

**THE BRIDGE
AT
HENLEY ON THAMES**

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THE BRIDGE AT HENLEY

"Through this fair arch henceforth with conscious pride
Let Thames and Isis roll their mingled tides
Hastening to swell old Ocean's watery shores
And sound their triumphs to his farthest shores
Tho' Tiber's classic wares distinguish'd flow
Our English rivers claim superior praise
From Damers sculpture and from Denham's lays"

Rev. Thomas Powys (1)

Why is the Bridge at this particular point of the River? The Magna Charta stated that "No village or individual shall be compelled to make bridges at river banks except those who from old were legally bound to do so." There is no evidence of a Bridge built by Romans in Henley. A Roman road went from Silchester to Staines (Pontes) with another road North West to Cirencester from Silchester. The ancient Icknield Way was routed North West of Henley. Fords were the best method of crossing rivers in mediaeval times.

Primitive bridges were simple stone slabs. Clan bridges were single span and Clapper bridges were multi-span. During Henry VIII's reign there were bridges of timber structures at Caversham, Sonning, Henley, Marlow and Maidenhead. Bridges in these times were maintained by Monasteries or semi-religious fraternities. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries the Statute of Bridges was passed in 1531 to enable them to be regulated and kept in repair and handed over to Counties and Parishes.

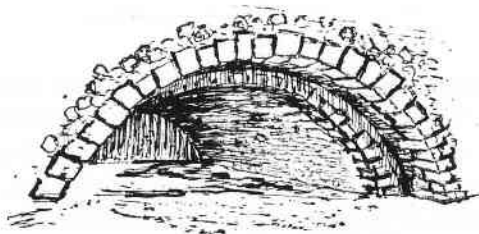
A number of them were destroyed as a result of the Civil War and eventually repaired extending their life for another hundred years before a large rebuilding of bridges took place in mid-18c. In 1766 a comprehensive Turnpike Act was passed to consolidate previous Acts.

The earliest reference to a bridge at Henley is contained in the Patent Rolls 1223/5. "The Warden of the Bridge at Henley has free passage through Windsor Forest to load such wood as he wanted for the repair of the Bridge." (Windsor Forest in those days stretched to Remenham and Wargrave).

(1) 'Presented' to Living of Fawley October 1762 by Sambrook Freeman

In 1385 King Richard II's Charter intimates that the Town was responsible for Bridge repairs. The Assembly Book in 1479 and 1681 refers to "the way at the Clappers was gravelled and again repaired.

In the Autumn of 1984 one of the arches at the east side was uncovered.⁽¹⁾ It was found to be constructed of shuttered flint masonry, with outer arch rims of Barnack stone. The outer part was of a stepped type, with the stone dressings squared off. These points of construction together with mason's markings have placed the dating to the 1170s. It is similar to the arch at the West end of the bridge which is in part of the cellars of the Angel on the Bridge lying under the pavement outside the North wall of the public house.



Romanesque Arch uncovered
1984 dated to about 1170

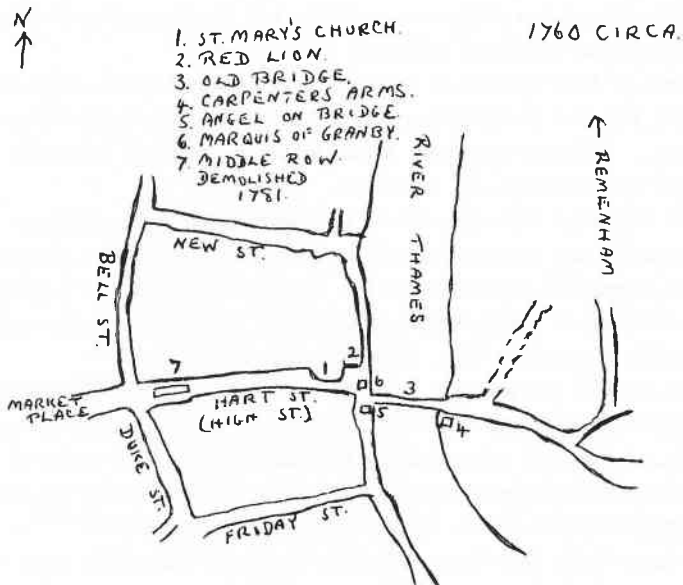
Paintings of the bridge by Jan Siberechts in 1690s show the bridge had one solid arch on the West end and two on the East side with the main central part in wood. This bridge was built on the South side of the present bridge.

