

ST. PAUL'S BRIDGE THE PROJECT OF A RIVER BRIDGE NEAR SAINT PAUL'S CATHEDRAL AND THE EFFECTS IT HAD

The City of London was built and developed on the north bank of the river Thames and communication with the south side has always presented difficulty or inconvenience. The Romans built the first London Bridge 1900 years ago and the numerous gifts of the citizens through the centuries to 'God and the Bridge' have demonstrated the feeling about maintaining a convenient crossing. Increasing need for carriage of goods and passengers in a north-south direction involving a crossing of the river made one bridge a bottle-neck and over the years further bridges were built at various points although Blackfriars Bridge in the 1760s was the only new crossing giving any relief in the vicinity of the City. In 1811 a private venture built Southwark Bridge, charging a toll but this did not provide sufficient relief and by the 1850s there was considerable public outcry for the provision of another crossing opening into the City.

A detailed examination of all that took place in the hundred years that followed would be completely beyond the scope of a short paper, so that it will only be possible to deal with the projects and their effects in broad outline. It was in 1852 that the first idea of a bridge in the area of St. Paul's was first mooted when Francis Bennoch, speaking to a proposal before Common Council to widen Blackfriars Bridge, got an amendment through, *nem. con.*, to postpone consideration until the question of building a new bridge between those at Southwark and Blackfriars had been examined. His proposals were published in booklet form in 1853 and first aired the idea that a bridge with a line directed on to the south door of the cathedral would open up a new and desirable vista of Wren's masterpiece. Parliament had taken notice of the river crossing problem and a Parliamentary Select Committee on Metropolitan Bridges reported in 1854 (a) in favour of freeing all London bridges from toll; (b) recommending a new bridge to be built below London Bridge from Tower Hill on the north side; and (c) favouring the building of a bridge by a continuation of Aldersgate Street at Old Change 'which would not only materially relieve traffic but also open out the approaches to and view of the Metropolitan Cathedral'. The Bridge House Committee of the Corporation sought the views of Mr. Stephenson, the Engineer, who advised them that if the comparatively unused Southwark Bridge could be given more use 'it might supersede the necessity of the proposed project.'

As a consequence, no further progress was made on the proposal for a bridge near St. Paul's but the Corporation did negotiate and ultimately purchase Southwark Bridge through the Bridge House Trust and freed

it from toll, thus achieving some part of the recommendations of the Select Committee. The construction of Tower Bridge some forty years later can be seen to have fulfilled a further part of those recommendations, but although it did relieve traffic, it could not at that time or for some years after it was built carry as much traffic as other bridges because of the necessity to open for ships. As later traffic censuses show, the advice on Southwark Bridge did not take one important factor into consideration, that its steep gradient — later referred to as a switchback — in a period when all traffic was horse-drawn, prevented its use for heavier vehicles so that goods traffic continued to use the other bridges.

Even after the opening of Tower Bridge in 1894 — it was planned in 1884 — London's traffic situation was such at the turn of the century that a Royal Commission was appointed to investigate it. This was in the period of development of tramways and one of the Commission's points was that tramways represented a very important feature and considerable advantage could be gained in connecting the various systems. On the City itself, the Commission stated that in no district of London 'is congestion greater or relief more urgently needed', but that the streets in the more crowded parts of the City were not wide enough to permit of surface tramways and relief could only be given by subways. On the general theme, the Commission's solution to the increasing population, improved methods of locomotion, increased travel and present and increasing congestion, was to provide for two new main avenues to be set up through London, one east to west and one north to south, this latter to connect Holloway to the Elephant passing over a new bridge sited somewhere near the west boundary of the City.

A traffic census taken about this time shows London Bridge and Blackfriars Bridge each taking about 19,000 vehicles a day, Tower Bridge, 14-15,000 and Southwark Bridge with its gradient problems only 4,000. Although the north end of Southwark Bridge did not give directly on to a through road to the north, the Corporation felt that its improvement to enable a traffic flow similar to that of the other bridges would provide some relief at a reasonable cost. Accordingly, a Bill was promoted in Parliament in 1904 to achieve this. Opposition was not on account of the nature of the scheme but from vested property interests, but that opposition proved effective and the Bill was withdrawn.

