Tamar Crossings Newsletter

No. 4 June 2020

Welcome to the fourth edition of Tamar Crossings

Like many thousands of other organisations across the country we have had to change the way we work to protect the health and safety of our service users, staff and the wider public during the coronavirus pandemic.

Thanks to the hard work of Tamar Crossings staff and our partners we have been able to continue to operate both crossings safely throughout this period. This is a significant achievement and I am very proud of the way everyone has worked together.

At the beginning of the lockdown the Government identified a small number of sectors as critical to the Covid-19 response. One of those critical sectors is 'transport', which made Tamar Crossings staff key workers. In addition any works needed to protect and maintain public transport services and crossings and key assets and bridges have therefore been considered as essential works.

We have been following all of the advice from the Government and NHS to ensure the safety of our staff and people using the crossings at the same time as providing an efficient service. This has involved continuing with some major protects, as well as closing some of our buildings to the public and temporarily suspending tolling.

Tolls on the two crossings were suspended on 25 March for an initial three week period. This suspension was then extended for a further period in line with the continuation of the Government's lockdown restrictions.

Following the Government's decision to gradually relax lockdown restrictions and start to rebuild the economy by re-opening some businesses and encouraging staff who cannot work from home to return to their work places, Cornwall Council, Plymouth City Council and the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee agreed to reintroduce tolls from 1 June.

While our primary concern remains the health and safety of our staff and service users, the suspension of tolling has had a significant impact on the operation of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry. Tamar Crossings does not receive any financial subsidy, relying on the toll income to fund the cost of operating, maintaining and improving the bridge and ferries.

Resuming tolling in a safe way by following social distancing and hand hygiene measures has helped to secure the future of the two crossings at the same time as ensuring that we can continue to protect staff and service users.

Thank you for your support.

David List, General Manager

Inside...

Joint Committee member: Derek Holley

When Derek Holley moved to Saltash from Shropshire to take up a post as a science teacher he was only planning to stay for three years. 45 years later he is still here and says he has never regretted his decision. "It is a bit like being in a trap" he says – "If you stay in Saltash too long you never want to leave."

After being elected as the Cornwall Councillor for Saltash in 2009, Derek was appointed as a member of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee – a position he holds today. Although he does not always agree with every decision made by the Committee, he is full of admiration for the 'great team of officers'. Having taught at Torpoint School for 30 years he is accustomed to using both the Bridge and the Ferry to travel to and from work and says he is very proud of the service provided by Tamar Crossings.

Currently his main focus is on addressing welfare issues for residents living under the Tamar Bridge as a result of incidents of anti social behaviour and suicides. He has asked the Committee to consider raising the height of the parapets at both ends of the bridge, with a detailed report on the options due to be considered at a future meeting.

He would also like to see an end to media blaming the bridge for traffic holds ups which are due to other causes, and the Government and Highways England contributing more towards maintenance costs. "The vast majority of other major bridges are either owned by the Government or receive a substantial contribution from the Treasury towards their costs" he said "As members of the Committee we spend a lot of our time defending the fact that income from the Bridge is used to subsidise the ferry service – it would be great if the Government helped by giving us more support."

We are keen to hear what you would like to see in future editions so please let us know at trisha.hewitt@tamarcrossings.org.uk

Rising to the challenge of Covid-19

We have been following the advice from the Government and NHS England to ensure that we can continue to operate both crossings at the same time as protecting the safety of our staff and service users.

Maintaining the bridge

To ensure that the bridge remains in a safe and serviceable condition, our contractors have continued to work on some key construction and maintenance projects. In addition to the teams working on the kerb works replacement project, we have also had teams repainting the bridge to ensure that it does not deteriorate.

We have worked closely with all of our contractors to ensure that Government guidance on safe working practices has been followed, including those on social distancing, and have taken robust and immediate action if any concerns are raised.

After considering Government advice on social distancing and avoiding the use of public transport where possible, we introduced new safety measures which enabled us to re-open the footpath and cycle path to the public. At the same time we were able to continue with the essential engineering works to replace the bridge deck waterproofing system underneath the kerbs, together with the replace the bolts that fix the kerbs in place.

Following the successful completion of the first phase, the project was due to continue on the main deck meaning that westbound traffic heading for Saltash would be diverted on to the south cantilever. This would have involved closing the lane to pedestrians and cyclists again and reinstating the shuttle bus service.