Hart Street leads to the Parish Church already in existence in 1204, and therefore the entrance into the Town was very narrow. During the Civil War, 1645, the bridge was broken by the retreating Armies.

In 1670 £264 (a lot of money) was collected in the Town for the repair of the Bridge. However we have evidence that in August 1731 there was trouble between the Lord of the Manor and Corporation and some three years later a ferry boat was to be provided and further repair was necessary.

(1) A Walk round Henley-on-Thames (2nd ed.) P.16

In November 1780 Mr. T. Cooper, the Town Clerk, was instructed to prepare a petition to Parliament to enable the Corporation to build a stone bridge on the North side of the existing one. But the Corporation found opposition from Sanbrook Freeman of Fawley Court who was Lord of the Manor of Henley, when the petition was presented to House of Commons on 31 January 1781. He, hoping for the support of large landowners, wished to see a new Bridge opposite New Street.



This would have had a bad effect on the Town trade and coaching inns. It was believed that public houses existed on all four corners of the Bridge. A series of letters between the Town Clerk and the High Steward of Henley, Lord Macclesfield, eventually solved the dispute and some important clauses were inserted in the Bill. Namely the new Bridge was to be built near the old bridge to facilitate the entry into Hart Street and when the borrowed money was paid back to the Bond holders the bridge would become the property of the Henley Corporation and community.

Sixteen well known persons in the surrounding district plus the High Steward of Henley and the Recorder in addition to 27 members of the Corporation, were to be Commissioners. The town could therefore outvote the surrounding County Gentlemen.

The Bill received the Royal Assent on 18th May 1781 and the Commissioners met on 1st June. (Three Gentlemen, Mayor, 7 Aldermen and 9 Burgesses). A temporary toll house was to be erected on the old bridge to collect funds for the new one and Richard Taylor was appointed Gatekeeper at 10/- per week. Advertisements were placed in nearby town papers and in London for plans for a bridge with as few arches as possible, and the borrowing of money and sale of annuities on credit of tolls was also included.

Six Bonds of £100 and six of £50 each were assigned to Mr. Hugh Keene to pay off debt incurred in obtaining Act of Parliament, the Bonds to carry 5% interest. Alderman Bradshaw, a builder, was appointed Inspector and Surveyor of the Bridge and paid £200.

On 14th September 1781 nine County Gentlemen and fifteen Aldermen and Burgesses met and approved the plans, with some alterations, submitted by William Hayward of the Parish of St. Julians, Shrewsbury at a price of £9521, and a covenant to complete by 1st May 1785. The Contract was actually signed and sealed on November 26th, 1781, and cost £9727.

William Hayward was a son of John Hayward senior (1708-1778) the famous Shropshire architectural family. His father built St. Mary's Bridge, Lincoln, and amongst other bridges William assisted John Gwynn on the rebuilding of Magdalen Bridge, Oxford. The Hayward family can claim a distinguished place in the history of English Architecture. (1)

There is no doubt that General Seymour Conway of Park Place took a great interest in the bridge. He was a Commissioner present on 14th September, and at subsequent meetings of the Bridge Commissioners. His daughter, the Honourable Mrs. Anne Damer, carved Keystones on the central arch of Thamesis and Isis. (2) Unfortunately William Hayward died and was buried on 16th January 1782 in St. Mary's Church Henley and subsequently a small monument was erected in the Church. As he left no Will his brother John Hayward was invited to continue, and on 16th May he was allowed £50 for plans, journeys and expenses - which his late brother had incurred.

(1) Shropshire Magazine - January 1960.

(2) The latter was supposed to be a portrait of her friend Miss Freeman of Fawley Court.

