

## **IVAN LUCKIN AND THE SALE OF LONDON BRIDGE**

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As this paper is about a man and a bridge, I will start with the man. He will only be familiar to those Historians who were members of Common Council before he died in November 1983 unless, like me, you had known him by some other route. I got to know him in the middle 1950's as an old school friend of my father. They were born 10 days apart in July 1907 and met starting at Mill Hill School in North London in 1919. He was known as Frank or Frankie to his school-chums and therefore to me until 1981 when I joined Common Council.

I know nothing of his schooldays except that he must have been something of an athlete. On leaving school in 1924, he joined the Midland Bank becoming their champion miler in 1927 and their cross-country champion in 1928. A career change occurred in 1932 when he joined the Morning Post, later to merge with the Daily Telegraph, and the following year he became their City Representative. A further change came in 1936 when he resigned and spent a year studying, before joining Time & Tide magazine. I presume in some advertising or P.R. capacity. The outbreak of war found him at The Illustrated London News which he promptly left for the Special Police Reserve. From there he was commissioned into the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve in 1940 and seems to have been involved in Radar for the duration.

In 1945 he joined Advertisers Weekly before moving to Fairchild Publications of New York as their London representative in 1950. He remained there until 1958, during which time he spent a year as chairman of the Publicity Club of London. The Galloways moved to London just before I finished at Mill Hill in 1956. I well remember interesting times as the outsider in a threesome in outings to various hostelrys with my father, a widower, and Frank, a bachelor. Another memory is of 1975 when Frank had lined up my father, then an early tenant in Brandon Mews in the Barbican, to fill a vacancy looming in Candlewick Ward that December. This was conditional on no other candidate emerging and, fairly late in the day, along came a certain Richard Saunders.

I turn now to London Bridge. Ivan, as I will now call him, joined Candlewick at the December Wardmote in 1964. Two committees he joined at the start of 1965, and which played such a large part in his civic career, were Police, on which he remained until his death, and Bridge House Estates, not attached to City Lands until 1969. Bridge House had been working for some time on what to do with Rennie's London Bridge which was sinking about an eighth of an inch each year. The pine foundations were wearing out under some ten thousand tons of granite plus a lot of traffic. After much deliberation, replacement emerged as the only solution and this was the clear, main objective of the committee. At an early meeting Ivan asked, "Why not sell old London Bridge?" He left some notes and the text of a speech he gave in 1982 which I have seen at London Metropolitan Archives. He had decided to ask the question on the back of the Chicago Tribune's Randolph William Hearst's activities in dismantling old castles and re-building them in America and there was the removal of the famous blitzed St.Mary Aldermary Church, next to the Guildhall complex, that

had been taken down and rebuilt at Fulton, Missouri: its reopening gave rise to Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain falling over Europe" speech there in 1946.

Ivan thought London Bridge was the embodiment of the history of London and that the U.S.A. might well become its future home. The committee were not impressed. From Ivan's notes, they were hostile. Who would want to buy a heap of old stones? However, he had the backing of the City Engineer, Harold King, a useful ally. The Chairman of Bridge House asked Ivan how much he thought he would get for the old Bridge. "Not less than one million pounds, Sir" "One million dollars did you say?" replied Deputy Erlebach. Ivan corrected him, "Pounds, Sir". "Mr. Luckin, do you really believe anyone would pay that sum for a heap of stones?" At this point, the quotations and the dialogue are missing, but Ivan was not to be put off. He had obtained professional advice (I find it hard to believe it could have been at his expense) that his idea was a practical one. The Chairman thought he had a winning hand when he announced that, to prepare for a sale, the bridge would have to be dismantled very carefully, all the stones numbered and stored for shipment, which was going to add one hundred thousand pounds to the bill. The City Engineer was charged by Ivan to obtain estimates for the additional work and these came to a total of five thousand pounds.

The time had now advanced to the autumn of 1966 and Ivan was getting worried that progress on the sale was slow and the committee were losing interest. He then set about a plan that is a lesson to all Aldermen and Councilmen with a good idea that is losing support. Having sounded out his allies on the committee, he proposed that a sub-committee should be formed to take the matter forward and report to the grand committee as and when appropriate. This was welcomed and the Chairman invited Ivan to serve on it with him and five other colleagues that could be persuaded to serve. They were all hand picked by you-know-who as supporters but he mentions only two, Alderman Sir Charles Trinder and Alderman Lindsay Ring.

The sub got down to business straight away, with Ivan insisting on world-wide publicity and a good marketing brochure (presumably, Mr. Chamberlain Whittington was on side). The brochure referred to five elliptical arches of Devon, Cornwall and Aberdeen granite and a total length of one thousand and five feet. The sixth arch is still in situ with about fifty feet of the southern end.

These brochures duly appeared in the summer of 1967 and Ivan instructed that it went to every British diplomatic outpost around the globe. Enquiries flooded in from everywhere and Ivan's offer to visit the various sources was rebuffed with the comment that anyone seriously interested would come to London to see what they were bidding for.

