

BALLINGDON BRIDGE, SUDBURY, 1805.

FROM THE COMMON.

BALLINGDON BRIDGE,
AND THE SUDBURY STOUR.

BY WILLIAM WALTER HODSON.

The Borough of Sudbury, in the County of Suffolk, comprises within its irregular boundary line the hamlet of Ballingdon in Essex; which has annexed to it the contiguous hamlet of Brundon, consisting of the Hall, Mill, and half-a-dozen cottages. For ecclesiastical purposes Ballingdon-cum-Brundon is united with the parish of All Saints, and the parishioners have the right to use the parish church of "All Souls." There was formerly a chapel at Ballingdon, and a very small church on the old bridle-road to Brundon wood (mentioned "with 20 swine" in the Domesday Survey), but both the church "of one pace," and the way-side chapel disappeared centuries back. Ballingdon Hall, an old-fashioned, many gabled, rambling house, a small remnant of the original Tudor mansion, was long the seat of the Eden family, whose pedigree is limned on the walls of their chapel in All Saints' Church, but the family, "right worshipful" (as designated by Fuller), though they were, have long vacated the once famous hall, and the original gold, crimson, and azure of their coats of arms are fast disappearing from their chantry chapel. At Ballingdon Hall the unfortunate "Essex" once stayed for time in a fit of sulks, after a more than usually sharp passage of arms between the imperious and capricious Queen and the spoilt and flighty Earl. Just past the "Hall" rises the hill, still steep, though reduced to a more easy gradient half a century back by the celebrated road-

maker, McAdam, and is now macadamized with granite. There were formerly two hills, and on the summit of the higher one a beacon was built when Bonaparté was expected to invade our shores, so that the intelligence might be flashed up and down the peaceful Stour valley, and the fiery signal be repeated from Hedingham Keep and Clare Castle; Lavenham lofty tower, and the Pentlow and Henny hills. Ballingdon has a "mixed" orthography,—Baldingcotum, Belidune, Balydon, Balliton, Ballidon.

The dividing line between Sudbury and Ballingdon is that which separates "fayre, fatte and fruitful" Essex (as Norden characteristically styles that shire), from the broad acres of Suffolk; namely, the pleasant Stour, which, from its meandering "quips and cranks," its curves, sinuosities, and double SS, should rather be called the *Serpentine*. Probably, in Saxon times, when Sudbury was the second town of note in East Anglia, the communication between the southern burgh of the southern folk (Suffolk), and the opposite hamlet of the East Saxons (Essex), was by a ford. The coracle of the fiery Celt, and the galley of the stern Roman, may have passed to and fro, and up and down the broad reaches of the placid stream. Alfem, the Saxon Thane, from his palisaded "ton" at Alphamstone, may have been rowed by his serfs to visit his brother chieftains at Buies and Sudbury. As the population grew and the felled spaces (or "fields") in the woods increased, a ferry boat would be started, and the fares would become a welcome addition to the somewhat precarious income of the feudal lords of the town. A bridge would follow, probably a rough wooden structure in the first instance, there being plenty of timber procurable in the woods that partly surrounded the town, in the Acton, Brundon, and Bulmer districts.

We possess no date of the erection of the original bridge, or its successor, which was of stone, but we know there was one standing in the time of King John, at the commencement of the 13th century, and from the record

extant that Amicia, Countess of Clare, daughter of William, Earl of Gloucester, a pious and munificent maiden, endowed the Hospital which stood on the Sudbury right bank of the stream, with 15 houses in the town, with divers rents and with the tolls of the bridge. This hospital was one of the Order of St. John at Jerusalem, and its site is now known as "Hospital Yard." Several old wooden and tiled, plastered and wattled cottages still stand near the bank of the river in this yard, which may have been the immediate successors of some of the out-buildings of the Hospital. In them may be found low-ceiled, winding passages, nooks and corners, irregular shaped rooms, and queer recesses. These hovels stand several feet below the level of the street, and have an outlet on the river, a portion of their gardens being under the first bay of the bridge.