Instead we reprogrammed the phasing and moved the project to the north cantilever, enabling the south cantilever to remain open.

Suspending tolling

On 25 March tolling was temporarily suspended to help reduce the spread of Covid-19 and protect customers and bridge and ferry staff whilst keeping the vital transport links open. The suspension of tolling has had a significant impact on the operations of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry. Tamar Crossings does not receive any financial subsidy, relying on the toll income to fund the cost of operating, maintaining and improving the bridge and ferries.

Following the Government's decision to gradually relax lockdown restrictions and start to rebuild the economy Cornwall Council, Plymouth City Council and the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee made the decision to reintroduce tolls from 1 June.

To enable us to resume tolling safely and secure the future of the two crossings, at the same time as continuing to protect staff and service users, we introduced new measures to mitigate against Covid-19 through social distancing and improving hygiene practices at both crossings.

These measures are based on the latest scientific and medical guidance from the Government and Public Health England and follow comprehensive risk assessments carried out by Tamar Crossings managers in all areas of the service.

New measures at the Tamar Bridge

We have also introduced some specific actions at the bridge. These include new cash handling processes, including contactless card payments and the use of special social distancing tools at the bridge. People paying by cash are also asked to ensure that they have the correct money to keep personal contact with toll booth staff to an absolute minimum.

Tag account holders are being asked to check that their tags are correctly located in their vehicles and are registered to the vehicle they are using.

New measures at the Ferry

As contactless payment is not currently possible at the ferries, we have introduced a new shoreside payment system. People paying by cash are also being asked to ensure that they have the correct money.

One lane on the ferries has been allocated for the sole use of cyclists and motorcyclists. All drivers are asked to remain with their vehicles, and to keep their windows closed when in close proximity to staff and other service users. We are also asking drivers to take extra precautions when using the crossings.

Other buildings

When lockdown restrictions were first introduced we closed the Bridging the Tamar visitor centre and our office reception facilities to the public. Since then our customer services staff have been dealing with queries from service users or the wider public via email, the Tamar Crossings website or by phone. There are also drop boxes at both crossings for people needing to return tags. These systems have been working extremely well and we will be continuing with these arrangements. The visitor centre and public toilets also remain closed.

All Tamar Crossings staff have access to appropriate levels of personal protective equipment.

Full details of all the measures are available on our website: tamarcrossings.org.uk

Refitting LYNHER

We were delighted to welcome LYNHER back to Torpoint on 19 May following her successful five yearly refit at A & P's dry dock facilities in Falmouth.

The work was completed just 13 days later than the original scheduled completion date which is a great achievement in the light of the COVID -19 constraints. The requirement to maintain social distancing in the workplace meant A &P had to reduce the number of workers in the more confined areas of the ferry such as the engine room and accommodation spaces.

We are very grateful to A & P for completing the work so quickly, and to everyone who has been following the Government advice on avoiding all non-essential travel during the coronavirus pandemic. This has helped us manage the demand for ferry crossings by key workers, emergency services and those travelling for essential reasons while running a two-ferry service.

Ensuring that our ferries can operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year requires a significant planned maintenance programme. While the majority of maintenance is carried out while the vessels are afloat or during off peak periods while an individual vessel is not on scheduled service, some maintenance activities have to be carried out during refits in dry dock conditions.

The major tasks completed on LYNHER during her five-yearly refit included:

- removing all the paint from the decks and re-coating, with more environmentally friendly paint systems
- repairs and re-application of the hull anti-fouling paint
- a major overhaul of the prows (ramps) at each end of the ferry
- a major upgrade to the CCTV and IT system
- renewal of the deckhead and bulkhead lining in the passenger area lobbies and under the control cab on the upper deck
- new deck coverings throughout the passenger accommodation
- extensive works in the engine room.

The refit also provided an opportunity for Lloyds Register to complete the five-yearly dock survey to certify that the ferry is in a satisfactory condition for continued operation.

We would normally have brought LYNHER back into service straight away. However an issue with the pulleys which secure the chains on each side of the river means that she will not be coming back into service until the beginning of July.

The ferries run on pairs of chains spanning the river, and the chains need to have a certain level of tension to ensure that the ferries have safe and efficient transits of the river. To achieve this tension, each chain is secured on each side of the river via steel cables to a system of pulleys and a large weight of about 12 tonnes hanging in pit and supported by a steel framework - we call them gantries.