William's death was attributed to his kindness in giving up his place inside a coach to a woman on a stormy day when he contracted a cold and fever. (1)

On March 30th 1782 a contract was executed with Mr. John Townsend, an architect and mason at Oxford, who a few years earlier had been the contractor for the Maidenhead Bridge, for £9452 practically in accordance with Hayward's plans.

To improve access to the bridge it was arranged that the "Marquis of Granby" on the North West side of old bridge be demolished, also the public house on the North East side.

"The Carpenter's Arms" on South East was retained and likewise the "Angel on Bridge" on the South West. Part of the Churchyard on the South side of the Church and a portion of the garden of the Red Lion were to be acquired. Bishop Longland's Almshouses on the site of present Bridge House and garage were to be demolished, and Hart Street was to be widened by removing the Old Market House and Middle Row houses.

Sambrooke Freeman despite being a Commissioner continued to be obstructive and in 1786/7 put stakes in the roadway, which had been purchased by Commissioners, between Bridge and New Street. He attempted to use his feudal powers by proclaiming a Court Leet and Court Baron Jury!

Further Acts of Parliament 1795, 1808, and 1836 were necessary to give the Commissioners additional powers to purchase land and widen the roads and round off corners at North East Duke Street and South East Bell Street. During the next few months there was a dispute with the Bishop of Oxford over the part of the Churchyard to be used for widening the road.

July 6th the Treasurer reported amounts to June as follows:

Receipts	£9074 . 2 - 6
Expenses	<u>£7695 . 3 - 7</u>
Balance in hand	<u>£1378 .18 .11</u>

On 4th September 1784 John Townsend died and the bridge was then to be completed by his son Stephen.

August 7 1786 Mr. Bradshaw reported the contractors had completed the Bridge in a workmanship manner.

The Bridge and approaches and road widening had cost about £13000. It is faced with Headington freestone. The balustrade is of special Headington hard stone.

(1) A Guide to Henley-on-Thames 1896 E.J. Climenson p.28.

Horace Walpole wrote to the Earl of Stafford saying "there is not a sight in the island more worthy of being visited. The Bridge is as perfect as if bridges were natural productions and the masks as if the Romans had left them there."

Tolls were to be collected as follows:-

Any Horse, Mare etc. etc. not drawing	1d
Any Horse, Mare, Gelding, Mule, Ass or beast drawing any carriage .	3d
Drove of Oxen per score	10d
Calves, Sheep, Lambs or Swine per score	5d

Royal Carriages and Soldiers are exempt of Tolls

March 18th 1782 the Treasurer was instructed to pay Townsend £800 as he had completed one Abuttment and Wing of the springing of the Arch.

There appears to have been no formal opening of the Bridge.

On September 5 1788 it was agreed to advertise for a Gatekeeper and the Tolls were to be let for one year at next Meeting.

On October 3rd "Mr. R.T. Taylor, the late keeper is to be given 5 guineas as a token of their appreciation of his conduct whilst keeper".

Mr. John Gibson of Colnbrook executed a lease of Tolls for a year at the sum of £770. He paid one month's rent in advance and executed a security bond.

As a result of the death of Mr. John Cooper, Clerk and Treasurer, his son Thomas Cooper was elected Clerk and Treasurer at £20 per annum on 16 January 1789 - security given £1000.

At a meeting of the Bridge Commissioners on July 25 1792 it appears that tolls were more than sufficient to pay interest and expenses and a new tariff was introduced.

Mr. Coux was appointed Gatekeeper July 25 at £600 per annum and warned if he takes "more toll than he ought will be proceeded against."

"Horses and other Cattle drawing teams laden with corn coming to Henley Market on Market Day and which at present pay 1½d a horse shall pay only 1d per horse and other cattle drawing carriages which at present pay 3d a horse should pay 2d a horse and third horses drawing barges shall pay 1d a horse as usual." On November 2 these new rates were to be posted up.

Next year the Bridge was cleaned. Mr. Cooper resigned as Treasurer and there appears to have been financial difficulties, as his surety Mr. William Hughes was acquainted as to the balance due from Treasurer.

