

The Bridge

A One Act Play

By
Bob Davidson

Written in the shed between 25th and 28th June 2008

© Bob Davidson 2008

www.bobdavidson.co.uk

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

Cast List

THOMAS TELFORD – Civil Engineering genius behind Dunkeld Bridge.

JOHN 4th DUKE OF ATHOLL – Local Duke and Landlord.

DONALD STEWART – A Mr Everyman from Dunkeld. A narrator. Seen in three periods – early nineteenth century, late nineteenth century and present. Same character, different costumes.

FERRYMAN’S WIFE – hard working, no nonsense type.

FERRYMAN – person in charge of the river ferry

NOBLE GENTLEMAN – Circuit Judge, Nobleman and ferry passenger.

PATRICK BROWN – Appointed chief stone mason on the building of Dunkeld Bridge.

WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN – Man representing the local council.

FIRST DUKE’S MAN – An employee of the Duke of Atholl.

SECOND DUKE’S MAN – Another employee of the Duke of Atholl.

TOLL COLLECTOR – Mr Peter Murray, toll collector on the bridge during the Pontage Riots.

MAN – The ultimate toll dodger!

DUNDONNACHIE – Local resident, Alexander Robertson known as Dundonnachie the Chief who led the pontage riots.

ONE OF THE MOB – Less than bright member of Dundonnachie’s mob.

WOMAN – Present day inhabitant of Birnam/Dunkeld doing her bit for the bridge.

COUNCIL MOB LEADER – Leader of the local council bridge inspection team.

HEALTH AND SAFETY – Person employed to enforce health and safety matters.

STRUCTURAL SURVEYOR- Person in the employ of the local authority.

SNH – Person in the employ of Scottish Natural Heritage.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

The house lights dim to some gentle Scottish fiddle music – most appropriate would be something by Niel Gow – the curtains are open on a completely bare stage, dimly lit. As the music fades we hear a howling wind and lashing rain with the odd thunderclap. NOBLE GENTLEMAN enters stage right and brushes himself down and cowers against the foul weather. He looks way over to stage left and peers through the mist.

He calls out.

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

Hello?

No answer.

Hello?

A raggedy woman appears stage left, and answers.

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

What is it?

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

Are you the ferryman?

FERRYMAN'S WIFE looks about her to confirm there's no-one else there and that the caller is referring to her.

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Aye... I suppose so.

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

(Slightly irritated)

You suppose so?

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Aye... I'm the ferryman. Can I be of service to you?

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

You most certainly can. How much to ferry me over the river on a wild night such as this?

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Same as any other night Sir. A ha'penny should do it.

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

A ha'penny. Very good my man. I would be very grateful if you could do the job with all haste.

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Aye... righto. Whatever you think.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

FERRYMAN'S WIFE then rows her ferry across the stage on what is obviously very rough water as she sways, rolls and pitches about until she reaches stage right.

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

Good evening.

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Aye aye.

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

Em... I have a horse also.

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

I thought you might. He'll be a penny.

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

A penny? (*He ponders*) Perhaps I should leave him here to graze for a day or two. He's rather fond of thistles.

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

(*looks out to audience*)

It would be easier Sir, yes.

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

Very good.

He turns and shouts off stage.

You stay there, Binky. Be a good boy, I'll be back in a few days... hopefully.

He clambers aboard the ferry and FERRYMAN'S WIFE propels them on their hazardous journey back across to stage left. NOBLE GENTLEMAN retches several times over the edge of the boat during the crossing. Once over he sits on a chair produced from the wings and is lit in a pool of light as he reads and checks over his letter.

NOBLE GENTLEMAN

The crossing of that damned river on that confounded ferry nearly cost me my life. And what I'd like to know is – what is the government going to do about it? This is the beginning of the nineteenth century for pity's sake, not the dark ages. The fact that we're in Scotland shouldn't make a difference. When oh when oh when will someone bridge this stretch of treacherous water? (*he looks up*) Stretch of treacherous? Or treacherous stretch? (*He does a bit of scoring out and changing*) ...treacherous... stretch...of water.

Off in a wee dream...