While there is a comprehensive planned maintenance schedule which is up to date for these gantries, it is not possible to view all of the pulleys while the ferries are in normal day to day operation. We used the Lynher refit as an opportunity to replace the steel cables and carry out a detailed inspection of the pulley system. This showed significant and unexpected wear on some of the pulleys, requiring them to be replaced.

Unfortunately the pulleys were made specifically to fit the gantries at Torpoint and Devonport so the option of “off the shelf” replacements is not available. The original sheaves were designed decades ago for use with chains and not cables, and our engineers have had to work with specialists to produce new designs which are fit for purpose for the current installation.

With most engineering fabrication companies in the UK either temporarily shut down or significantly reducing the range of services they can offer because of the coronavirus pandemic, the pulleys have had to be made by a specialist manufacturer in the Czech Republic. While they are working as quickly as possible, they will not be available until July.

In the meantime LYNHER has been placed back on her chains so she can be prepared for bringing back into service as soon as the pulleys have been fitted in the gantry. This also enables us to carry out routine maintenance and to use the ferry for essential training.


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Whilst this issue was not detected during the replacement of the wires in PLYM and TAMAR gantries, a programme of additional survey and inspection is being put in place to ensure that timely and appropriate action can be taken if this particular defect is detected elsewhere.

We recognise that this has meant a further extension to the current two-ferry service, but we have no other option than to replace the damaged pulleys. Carrying out this work now while traffic volumes are low because of the COVID -19 restrictions on travel will significantly help reduce the impact on service users and we would like to thank everyone for their patience during this period.

Replacing the chains

Ferry chains need to be replaced every three years and, where possible, we try to match these works with the refit programme to avoid damaging the newly recoated deck surfaces where the chain has to be handled. Both main chains on LYNHER were replaced before she left Torpoint for her refit.

Changing main chains is a major engineering exercise - each chain is over 650 metres long and weighs 23 tonnes - and involves the ferry itself being used to pick up the old chain and feed in the new chain. Part of the process is ‘pulling slack’ - getting the right amount of slack and tension into the chain so that it will match operational requirements. The whole process typically takes 2-3 days depending on tide timings.