The withdrawal of the Bill could not be the end of so important a matter and in March 1905 Common Council accepted a motion to refer to the Bridge House Estates Committee to consider and report 'as to the best method of adding to or improving the present means of communication between the north and south sides of the river Thames within the City'. Two things were clear from the debate on this motion, firstly that it was a new bridge that the Committee were

really being asked to consider, and secondly, that, for several reasons the question of a new bridge was likely to be an emotive issue and that there would be determined opposition in spite of the report of the Royal Commission. Such a project would take time to consider, in spite of all the ground that had already been gone over before more than once and nearly two years later, in January 1907, the Committee not having reported, a further resolution was sent to them to consider the matter of improving or reconstructing Southwark Bridge. This unsatisfactory bridge seems to have been used as a sort of red herring whenever the question of an additional bridge was being considered but this does seem to have been a serious proposal at this time.

By July 1908, more than three years after the original reference, the Committee determined that a new bridge was probably going to be at least part of any solution they might put forward and they engaged Mr. Basil Mott to report to them. A further year later, in July 1909, the Committee reported, recommending that (a) Southwark Bridge should be reconstructed at a cost of £261,000, and (b) a new bridge, 80 feet wide, should be constructed, sited between Southwark and Blackfriars Bridges, at a cost of £1,646,983. This at least produced concrete proposals on which battle could be joined, which it soon was, for in a Court which by the end of a considerable debate only numbered 110 — much less than half the membership — first, an amendment was carried to proceed only with the Southwark Bridge part of the proposal, which on a division showed a majority of ten, and then, a further amendment to refer back was carried, with a suggestion that the alternative of a tunnel should be considered.

When the report came back to the Court in November 1909, there were some minor adjustments to the original scheme on the southern approaches and a costing had been made of the alternative of a tunnel, estimated at £4,522,050. In view of the strong feelings involved and the likelihood of a protracted debate the Lord Mayor deferred consideration to a Court to be specially convened for the report to be taken into consideration and the newly installed Lord Mayor duly held this on 15 November 1909. In the meantime there was considerable lobbying and canvassing and in particular a public meeting sponsored by representatives of the Wards of Vintry, Dowgate, Castle Baynard and Queenhithe. Several senior Aldermen attended this meeting to whip up opposition to the scheme and a deputation from the meeting asked to be heard at the special meeting of Common Council before the debate took place. They were duly heard and questioned and the report was introduced.

Finance was likely to be an important factor as the Bridge House Trust would have to supply the funds. It was clear from a cost comparison that the alternative of a tunnel was not viable. It was pointed out that, with the method of financing earlier projects by borrowing

and repaying out of later income, the Bridge House Trust was nearly £1m in debt, there remaining outstanding, inter alia, £475,000 borrowed for Tower Bridge and £210,000 on Blackfriars Bridge, and that the Committee must be obsessed with spending money to contemplate further commitments. It was suggested that the need for the scheme had diminished with the recent widening of London Bridge and the work going on on Blackfriars Bridge to accommodate trams. It was further objected that the scheme would cause more traffic problems in the City than it would cure as it would make two major crossings of east-west traffic if the approach were to carry traffic into Aldersgate Street as was contemplated. There were appeals to delay until further widening of existing bridges could be examined and finally the same amendment to proceed with Southwark Bridge only, which was forced to a division. This time, with 157 present at the division, the amendment was negatived by a majority of 34 and the report was approved. The second battle therefore went in favour of those supporting the scheme but as Parliamentary powers were required to put it into operation, the delay from July to November meant the loss of a complete Parliamentary session in getting those powers and the necessary Bill did not come before Parliament until yet another year had passed.

In the interim the Bridge House Estates Committee approached the R.I.B.A. ' . . . with a view to their being heard on the construction of the new bridge.' That body stated that for aesthetic and architectural reasons the line of the bridge and its approach on the north side should be set to come out opposite the south door of the central transept of the Cathedral. The Committee appreciated the aesthetic reasons for the Institute's suggestion but felt that, as it would effectively make a dead end in St. Paul's Churchyard, from a traffic point of view such a route would be inferior to that proposed and would probably cost an extra £1m. They did not therefore change the scheme as a result of this consultation. The Committee also received in this interim period representations from the Wards of Cordwainer, Bassishaw, Cripplegate Within and Farringdon Within all asking that a swimming bath should be incorporated in any scheme for the bridge. The Committee also approached the L.C.C. suggesting that the new bridge might be a means of linking the north and south tramway systems but as that would involve additional land and additional expense, it could only be done if the L.C.C. were prepared to make a reasonable contribution. The L.C.C. made a percentage offer up to a maximum amount which the Committee did not consider adequate and the Parliamentary Bill was prepared without including provision for tramways over the bridge.

