



## Reconstructing the Gobbins Path

**Gavin WILSON**  
Chartered Civil Engineer  
Doran Consulting Ltd  
Belfast, Northern Ireland  
[gavin.wilson@doran.co.uk](mailto:gavin.wilson@doran.co.uk)



Gavin Wilson, born 1981, received his engineering science degree from the University of Oxford, England. He works for Doran Consulting Ltd, based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. There he works within the Bridges and Marine Section.

### Summary

The Gobbins Path, located in Islandmagee, Northern Ireland, was a dramatic coastal walk first opened in 1902. The path, designed and built by Irish engineer Berkley Deane Wise, required many bridges to cross between rock outcrops and inlets, including spectacular structures such as the Tubular Bridge, shown in fig. 1.



*Fig.1: Bridges of the original Gobbins Path and a postcard showing the Tubular Bridge*

During the Second World War, the Gobbins Path was temporarily closed. Despite strengthening works to a number of structures after the war, high maintenance costs forced the path's closure in 1961.

In 2013, Larne Borough Council launched a project to reconstruct a section of the original Gobbins Path to provide a major tourist attraction for the area. This new scheme incorporated the construction of stainless steel bridges, with the design completed to date the focus of this paper.

**Keywords:** bridge, stainless steel, marine, restoration, Gobbins, Northern Ireland

### 1. Introduction

The Gobbins Path, first opened in 1902, was designed and built by Irish railway engineer, Berkley Deane Wise, who saw the tourist potential of the Gobbins cliffs to help promote the railway line in the area [1]. Major structures of the original path, such as the bridges, were built in the Harland & Wolff shipyard in Belfast and floated out to the Gobbins on barges. At its peak, prior to World War II, the Gobbins attracted thousands of visitors annually. During the 1940's, however, resources to maintain the path became unavailable and gradually the path began to fall into disrepair. Despite attempts to strengthen structures in the 1950's, the path was officially closed in 1961 [2].

Over the last 50-years, much of the Gobbins Path has significantly deteriorated, with many of the original bridges having collapsed into the Irish Sea. Some of the original structures, however, are still visible, fig. 2.