At some stage, a closing date was set for the receipt of offers and the date chosen was Friday 29 March 1968. It was hoped that this step would concentrate the minds of a number of potential bidders as there was a seeming lack of any keen interest to actually make a bid. By the February meeting of the sub-committee there was a "wait and see" attitude among the members but Ivan persuaded them to let him go to the States to make a final effort to whip up interest. The grand committee and Common Council quickly agreed and the great publicist announced his trip to a press

conference hastily called on the Bridge itself. This was filmed and flown out to New York and syndicated to a myriad of TV and Radio Stations and the press.

When he arrived 24 hours later, Ivan was met by them all and, not surprisingly, claimed to have handled them well. The nursery rhyme is well known there and he concentrated his sales pitch on selling, not a pile of nineteenth century stones, but nearly two thousand years of history going back to 45 AD and the Romans. From New York, his party, including the City Engineer, flew to Washington, met Ambassador Sir Patrick Dean and had another press conference. They then flew on to Los Angeles. It was here that he met Mr. C.V. Wood, President of McCulloch Oil and a master planner who was responsible for Disneyland. Mr. Wood had previously written in to express interest in the bridge and this meeting had been pre-arranged. They met for lunch and then flew in a McCulloch plane to look at the site of Lake Havasu City. On returning, they met Robert McCulloch Senior, the chairman and were immersed in discussions until eleven that night. Ivan soon returned to New York and, just before he set off for London, he had a further meeting with McCulloch representatives.

He was back not long before 29 March. I do not know how many bids there were, but as we all know there was an acceptable one. McCulloch's offer of two million, four hundred and sixty thousand dollars saw off any competition and Ivan's determination was fully justified. The story goes that the offer was made up of doubling the demolition cost (presumed to be one million two hundred thousand dollars) plus one thousand dollars for every year of Robert McCulloch Senior's age—60. Ivan always referred to it as one million, twenty nine thousand, four hundred pounds, ten shillings and four pence ha'penny.

After what is now called due diligence had been concluded, (amongst which was the testing of the stones for the hot climate of the Arizona desert, which cheekily reported that it ignored the outcome of any Red Indian attack) came the day for signing the contract. This took place in Guildhall on 16 April 1968, the day after Easter Monday. This was followed by lunch at The Mansion House with both Robert McCullochs, C.V.Wood and Ivan, and hosted by the Lord Mayor, Sir Gilbert Inglefield, who had cut short his Easter break to be a signatory. The inevitable press conferences followed in both London and New York and you can guess who was at both.

Ivan had been worried that there may have been a requirement for an import licence for the stones entering the U.S.A. but there was a happy outcome in that, as the bridge was over one hundred years old, they would be exempted as antiques. This led him to ring his old friend Norris McWhirter to see if he could get an entry in the Guinness Book of Records. The answer was No as it did not fit the definition of "tallest, longest, shortest, highest or fewest"—these being the permitted categories. Ivan won the day with "the sale of the world's largest antique". I don't know how many editions carried it, but it is not there now.

A formal foundation stone laying ceremony took place later that year attended by the Lord Mayor, and Sheriff Peter Studd and the final act was the Opening of the rebuilt bridge on Sunday 10 October 1971. This was a return visit for Lord Mayor Sir Peter Studd (and undoubtedly Ivan) accompanied by Sheriff Murray Fox. The mayoral party were in their City finest with Sir Peter in his black and gold gown, Murray Fox

in his red one and escorted by a Company of Pikemen and Musketeers also in full dress. Ivan noted that the temperature stood at 105 degrees - that is 40 to us Europeans. I now move forward ten years to September 1981 when I beat Terence Donnelly in an election exactly ten days after my father had died. Frank had wished me well at his funeral and when I came to be admitted on 7 October, I was saddened to see he was missing. I then realised that a good number of senior members were absent and the reason turned out to be the tenth anniversary celebrations at Lake Havasu City. Ivan told me on his return that the population out there had risen from 3,000 to 55,000 in the ten years since the bridge opened.

The other thing he told me on that occasion was that I was to replace my father as his guest at the police committee lunch that was coming up in December. It was in the west Crypt and it was full of lights and TV cameras. Typical Ivan, he had fixed it for a young girl to be our toastmaster and he introduced me to his friend Jimmy Savile. In amongst all my research, I have only come across one passing reference to Tower Bridge. It clearly doesn't have the historical background of its neighbour and Ivan only shrugged when I asked him about it. At best, if it was going to help sell the right bridge, he had no need to complain. He was, of course, the member who was instrumental later in getting Tower Bridge open for tourists.

Ivan died at his home in Chorley Wood at the end of November 1983. I attended his funeral and immediately afterwards I was approached by the two senior councilmen for Candlewick, Bobbie Eversham (up until that moment, Lord Ebbisham to me) and Jim Keith saying it had been agreed that I would give the Address at the memorial service to be held in the City the following year. I protested in vain and duly did so in St.Clement Eastcheap on 16 February 1984 before a full house that included Alderman Sir Robin Gillett representing the Lord Mayor and rows of top policemen. One unusual memoire I have of my father's old friend is a photograph in Guildhall Yard of Police Commissioner Owen Kelly and me on the left and Rodney FitzGerald, a fellow Old Millhillian, with Ivan's sister, Mrs. Bingham on the right. Between us is Luckin, all kitted out to patrol the streets of the City, with an unnamed constable in the saddle ready for his first day of service.

Finally, may I thank Elizabeth Scudder for helping me around the mysteries of the London Metropolitan Archives in order to put this paper together.