

Tamar Crossings Newsletter

No. 5 November 2020



Welcome to the new edition of Tamar Crossings

During the past few months we have been working very hard to ensure that Tamar Crossings meets all the Covid-secure guidance set out by the Government while continuing to operate both crossings.

This has been particularly challenging as we enter the final stage of our kerb replacement scheme on the Bridge and complete the upgrade of our toll system.

Earlier this month representatives from the Health and Safety Executive made an unannounced spot-check visit to the Ferry to inspect and review our Covid-secure arrangements. This was part of their ongoing programme of spot-checking businesses for compliance. They were satisfied with the measures we have in place and did not identify any further actions we needed to take, so this is very reassuring for our staff and for our users.

You can read more about how our health and safety team are keeping people safe in this edition of the newsletter.

We also explain how we have maintained ferry services in the middle of a global pandemic, and why the financial shortfall caused by the impact of Covid-19 means that we are being forced to consider revising toll prices.

Finally, it is often said that the camera never lies - find out why a photo of a Shackleton plane flying under the Tamar Bridge in 1962 may not be all that it seems.

Thank you for your support.

David List,
General Manager

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Joint Committee member: Cllr Pam Buchan



With a background in science, a love of the sea and a commitment to supporting her local community, Plymouth Councillor Pam Buchan is thoroughly enjoying her role as a member of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee.

After spending her childhood near Manchester, Pam fell in love with the sea at the age of 11 during a visit to the Northumberland coast and later decided she wanted to study marine biology so she could live by the sea.

After completing a degree and postgraduate research at Newcastle University, she then spent eight years back in Greater Manchester managing public engagement across the North of England for the British Science Association. She found she was missing the sea so completed a part time Masters in Coastal Zone Management before finally moving with her family to Plymouth in 2015 to do a PhD in marine citizenship at Exeter University.

While enjoying living in Plymouth and working on her research, Pam felt something was missing and, keen to support her local community and make a difference, she stood for election to the City Council. After being elected as the Plymouth City Councillor for Honicknowle in 2018, she was appointed as a member of Joint Committee.

As a new member of the Committee Pam immediately began to use her research skills to learn more about the history of the iconic bridge and the ferries, and to gain a greater understanding about the day-to-day operation of the two crossings.

"Both crossings provide a vital transport link across the river" she said. "From using the crossings every day to travel to work or school, or to get to the hospital in an emergency, the bridge and the ferries play a key role in the lives of people in both Plymouth and South East Cornwall."

"As the only woman on the committee when I joined and often the only woman in the room, I felt it was important to speak up and ensure that other perspectives were being considered. In the two years I've been on the committee I feel our communications with the public have really improved, and I'm pushing for more consideration of the environment in our operations."

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

LYNHER'S refit and Gantries - the challenges encountered and overcome in the middle of a global pandemic

On 24 March LYNHER left Torpoint for her five-yearly refit at contractor A&P's dry dock facilities in Falmouth.

LYNHER is one of three Torpoint Ferries which, together, provide a 24-hour chain ferry service in all weathers for up to 8,000 vehicles and 1,500 pedestrians each day, 365 days a year. Believed to be the world's biggest and busiest chain ferry service, the Torpoint Ferry is certainly the UK's busiest inland waterway vehicle ferry crossing.

Delivering this service 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 and inspections and surveys have to be carried out during refits in dry dock conditions.

Normally this would be a fairly straightforward process taking around eight weeks to complete. On this occasion, however, the refit proved to be anything but routine.

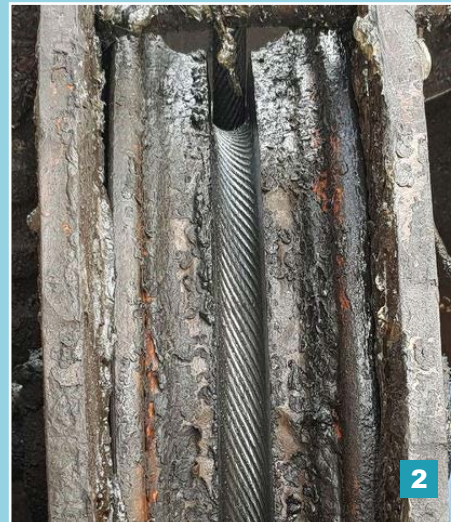
We worked closely with A&P Falmouth on the refit, and in spite of the significant impact on working practices imposed by the Covid-19 restrictions, the additional time in the dry dock was actually very modest.