The presentation of the Bill to Parliament provided another opportunity for objections, both to the scheme as a whole and to aspects where particular persons might appear to be affected. Twenty-one petitions were presented against the scheme, principally from property owners likely to be affected by the compulsory acquisition powers included

in the Bill. It was referred to a Commons Select Committee to hear evidence. Support for the project was forthcoming from the Police and the Institution of Civil Engineers, and also from the L.C.C. — subject to the inclusion of tramway facilities. There were still attempts to alter the line of the bridge as the R.I.B.A. wanted it, and the Dean and Chapter expressed concern that works so close to the Cathedral might be harmful to the structure. The Bill finally reached its third reading but at this stage opponents of the scheme got it recommitted to the Select Committee for them to hear further evidence on design and convenience. The Select Committee reported that the scheme was 'the one best adapted for the public needs and the best suited to the character of the site' and in spite of a further attempt at delay on the third reading, it finally became law on 18 August 1911 as the City of London (Bridges) Act 1911.

The final text of the Act demonstrates by clauses specially drawn to protect the interests of named individuals and companies that arrangements had been included to deal with the objections of property owners of all sorts, and it is also clear that the L.C.C. had made their point over the inclusion of a tramway linked with their southern system. This would, on the north side, be carried underground to a terminus under Cheapside with a view to a later link with the northern system via Aldersgate Street. There were later negotiations with the L.C.C. Over paying for the terminus; as to who should have the title to the property as it was within the City; and about contributing to the cost of widening the east side of St. Paul's Churchyard. The Dean and Chapter were given rights of inspection and even veto in order to ensure the safety of the Cathedral. The Act stated that the new bridge must be completed within ten years; it also provided for the rebuilding of Southwark Bridge and stated specifically that the Corporation should not construct both bridges at the same time but that one must be completed before work on the other commenced.

Because of this last provision, Southwark Bridge again became the bogey in the construction of the new bridge for, to meet the view of the inhabitants of the Ward of Vintry, the actual work of rebuilding Southwark Bridge was proceeded with first. The Act provided that the powers to acquire the necessary land compulsorily, including any required 'for providing accommodation for persons belonging to the working class who may be displaced in executing the powers of this Act' lasted for only five years so that a substantial amount was obtained fairly quickly, and other preliminaries and preparations for the new bridge were started straight away. Satisfactory progress having been made on Southwark Bridge by the autumn of 1913, the Committee, having formally decided to name the new bridge St. Paul's Bridge, in November 1913 announced an architectural competition for return at the beginning of the following May. The winner announced at the end of May 1914 was G. Washington Browne of Edinburgh,

with Charles E. Barry as the runner-up. Through the summer of 1914, during which, it will be remembered, that war broke out, Basil Mott considered the winning designs and made suggestions for their modification, along with a proposal that Browne and Barry should be asked to co-operate in submitting a scheme plan incorporating Mott's points. On 14 December 1914, when the war had been more than four months in progress, Browne and Barry were appointed as joint architects for the new bridge.

After a year or so of war the Government ordered work to cease on Southwark Bridge — which had reached a fairly advanced stage — and also stopped all further acquisition of land for the new bridge. This shelved the scheme for a new bridge and although the powers of compulsory purchase were extended annually after the time limit expired in 1916, no further acquisitions could be made and the whole of the papers were deposited with the National Safe Deposit Company. As these papers included contract drawings, plans, and quantities, substantial progress had been made before the war stopped everything. When the war ended work was quickly resumed on Southwark Bridge and it was completed and formally opened on 6 June 1921. As there was no possibility of completing St. Paul's Bridge within the ten years laid down in the 1911 Act, a new Act was obtained, the Corporation of London (Bridge) Act 1921, extending the provisions relating to the new bridge until April 1929.

The financial commitment in changed post-war conditions must have been a worrying aspect. The original limit of borrowing to cover both bridges under the 1911 Act had been £2¼m, and that included the purchase of all necessary land as well as the costs of construction and any other expenses. Southwark Bridge finally cost about £350,000. For St. Paul's Bridge, acquisition of land up to 1920 had cost £787,000 and it was anticipated that a further £380,000 would be required; cost of construction was estimated at £1,360,000, making, with Southwark Bridge, a total of £2,877,000 without allowing for fees and other expenses on the new bridge. The Government wanted the work to start and were sympathetic about costs but were not prepared to give any grant for the actual construction of the bridge. However, by the middle of 1922 it was possible for the Committee to report that virtually all the land had been acquired, the contract drawings and quantities had been prepared, and provision of finance satisfactorily arranged. The way was therefore clear, with Southwark Bridge completed, to invite tenders, which required the authority of the Common Council. At the Court on 13 July 1922, after considerable debate in which some old and some new objections to proceeding with the new bridge were voiced, the report was referred back to the Bridge House Estates Committee for further consideration but without any specific points for such reconsideration.

