

# *Tay Rail Bridge Disaster Memorial Trust*



## **CHRISTMAS 2011 NEWSLETTER FROM THE TRUST**

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Tay Rail Bridge Disaster Memorial Trust. This major disaster occurred almost 132 years ago and, to date, the victims of this major national disaster have never had any form of recognition. There is a myth that the stumps of the first bridge were left to me a memorial to the victims. The reality is that the stumps were left to act as a breakwater for the pillars of the new bridge. It was also cheaper to leave the old stumps.

As the great, great, great grandson of one of the victims and a relative of another, the story of the disaster has always been part of my family history. It was in the centenary year in 1979 that I learnt that there was no memorial to the victims. Over the years my mind has often returned to this situation. About twelve years ago I started to think about the possibilities of the creation of a suitable memorial to rectify this situation. Following an article about my idea in a local paper, I was contacted by several people, the resulting meeting laid the foundation of our Trust. We were formally launched on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 2010, the 131<sup>st</sup> anniversary, at a reception hosted by the Lord Provost of Dundee. Also present were the Provost of Angus and Deputy Provost of Fife, representing both sides of the Tay and several descendants.

It is the Trust's intention to create a memorial that is appropriate and respectful to the memories of the victims of the Tay Rail Bridge Disaster, and, to commemorate their lives, as much as their tragic deaths. We have identified a suitable site on the Dundee side of the Bridge. There are two small memorials to the loss of the bridge, one on either side of the Tay. We would therefore like to create a second memorial on the Fife side, to unify the both sides of the Tay. We also aim to create information boards at these sites, telling the story behind and consequences of the disaster.

The Playwright Mike Gibb wrote a musical "Five Pound and Twa Bairns", based on the disaster, which was first performed in 2005. Mike has arranged to re-stage this at the Dundee Rep for three nights, namely Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> January to Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2012, to raise funds for the memorial. He generously managed to bring together most of the original cast to perform a show case at our launch. This gave the launch a wonderful ending. He also hopes to stage the musical on the Fife side as well as a possible showcase at Balgonie Castle. Some seats are still available so please book directly with the Rep. (Seats are selling fast!) leaflet attached.

Our first fundraiser was Gaels Fire, which was kindly organised by the RT Burns Club. This was held at Balgonie in March and raised £1,700. It was a wonderful and lively evening. The RT Burns Club has begun to plan Gaels Fire II. Sheena Wellington, who sang at the opening of the Scottish Parliament, and Kathleen Procter-Moore, Soprano, have agreed to take part in this. Kathleen will be travelling from Australia.

Following the disaster, there was a dinner held onboard HMS Unicorn, to raise funds for the victims' families. We hope to hold a dinner on the Unicorn next year, for the memorial. There are several other exciting plans in the pipeline.

We are also attended events such as the Fife Family History Fair and the Dundee Model Railway Club Exhibition and some of our committee members are giving talks to various societies. We are also in talks with the local education authorities, with view to getting the schools involved in the story of this disaster. It is so important to get the young people involved so that this national tragedy is not forgotten.

Since the launch of the Trust we have had an increasing number of descendants of victims and other people involved in the disaster and its aftermath, coming forward. We have formed the Friends of the TRBDMT. I am most grateful to all those who have helped us to get to where we are now. We would be delighted to hear any good fundraising ideas or from anyone who would like to help us achieve our goal.

We will also circulate details of events we intend to participate in locally in case any of the Trusts Friends wish to help.

#### The Commemoration of David Mitchell of Leslie

During 2011 a headstone was laid to commemorate the train driver David Mitchell of Leslie. Ian Nimmo White our vice chairman penned an article which is attached along with this newsletter.

Our first AGM will be held on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012 the venue to be confirmed. (Most likely Blyth Hall, Newport-on-Tay)

Have a Merry Christmas everyone.

**Stuart Morris of Balgonie, Chairman,**

*John Irvine, Secretary*

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