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THE BALGAY BRIDGE PROJECT 2008

Celebrating the
reopening of the Balgay Bridge
28 May 2008



THE BALGAY BRIDGE

PROJECT 2008



HISTORY

Balgay Hill Recreation Grounds and Cemetery were officially opened on Wednesday 20 October 1871 by the Right Honourable Earl of Dalhousie. The opening ceremony was a day of celebration with most shops and factories closed for the day, and the majority of the population seemed to have been present lining the route of the procession throughout the City.

On 23 January 1872 details and plans for a bridge within Balgay Park were submitted by Wm Mackison, Town Surveyor. On 12 April 1872 the construction of the bridge was approved.

Balgay's picturesque Category B footbridge spans 80 feet across a natural gorge in the park, and was said to have been designed during 1872 by Mr George Hird, of the City Council's Engineering Department. The bridge was erected in 1879.

It contains decorative ironwork consisting of cast iron interlaced railings with floral finials and a central inscription plaque bearing the Town's arms, two segmental-arched ribs each of three castings with latticed cast iron struts in the spandrel. The bridge was found to be a convenient way to allow visitors to get from one section of the park to the other without having to descend and ascend the steep slopes of the ravine that separates them.

Who should take credit for the bridge led to a long-running dispute between Town Surveyor Wm Mackison and Engineer George Hird. Wm Mackison was also in dispute with the Council for monies he claimed were owed to him for the works, but they dismissed him. He died before his case could be heard. His family were financially ruined as a result of continuing the case all the way to the House of Lords after his death. Even to this day the dispute continues, with the bridge being variously known as the Hird Bridge and Balgay Bridge.

HOW THE PROJECT CAME ABOUT

The bridge was closed in 2002 owing to public safety concerns after the top rail of the south parapet and the attached extension were destroyed by vandals.

The refurbishment project came about as the condition of the paths and bridge were raised on a regular basis by the Friends of Balgay and West End Community Council. The condition and need for refurbishment was also raised by local ward councillors and park users through visitor survey cards. The original plan was to replace the old damaged railings and the associated stonework only. This was amended to include refurbishment of the whole bridge.

The Balgay Bridge project was undertaken with funding from Dundee City Council, Historic Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The refurbishment of the bridge is also supported by a number of local community groups.



WORK CARRIED OUT ON THE BRIDGE



repair and refurbishment of parapet



reinstallation of parapet

- **Removal of reinforced concrete deck.**
This was installed in 1909 and was beyond its serviceable life.
- **Removal of existing steel support grillage.**
These steel beams were extensively corroded and required to be replaced to support the new concrete deck.
- **Install new support structure for deck.**
- **Install reinforced concrete deck.**
- **Blast clean and paint structure.**
The structure was cleaned to bare metal and given a four coat paint system. After negotiation with Historic Scotland, 'Signal Blue' was decided upon for the colour of the bridge. The stonework was cleaned of graffiti and given an anti-graffiti coating. Minor repair and pointing was carried out on the abutments and piers.
- **Repair to end pier and installation of missing masonry coping-stones.**
- **Repair damaged cast iron elements.**
There were some small areas of damage, none structurally significant.
- **Replace missing parapet top rail.**
The entire parapet was removed for repair and refurbishment. The new south top rail was cast, using the north top rail to construct the pattern.
- **Installation of cycle control measures.**
To prevent cyclists going onto the bridge while mounted, measures are to be installed at the west end of the bridge.

The position of the bridge meant that most of the work was undertaken from the extensive scaffolding, which was erected at the start of the project.