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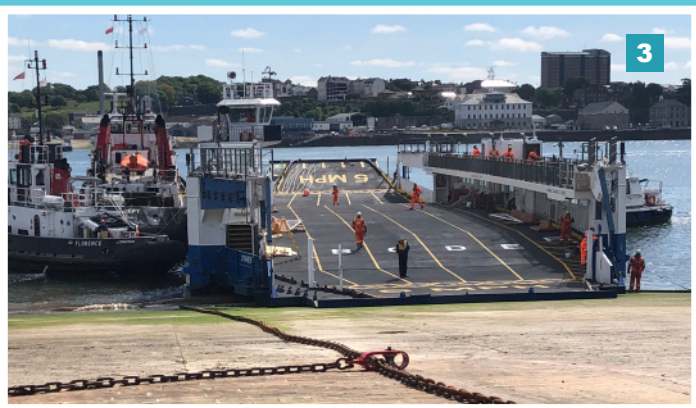
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Captions
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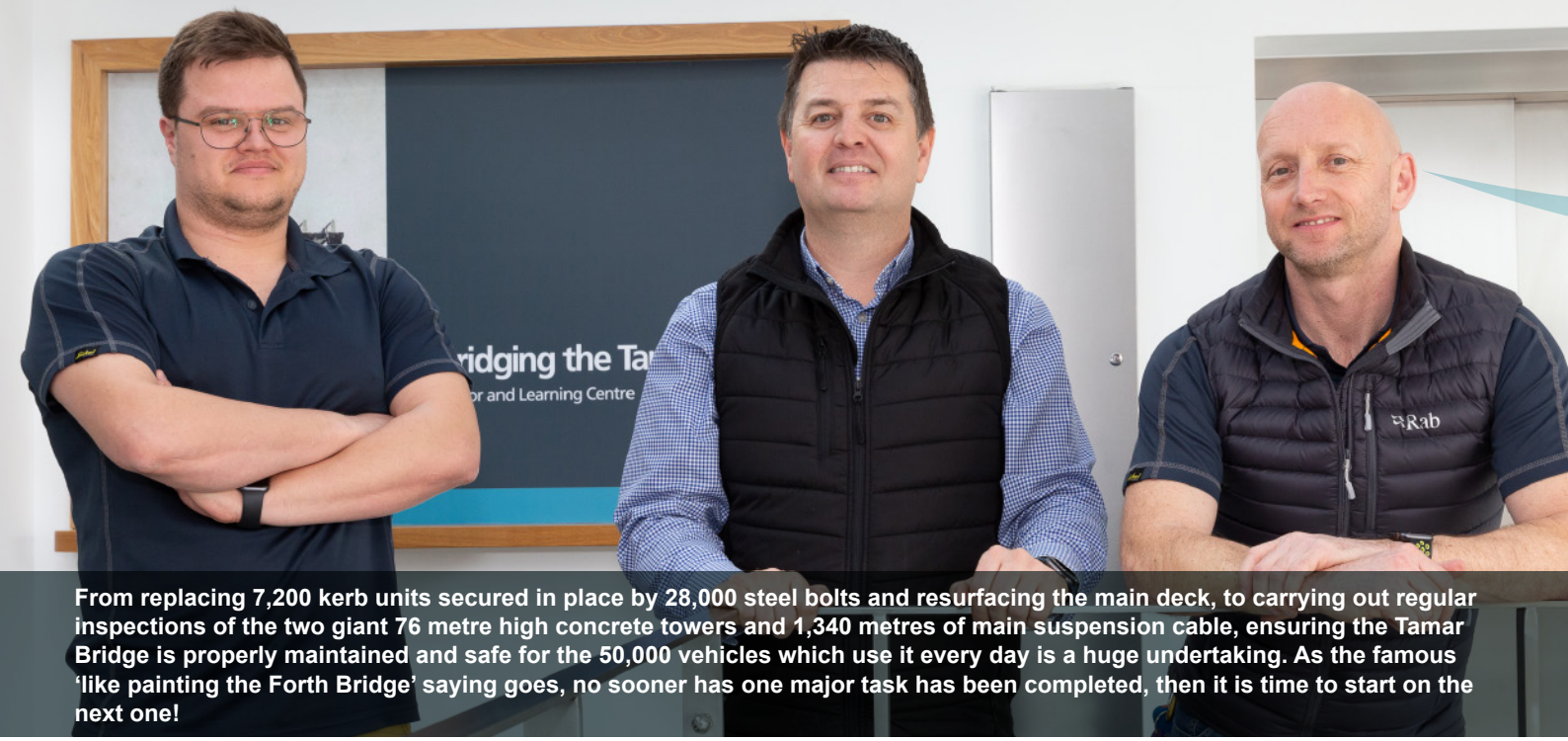
Behind the scenes with our Bric



From replacing 7,200 kerb units secured in place by 28,000 steel bolts and resurfacing the main deck, to carrying out regular inspections of the two giant 76 metre high concrete towers and 1,340 metres of main suspension cable, ensuring the Tamar Bridge is properly maintained and safe for the 50,000 vehicles which use it every day is a huge undertaking. As the famous 'like painting the Forth Bridge' saying goes, no sooner has one major task has been completed, then it is time to start on the next one!

The team responsible for carrying out the engineering and maintenance are the Tamar Crossings engineering team: Engineering Manager Richard Cole, Assistant Engineering Manager Steve Rimmer and Bridge Inspector and Maintenance supervisor Piotr Helm.

Constructed between 1959 and 1961 at a cost of £1.5m, the iconic suspension bridge now carries over 16 million vehicles a year across the River Tamar. Additional works to strengthen and widen the 60 year old structure were completed in 2001 at a cost of £34m.

Richard Cole joined Tamar Crossings in 2004, three years after the completion of the strengthening and widening project. Originally employed as a bridge inspector, he took on the role of Engineering Manager in 2008. "I always knew I wanted to work in the construction industry as I liked building things and finding out how things worked and did not want to work in a conventional office environment" he said.

Richard had a particular interest in coastal engineering (coastal defences, harbours, ports and marinas) and, after completing a BTEC in Building and Engineering at a college in Birmingham, he went to Plymouth University to study for a Batchelor of Science degree in Civil and Coastal Engineering. While studying there he also gained his HSE Part III commercial diving certificate.

Fresh from university Richard joined Costain Civil Engineering, one of the country's largest civil engineering firms and found himself working on a £120m project to build a new bypass in Newbury, Berkshire. Perhaps best known for introducing the country to Swampy and his band of eco protestors, this proved to be a fascinating first job for the young engineer as the company found themselves working in the middle of a media spotlight.