Mind you that damned ferryman. I cannot get him out of my mind. I fear for my sanity, for as sweet and fair a ferryman I have never encountered.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

He shakes his head...

I must banish these thoughts... where was I? Oh yes, I remain your most humble and loyal servant... although not in the cleaning and cooking sort of a way you understand... Yours sincerely Lord Blah de blah de blah.

He signs the letter with a flourish using a large quill. He exits quickly as the stage becomes brightly lit.

In strides TELFORD stage right to down stage right.

TELFORD

I am Thomas Telford and I am an engineer. In fact I'm a rather brilliant Civil Engineer. I've built harbours, churches and canals. I've done a lot of work on canals, but my passion, my passion, ladies and gentleman is for bridges.

DONALD STEWART (costume one) enters stage left and moves downstage left.

DONALD STEWART

My name is Donald Stewart and I represent... for dramatic purposes only... the people of Dunkeld. You will notice that over there, there is no-one representing the people of Birnam, but then... who cares?

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL enters stage right and moves centre stage.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

And I am the Duke of Atholl. *(He stands smiling for a minute)* And... I am a Duke.

DONALD STEWART

It would be better if you were a duck, your Grace, as you happen to be standing waist deep in water.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

(looking down, somewhat startled)

Am I?

DONALD STEWART

Yes man... you're standing in the middle of the river.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

I am?

DONALD STEWART

Aye, can't you see? Dunkeld over here. *(Points)* Little Dunkeld over there... look can ye no' see the kirk?

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

(peering off stage right)

Oh yes, I do believe I can.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

DONALD STEWART

Well then, oot ye get or you'll catch yer death. Away ye go, across there.

The Duke wades out on the banking and stands dripping near to TELFORD.

DONALD STEWART

The river to which I am referring is of course the Tay, Scotland's longest river. Carving a slice through the heart of the country one hundred and seventeen miles long from Loch Tay at the foot of Ben Lawers until gently flowing into the North Sea just beyond Dundee... (*points*) over there. Beautiful... treacherous...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

...Wet!

DONALD STEWART

Wet, yes, thank you your dukeship... and, if you don't mind me saying so... a bit of a bugger to cross.

TELFORD

And so - the year is 1802 and I have been asked by the Commissioners to the Treasury to carry out a survey of the roads and bridges in Scotland. I can understand them asking me because I am a rather brilliant civil engineer...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

...Yes, yes... get on with it...

TELFORD

Europe was at war, but the Highlands were at peace. Wade's old military roads had seen better days and the Government recognised the importance of improving communications in the North. Gateway to the Highlands was here at Dunkeld.

DONALD STEWART

Aye, and Dunkeld was a thriving wee place. We made a lot of leather goods here and there was quite a weaving industry as well...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

...Cobblers!

DONALD STEWART

I beg your pardon your Grace...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

A lot of cobblers...

DONALD STEWART

I can assure you it's true, your Grace...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

... no, no... there were a lot of cobblers employed in Dunkeld.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

DONALD STEWART

Ah yes indeed, that there were. Exported their footwear as far a field as the European Continent. We were on the old drovers routes and held cattle markets. Dunkeld was also on a bit of cross roads. Traffic, travelling north from Perth to Inverness through the pass of Atholl, came through Dunkeld. We were also on the east west route between Blairgowrie and Crieff. Not to mention up through Strath Braan to the likes of Aberfeldy and beyond. It was obvious to everyone that a bridge would be of great benefit, not only to this part of Scotland but to the rest of the Highlands and Islands as well.

FERRYMAN enters stage left, in grumpy mood.

FERRYMAN

Well it's no' obvious tae me!

TELFORD

And who might you be my good man?

FERRYMAN

I am a ferryman. I work the east ferry and have done for years. What'll happen tae my wife and bairns if my livelihood is taken away?

TELFORD

Ah, well...

FERRYMAN'S WIFE enters stage left...

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Dinnae listen to him Mr Telford, and dinnae you worry about his wife and bairns, cos *he* dissnæ!

FERRYMAN

Whit dae ye mean by that?

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Ye ken fine whit a mean. Ye ken fine it's usually me or one of the bairns that has to row the damned boat!