On July 5, 22 Commissioners met instead of the usual 11 or 12 and Mr. Hugh Keene was elected Treasurer and Mr. Cooper retained his other office as Clerk. By 1797 Mr. Thomas Cooper had managed to make an offer with regard to balance owing to Commissioners from his late father's bankrupt estate, and this was accepted.

Next year the Commissioners agreed to buy £150 worth of Bonds from Dorchester and Bix Turnpike Trustees to make a new road up Bix Hill as they considered it would increase traffic over bridge.

John Cooper was elected Treasurer in July 1801 and in 1808 he reported that £5000 had been paid off the original cost of bridge.

On June 7 1816 Mr. Tawney, engineer of Oxford Council reported on the condition of the bridge which had deteriorated due to floods, erosion and settlement of the pier. He recommended two more land arches nearer to the East side of bridge, which were completed 1830. Subsequently the lane to Remenham was "turned" to its present position.

Mr. Samuel Cooper was elected Clerk on resignation of Mr. Cooper in 1819 and next year Mr. Parker was elected Treasurer.

Mr. Isaac Bolton was appointed Gatekeeper at £880 p.a. in December 1812. There were occasional complaints as to his overcharging over the next twenty years.

In October 1835 when Queen Adelaide crossed the Bridge the Commissioners considered "the improper conduct by Bolton on the occasion of Her Majesty's passing through the Town on Monday 19th."

It was unanimously resolved that "The Commissioners regard with the deepest regret and indignation the conduct of the Gatekeeper in the obstruction occasioned to her Majesty and her suite and in his insolent and unbecoming behaviour to Earl Howe, Her Majesty's Chamberlain. He will be removed from the Gate at the end of his term".

November 13 the following was received from the Lord Chamberlain:-

"Sir,

I am honoured by the Queen's command to convey the most earnest request of Her Majesty that no steps be taken whatsoever in consequence of the misconduct of Gatekeeper Bolton. It would be a source of deepest regret to the Queen that the ignorance of the man should bring him so severe a punishment as dismissal. Her Majesty is anxious that a journey of such unmingled satisfaction to herself should be free of suffering to any individual. The conduct of the poor man has been much exaggerated."

The Royal archives unfortunately contain very few of Queen Adelaide's papers and most of King William IV's correspondence was destroyed on his death.

Thomas Porter was appointed new Gatekeeper May 6 1836 having bid £1040 for Tolls.

The Great Western Railway opened in 1840 and on May 4 1840 George Temple was appointed after having bid £550 for Tolls.

From now onwards economies were sought and a committee was appointed in 1842 to investigate expenditure and reported as follows:-

<u>Income</u>			
Tolls let for	£435	0	0
Rent Mr. Dixon's	4	-	
" Mr. Sergeant's	8	-	
Corporation of Henley - Kenton	23	17	6
National School	14	16	0
Barnaby's		13	4
Gravetts	2	0	0
Estimated income	£488	6	10

<u>Expenditure</u>			
Interest on Bonds	£243	0	0
Clerk's salary	20	0	0
Bridge rents		19	10½
Lamps & lighting	155	19	6
Repairing of roads	15	19	6
Monthly Meetings	6	0	0
Law charges	16	8	0
Watering and cleaning	6	10	6
Toll Keeper's Gratuity	3	0	0
Incidental expenses	9	7	8
Estimated costs	£477	5	0

Savings that might be made:-

The Clerk to pay for his own stationery	3	3	0
Reduction of Gas Lamps	28	17	0
Quarterly Meetings instead of monthly ones	4	0	0

The interest on bonds cannot be reduced

Bridge rents cannot be reduced

Road costs will increase rather than decrease

Watering to be transferred to the Surveyor of the Highways

Gratuity to toll keeper dependent on toll lettings

By 1862 some concern was shown as to the condition of piers and in August Mr. Murray from Slough made a report disclosing settlement but suggesting some points which required alteration such as cleaning archways of debris and a sunken boat.