Repairing the gantries

Our ferries each run on pairs of chains spanning the river – the vessels are self-powered and use chainwheels to pull on the chains to cross the river. This is the same principle as that used by engineer James Rendel who designed the first Torpoint chain ferries in 1834. As well as providing traction, the chains guide the ferries as they cross and land on each side of the river. These chains need to have a certain level of tension to enable the ferries to cross the river safely and efficiently. 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 a pit and supported by a steel framework - we call them chain gantries.

The cables and pulleys are routinely inspected for wear. The chains need to be replaced about every five years, and as this is a major exercise, this is normally carried out while each ferry is away being refitted to avoid affecting the service. On this occasion staff removing the old cables from the LYNHER gantry discovered a significant unexpected amount of wear on some of the pulleys.

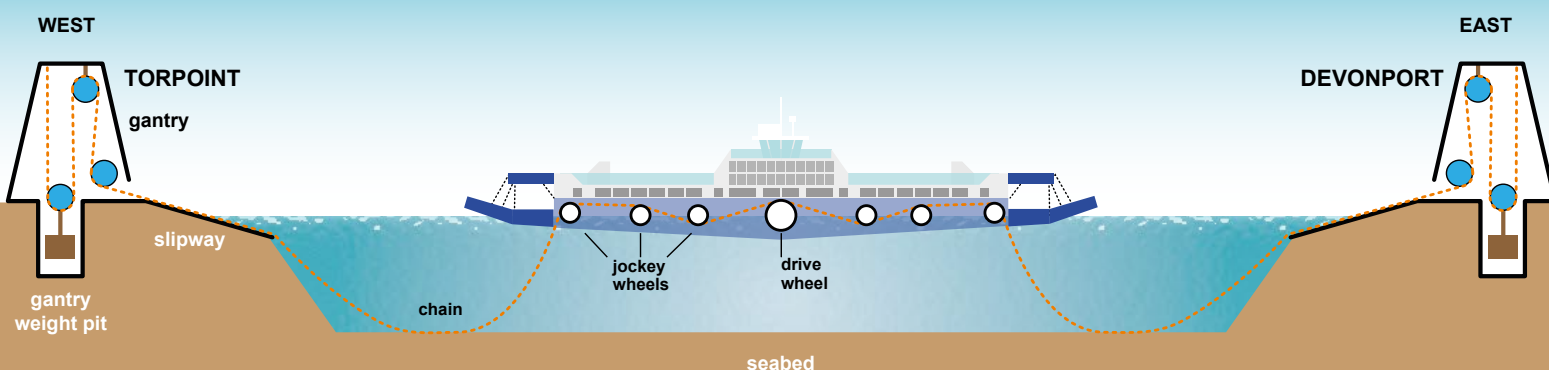


Following consultation with the specialist contractor carrying out the cable change, it was concluded that the pulleys were not fit for use, and would have to be replaced to ensure that the ferry could be safely operated on its return from refit.

The pulleys were not 'off the shelf' items and had been custom made specifically to fit the

gantries at Torpoint and Devonport, meaning that replacements had to be designed and fabricated. We had to locate a specialist contractor who could work with our engineers to produce new pulleys and then get them manufactured – all in the middle of a global pandemic.

With most engineering fabrication companies in the UK having either temporarily shut down or significantly reduced the range of services they could offer, we eventually identified a manufacturer in the Czech Republic with the very specific expertise needed to produce the bespoke design pulleys and who was still operating and able to complete the task in a reasonable timeframe.



Red lead paint challenge

With work taking place to manufacture the new parts, our engineering staff began preparing the pits so that the replacement pulleys could be installed as soon as they were available.

This involved pumping out the water, grease and debris which had accumulated over the years so the pit could be cleaned to provide access for the engineering works. It was only when the pit, its associated fittings and the weight bucket had been cleaned that staff discovered the extensive presence of red lead paint. As lead paint is hazardous, this meant immediately stopping all work, removing samples for analysis, and cleaning and sealing all red lead painted surfaces.