Two years later he was part of the £6m A30 Cheriton Bishop junction improvement scheme. This proved to be another challenging job due to nationwide fuel protests and the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

In 2001 he joined a local marine engineering contractor based in Plymouth – enabling him to focus on his first love of marine engineering. 18 months later, after working on a series of projects in Jersey, including the construction of a new jetty in the harbour, he was made redundant when the company went into administration. Keen to stay in the Plymouth area he joined Capita Simmons and found himself working on the Highways Agency project to refurbish the Saltash Tunnel.

"This was another very challenging job that involved refurbishing the lining of the tunnel, new surfacing, drainage improvements and an upgrade of M&E systems " explained Richard. "The vast majority the work had to be done at night to minimise disruption and this added to the challenge."

Richard is very clear that joining Tamar Crossings was one of the best decisions of his life. As the bridge strengthening and widening scheme had only been recently completed Richard spent most of his first two years undertaking routine bridge inspections and overseeing routine maintenance. Since then, however, he has been responsible for planning and delivering a number of major projects on the ageing structure – a challenge he obviously relishes. "As well as the engineering challenges of maintaining and improving the bridge, we also have to manage the potential impact on all our users and local residents."

"If we could fully close the bridge to undertake engineering works, our projects may be more straightforward, but we obviously can't do that. We always have to balance a number of factors, these being project costs, overall project duration and potential disruption to users. On the whole, I think we generally get the balance right, but there will always be a compromise."

"We are often asked why we cannot do all the works at night. Where appropriate we will consider this option – but working at night introduces other issues – such as worker safety and noise disruption for neighbours - using heavy plant and machinery at night would have a major impact on the lives of the people underneath and close to the bridge."

Richard is currently leading the project to replace the deck waterproofing system and kerb fixings which is due to be completed at the end of the Summer. He has already started making plans for the next major project - the resurfacing of the whole bridge deck in Spring 2021, expected to cost around £6m and take up to 9 months to complete.

Being responsible for maintaining such a vital crossing may appear a somewhat daunting task but for Richard the key to success is teamwork. "Tamar Crossings is a great place to work – I am lucky to work with an incredible group of people in a hugely supportive environment which enables us to meet and overcome any challenges that we are faced with."

A key member of this incredible group of people is Richard's number two Steve Rimmer. Steve had a somewhat unusual start

dge Maintenance team

to his engineering career – originally studying and completing art and design at college, he took a summer job before university to earn some money in a local highways maintenance office run by Somerset County Council. At the end of the summer the senior highway technician left and Steve was offered the job along with the relevant studying.

After completing five years of combined working and day release studying, Steve moved over to Atkins who were then the appointed consultant for Somerset County Council. At the age of just 25 he became the manager of a highways depot in charge of 30 people. He was the youngest person at the depot and surrounded by a wealth of experience and learned a great deal working in many different disciplines.

He remained with Atkins for the next 15 years, working on a number of civil engineering schemes in Somerset, including building new roads and managing major drainage and earthworks projects, including providing infrastructure for a new hospital in Minehead and extending sports facilities at West Somerset College. When pressure on local government funding led to a number of major projects being cancelled, Steve decided it was time for a change and in 2010 he joined Tamar Crossings. Originally appointed as a bridge inspector Steve was thrown in at the deep end when three days after he joined the organisation, Richard went to hospital for an operation.

During the past 10 years Steve's role has changed enormously and he now works closely with Richard to plan and deliver the bridge maintenance programme. He is also responsible for overseeing the financial side of the works. Like Richard Steve enjoys working as part of the team and loves 'getting his hands dirty' when he has the chance. One task he particularly enjoys is walking along the 1,340 metres of suspension cables (or ropes as they are called by the team). Despite there being a 61 metre drop from the cables into the water Steve, who is industrial rope access trained, says hanging off the ropes is a fun part of his job!

The third member of the close knit team – Piotr Helm - is also rope access trained and can be regularly seen harnessed to the cables while carrying out inspections of the bridge. Originally from Poland, Piotr was studying at a college in London when an interest in engineering and water sports led to him applying to the same Civil and Coastal Engineering course at Plymouth University as Richard had previously completed.

He was attending a lecture about the Brunel Rail Bridge when he heard two people in the audience asking lots of technical questions about the project. Having discovered they were working for a specialist engineering firm called XEIAD, he sent the company a speculative email asking about employment opportunities and few months later was offered a job. The company were involved in a number of major projects across the country, and Piotr soon found himself working on the Hammersmith Flyover strengthening works, and carrying out inspections on the Dartford Tunnel and QE2 Bridge.

