

Issue 5
October 2009

the Knowledge

Learning from London



The City Bridge Trust
**800 Years of Linking
London's Communities**



A bridge fit for London

2009 is a very special year for the City Bridge Trust – it is 800 years since Old London Bridge, the first stone bridge to span the River Thames, was completed.

The Trust can trace its origins back to William Rufus, second son of William the Conqueror, who raised a tax to help repair what was then a wooden London Bridge. Later the newly-rebuilt bridge was swept away by floods and it was decided that a much stronger stone structure was needed. This massive undertaking, now referred to as Old London Bridge, was completed in 1209 having taken 33 years to build. It was worth the effort as it lasted more than 600 years until it was replaced in 1831.

More than just money

Thoughtful grant-makers know that money alone does not always make community organisations stronger. Indeed, sometimes it can do as much harm as good, introducing 'boom and bust' to small local groups.

In 2006 we started an experimental programme, Improving Services for Older People, which offered tailor-made development support to small, sometimes fragile, community groups, as well as giving them a grant for their work with older people.

In all, 135 groups were supported with awards totalling £1.8 million. The majority of those supported have made substantial progress in strengthening, not only their services, but their sustainability too. (Institute for Voluntary Action Research 2008).



A 'Town on the Bridge' – living and working on London Bridge

Mission Dine Club helps elderly and vulnerable people in Brent, from a wide range of communities, bringing people together for friendship and comfort:

"We have really improved the quality of what we offer due to your help. More people come to our lunch club and we can visit more housebound people as well. Everyone has noticed the difference. Bless the City Bridge Trust!"

**Dame Betty Asafo-Adjaye,
Mission Dine Club**

"This is the best way to spend the day and the tastiest lunch in town. I have a lot of health problems and coming to the club helps me keep in touch with my friends."

**Bertie, lunch club member,
Mission Dine Club**

Old London Bridge was a triumph of engineering and architecture: it was the oldest inhabited bridge in Europe, with houses, shops and hostels across each of its 19 arches. Thousands of Londoners lived and worked in the 'Town on the Bridge'.

The Bridge witnessed many historic celebrations but also some gruesome acts. In 1305, the Scottish leader William Wallace was beheaded and his head placed on a spike at the southern drawbridge gate. It served as a deterrent to those tempted to consider treason or rebellion. This macabre tradition continued for a further 350 years, with the heads of Guy Fawkes, Sir Thomas Moore, St. John Fisher and Wat Tyler also displayed on the Bridge as a clear warning to everyone entering or leaving London across the river.



‘To God and the Bridge’ – raising funds

Until 1869 it was the only Thames bridge in the City of London and took centre stage in the life of the Capital in peace and war. Many people left bequests for its upkeep, dedicating money ‘to God and the Bridge’ and these carefully husbanded funds, along with the money raised from tolls, were administered through Bridge House Estates, whose grant-making arm is the City Bridge Trust.

The bridge also generated large sums of money through taxes, tolls and rents. Henry II imposed a wide-ranging tax on wool to pay for its upkeep and ‘bad’ King John imposed rental charges on the houses and shops on the bridge and tolls for crossing the bridge on horseback. Considerable funds began to accumulate, administered from a building on the south side of the bridge called Bridge House. The City of London Corporation took over the stewardship of Old London Bridge in 1258, entrusted with keeping the bridge in good repair and managing its increasing wealth.

Addressing climate change

Since 1995, the Trust has been funding work to improve London’s environment and reduce its carbon footprint. As long ago as 1998, we helped the Women’s Environmental Trust to significantly reduce waste in London’s wholesale street markets. After a feasibility study (1999) we initiated the London Sustainability Exchange, now ten years old and thriving.

Now climate change is perhaps the most pressing social justice issue facing us all. That’s why the Trust pioneered award-winning eco-auditing amongst key third sector organisations, especially those which could influence others.

It is imperative that the third sector plays its part in reducing carbon footprint. The Trust has signed up to the Third Sector Declaration on Climate Change and pledges to help our grant holders to ‘do their bit’.



‘London Bridge is falling down’ – ensuring competent stewardship

Merton Council for Voluntary Service supports hundreds of small community groups and has a key role in influencing local policy. This was the impact of their Eco-Audit:

“We thought we were quite good at recycling, reducing our overall use of resources etc., but we learned a tremendous amount. Not only has this audit changed the way we work, it has affected the personal lives of our staff and their families and friends, and even led the local authority to change its paper supply. It was a fantastic opportunity!”

Chris Frost, CEO, Merton CVS

The revenue generated by Old London Bridge soon began to attract covetous glances and unwanted attention. In 1269, Queen Eleanor was given the monies raised from toll charges as a gift from her husband, Henry III. Eleanor used this money to fund her excessively extravagant lifestyle and the bridge quickly fell into a state of disrepair, putting the livelihoods, and indeed the lives, of the thousands of Londoners who lived and worked on Old London Bridge in peril.