Our new pulleys were delivered in early August and, having been successfully fitted and set to work, LYNHER was once again ready to resume service.



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Resuming a three-ferry service

While LYNHER was away for her refit, the service was provided by the two remaining ferries.

Normally we would bring the third ferry back into service almost immediately after refit. On this occasion, however, the combination of the works at the gantries and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic meant that we continued with a two-ferry service until the end of August.

Like most other businesses and organisations across the country, the lockdown restrictions introduced by the Government to help reduce the spread of the coronavirus pandemic had a huge impact on our day-to-day operations.

Tolling is normally carried out on the ferries during crossings, but Covid-19 social distancing requirements led to us introducing a temporary shoreside tolling system to allow staff to keep a safe distance from users. Ferry staff worked very hard to carry out routine planned maintenance on the other two ferries PLYM and TAMAR, whilst at the same time dealing with the issues with LYNHER's gantries.

The pandemic resulted in a significant increase in workload across the whole organisation and changes in working practices at a time when a number of existing staff were self-isolating or shielding as result of the pandemic, and when the pandemic had forced the temporary suspension of recruitment of new staff.

Although all the routine maintenance work that can be done with a ferry in service had been carried out on the two remaining ferries to keep them running while LYNHER was away, there were some activities that needed a ferry to be out of service to complete. As soon as LYNHER was available for service we took the opportunity to catch up with these activities. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and Lloyds Register also resumed their normal programme of inspections and surveys, in August.

Toll revision

Like many other organisations across the country, the impact of Covid-19 pandemic has left Tamar Crossings facing a significant financial shortfall.

Our crossings are almost entirely funded by toll income, which is used to operate, maintain and improve the bridge and ferries.

In the initial phase of lockdown traffic dropped to around 30% of normal levels and, since then, recovery has been slow, with current levels still only around 85% of normal.

Immediately following the lockdown, the Joint Committee took the decision to temporarily suspend tolling between 24 March and the end of May for safety reasons to help staff and users to comply with the coronavirus legislation on social distancing. As a result of the loss of income our modest reserves have been exhausted and, without intervention, we are facing a growing financial deficit.

The two Joint Chairmen of the Committee and the respective Transport Cabinet Members for Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council have been very active in making the case for Government support to replace the income lost due to the effects of Covid-19, and that dialogue is ongoing.

After considering and ruling out a number of potential options, including significantly reducing the ferry service, members of the Joint Committee have agreed to carry out consultation on revising the toll prices to help address the financial shortfall and keep both crossings operating.

If implemented, the proposal would mean a 10% reduction

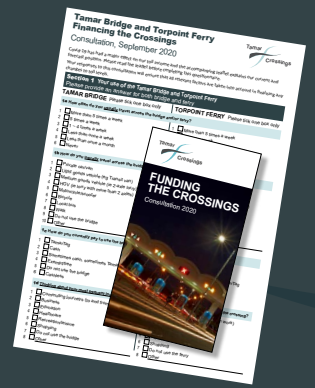
in the current pre-payment (TamarTag) discount (from 50% to 40%) from January 2021 at the same as beginning the formal application process for increasing cash tolls by 20% in January 2022.

The change would see the discount toll for a car increase from £1 to £1.20, with the cash toll increasing from £2 to £2.40.

The consultation on these proposed changes is taking place during October and November. All users of the crossings on 2nd and 3rd October (a weekday and weekend day to capture a representative sample) were offered a consultation pack comprising an information leaflet and questionnaire, and we have invited key stakeholders and partners to complete our online questionnaire on the Tamar Crossings website.

The results of the consultation will be reviewed at the next meeting of the Joint Committee on 11th December when a final decision will be made on whether to go forward with the changes.

The process can be halted at any stage in the meantime if circumstances change as a result of additional Government funding or a significant increase in traffic levels, and toll increases are therefore no longer needed.



Kerb replacement works

We are now in the final stages of the £3.8 million scheme to renew the kerb fixings and associated bridge deck waterproofing system on the Bridge.

Replacing the deck waterproofing and steel fixings holding the units in place is essential to prevent the steel bridge deck from corroding and to ensure the continued safety of those crossing the bridge.