Ten years later on Saturday March 1st 1873 the Commissioners proceeded to the Bridge Gate and declared the Bridge to be free from Tolls and gave orders for removal of Toll Gate and Toll Board. ⁽¹⁾ The balance of £16 . 1 . 7 to be handed over to the Corporation.

Henley Advertiser March 8th 1873 reported:-

"The-Toll of Henley Bridge was finally abolished last Saturday March 1st. The debt incurred in building having been paid off. The office of the Commissioners appointed by Act of Parliament when the Bridge was built has ceased to exist and the care of the structure reverts to the Corporation. The Mayor (Mr. Mercer) soon after noon on the above mentioned day formally announced to a goodly number of town's people that the Bridge will in future be toll free. The occasion was one of rejoicing to a large number of the inhabitants who were disappointed that the season of Lent prevented the pealing of the Church Bells and who signified their joy by firing a salvo of maroons from the water side."

The next week the Henley Advertiser (March 15th 1873) published a letter from the Rev. Greville Phillimore: "I have read a notice in your paper of today about the abolition of the Bridge Toll, in the benefit of which I participate as much as anybody. In this notice you make some reference to the omission of the ringing of the Church Bells upon the occasion, as if I, as Rector, was aware of the ceremonial which was to take place on the Bridge. Pray, Sir, assure your readers that I had no warning of such a ceremony, nor any invitation to attend it. Otherwise, if the Mayor and Corporation had spoken to me of a publick rejoicing which could not be postponed, there might have been reason to relax the old rule of the silence of Church Bells during the occasion of Lent. As it was perhaps it was fortunate that I was not asked by the Authorities, and that I did not yield the point, for when the mob assaulted the Rectory the same

(1) Henley Advertiser 22 February 1873 - Official Notice

evening, I would not but be glad that these Bells had not been desecrated to assist the orgies of the class of people, who to the shame of a civilised community were allowed to indulge in that brutal and cowardly attack."

In August 1899 the Corporation had two iron plates with raised lettering costing £3 each fixed at either end of the Bridge warning Traction Engine drivers of penalty if they took more than one loaded trailer over Bridge.

GATE-KEEPERS. 1781-1873

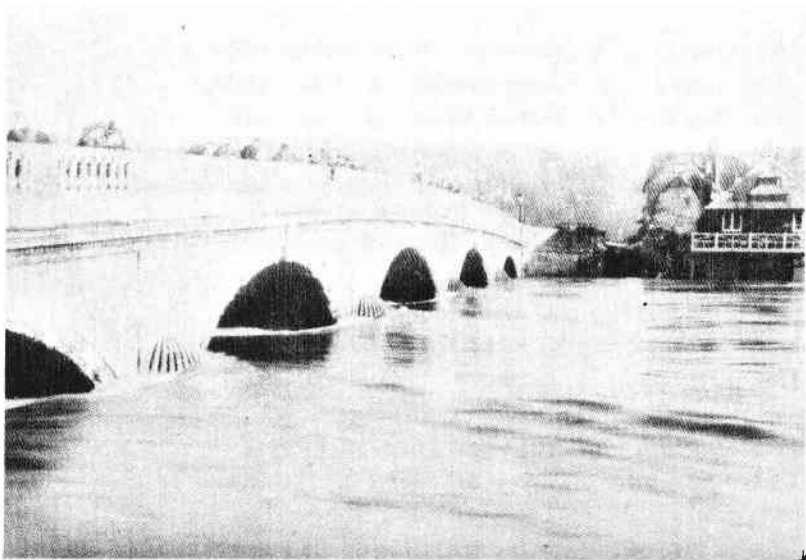
1781	June 1	Richard Taylor - 10/- per week.
1788	October 10	John Gibson of Colnbrook. One year lease £770.
1789	September 11	Joseph Coux. Best bidder £771 per year for 3 years.
1792	September 7	Appleton. £600 per year for 3 years. (Draft Lease).
1795	October 2	John Berris. £916 (best bidder). Lease executed.
	December 4	Coux takes over as Berris quits.
1798	September 7	Isaac Bolton best bidder £800 although Tolls were advertised £916.
1802	July 9	Isaac Bolton £840 per annum, for 3 years.
1805	August 9	Joseph Bland £1006.
1808	September 2	Sylvanus Hanley. Best bidder £966. (Bland jointly concerned).
1811	October 21	Richard Hissey. Best bidder £980. (Treasurer authorised to pay 3 guineas towards dinner for bidders).
1812	August 7	Hissey gives notice to quit (Floods in early part of year had seriously affected roads near Bridge).
	October 30	No bidder. Owen to collect Tolls at £1 per week.
	December 4	Isaac Bolton bought Tolls for £880 per year.
1813	September 3	Bolton gives notice to quit.
	December 3	Hanley & Walton best bidders £850.
1814	December 2	Henry Thompson appointed collector - One guinea a week. (Previous complaints of over charging).
1816	April 7	Isaac Bolton. Lease £850 per year, from May.
1819	August	Isaac Bolton. Lease £850 per year, executed.
1822	March 1	As above.
1825	March	do do £910 per year.
1828	March 4	do do £930 per year.
1834	April 4	do do £850 per year.
1836	February	Notice given by Clerk to terminate Lease in May.

