the horse and cart at this time. The control cabin was manned 24 hours a day and the bridge was apparently operated more than 55,000 times in the first 15 years. Compare that with today's largely leisure boating traffic, which requires the bridge to be swung less than 50 times a year, due to the smaller nature of most boats, which can safely cruise underneath.

"The original engineers devised a series of clever adaptations to the bridge to cater for subsidence caused by collapsing salt brine mines. The bridge is partly floating and partly supported on adjustable cast iron screw piles. The water level is maintained by sluices, located away from the subsidence and the screw piles can be raised with adjustable screws. The bridge was powered by

Canal & River Trust

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electric motors rather than steam to avoid pipes bursting due to the effects of corrosive, salty river water.

“This latest innovative solution to keep the original Victorian mechanism functioning and the swing bridge swinging has been designed by specialist mechanical engineers working with Trust staff and Sheffield fabricator, Hadee Engineering Company. It has involved the installation of new large sprung rollers and a circular metal rail. This should now help to keep the bridge swinging on its intended track, prevent further instability and ensure the historic bridge remains operational for many years to come.”

The six week repair project is now completed and the bridge is able to swing again to allow larger vessels to sail through Northwich up river towards Winsford or downstream towards Frodsham and Runcorn. Boat passage can be booked by ringing the Canal & River Trust on 0303 040 4040.

For more information about visiting the River Weaver Navigation, check out the Canal & River Trust website www.canalrivertrust.org.uk.

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Notes to Editors:

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people’s lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day www.canalrivertrust.org.uk.

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