The Committee approached this problem in two ways. First, having ensured a transcript of the long debate they examined the objections set out in the speeches and prepared a detailed answer to all of them. They also approached other interested bodies to write approving the scheme and pressing the Corporation to start the work. A report was then presented in November 1922 setting out the answers to the objections and the letters received from Southwark Council, the Director General of Roads at the Ministry of Transport and the London Cartage and Haulage Contractors Association, all urging action. Common Council, on receiving this report, ordered consultation with the other local authorities involved on the matter of the approach roads and their cost. The Committee were in a position to report in May 1924 but before the report could be circulated, the Government advised the Corporation that, under the London Traffic Act, they had formed a Traffic Advisory Committee and that further deliberation should be postponed until this new body reported. This they did in April 1926, entirely in favour of the scheme for the new St. Paul's Bridge.

The Committee immediately, in June 1926, brought a report to Common Council again seeking leave to proceed; this coincided with the appointment of the Royal Commission on Cross River Traffic in London and consideration was again deferred until that Commission reported. Later that year the Commission recommended that 'the projected St. Paul's Bridge should be abandoned in favour of an alternative proposal for a new high level bridge between Southwark Street and Holborn Viaduct.' The Government accepted the report but declined to make any grant towards the bridge, only to the approaches. This project was called the Ludgate Bridge and as it would enter the City on the north side of the river, concerned the Bridge House Trust. With all the purchase of property and other expense incurred out of Bridge House funds for the St. Paul's Bridge project, the Corporation did not take kindly to the Commission's report.

In January 1927 the report of the Royal Commission was referred to the Bridge House Estates Committee and in December of that year the Committee reported that it had examined this new proposal along with other alternatives, such as a tunnel, or a new road from the north end of Southwark Bridge direct to Aldersgate Street. The Committee felt that all alternatives to the original St. Paul's Bridge scheme, including the Royal Commission's suggestion, were quite impractical and recommended that the Ludgate Bridge scheme be not proceeded with. Common Council endorsed this view, and as the powers of the 1911 Act were still available, the Committee again set itself to introduce a scheme for the St. Paul's Bridge project to proceed. One problem which had arisen was a report by the Fine Art Commission in 1924 that it had fears for the safety of the Cathedral if the original line of the approach road from Aldersgate Street were adhered to. The 'Cathedral Safety' lobby naturally used this to exert pressure

and, although their own experts and independent surveys took the opposite view, the Committee did suggest an altered line for this northern approach, taking it on a curve further from the Cathedral. This change of line was incorporated in a report to Common Council in October 1928, which also gave financial assurances, but proposed that Parliamentary sanction be sought for a further extension of time beyond the deadline of April 1929, before proceeding. Common Council refused to allow the change of line, confirmed the original scheme, agreed to promote the Parliamentary Bill, but took future matters out of the sole control of the Bridge House Estates Committee by joining with them the old Special Committee to reconsider the whole project. Parliament failed to pass the Bill and the powers under the 1911 Act expired in April 1929.

The Joint Committees continued to give attention to the matter, but after 1929 the country faced a financial crisis and economic depression so that a report in 1931 stated that they still considered the northerly route as proposed in the 1928 scheme to be best, but in view of the current financial situation, no further action should be taken. Further consideration had to be given in 1933-34 because of the expiry on 1 January 1935 of an option on certain land on the proposed southern approach and the other party were not prepared to extend the option. A proposed development of land in St. Paul's Churchyard would also, if proceeded with, jeopardise the future building of the bridge. Accordingly, advice was sought from the Ministry of Transport, on 26 February 1934. After considerable consultation by both parties with the London and Home Counties Traffic Advisory Committee, the Ministry finally replied on 21 November 1935 that Mr. Hore Belisha concurred with the Advisory Committee's view, that:

. . . had the St. Paul's Bridge and adequate approaches been built when the statutory powers were in force a most useful and desirable traffic artery would have been provided. Under the altered circumstances, however, they see no prospect of a revised or modified proposal meeting with Parliamentary or public favour . . .

So the bridge project died unfulfilled and the issue has not yet been raised again, but Bridge House Estates were left with considerable property they would otherwise never have acquired and which had been causing them trouble ever since it came into their possession just before the first war.

