

London Calling

USL BridgeCare is awarded prestigious contract to replace all mechanical expansion joints on “LONDON BRIDGE”.

Over two weekend closures during August and September USL are replacing the original movement joints on the “New London Bridge” with the tried and tested “BEJ” mechanical joint system.

This contract gives USL the “Full set” as all the other bridges over the Thames in the city of London also have “BEJ” joints in service on their decks, some joints have been in place for many years going back 25 years when USL replaced the existing joints on Tower Bridge.

London Bridge is the oldest bridge of them all going back nearly 2000 years! So why not take a few minutes of your time and digest the following article giving you an insight into the history of London bridge.

The History of London Bridge

The Roman city of Londinium was established in the first century AD and for much of the following 2000 years there was only one London Bridge. This was near the site of the current bridge which is close to where the Romans built their crossing over the Thames. The river had presented a barrier to their armies marching north and initially Celtic fords would have been used to cross it. The first Roman Bridge was a temporary military structure replaced in AD120. The high ground of Cornhill and Tothill were a natural place to colonise, above the marshy floodplain of the river. The choice of a crossing place would have been based on the narrowness of the channel, firmness of the ground on both sides of the water and quick access using the tide. A bridge allowed the Romans speedy access to both sides and provided a good defensive barrier for the city. Had there not been a bridge built where it was, then London itself would not exist in its current position.



What is referred to as old London Bridge was completed in 1209 and took 33 years to build under the direction of Peter de Colechurch. It was 274 metres long with a 4 metre wide roadway that was supported by 19 piers. These were surrounded by starlings (boat shaped pilings) to help break the flow of the water and protect the piers. It also had a drawbridge (between the sixth and seventh piers coming from the south) that could be used to make the city harder to attack. Traitors’ heads were displayed on the bridge as a warning, a fact cheerfully commemorated by a giant white spike on the current bridge, some metres upstream. There were shops, houses and a chapel and the bridge was the scene of lavish celebrations, including jousting tournaments. The bridge maintained its defensive roll but it was also part of the city not just a means of crossing between the two shores. Eventually the houses on the bridge created a congestion that resulted in serious safety hazards and as the bridge had remained unaltered for more than 600 years it was decided to replace it with a new one.

John Rennie’s London Bridge

After many plans being submitted it was the proposal by John Rennie which was accepted. Although his design was used, it was his son, Sir John Rennie who actually saw it through to completion. His father unfortunately died before the construction work had even started. On 15th June 1825 the first foundation stone was laid. The first stone to be laid, on the City side of the river, was in December 1826. water flow not to hinder the operation.

Widening of London Bridge

Throughout the later part of the 19th century there were repeated calls for the bridge to be widened. These demands were due to the ever increasing volume of traffic chaos caused by the vast number of vehicles using it. They were all ignored for reasons of finances and the wish not to spoil the architecture. In 1902 plans were finally put into action and the bridge was widened. The alterations added four and a half feet to each footpath, and two and a half feet to the road.

London Bridge today

In 1967 it was decided to replace the bridge once again, there had been reports of cracks appearing and general decay of the old bridge during the previous forty years.



London Bridge with the Gherkin in the background

Modern design and technology allowed the bridge to have only two supporting piers in the water, making a much wider space for the water borne traffic. The way they tackled the task this time was to build the two outside lanes either side of the bridge. The old bridge was then dismantled, and the two centre sections of the new bridge were put into place. The three span pre-stressed concrete Bridge was designed by Mot, Hay and Anderson.

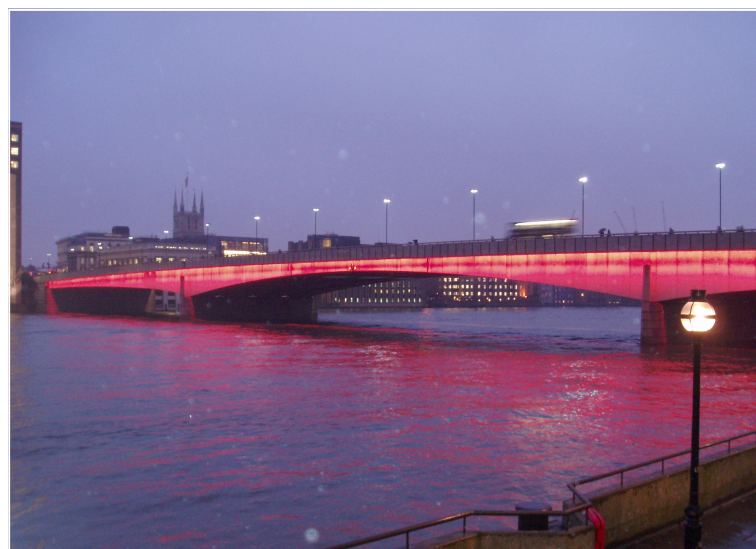
The concrete was given a granite finish and steel handrails completed the slick appearance, however one unique modern touch was added by installing a heating system to prevent freezing on the road surface.

The cost of the new bridge was just over £4 million which was more or less the same as dismantling, transporting and re-erecting the Rennie Bridge in the US.

London Bridge exported to America

When news of the intended demolition of Rennie's bridge was announced, there were protests from many quarters that it should be preserved. Some even suggested restoring it to its original form, including the buildings that were once part of it.

In the end, an American gentleman representing McCulloch Properties, put in a bid of £1,025,000, and purchased it to take back to the USA. The bridge was divided into sections and marked out by numbers, like a puzzle, 10,246 pieces of stone were then dismantled and shipped across the Atlantic. It arrived in California on July 5th 1968 after a 240 mile journey to its final destination (it was imported as a "large antique"). The first stone was laid by the then Lord Mayor of London, Sir Gilbert Inglefield on September 23rd 1968 after a 240 mile journey to its final destination (it was imported as a "large antique"). The first stone was laid by the then Lord Mayor of London, Sir Gilbert Inglefield on September 23rd 1968. It was re-erected over a bit of Lake Havasu in Arizona and it can still be seen there today in a place called Lake Hatsu City, halfway between Phoenix and Las Vegas. It was rumoured that the Americans thought they had bought Tower Bridge!



A view of London Bridge which connects the City of London and Southwark in central London