FERRYMAN

Aye, well you and the bairns are no as big as me eh? Makes mair room in the boat for the punters like.... And besides, somebody has to supervise fae the bank.

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Fae the bank? Fae the bank! Fae the pub mair like when you're drinking the proceeds o' oor hard work.

FERRYMAN

I telt yea – I'm entertaining clients.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Entertaining clients my erse... Don't you listen to him Mr Telford you go ahead and build your bridge I for one will welcome it.

FERRYMAN

That's it – I'm oot on strike! Somebody has to stand up to protect the future of ferrying for oor children and oor children's children.

FERRYMAN'S WIFE

Oh come on ye big eejit.

FERRYMAN'S WIFE exits stage left dragging FERRYMAN along behind her by the ear.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Well Telford, I'm all in favour of a bridge. Do you think it can be done?

TELFORD

I'm sure it can. The river's wide though and deep too.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

And wet...

TELFORD

Mmm... quite. And in springtime I should think there'd be a few mighty floods to contend with.

DONALD STEWART

Aye... well, that's what bugged the last one.

TELFORD

I beg your pardon?

DONALD STEWART

The old bridge at Dunkeld Mr Telford.

TELFORD

There was a bridge here before?

DONALD STEWART

Oh aye, built by the Kirk, so they say. Somewhere about the start of the sixteenth century.

TELFORD

Gosh – and what happened to it?

DONALD STEWART

Washed away Sir. Huge flood in 1573 so they reckon. Same flood nearly took the Perth Brig as well.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

TELFORD

Mmm... never underestimate the power of water.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Telford, if a bridge could be built across here, and I mean a good one, one that would last...

TELFORD

...Uh hu?

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

How... how much... er... do you think it would cost?

TELFORD

Well, not cheap. It's the foundations you see. If the river was flowing over a bed of rock that would be fine, but it isn't. We've got the Braan upstream pouring out all this silt and stuff into the Tay and this whole stretch of riverbed is made up of alluvial earth and gravel.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Alluvial – oh I like that. (*pause*) Sorry – what is alluvial?

TELFORD

Well it's not really all that hard and firm your Grace. You see hard and firm is what you'd want to build a bridge on... in an ideal world...but alluvial, it's more... more... mushy.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Like peas?

TELFORD

A bit like peas your Grace but maybe not quite as mushy as that.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

(*nodding*)

I see.

TELFORD

Then there would be the access roads... it would probably make sense to bridge the Braan at the same time, the materials, the labour costs. Labour's not cheap nowadays. Difficult to find good men - a lot of them are away fighting Napoleon. I mean it would be a massive undertaking. A huge civil engineering project that could take four or five years.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

How much, Telford? How much cash?

TELFORD

Have you any idea how many horses would be used in a project like this? Horses aren't cheap... have you seen what they eat?

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Telford! How much?

TELFORD

A rough, and I stress a rough, estimate I would say... off the top of my head... at today's prices... taking everything into account... give or take a bit here and there.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

TELFORD!

TELFORD

(Innocently)

Fifteen thousand pounds?

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL/DONALD STEWART
FIFTEEN THOUSAND POUNDS?

TELFORD

(nodding nervously)

Mmm... fifteen thousand pounds. Give or take a few quid.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Fifteen thousand pounds is a lot of money Mr Telford.

TELFORD

It would be a lot of bridge your grace. Perhaps even Scotland's finest.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Scotland's finest eh?

TELFORD

Perhaps.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Very good Mr Telford. If you would be kind enough to leave the matter with me for now – I think I have some strings to pull.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL exits stage right, while TELFORD crouches and examines the bank and eyes up possible locations for the bridge.

DONALD STEWART

Telford was a very highly regarded engineer, all the more remarkable for the fact that he was self-taught. He was the son of a shepherd and was brought up in poverty by his mother in the Scottish Borders. His father died when Telford was just a boy and he became an apprentice stone-mason at fourteen. By the time he came to Dunkeld he was much in demand at home and abroad and could handle a seemingly endless workload. His scheme to improve communications in Scotland, of which Dunkeld Bridge was only one small part, was an enormous job that would last twenty years.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

TELFORD and DONALD STEWART exit. 4th DUKE OF ATHOLL enters stage right and moves downstage centre. He is holding a scroll of paper, which he unrolls and shows to the audience.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Look what I've got... my very own Act of Parliament, and it's written specially for me!