The line of the proposed St. Paul's Bridge on the south side of the river went from Bankside to Park Street through a residential area which became known as the Moss Alley area from one of the alleys contained in it, and it stretched the whole way from the river to Park

Street in such a way that the whole of this small residential enclave had to form part of the compulsorily acquired land. After crossing Park Street the line followed that of the north end of Great Guildford Street to Southwark Street, crossing Sumner Street on the way. On the west side of Great Guildford Street and to the south of Sumner Street was another residential area based on Zoar Street which would also be affected by compulsory purchase. If the bridge were built, the residents had to be rehoused and the 1911 Act placed the responsibility firmly on the Corporation to do so and included compulsory purchase powers so that land could be provided for this. Unless other authority was given, the rehousing of those in the line of the bridge could, of course, only be done if and when the work on the bridge was to begin.

The Moss Alley area was among the first to be acquired under the scheme and this area was at that time considered one of the worst slums in London with houses nearly a hundred years old, well below housing standards of the time, while the four hundred inhabitants were subject to considerable overcrowding by those standards. With Southwark Bridge reconstruction started and preparations for the start of St. Paul's Bridge well under way by early 1915, it seemed that, subject to the progress of the war, some arrangements must be made for rehousing those who would first be dispossessed — almost certainly the Moss Alley area. Accordingly, a scheme was made in 1915 by the then Local Government Board directing the Corporation to use for such rehousing a site in Sumner Street, which had been acquired under the 1911 Act for the purpose. The Corporation, rather than undertake the building itself, made an arrangement with the Peabody Trustees, who had dwellings in the area, for the erection by them of the necessary dwellings. Unfortunately the stoppage of all work on the bridges during the war also stopped this scheme and in fact the War Office took over the Sumner Street site and it did not return to Corporation control until 1923, by which time Southwark Bridge had been completed and the post-war battle over building St. Paul's Bridge was well under way.

As soon as the war was over the Metropolitan Borough of Southwark began to press the Corporation on the rehousing of those in the overcrowded and substandard accommodation. By this time this included the Zoar Street area and very soon the L.C.C. joined the Borough in trying to induce the Corporation to act. In 1925 there was a conference between the three parties at which the Chairman of Bridge House Estates Committee explained his impossible situation, that he had given the Government an undertaking that no further action would be taken on the building of the bridge until the Royal Commission reported, and that until the bridge position was finalised there was no power to rehouse. Immediately after this the Ministry of Health also joined issue on the condition of Moss Alley and Zoar Street, so the Corporation advised the Ministry of Transport of the position. The

Ministry's reply was less than helpful — that consideration of the bridge had been deferred. The L.C.C. then tried to involve other Bridge House property which had no connection with the St. Paul's Bridge project, while soon afterwards the Royal Commission reported that a quite different plan for a bridge was now suggested; this made the Corporation's position even worse. Several attempts were made to find ways round the problem as the Corporation remained convinced that they had no powers to rehouse unless the work on the bridge contemplated by the 1911 Act was carried out, but the refusal of Parliament to extend the time beyond April 1929 put a different complexion on the problem. When it thus became apparant that there was no hope of an immediate move in the matter of the bridge, the Corporation showed itself willing to undertake rehousing providing that they, as Trustees of the Bridge House funds, could be protected. This particular difficulty was overcome and two blocks of flats were built in 1930 at Winchester House, Sumner Street for 350 people — and 288 actually moved there from the Moss Alley area. Two further blocks on an adjoining site quickly followed which housed a further 260 people and the major problem had been dealt with.

Southwark Council continued to press the Corporation however, not only over further sub-standard property but also over the use of the land which was released by the rehousing of those living in Moss Alley and Zoar Street — fearing that the Corporation, as the land was no longer to be used for the bridge, would attempt to reap a rich reward for the Bridge House Trust by industrial or commercial development. The Corporation did not do so but continued to build working class housing in the area, with Stopher House in Webber Street in 1935, Pakeman House in Pocock Street in 1938 and also selling off some of the land to Southwark Council. The series of schemes had not been completed before the war came and after it the first job was a part rebuilding of Sumner Buildings which had been severely war damaged; this was followed by Markstone House and Bazely House, both in 1954 and Collinson Court in Great Suffolk Street in 1958.

When one is concerned with the way the Bridge House Trust funds are invested, one is surprised to find a very substantial holding of what used to be called working class housing in Southwark — not at all what one would suppose this important Trust for the maintenance of the City's bridges should invest in. They have in fact 366 flats in this part of Southwark — which are now managed on behalf of the Trust by the Corporation's Housing Department — and they are there purely as a result of the abortive St. Paul's Bridge project which occupied so many people for so long.