As well as being rope access trained, Piotr had also completed a diving qualification while at university and became involved in carrying out underwater inspections of old and existing structures as part of the construction of a new jetty at the Port of Bristol, and at Canary Wharf, as well as in underground culverts on the M5 and M4.

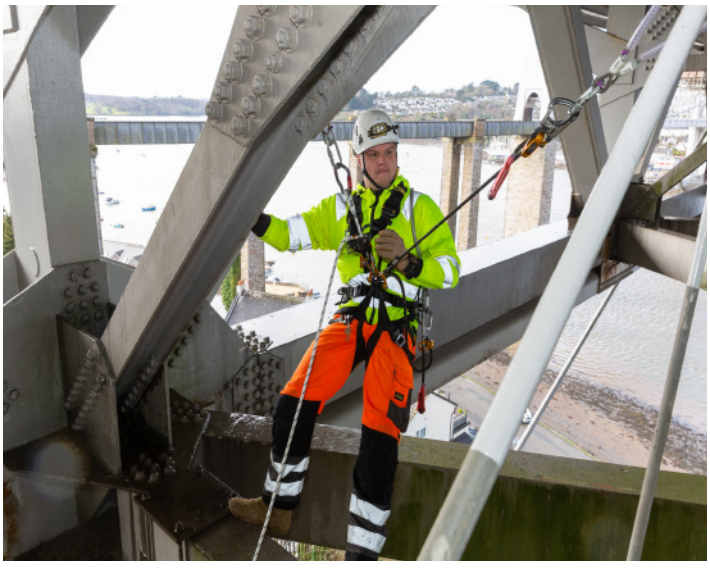
While he had enjoyed working for XIAD, Piotr and his wife had just had a baby and he wanted a change from working away from his home in Plymouth for long periods of time. Luckily the job as a bridge inspector at Tamar Crossings came up and he is now a highly valued member of the team.

Piotr's role means carrying out three scheduled inspections of the bridge each year, identifying defects and any additional works which need to be done. This can range from identifying corroded bolts

which need replacing to repairing damaged incline mesh. He also assists our structural consultants AECOM with multiple inspections of various elements of the bridge throughout the year. The results form part of an annual inspection report which is then reviewed and maintenance planned accordingly. Like Steve he particularly enjoys cable walking, which he does at least three times a year, as well as working at the top of the towers.

While all three obviously work extremely well together, they are very clear that they are part of a wider team who all work together to keep the bridge open.

As Steve puts it: the Tamar Bridge is very personal to everyone working here – it is OUR bridge and we all want to do a fantastic job."



Returning to the Tamar Bridge – after 60 years

60 years ago Gerald Ashton was one of a team of people working on the construction of the new Tamar Bridge. Last month he came back to visit the structure he helped build all those years ago and share his memories of that time with staff currently working for Tamar Crossings.

Accompanied by his son Gary, Gerald, who celebrated his 90th birthday earlier this year visited the control room with its bank of CCTV screens monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week by Tamar Crossings staff. He was also taken on a tour of the 'Bridging the Tamar' Visitor and Learning Centre where he saw archive photos showing the construction of the bridge, some of which included people he had worked with at the time.

Staff wanting to work on the construction of the bridge needed to live within 10 minutes of the site so they could be called in out of hours if required. Having moved to Ernesettle to meet this requirement Gerald began working on installing the 60 foot anchor bolts and the suspension cables on the towers, before being put in charge of the decompression chamber set up to support the divers who were responsible for constructing the pillars on the river bed.

Neither role was easy – installing the cables meant being at the top of the giant towers (without the harnesses and other safety equipment provided for today's engineers), while managing the decompression chamber meant having to deal with impatient divers wanting to be released from the chamber so they could catch last orders at the local pub. There were no radios or walkie talkies in those says - the crews communicated using red and green flags.

"I did not mind being at the top of the towers, but it was more difficult for my wife" explained Gerald. "On one occasion I had told her I was not working on the towers but unfortunately a local news crew were doing a story about the construction of the bridge and she saw pictures of me working at the top of the tower. She was heavily pregnant at the time and needless to say she was not very happy."

There was a great sense of camaraderie among the men working on the bridge – with everyone looking out for each other. Gerald was often found cooking fry ups for colleagues - having first gone to one of the local shops in Saltash to buy the bacon and eggs!

