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Forgotten pioneer's Forth crossing dream realised after 200 years

It was to prove a bridge too far for engineers 200 years ago ... but now a little-known Scot's vision of a Forth crossing is set to become reality.

Plans drawn by engineer and surveyor James Anderson in 1818 – which look remarkably similar to the Queensferry Crossing that opens tomorrow (Wednesday) – have come to light in a University of Edinburgh archive.

Anderson's proposal for a "*Bridge of Chains proposed to be thrown over the Frith [sic] of Forth*" was discovered by University geographer Bruce Gittings while researching his *Gazetteer for Scotland* – a project to record every settlement and landmark in Scotland.

The remarkable plans for a roadway linking North and South Queensferry were proposed 72 years before completion of the iconic Forth Bridge.

Both Anderson's design and the new Queensferry Crossing are suspension road bridges, with their supports extending as straight lines from the towers, in both cases resembling the sails of an immense yacht.

Edinburgh-born Anderson's scheme has the roadway supported by chain cables, forged from iron bars, very similar to Thomas Telford's bridge across the Menai Strait in North Wales.

Anderson, who was friendly with Telford, suggested that the success of Telford's Menai Suspension Bridge, begun in 1819, was a good reason that his own design should be built.

Anderson proudly suggested his bridge would "facilitate the communication between the southern and northern divisions of Scotland". At the time, the cost was between £175,000 and £200,000, which would equate to around £840 million today.

James Anderson was born in the Old Town of Edinburgh, the son of a textile worker. He died at his home in the city in 1861 and is buried in Old Calton Burial Ground.

The *Gazetteer for Scotland*, www.scottish-places.info, was the first description of Scotland to be published online in 1995 and remains the largest, with more than 25,000 entries. According to Gittings, maintaining this remarkable geographical, historical and educational resource is, as used to be said of painting the 1890 Forth Bridge, a never ending process.

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Bruce Gittings, of the University of Edinburgh's School of GeoSciences, said: "It is great to be able to add the Queensferry Crossing to the *Gazetteer*, and important to remember Anderson's pioneering work.

"His design was beyond the engineering capabilities of the time, as evidenced by the collapse of the Tay Bridge in a storm in 1879 and of the Chain Pier at Trinity in Edinburgh – on which Anderson also worked – in 1898."

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