(he begins reading)

17th May 1803 empowering John 4th Duke of Atholl... that's me... to build a bridge at or near the town of Dunkeld and make roads to connect to it...well obviously. Blah blah oh and it's also offering me a loan, a sort of build a bridge now, pay later sort of thing at 5% interest and... and this is the good bit... if I put up half the cash the government will pay the other half AND I get to charge pontage, that means a toll, on everything that crosses. Everything... I mean even like a sheep or something. Telford reckons his bridge will last for yonks so I'll be rich. Well, I am rich... but I'll be even richer. Mind you it does say that once all the loan has been paid back and with maybe a bit extra to spend on repairs etc, that the tolls should be stopped and thereafter the bridge should be toll free. Mmm... well – we will, as they say, cross that bridge when we come to it.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL exits. TELFORD and DONALD STEWART enter.

TELFORD

I had thought of putting it here.

DONALD STEWART

Just to the south o' the Little Dunkeld Kirk?

TELFORD

Yes... well the river's straight there and that wee bit narrower.

DONALD STEWART

Hell o' a bend onto the Caputh road though Mr Telford... at the other side.

TELFORD

Yes Donald... that is of some concern to me too. But I like the fact that it's downstream of that spit of gravel, which I think would help protect the bridge in winter. It would break up the ice and slow down the flow of the water during a flood. I think the Duke favours further upstream. More in line with the main street in Dunkeld.

DONALD STEWART

What are your views on that Mr Telford?

TELFORD

Well the ground either end would be that bit higher which would make for a good approach. No sharp bend at the Dunkeld end either.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

DONALD STEWART

It would look bonnier Mr Telford.

TELFORD

It would that. Maybe cost a bit more though. My original estimate was for downstream of the Kirk...

DONALD STEWART

Oh dear!

TELFORD

Mmm... but the real advantage of building it opposite the main street is... The river's on a bend, see? And the southern half of the riverbank is silted over. If we were to build the bridge here, we could construct the Birnam half virtually over dry land. Then once the piers were in position, we could dig out the channel and divert the flow of the river to allow us to build the Dunkeld end in much the same way. We'd need coffer dams and pumps I suspect but I reckon with all hands to the pumps we could get the masonry above water level pretty quickly. Yes indeed.

TELFORD and DONALD STEWART exit stage right and enter immediately with a small table which they place centre stage. They exit again and TELFORD enters again with a chair and sits at the table. There is a huge sheet of paper on the table, on which TELFORD begins to scribble. PATRICK BROWN enters carrying a chair.

PATRICK BROWN

My name is Patrick Brown and I am chief stone-mason on the project.

PATRICK BROWN sits next to TELFORD and they study the drawings.

TELFORD

I'm very impressed with your survey of the river bed, Brown, well done indeed.

PATRICK BROWN

Thank you Mr Telford.

TELFORD

Now, we've got four hundred and fifty feet of river to cross. I propose... *(he draws on the paper)* ...seven arches. Biggest one in the middle... gradually reducing in size as... we go outwards.

PATRICK BROWN

With you so far...

TELFORD

... that would give us... *(draws again)* ...four piers in the river with a total width of say... sixty feet, so I'd want twice that plus the span between the abutments so we're talking a total length of the bridge, including the land spans at either end of about... six hundred and eighty five feet.

PATRICK BROWN

Very good Mr Telford – it's beautiful.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

TELFORD

Now because of this confounded gravel in the river bed we'll obviously have to set the piers on piles, oak preferably driven deep into the soil below the river.

PATRICK BROWN

If you'd be kind enough to allow me to make a comment Mr Telford?

TELFORD

Yes of course man, continue...

PATRICK BROWN

Well, Mr Palliser is of the opinion, begging your pardon, Sir, that the piers should be placed on large rafts made from oak, or larch. He considers the weight of the bridge would, in this way, be better supported.

TELFORD

Very well. Would you be in favour of a wooden service bridge?