While we have been able to continue with the project during the past few months, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the associated social distancing requirements has created some additional challenges for our contractors.

This project has involved working on all six of the kerb lines on the bridge – two on each of the two cantilever lanes, and two on the main deck. Working on kerb lines inevitably means closing the adjacent traffic lanes, affecting traffic capacity. The work has been split into stages so that only one traffic lane on the bridge has been affected at any one time. During most of the work we have operated a free shuttle bus service for cyclists, pedestrians and mobility scooters, during work phases when the pedestrian/cycle lane on the south cantilever has had to be closed. That shuttle bus service has been supplemented since August with additional double-deck buses provided by our partner Citybus to allow social distancing for passengers.

We have now switched the traffic management to close the nearside eastbound lane on the north side of the main deck of the bridge to continue with the next phase of the project, which is currently scheduled for completion at the end of November 2020.

We have also erected a new bus shelter at the top of Pemros Road at the east end of the bridge to help identify the pick-up/set down point and to provide some shelter from inclement weather. We would like to remind all users that facemasks are required while travelling on any of our bus services, and to respect social distancing in and around the bus shelter.

We recognise that these works have been disruptive but we have tried to minimise their impact on users. We are very grateful to service users for their patience during these essential works and would also like to thank everyone who has used the shuttle bus services to cross the bridge while the pedestrian/cycle lane has been closed.

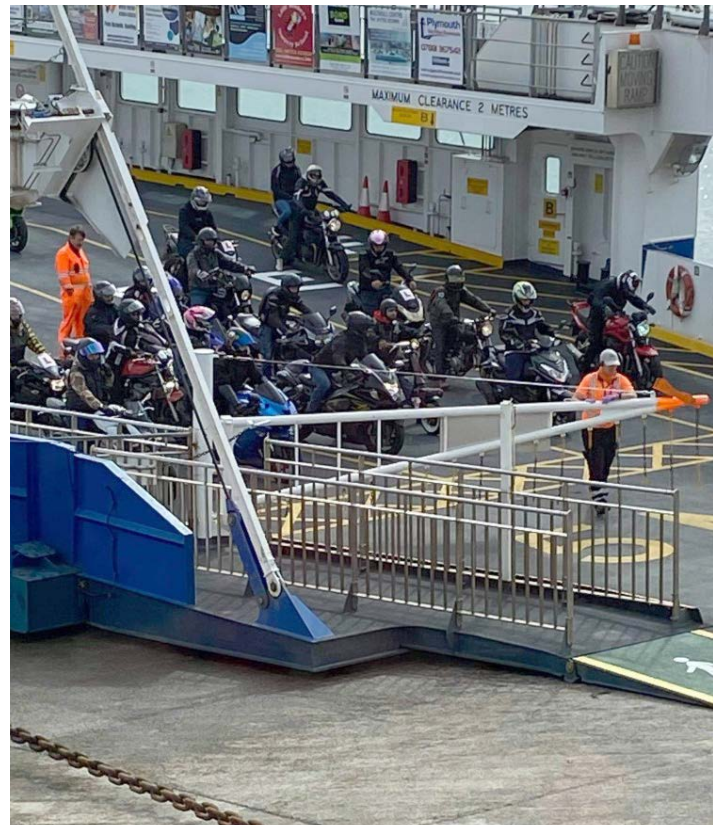




Charity motorcycle ride

We were delighted to have had the opportunity to support a special charity motorcycle ride in aid of Cornwall Air Ambulance. The motorcycle ride was organised by friends of Jay Dickson who was tragically killed in an accident on the stretch of road between Torpoint and Antony last year.

After hearing of the plans for the charity bike ride we were very happy to support the event and arranged a special crossing using the third ferry to avoid causing disruption or delays to other service users.



Keeping people safe

Tamar Crossings is committed to providing safe, reliable and efficient crossings of the River Tamar for all users. With 18 million vehicles using the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint ferries a year, and a staff of just over 100, working to maintain the iconic bridge and three ferries and keep the crossings operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it is easy to see why health and safety is so important to the organisation.



