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Hull's Bridges

Bridges have played a vital role in Hull's historical and geographical development since the sixteenth century, when the defence of the prospering and strategically important port required the construction of the first bridge across the River Hull. Erected in 1541 on the orders of Henry VIII, the crossing provided better access to the newly built fortifications on the east bank of the river. The original bridge was replaced by a firmer structure, known as 'North Bridge', which was developed further over the next 200 years as the town increased in population, importance and as a hub of commercial maritime activity.

From the 1850s, planners faced the challenge of providing access to Hull's expanding dock system and rapidly growing industries to the east of the River Hull. In 1865, the South Bridge, or 'ha'penny' bridge, was built across the river from Humber Street to Garrison Side, thereby improving access to Victoria Dock and its timber industries. Links between east and west improved further between 1875 and 1905 with the construction of bridges at Sculcoates, Drypool and Scott Street. In 1885, the Hull and Barnsley Railway Company built a high level rail line as part of a direct connection between the South Yorkshire coalfields and the newly opened Alexandra Dock. Railway bridges were erected over several of the city's major roads, while 'Hull Bridge' extended over the River Hull in an infrastructural development that is still used by rail freight today.

Road rather than rail links to the eastern docks dominated planning after 1945. The huge growth of motor transport, particularly during the 1950s, prompted the reconstruction of Drypool Bridge between 1958 and 1961. This soon proved inadequate, however, as the rapidly expanding volume of traffic precipitated bridge construction on an unprecedented scale in and around the city. A major road traffic route across the River Hull to the new container and roll-on/roll-off terminals in the eastern docks entailed the construction of Myton Bridge in 1981. A year later, following a century of campaigning, the Humber Bridge opened to provide the first direct road link between Hull and the South Bank of the Humber. It was the longest suspension bridge in the world, an iconic structure that came to symbolize the city and region. By this time, suburban expansion to the north and east of the city created a need for improved east-west connections upstream from the historic bridges. Accordingly, to complement Sutton Bridge, which had been completed in 1939, the Stoneferry and Ennerdale Link bridges were opened in 1991 and 1997 respectively.

In the twenty-first century, bridge building in Hull has entered a new and very different era with construction of quirky and iconic footbridges, which contrast with the utilitarian and functional designs of earlier steel constructions. The Millennium Bridge was opened in 2001 to offer pedestrian access to The Deep, while 2013 witnessed the unveiling of Scale Lane Bridge, which links the Old Town to the east bank.

This array of bridges testifies to the ability of Hull's inhabitants to respond effectively to their ever-changing transport needs, as well as their ingenuity in overcoming obstacles such as the rivers Hull and Humber, and the roads that hindered railway operators in their efforts to reach the eastern docks from the west and the north.

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