PATRICK BROWN

Undoubtedly Sir. I have already located a local supply for the timber.

TELFORD

And the stone itself?

PATRICK BROWN

Gellyburn Quarry, Mr Telford. Five miles downstream.

TELFORD

Excellent. In that case once the initial finances are in place I can see no reason why we should delay commencement any further.

PATRICK BROWN

I agree Sir... and it will look like... something like this?

PATRICK BROWN picks up the drawing and holds it – upside down – to the audience) TELFORD looks at the drawing and gestures to BROWN to turn it up the right way, which he does. It is a drawing of the bridge as we know it.

TELFORD

(Beaming)

Precisely.

There then follows a four-minute musical extravaganza, during which time a replica of Dunkeld Bridge is built, spanning from one side of the stage to the other. The song to accompany this labour would start with a chorus, which would be sung by everybody. Verse one, would be sung by TELFORD. There would then be a chorus. Verse two, by the 4th DUKE OF ATHOLL, then another chorus. The first half of verse three by WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN. The second half of verse three by TELFORD and then the chorus and repeat of the chorus. When appropriate

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

TELFORD would be supervising the construction etc. The section would end with a flourish with folks on the bridge and either bank. The bridge is built.

Bridge Song

(chorus)

Oh we're going to build a bridge across the Tay
We built one once before, but it got washed away
Oh we're going to build a bridge across the Tay
We built once before, but it's a bridge no more
Inky pinky parlez-vous.

(1)

My name is Thomas Telford and an engineer am I
I've built all kinds of fancy stuff from Cornwall up to Skye
Built harbours, kirks and bridges and I even built canals
But I don't like building small stuff which I find a little banal
When the powers at be came to me and asked about the Tay
They needed a bridge at Dunkeld – well what else could I say?
I told them I was a genius and if anyone could I can
If it's an engineer you're after – I'm your man

(chorus)

(2)

I'm the 4th Duke of Atholl and I really cut a dash
I don't know much about bridges but I've put up half the cash
I don't know much about anything or so the story goes
But I live in the biggest house around as everybody knows
And when the bridge is finished I will really make a killing
For every couple of dozen who cross I'll end up with a shilling
A pretty shrewd investment I'm sure you will agree
Especially when I come to cross, they'll let me o'er for free

(chorus)

(3)

We are the Coonty Coouncil and we're watching a' the fuss
We're scheming and we're wondering just what's in it for us
Maybe in a while we'll get the Duke off all their backs
It'll give us lads a reason tae invent the council tax
But meanwhile as the bridge takes shape it makes a wondrous site
Its seven glorious arches are to me a pure delight
And when the work is finished we will celebrate and cheer
I'll guarantee this bridge will be...
Still here in 200 years!

(chorus)

Oh we're going to build a bridge across the Tay
We built one once before, but it got washed away
Oh we're going to build a bridge across the Tay

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

We built once before, but it's a bridge no more
Inky pinky parlez-vous.

(repeat)

Oh we're going to build a bridge across the Tay
We built one once before, but it got washed away
Oh we're going to build a bridge across the Tay
It'll last two hundred years of that there is no fear
Inky pinky parlez, inky pinky parlez
Inky pinky parlez-vous.

The stage clears leaving only TELFORD and 4th DUKE OF ATHOLL.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

So that's it then Telford.

TELFORD

That's it your Grace.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

It's... it's awfully small.

TELFORD

I beg your pardon your Grace?

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Well... I would have thought it would have been bigger than that?

TELFORD

Oh that? That's just the one for the play your Grace. The real one's outside across the river... and yes it's much, much bigger.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Oh I see, I didn't realise we were in a play. How exciting... it's not Pinter is it?

TELFORD

No, no...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

... Good! Well in that case Telford, I think it's a splendid bridge.

TELFORD

Thank you your Grace, you're very kind. And opened on time. Final inspection by me October 1809.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

And the final bill?

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

TELFORD

Ah!

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Well?

TELFORD

We...ll. It's maybe a wee bit more than my original estimate, your grace.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

A wee bit?

TELFORD

Well a wee bit more than a wee bit actually...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Ye-es?