Health, Safety and Environmental Manager Davood Kalantar joined Tamar Crossings four years ago. After originally studying environmental management at university, Davood moved into the field of health and safety, joining a facilities management company where he worked on projects in major shopping centres, airports and leisure and entertainment venues across the UK.

After working at iconic venues such as the O2 arena and the Birmingham Bull Ring, Davood decided he was tired of always being on the road and moved with his family back to the area where he had lived as a child.

“Despite spending my childhood going across the bridge and the ferries, it was not until I joined Tamar Crossings that I really thought about what was involved in operating the crossings” he said **“It was a real eye opener.”**

A key part of Davood's job is working with the management team to protect the safety of staff and members of the public by ensuring that all parts of the organisation are working safely and following environmental, health and safety regulations.

This involves setting the organisation's policies and procedures that establish the safety arrangements and principles that govern how staff and contractors work. A comprehensive inspection programme for all areas of the operation is in place to ensure compliance with legislation, and to review and identify any weaknesses, thereby ensuring improvements and solutions are put in place where necessary.

His work entails carrying out detailed risk assessments for specific areas of the business and recording as well as investigating accidents or near misses involving Tamar Crossings staff or members of the public to identify potential trends or patterns

and advise on any changes which need to be made to existing processes and procedures.

“One day I could be assessing the ferry slipways to minimise the risk of slips, trips and falls, or looking at how traffic is managed in the ferry lanes, while on another I will be working with the bridge team to review their plans for working at height or preparing for the start of a new project such as the kerb replacement scheme.”

While Tamar Crossings already meets health and safety standards, it is currently working towards implementing ISO 45001 health and safety accreditation.

Davood was recently joined by a new member of the team, Leon Brimble, who also works across both sites.

The health and safety team work closely with the emergency services to support the day-to-day use of the crossings, as well as preparing for potential emergency situations.

Earlier this year Tamar Crossings joined with Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service to carry out a joint emergency exercise on the Torpoint Ferry to test the organisation's Emergency Response Plans.

The exercise involved the ferry team members testing the fire and communication procedures, as well as providing Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service with valuable search and rescue training opportunities specific to the ferry.

More recently Davood has been responsible for managing the organisation's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, working with the rest of the management team to keep staff members and the public safe, whilst continuing to keep both crossings open.

Delivering key transport links, Tamar Crossings was part of the region's multi-agency response to Covid-19, liaising with



emergency services and Local Resilience Forum throughout the lockdown. While the multi-agency response was shifted on 1st July as lockdown measures were eased and handed over to the regional Health Protection Board, Tamar Crossings has continued to work closely with partner agencies.

As well as monitoring and analysing new legislation and guidance issued by the Government in the relevant areas – particularly transport, construction, operation of offices and contact centres - Davood also ensured that Tamar Crossings kept up to date with changes to existing regulations. He works with managers and union representatives to implement appropriate measures related to the guidance and legislation, for example in relation to hand hygiene, social distancing and use of face coverings. Tamar Crossings was declared 'Covid-secure' on 15th June and continues to review this on a regular basis.

One of the most challenging days of Davood's time with Tamar Crossings came in March this year when the Prime Minister announced the 'lockdown' restrictions on the same day as the LYNHER ferry was due to leave Torpoint for her five-yearly refit.

“While we had obviously carried our extensive planning to make sure that the whole operation ran smoothly, we had not factored in the sudden introduction of a nationwide lockdown” he said. **“I had a call at 6am from a leading hand and had to jump in my car and work with the contractors A & P to come up with a plan on how we could ensure staff worked together safely to get the ferry away.”**

“Having successfully managed that situation, we then had to deal with the issue of carrying out repairs to the pulleys in the gantries whilst maintaining social distancing guidelines, followed by the discovery of the red lead paint. It was certainly a very interesting ferry refit.”

The other part of Davood's job involves environmental management. He has been involved in a number of specific environmental projects, including an innovative scheme to recycle the seaweed washed up on the ferry slipways.

Seaweed, algae and other materials are washed up onto the slipways at either side of the River Tamar crossing with every tide. This debris must be regularly cleaned off to avoid creating a potentially slippery surface for people using the crossing. The seaweed cannot be returned to the sea because it may have picked up contamination, including additional waste materials, such as plastics.