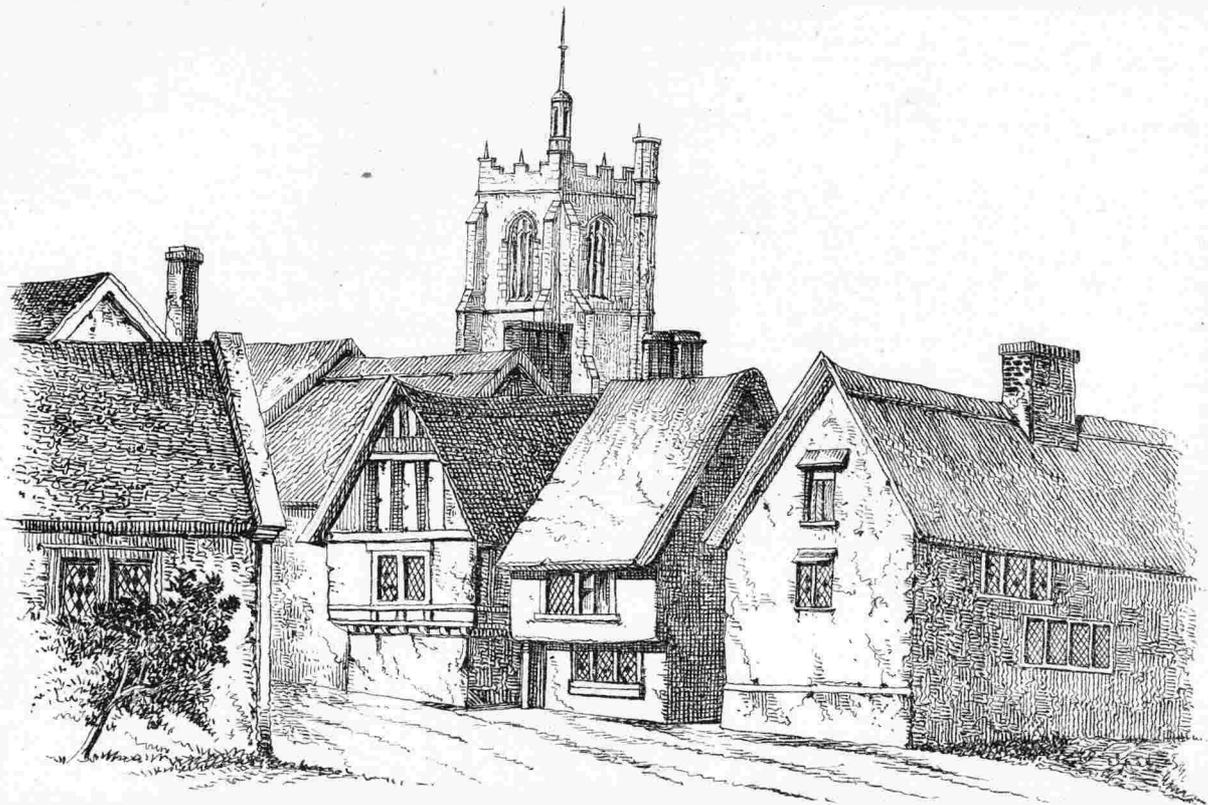
The next mention that can be found of the bridge is that it was swept away by a flood on the 4th of November, 1520, but it was re-built in the following year. Mr. Badham, in his "History of All Saints' Church and Parish," states that the tradesman's bill for the repair, or re-building of the bridge, was in the possession of the then Town Clerk. The writer of this paper, in searching the borough records in 1886 for materials for the article relating to them, read before the members of the Suffolk Institute of Archæology, at their visit to the town (*vide* "Proceedings," Vol. VI., xxx.), was not able to find this and several other important documents which had not been transferred to the custody of the present Town Clerk.

The valley of the Stour, near Sudbury, is frequently submerged and converted into an inland sea after heavy rains, and there are existing records of heavy floods causing much mischief, not only to the meadows and lowlands, but to the houses and property on both sides of the bridge. After a continuous rainfall of several hours the river overflows its banks and the water rushes up the sewers and drains, forming a broad sheet which extends to the south door of the church and for some distance down

the Ballingdon street. On one particular occasion the water on this side was converted into ice, and a big skating rink was suddenly improvised by King Frost. Frequently foot passengers have to be conveyed to their homes or destinations in carts and vans, or in boats or punts across the watery highway.

On 8th September, 1594, there was another great flood, breaking the bridge and stopping all traffic. This is gathered from the following entry in All Saints' Registers. "Anno Dni, 1594—John the sonne of Will^m Wybitree was baptized at Middleton church, by reason Ballingdon Bridge was broken with a flood, the viij Septr."