There were also some challenging times – one man fell from the top of the tower into the water below and was taken to hospital suffering from concussion while on another occasion a cable block got loose and landed on the footpath just behind a young woman pushing a pram "That was very close" said Gerald shaking his head. "Bridges can be dangerous old jobs."

Gerald was also on duty on that Sunday in April 1961 when five workers tragically lost their lives when their boat was caught in a whirlpool current and sank. Gerald had been due to get on the boat but decided at the last minute to take the ferry across the river.

Gerald has very happy memories of his time working on building the bridge and was delighted to have the opportunity to look round the offices and talk to staff.

Gerald was shown around the Tamar Crossings building by 'Bridging the Tamar' project assistant Mark Tebbs who thanked him for sharing his memories. "While we have some incredible photos and film footage of the construction of the bridge, nothing beats hearing about it first hand" he said.

Staff from the Centre are also seeking other people to come and share their memories of the bridge as part of its Bridging the Tamar's oral history project.

Whether that is seeing the deck being lifted by crane from the school yard, or being on the last Saltash Ferry crossing, to having worked or walked along the Royal Albert rail bridge or having a family member who worked on the Tamar Bridge - the team would love to hear from you.

When the Centre re-opens the staff will be staging a series of Open Days where people can come and have their memories recorded either then or at a later date as well as have a range of images and records on display for visitors to drop by and look at.

If you have a story that you'd like to share you can contact the team at bridgingthetamar@tamarcrossings.org.uk

Working with Highways England

It may take less than a minute to drive the 410 metres through the Saltash Tunnel, but managing the three lanes to keep the traffic moving 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year requires a major behind-the-scenes operation which is delivered through a partnership between Tamar Crossings and Highways England.

Designed by Mott, Hay and Anderson and built by Balfour Beatty, the A38 Saltash Tunnel was opened in 1988 to help relieve the pressure of increasing levels of traffic travelling between Cornwall and Devon on local residents. It is now used by an average 40,000 vehicles a day.

While the day to day operation is managed by Tamar Crossings staff based in the state of the art control room in the main bridge office, the actual structure of the tunnel and the equipment, including all the signage and the specialist SCADA (supervisory control and data acquisition) equipment used to monitor air quality, lighting and emergency evacuation in the tunnel, is owned and maintained by Highways England.

Together the bridge and tunnel form a Tidal Flow Corridor which uses a sophisticated lane control system to change lane priorities to reflect changes in traffic demand.

Staff in the control room use information on traffic flows provided by 19 CCTV cameras at the bridge and tunnel and at the roundabouts at Carkeel and St Budeaux, as well as liaising with staff at the Toll Plaza and, where necessary with the police and Highways England, to decide when to change lane priorities. This can take place up to 10 times a day on a busy weekday. The Control Room staff are also responsible for managing and responding to incidents on both the bridge and the tunnel. These include accidents, vehicle breakdowns and fires, and debris from vehicles shedding their loads.

Managing the tunnel for Highways England is Service Manager for Structures and Tunnels Julian Mitchell. Based at Notter Bridge, Julian has been involved with the tunnel since 2008, working with a range of different private sector contractors before being directly employed by Highways England in 2017 when it moved the contract for maintaining the tunnel in-house.He manages a team of eight inspectors who are responsible for inspecting around 2,000 bridges and one tunnel across the South West.

One of Julian's main roles is to ensure that the tunnel is properly maintained and meets all health and safety requirements. As the high volume of traffic makes it extremely difficult to close the tunnel during the day to enable works to be carried out, any planned maintenance usually takes place over night. The tunnel is closed for two nights every three months to enable routine maintenance to be carried out, with an extra night's closure taking place every five years for the mandatory testing of the complex electrical systems.

Julian works closely with Tamar Bridge Operations Manager Mike Houghton and the Tamar Crossings staff to manage tunnel closures to minimise disruption to local residents and drivers, and also to make the most of any planned closures by carrying out maintenance on the bridge at the same time.

"As well as alerting the bridge team when we are planning to close the tunnel so they can carry out maintenance on the bridge, we also try and do work on the tunnel when individual lanes are closed on the bridge" said Julian. "We hold bi-monthly maintenance meetings with Tamar Crossings to discuss maintenance issues, as well as wider safety meetings with a range of partners, including the emergency services."

