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THE BRIDGES OF BUDAPEST

Margaret Bridge

*Eiffel had a hand in it*

After mid-19th century, large-scale regular town-planning began in the three towns of Pest, Buda and Óbuda, lying on the banks of the River Danube. In 1873 the three townships were united under the name of Budapest, capital of Hungary, and the need to form a harmonious city-shape became an urgent task.

Besides, the only permanent stone bridge spanning the river at Budapest at that time was the Chain Bridge which could no longer cope with the increasing volume of traffic after the year 1867, marking the constitutional compromise which resulted in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The establishment of the Monarchy involved rapid industrialization and dynamic development in every field of life.

An act of Parliament calling for the building of a new bridge was finally adopted in 1870, and an international competition was launched for designing a stone bridge spanning the River Danube near Margaret Island. The bridge had to become an integral part of an almost circular boulevard enclosing the inner parts of both Buda and Pest.

The competition was won by a French engineer, Ernest Gouin, and the construction of the bridge was also carried out by the French company of Société de Construction des Pâtignole. Gustave-Alexandre Eiffel also took part in the building of the bridge. The statues on the piers were done by Frenchman Thabald. Actual building work began in 1872, while the bridge was finally commissioned in 1876.

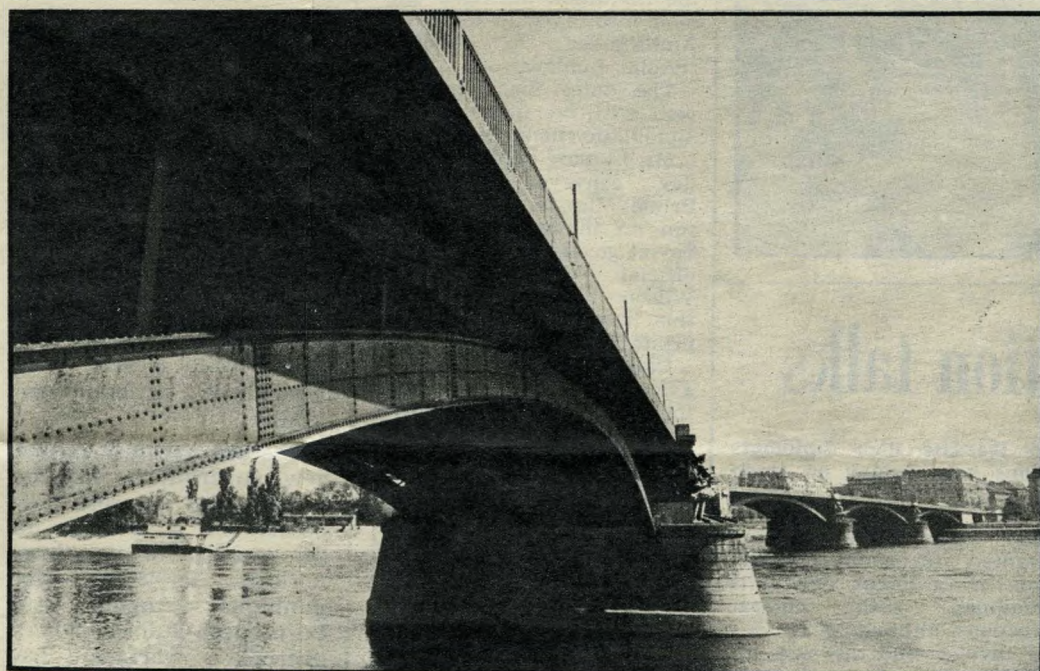
Margaret Bridge, named after the island in the Danube, recalls the old legend of Hungary's Saint Margaret (1242-1271) daughter of King Béla IV (1235-1270), of Hungary's Árpád dynasty. Margaret took Dominican vows and spent most of her life in a nunnery built for her order on the island by her father. Several miracles have been attributed to the pious and virtuous Margaret, who was beatified the year after her death, and canonized in 1944. The island, however, has been called Margaret Island since the 14th century.

The bridge was so construct-

ed that the river's currents on either side of the island hit the bridge's piers perpendicularly. This made for a bridge construction with a broken line, forming a blunt angle at the southern tip of the island. At the tip of the angle, a flank bridge leads onto Margaret Island. This branchoff was completed in 1900.

Between 1935 and 1937, the bridge was widened and made stronger with the building in of several hundred more tons of structural steel.

During World War II, German troops blew up all bridges of Budapest, including Margaret Bridge. The Pest half of the bridge was blown up on Nov. 4, 1944, while daytime traffic was moving on the bridge. Many cars, lorries and even a three-carriage tram tumbled into the river with a heavy loss of life.



Photos András Lévai

The Buda half was blown up a few days before Budapest's liberation on Feb. 13, 1945.

enough and it was commissioned a second time Aug. 1, 1948.

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Immediately after the war pontoon bridges were constructed across the Danube to make life and work possible. A few metres from the site of Margaret Bridge Budapest's famous and popular "Manci" pontoon bridge was erected (Manci being a Hungarian petname for Margaret).

However, reconstruction of the bridge started soon