As part of the organisation's 'zero waste to landfill' partnership with Viridor, the waste company are now collecting the seaweed and taking it to be cleaned and processed by Tavistock farmer Dave Bragg and then turned into high-quality agricultural fertiliser.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic one of Davood's main focuses was on preparing the organisation for Brexit and potential changes to environmental reform. While some of this work was put on hold during the pandemic, the end of the transition period on 31 December means that it is now very much back on the agenda.

While working for Tamar Crossings is certainly very different to managing health and safety at the O2 arena, Davood has no regrets about moving back to the South West.

“Tamar Crossings is a fantastic place to work and every day is different” he explained **“From working with managers at the ferries and the emergency services to plan how to evacuate passengers in the case of a fire breaking out mid crossing, and ensuring that people can walk and cycle safely across the bridge, to making sure all our staff have a safe place to work, you never know what you are going to be faced with.”**

Bridging the Tamar update



True or false? An Avro Shackleton flew under the Tamar Bridge and the Royal Albert Bridge when practising for the fly past for the official opening of the Tamar Bridge? We have a photograph so surely it must be true!

Wrong: After some research we discovered the image of the aircraft has been superimposed onto a contemporary image of the Tamar Bridge.

During lockdown the Centre was shut but our staff and volunteers have been busy behind the scenes. Volunteer Andrew Davy first alerted the team at the Visitor Centre to the image and asked if it could be true. We initially considered if it was physically possible for a Shackleton to fly under the bridge (particularly given the Saltash Ferry would have been still operating). The answer to this was yes – in those days this was the sort of thing a pilot might get away with!

The picture also shows the Tamar bridge is still under construction, with one side of the temporary catwalk still in place, dating the image to between January and March 1962. We know the official opening flypast took place on 26th April 1962 and it is certainly reasonable to assume the RAF would practice the flypast before the event.

So, having decided it was possible in theory, was there anything in the picture to suggest it did not actually happen? We needed to consider who took the photo, where it was taken from and if it appeared in the press.

The angle suggests it could have been taken from what is now the area where our contractors' portacabins currently are sited. The image is quite sharp so did the photographer know this was going to happen? We also could not find any mention of the image in the papers of the time which also seems strange. One possibility is that two aircraft flew under the bridge, with the lead aircraft taking the image. While this might have been possible, it would have been very risky as the space is minimal.

Having blown up the image we found an aircraft number on the side: XF701. Having checked a Shackleton veterans' website, we discovered XF701 did not arrive at RAF St. Mawgan, where the aircraft in the flypast were based, until August 1962, some months after the flypast. Further discussions with the Shackleton Society revealed that the image was a fake, which members in the group had seen previously.

Andrew Davy has a long association with the Tamar Bridge. Born in 1961, the same year as work began on constructing the bridge, he often visited the bridge with his father, a member of a local camera club, when he was taking pictures of the work. When his father died three years ago Andrew inherited his incredible collection of photos which he subsequently donated to the Learning Centre.

Earlier this year Andrew also donated a ferry bell from one of the steam powered chain ferries which carried passengers between Saltash and Plymouth in the 1930's. His grandmother Mabel also officially opened the Saltash ferry in 1933 on behalf of his grandfather Herbert, the Mayor of Saltash, who was ill at the time of the ceremony, and Andrew found the historic bell in a box in the attic after the death of his father.

He is now researching the compulsory purchase of a masonic lodge and graveyard prior to construction of the Tamar Bridge. The bodies were re-interred but who were they and how old were the graves?

We have received VisitEngland's 'Good to go' badge for our Visitor Centre tours which are currently running every Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday at 11am and 1pm. The badge recognises that we follow social distancing and good hygiene practice. **Pre-booking is now essential and can be done via Eventbrite <https://bit.ly/3kuRsyG>**

This September we took part in the national 'Heritage Open Day' initiative and provided a special guided tour of the Royal Albert Bridge, exploring the history of Brunel's iconic structure.

So what is next for the Learning Centre?

The Centre helps young people discover more about the history of our amazing bridges and the people who helped to build them. This Autumn we will be liaising with teachers and adapting our schools' workshops in a COVID-secure way in this 'new normal'.

We are very happy to arrange visits and workshops for any schools so please get in touch if your school would like to visit the Centre.

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