As a consequence of years of neglect, heavy ice in the winter of 1281 caused five arches to collapse into the water and a temporary wooden bridge had to be erected.

Fortunately, when King Edward I took the throne, he restored the bridge to Bridge House Estates and its single trustee, the City of London Corporation.



Five iconic bridges – Bridge House Estates in more recent times

In 1823 Parliament approved the re-building of London Bridge and John Rennie, a celebrated engineer, was tasked with the construction of New London Bridge, completed in 1831.

By 1894 there were three other bridges across the River Thames. Bridge House Estates also built Blackfriars Bridge (1869), purchased Southwark Bridge (rebuilt and completed in 1921) and, just over a century ago, commissioned one of the world's most iconic landmarks, Tower Bridge (1894). More recently, it took over the management and maintenance of Millennium Bridge. This pedestrian-only bridge was conceived by Sir Anthony Caro, Ove Arup and Sir Norman Foster and constructed by Monberg Thorsen and Sir Robert McAlpine.

The five City bridges receive no financial support from the tax-payer or government and Bridge House Estates' primary purpose remains to provide funding for the maintenance of these bridges.

Tackling knife crime

After commissioning research into the carrying of knives and weapons by London's young people, Fear and Fashion 2004, four other London-focused foundations joined us to form a funding collaborative. We jointly supported ground-breaking prevention exemplars in knife crime 'hot spots' and a comprehensive website www.fearandfashion.org.uk now used by subscribers all over the country. Funders cannot work unilaterally; we achieve more by working together. By the same token, single agencies have minimal impact on knife crime; multi-agency approaches are proving more successful.

Fear and Fashion has also highlighted the lack of support for parents on the issue. Our programme Tackling Violence (35 grants awarded Spring 2009) seeks to help parents and young people together.

Bridging the divide – Bridge House Estates as a charitable grant-maker

So, how did Bridge House Estates move from owning bridges to making grants?

By 1995, careful management of the Estates' land resulted in the accumulation of a substantial fund. After registration with the Charity Commission in 1995, a cy-près scheme was approved, enabling excess funds to be spent on charitable activities in London. Grants are distributed through the grant-making arm of Bridge House Estates, the City Bridge Trust. In 2009 a total of £15.5 million was spent on community projects throughout London.

With a total grant-making legacy of £220 million to date, spread over 5,800 separate projects, the City Bridge Trust is now the largest independent grant-making trust in London.

Catch 22 works with young offenders in a variety of settings. They are running one of our Fear and Fashion exemplar programmes:

"I am having a lot of success in my work on knives and gangs with young people referred by Brent Youth Offending Team. It is because I am not a YOT employee that they can have a different kind of relationship with me. I am trusted by YOT staff and the youngsters they are supervising and supporting, which creates great opportunities for influencing them."

Angela, Project Worker, Catch 22, based with Brent YOT

"Angela has opened my eyes to what I've been doing and helped me find a positive path for my life. I'm going to college now and then into the music industry."

Jake, 17, Brent

The City's bridges provide a link between communities throughout London and the City Bridge Trust tries to reflect this in its grant-making. The work funded aims to build social capital through building resilient and co-operative communities. Timebanks, youth leadership initiatives and conflict transformation programmes are but a few examples.

The Trust works closely with voluntary groups and charities across Greater London and the giving is currently focused on seven specific themes:

- Improving Disabled Access in London
- Bridging Communities
- Improving Londoners' Mental Health
- London's Environment and Greening the Third Sector
- Older Londoners
- Positive Transitions to Independent Living
- Strengthening the Third Sector

As well as giving money directly to charities for work to improve London for Londoners, the Trust works strategically on some of the most pressing social issues of our time. Major initiatives include establishing the London Sustainability Exchange, pioneering eco-auditing in the third sector and commissioning research on homelessness, children in the sex industry and children and domestic violence.

It is now 800 years since Old London Bridge provided the first permanent link across the River Thames. Bridge House Estates is now responsible for the upkeep of the five City bridges which provide a physical link between communities across London. More recently, it has evolved into a charity committed to improving the lives of some of London's most disadvantaged residents, through the City Bridge Trust. Long may this continue.

Acknowledgements

Published by the City Bridge Trust,
City of London, PO Box 270, Guildhall,
London EC2P 2EJ

T: 020 7332 3710

E: citybridgetrust@cityoflondon.gov.uk

W: www.citybridgetrust.org.uk

Registered Charity: 1035628

Designed by www.luminous.co.uk

All images except cover illustration
courtesy of City of London Corporation,
London Metropolitan Archives.

Printed on Challenger Offset which is
made from ECF pulp at a mill that is
ISO 14001 accredited.