1837	May 12	Thomas Hatton best bidder	£965.
1838	June 1	Jacob Simmons do do	£1015.
1839	May 24	Berkley Hicks do do	£895.
1840	May 4	George Temple offered	£550 after auction.
	September 21	Possession of Tollgate as rent not paid.	Brewett appointed collector.
1841	August 5	Keene's offer	£435 accepted.
1844/8		No bidders.	
1849	November	J. Bowles offer	£340 accepted.
1858	April 27	B. Hicks	£210 per annum.
1861	July 19	do do	
1864	August	Best bid	£345 accepted.
1865	March	Hicks best bid	£295.
1867	July	do do do	£250.
1870	July	do do do	£252.
1872		do rents tolls at	£18 per month.

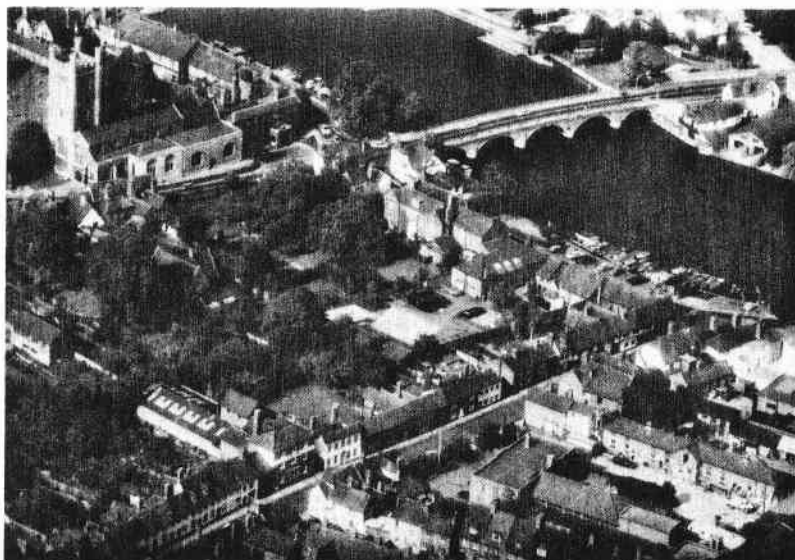
In conclusion, this is an account of the reactions of the Town's people and the surrounding Gentry to the new bridge. Mr. Francis Sheppard has written in "Architectural History" Volume 27, 1984 concerning the bridge and its architect.

The majority of the information has been obtained from the Henley Borough Assembly and Henley Bridge Commissioners' Minutes which have been painstakingly extracted by Mr. John Crocker, a member of our group. My thanks are also extended to another member, Mrs. Ann Cottingham, who has read the first draft and has contributed the delightful illustrations. Finally thank you Mrs. Johnstone for typing the script.

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THE FLOOD 1894



LOOKING DOWN ON THE BRIDGE