TELFORD

Your Grace, you had two hundred and fifty men working on this... and loads of horses. And drivers delivering the stone. And there was the roads and all the big bits o' wood and stuff and the backfill and the glue...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Glue?

TELFORD

Maybe not glue...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Mr Telford... the final bill if you please!

TELFORD

Promise you won't be angry?

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

I promise.

TELFORD

Just a shade under ... thirty four thousand pounds...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

WHAT?

TELFORD

You promised...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Your estimate was fifteen thousand pounds...

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

TELFORD

Fifteen thousand pounds... give or take a few quid I said...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

(after a quick bit of mental arithmetic)

Nineteen thousand pounds is not – a few quid!

TELFORD

Beautiful bridge though eh?

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

It would jolly well have to be!

TELFORD

I mean just look at those curves... it's gorgeous...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

... and the Commissioners are paying half... so that's seventeen thousand I'm out of pocket.

TELFORD

Ah... well. I think the deal was that they would pay half of my original quote. In fact I think it's a bit under. Seven grand rings a bell.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

(after more mental arithmetic)

So, you're telling me that they pay seven thousand and I pay the outstanding twenty seven thousand?

TELFORD

More or less...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

More or less?

TELFORD

Well... no, that's exactly it, in a nutshell. But it is a topper of a bridge, you have to admit?

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

But in the song we just done, I was going to be making a killing.

TELFORD

Yea... well, I didn't like to say.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

I was going to be rich...

TELFORD

You are rich...

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

Yea, but I thought I was going to be richer?

TELFORD

But look, you've got this fantastic bridge. It'll be here for generations to come. That bridge'll still be here in two hundred years time... and it wouldn't have happened without you.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

(sniffs)

Suppose so...

TELFORD

And besides... you can start charging pontage right away...

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

What?

TELFORD

The tolls your Grace. Get your toll gates up and start charging the punters.

4th DUKE OF ATHOLL

What a damned jolly good idea!

TELFORD and 4th DUKE OF ATHOLL exit, just as two of the DUKE'S MEN appear on the bridge carrying the toll gate between them. They are positioned one on one side of the gate and the other on the other.

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

Back a bit... back a bit. Across a wee bit. Back a bit... that'll dae.

SECOND DUKE'S MAN goes to pass through the gate but is stopped midway by FIRST DUKE'S MAN.

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

And where d'ye think you're going?

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

What dae ye mean... where am I going? I'm coming wae you.

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

(holding out his hand)

That'll be a ha'penny then.

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

What?

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

That's the rules Jim... pass through the gate and you haetae pay a ha'penny.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

Och dinnae be daft. I've just brought the gate up wae you, the now.

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

I dinnae mak the rules... ha'penny, c'mon.

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

I'm no' paying.

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

You dinnae hae a choice.

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

I'm no' paying and there's nothing you can do about it!

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

Oh no?

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

No.

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

I could arrest ye...

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

Aye ye could try!

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

Right I will.

FIRST DUKE'S MAN passes through the gate...

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

(pointing)

Ah ha...

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

What?

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

(snapping his fingers)

Ha'penny please!

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

What?

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

A'body that passes through the gate has tae pay a ha'penny... you said so yersel.
C'mon pay up... I dinnae make the rules.

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

Oh aye... I see what you mean. It's kindo complicated eh? Wait a minute... I could
pay you a ha'penny and you could gie me a ha'penny, or even the same ha'penny
back...

SECOND DUKE'S MAN

Aye, or we could just go tae the pub... I mean, who's to ken?

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

Aye right.

The DUKE'S MEN scurry off over the bridge to Dunkeld. TOLL COLLECTOR enters stage right and stands by the gates. DONALD STEWART (costume two) enters stage left and crosses the bridge paying the toll to TOLL COLLECTOR and walks to downstage right.

DONALD STEWART

Within twenty-five years of the bridge being completed, both John 4th Duke of Atholl
and Thomas Telford were dead but the bridge lived on. Folks paid the tolls and
crossed the bridge.

MAN enters stage right.

MAN

How much is it to cross on horseback?

TOLL COLLECTOR

Eh... penny ha'penny.

MAN

Eh... right. How much is it to cross on foot?

TOLL COLLECTOR

Eh... just a ha'penny.

