

Bridging the World: Teesside's bridge-building heritage and the Tees Transporter Bridge Visitor Experience Project

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Abstract

The Tees Transporter Bridge is arguably one of the most recognisable structures in the north-east of England having towered over the River Tees since 1911 and described by Pevsner as "a European monument – in its daring and finesse...a thrill to see from anywhere". A unique embodiment of Victorian and Edwardian technology and ingenuity utilised to solve the problem of crossing the Tees without impeding traffic on the 'steel river', this 'majestic dinosaur' has become an iconic landmark of Teesside and an embodiment of 'home' for many.

Following on from the Bridge's 2011 centenary, the HLF-supported Tees Transporter Bridge Visitor Experience Project has celebrated and explored the landmark through a range of new interpretation, pageant and reminiscence activities. The launch of the new 'Visitor Experience' in late 2015 coincided with the end of steel manufacturing on Teesside inextricably linked to the area's identity and in particular its bridge-building heritage. This paper considers how the Tees Transporter Bridge serves as an evocative, sometimes contentious, platform for inspiring memories of yesteryear's industrial heyday whilst provoking a sense of loss and dislocation in the post-industrial town.

It will be contended that the ongoing preservation and reinterpretation of this urban landmark and space has highlighted how sites of industrial heritage serve as an apparatus for creating an often romanticised 'sense of place' and helped celebrate Teesside's rich bridge-building history in particular.