

The British Adam Clark

Two Britons built Budapest's first Danube bridge

Foundation stone laid 125 years ago

already spanning the Thames.

Ten hard years

Thierney William undertook to design the Danube bridge at Széchenyi's instance. Later, he came to Hungary and promptly met a compatriot and namesake, Adam Clark, engaged at the time on river regulation work.

English-born Adam Clark had in due course become a "true" Hungarian, settled here, and married a Hungarian girl, Irma Áldássy. After Thierney William's return home, Adam Clark undertook the whole construction work on the bridge.

In 1839, Adam Clark and Széchenyi set to work. The ten years, during which the bridge was built, were often marred by wrangling, setbacks, technical and material shortages. And before its completion, the bridge had even been in mortal danger and only the builder's devotion saved it from destruction.

In 1849, the Imperial troops of Habsburg Austria ordered the destruction of the bridge after their retreat from Budapest. Adam Clark, who was ordered to

charge the bridge pillars with gunpowder, had the courage to say "no". Instead, he let water into the lock chambers to destroy the gunpowder and save the bridge. Then he walked onto the bridge and stayed there while the Imperial artillery shelled it at the command of the angered Austrian General Hentzi.

Chain-walk

An unfortunate accident happened when the bridge was already close to completion: a chain, while being fitted, plunged into the river, killing five people sailing in a boat underneath.

This incident, and the rather slow pace of work, made Count Széchenyi so desperate that he told Adam Clark: if the bridge is ever finished, he would walk on the last chain to be fitted, all the way across from Pest to Buda.

When in 1849 the building workers—who were also British—finished mounting the last chain, amid the cheering of the crowd watching the operation, the daring Count balanced his way across from Buda to Pest. He was 57 years old at the time.



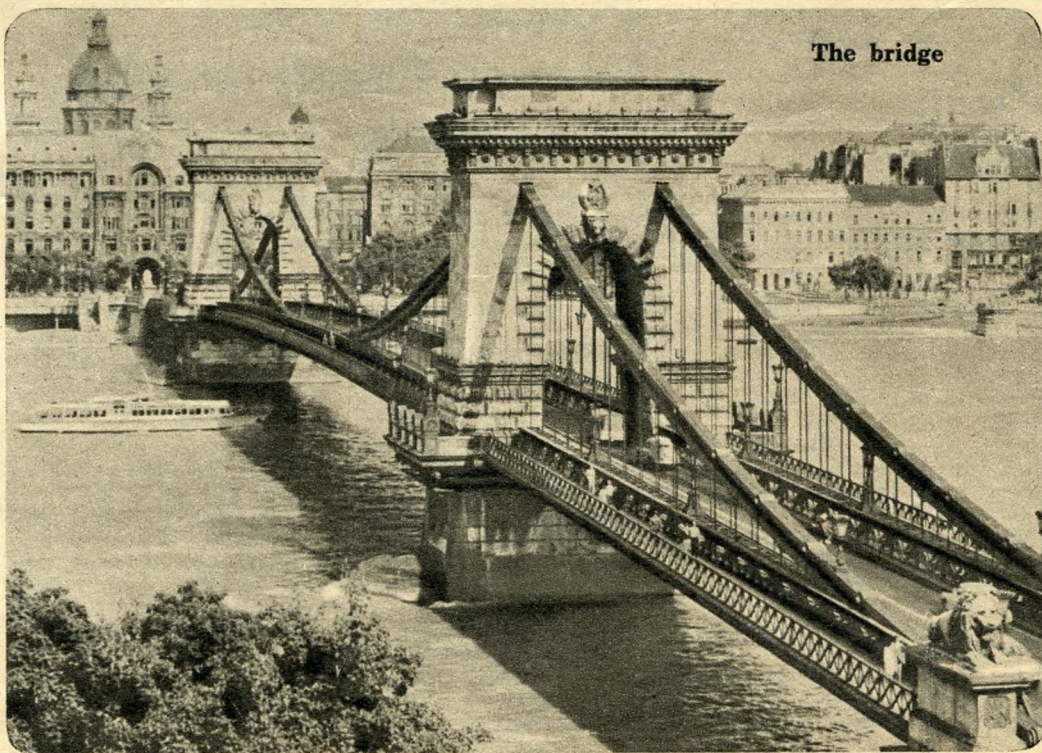
The Chain Bridge seen from the Buda side through the tunnel—also Adam Clark's work

Adam Clark's memory has ever since been held in high esteem in Hungary, and one of the busiest squares of the city is named after him.

Later adversities

By the irony of fate, the documents and letters which Clark's family presented to Hungary after his death, and his life's work the graceful bridge itself, were destroyed at the same time. In 1945, when the retreating German occupation forces caused widespread destruction in Budapest, the Széchenyi rooms at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences were badly hit—while the blown-up bridge lay desecrated in the surging waters of the Danube.

The Chain Bridge was among the first Budapest bridges to be rebuilt after the war being completed in 1948. It still stands in its original form, with mighty lions at either end guarding it symbolically from further adversities.



The bridge