In 2016, when the new CCTV system was installed to monitor traffic flows and adjust the configuration of lanes, Highways England also added an emergency public address system with ten speakers providing both pre-recorded and live messages to tunnel users in emergency situations.

In 2016, when the new CCTV system was installed to monitor traffic flows and adjust the configuration of lanes, Highways England also added an emergency public address system with ten speakers providing both pre-recorded and live messages to tunnel users in emergency situations.

In July 2018 extensive work was carried out to upgrade the incident detection system within the tunnel to provide quicker and more reactive detection of vehicle fires and other incidents. The scheme involved installing around 5,000 metres of new cable – equivalent to the length of 415 double decker buses - as well as adding new state of the art emergency evacuation signs, and separate smoke and heat detection systems. These systems are aligned to the public address system to direct drivers to the safest tunnel exit in the event of an incident.

Julian is currently working with Highways England colleagues to develop a maintenance plan for the next five years. The £10m programme will include replacing the entire lane control system, an extremely complex operation which would normally involve the complete closure of the tunnel. Recognising the potential impact of this on local residents and tunnel and bridge users, Julian has devised an innovative 'ghost system' approach which will see the installation of the new system running in parallel with the existing system. It will still require some over night closures but will avoid the need for closures during the day.

"The link between the Tamar Bridge and the tunnel means it is vital we work closely together to keep the traffic moving" said Julian. "We have developed a very strong partnership with Tamar Crossings and look forward to continuing to work with them in the future."

Did you know:

Saltash Tunnel and Tamar Bridge are the only 3 lane bi-directional tidal flow bridge and tunnel combination in Europe if not the world!

The illuminated road studs are powered by work by electromagnetic induction; a bit like how an electric toothbrush or new mobile phone is charged when placed on a charger.

Approx. 20,000 litres of ground water from springs along the tunnel length is pumped out every day.

In the event of a power cut the tunnel is powered exclusively by a backup diesel generator.

There is over 7km of fibre optic cable carrying information to and from the tunnel control system.

Spotlight on our customer services team

We pride ourselves on providing excellent customer service. Visitors at the Tamar Bridge office in Saltash are always sure of a warm welcome from Customer Services Supervisor Sue White and her team.

Sue joined Tamar Crossings as a customer services assistant 13 years ago. With a background in customer services and hospitality, including experience working in hotels and sales, she had been running her own booking agent business when she became seriously ill and had to close it down. Having recovered her health, she decided she wanted a change and began looking for a job where she would be working with people.

"I saw the advert for the job at Tamar Crossings, decided to apply and was delighted when I was appointed" she said. "I became Customer Services Supervisor in 2015 and could not be happier with my role."

Sue is responsible for overseeing the day to day running of customer services, with the 10 strong team dealing with everything from responding to basic customer queries, compliments and complaints, to managing the 52,000 plus toll accounts and 95,000 tags.

"This is a very busy office" she said. "On an average day we can deal with around 450 phone calls from people needing to top up their tag accounts, with a further 250 people walking through the door in person with a range of issues and queries. These can vary from wanting to set up new toll accounts and add new vehicles to existing accounts to changing their direct debit details."

The team also deal with between 20 – 30 people a day who are issued with a debit note because they were unable to pay the toll when they arrived at the toll booths.

"Some people arriving at the reception desk can be a little bit grumpy if their tag has not been working, or they are unhappy about having to pay the admin fee for the debit note, but we always do our best to help and send them away with a smile on their faces."

One of the newest members of the customer services team is 20 year old Megan Beaumont. Megan originally joined Tamar Crossings' customer services team as a business administration apprentice in 2017. Two and a half years later she has completed her Level 3 apprenticeship and last month was offered and accepted a full time job in the team.

Having first completed an NVQ in beauty Megan decided working as a beautician was not for her, and began looking around for alternatives. "I knew I enjoyed working face to face with people and so the opportunity to join Tamar Crossings as an apprentice in customer services sounded perfect" she said.

Ask Megan what she enjoys about her job and she replies "Everything" with a big smile on her face. "Every day is different. This is such a positive place to work – everyone looks after each other and there is a real family ethos."

Megan has particularly enjoyed the finance part of her apprenticeship and is now looking forward to building on this interest in her first 'proper job'.

For Sue the strong family ethos is one of the things she loves most about working both in customer services and in Tamar Crossings.
"This is a great place to work – I have a fantastic team who always go the extra mile to help people."