MAN

Right - I'll cross on foot.

TOLL COLLECTOR

Ha'penny please.

MAN

(handing over the coin)

There ye go.

MAN exits and then staggers back on carrying a horse. He then wobbles his way over the bridge to Dunkeld and exits stage left.

DONALD STEWART

It seemed that for the first forty to fifty years of the bridge's existence people were happy to pay the tolls. But eventually they began to resent the tolls feeling that the Atholl estate had been more than recompensed for its outlay. Then in 1852 the Postmaster General refused to pay the annual fee of £97 for the mail coach. The matter went to court and the mail coach stopped running. Then ten years later the railway arrived in Birnam diverting considerable traffic from the bridge sufficient to merit the railway paying compensation to the Atholl Estate. But when 7th Duke of Atholl refused to waive the tolls for church goers from Birnam to cross free of charge to attend their church in Dunkeld tempers began to rise.

DUNDONNACHIE enters stage left.

DUNDONNACHIE

My name is Alexander Robertson, although people like to call me Dundonnachie, and I am a local merchant. A successful local merchant at that. It is my considered opinion that the Atholl Estate has no right to collect tolls on Dunkeld Bridge for according to my calculations the debt would have been fully repaid in 1853. Fourteen years ago!

DUNDONNACHIE exits stage left.

DONALD STEWART

In 1868 a court action was prepared against the Atholl Estate. There was claim and counter claim. Some say the tolls should have been stopped. Some claim the Atholl estate did not profit from the bridge and indeed were left with an ever-increasing debt. One thing is for certain. A lot of lawyers and a lot of accountants made a lot of money. Not to mention the banks. The interest they charged could have built three bridges! It was time to read the riot act.

DONALD STEWART exits stage right just as DUNDONNACHIE and his cronies enter stage left on the bridge from Dunkeld. His cronies could be described as an angry mob in boisterous mood. TOLL COLLECTOR cowers at the Birnam end of the bridge. When they are about half way across one of the mob cries out...

ONE OF THE MOB

We're right behind you Dundonnachie the Chef...

The procession stops and DUNDONNACHIE looks around.

DUNDONNACHIE

It's Dundonnachie... the Chief!

ONE OF THE MOB

Aw... I thought it was Dundonnachie the Chef...

DUNDONNACHIE

Well it's no'...

ONE OF THE MOB

Are ye no' a chef - right enough?

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

DUNDONNACHIE

No... I'm a coal merchant.

ONE OF THE MOB

Naw?

DUNDONNACHIE

Aye!

ONE OF THE MOB
(to another of the mob)

I thought he was a chef...

DUNDONNACHIE

Are you quite finished? Chef, coal merchant, plooman it dissnæ matter. We're here tae hae a riot. *(turns to audience)* Ye just cannae get decent rioters these days. *(turns to MOB)* Right! Are yous a' behind me?

ASSEMBLED MOB

AYE!

DUNDONNACHIE

Are we going tae hae a riot or no'?

TOLL COLLECTOR

NO!

DUNDONNACHIE

It's okay Mr Murray... oor quarrel's no' wae you. Lock yersel in yer hoose man, you'll be fine. Right lads... get the gates and throw them in the river.

FIRST AND SECOND DUKE'S MEN enter stage right and grab the gates from one side. The MOB grab the gates from the other and there is much pulling and pushing and shouting...

FIRST DUKE'S MAN

Send for the Polis!!

SECOND DUKE' MAN

Send for the Black Watch!

ONE OF THE MOB

Send for the outside caterers!

The small riot continues until the gates are lifted high and are just about to be launched over the bridge when WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN enters and blows a referee's whistle. The MOB freezes mid riot.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN

Good afternoon and thank you very much indeed ladies and gentlemen for your attention.

DUNDONNACHIE

Who are you?

WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN

I'm fae the Coouncil... do I have the honour of addressing... (*checks his bit of paper*)
Dundonnachie the Chef?

DUNDONNACHIE

It's the Chief... Dundonnachie the Chief!

WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN

Oh... (*referring to a bit of paper*) it says chef here...

DUNDONNACHIE

Well it's Chief!

WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN

Oh, well never mind... I've been sent oot to let you lads ken that The Roads and Bridges Act of 1879 is now in force.

DUNDONNACHIE

(*suspiciously*)

Aye?

WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN

And... as of today the tolls on this bridge and all other bridges in Scotland have been abolished...

The ASSEMBLED MOB cheer.

WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN

... And you're all invited over to the Atholl Arms on Thursday night for a wee dram and bite to eat to celebrate...

The ASSEMBLED MOB cheer.

WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN

Guest of honour will be Chairman of the Highland Roads Committee.

DUNDONNACHIE

And who's he when he's at hame?

WEEDY COUNTY COUNCIL MAN

The Duke of Atholl!

The ASSEMBLED MOB begin a cheer but break off quickly.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

DUNDONNACHIE

Och... what does it matter noo? As long as he's paying!

The ASSEMBLED MOB cheer and proceed back off the bridge and exit stage left towards Dunkeld. THE DUKE'S MEN exit stage right with the toll-gate. DONALD STEWART (costume three) enters stage left and walks to the middle of the bridge.

DONALD STEWART

And there you have it. The bridge continued to carry the A9 traffic until Birnam and Dunkeld was by-passed in the nineteen seventies. Nowadays locals, visitors and holiday makers, drive, cycle or walk over Telford's bridge, many perhaps not even noticing it's there. It's interesting to think that two hundred years on, it's still stressed to carry forty-ton trucks... ten times the weight of anything in Telford's day. All the hard work was done a couple of centuries back. Telford and the Duke, Brown and Palliser, the two hundred and fifty masons and labourers. The four years of hard physical graft and design genius. All we've got to do now is look after it.

DONALD STEWART exits stage right just as WOMAN enters stage right and crosses the bridge towards Dunkeld. She stops halfway over and spies a large weed growing from the bridge. She continues across the bridge and moves to downstage left, dialling on her mobile phone as she goes.

WOMAN

(speaking on her mobile phone)

Is that the roads department? I've just crossed Dunkeld Bridge and there's what looks like a small version of the Birnam Oak growing out of the parapet. It's just a weed really but it would be better out of there before the bridge falls down eh? Cheers.

Woman exits stage left as a new mob, which looks suspiciously like the old mob, enters stage left and crosses to the middle of the bridge. There is at least half a dozen of them all wearing reflective jackets and some with hard hats. Their leader, who looks very like a modern day Dundonnachie, carries a clipboard. He spies the weed.

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

There it is...

The mob scrunch to a halt behind him.

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

(after some close examination)

... aye that would be better out o' there right enough.

He turns to the mob and shouts.

Health and Safety?

HEALTH AND SAFETY

(after a quick glance in the weed's direction)

I'll need to submit a report... I could rush it through in maybe... two to three weeks?

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

Yes that'll be fine. *(He ticks something on his clipboard)* Structural Surveyor can you do the same please?

STRUCTURAL SURVEYOR

Em... lot on at the moment... maybe a month?

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

Yep that'll do. SNH?

SNH

Well I'm not sure, but there may be legal implications under the Wildlife and Countryside Act if we were just to pull that weed out... I'll have to check up...

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

Can you report back in a month's time?

SNH

Well, I'm on holiday in a month.

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

Oh are ye? Where are ye off to?

SNH

Em... I'm going to The Seychelles.

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

Oh very nice... well two months then?

SNH nods.

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

Two months it is. *(He ticks his clipboard)* Right we'll convene a meeting for two months from today... *(He looks around the group for confirmation)* on the bridge?

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Na... it's too cold.

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

Okay fair enough... In the big meeting room on the third floor, the one wae the comfy chairs and the coffee machine.

The MOB all nod enthusiastically.

COUNCIL MOB LEADER

(addressing the audience)

Right... *(He tucks the clipboard under his arm)* Well... I would say that's a job well done.

The Bridge – Bob Davidson

The end music begins and the MOB drift off the bridge stage left as the lights slowly begin to fade. As the MOB exits a young boy runs onto the bridge with his skateboard. He spies the weed and pauses briefly before pulling it out by the roots and throwing it over the back of the bridge. He runs off as the curtains close.