The foundations of the stone bridge, swept away in 1520, can be plainly seen under the present structure, and the concrete is so hard that pick and crowbar seem to make no impression upon it. There are extensive remains of seven piers, widening, from the Ballingdon side, from $3\frac{1}{2}$ ft. to 4, 5, and 6 ft.; the two last blocks decreasing in width to 5 and 4 ft. The foundations extend from the north side of the present bridge to about three-quarters of its width, and are nearly perfect towards the Essex side to the depth of several feet below water mark. Those on the Suffolk side are more broken and fragmentary, particularly Nos. 5 and 7. There is about a 13-foot interval between the piers. The cut-waters are plainly visible on the north side, and several of the Essex ones at both ends. The old bridge was evidently built more up-stream than were its successors, and was not so wide as the present structure. The stone bridge consisted of eight arches of about 13 ft. span, which were probably "depressed ones," not more than 6 or 7 ft. high, as no barges go upstream farther than the Quay and do not pass under the bridge. The "rise" was an easy one and was principally on the Ballingdon side. This gentle gradient was important, as there must always have been considerable traffic from the days of the strings of pack horses, with their bales of woollen merchandize, and through the times of the lumbering six and eight-horsed waggons and



CHURCH STREET, SUDBURY, 1815.
WITH TOWER OF ALL SAINTS CHURCH.

Cowell, Ipswich.

the numerous stage coaches, with their splendid teams of four horses each. All traffic which followed the high road from Norwich or Bury to London, had to converge and pass over this bridge. At one time more than a dozen coaches passed through the town in a day. In a Highway Act, passed 1696 (7 and 8 W. III.), "the roads called Bulmer Tye and Armsey Road, leading to Ballingdon, in the County of Essex (at the top of the hill), by reason of the great and many loads which are weekly drawn through the same," are stated to have "become very ruinous and almost impassable, insomuch that it is become very dangerous to all persons that pass those ways." The stage waggons, which occupied about a week in the journey to and from the metropolis, used to start from the Exchequer Inn (or "Chequers"), where the Town Hall now stands.

Resuming our history, we note that at the beginning of the 17th century, the town authorities were indicted and fined at the Borough Quarter Sessions for not keeping in proper repair the Sudbury side of the bridge. In the Borough Chamberlain's account for the year 1661, we find the proceeds of a rate made "for the King's Armes (at the Moot Hall), and for ye repayre of Ballingdon Bridge." It appears that about that time there were toll or boundary gates at the Sudbury end of the bridge, the survival, probably, of those first set up for the defence of the town against sudden attack, and for the collection of the passengers' tolls, which were probably gathered by a lay brother of the hospital and deposited in "ye comon cist" (common chest). In the Corporation Books, under date 26th August, 1661, there is the following entry:— "Ordered y^t the Chamberlayne shall take off all the Gates belongynge to the towne, standing and being at the ende of y^e towne, vpon Balingdon Bridge, and selle and make money thereof for and towards the reparying of the sayd bridge." No credit is given in the town account referred to for any receipts of bridge tolls or gate money, though the Chamberlain accounts for tolls

received for certain butchers' shambles, &c. It does not appear when the hospital was dissolved, or when the bridge tolls ceased to be collected. The gates are probably referred to in a narrative preserved in the "Desiderata Curiosa," by Mr. Wilson, the historian, then agent for the Earl of Warwick, in connection with the plundering of Melford Hall (August, 1642). He writes, "When I came to Sudbury, in Suffolk, not a man appeared till we werè within the *chain*, and then they began to run to their weapons, and before we could get to the Market-place, the streets swarmed with people." On the 10th August, 1757, there was an order made on the Chamberlain for the repair of the bridge, and another in 1761. The repairs, however, could not have been very thorough, but a mere patching up, or "builder's job," for only six years afterwards (July, 1767), the bridge is described as "being very ruinous," and repairs were effected costing £57 9s. 6d. Sixteen years subsequently, on 16th Feby., 1803, a report was made to the Corporation, that "the bridge is much decayed, and the repairs will cost £212 4s. 6d." Evidently the report "lay upon the Table" for some time, as two years afterwards, on 23rd May, 1805, the Essex magistrates directed that their half of the bridge should be pulled down and rebuilt. The Borough of Sudbury was responsible for one half, and the County of Essex for the other half of the bridge, but now the West Suffolk County Council has the control of the whole structure. An entry in the inside of the cover of a memorandum book, which belonged to an old Ballingdonian who lived near the bridge, records under the same date of 1805, that it was "repaired by W. T. Herman and James Sparrow; Herman the Sudbury side, and Sparrow the Essex side. Begun to rip up the bridge 25th June, and was not passable till the 18th Septr., being 12 weeks in hand." The traffic was diverted over the common all this time.

In 1828 a Paving and Lighting Commission took the place of the Corporation, as the Urban Sanitary Authority, their first Act (6 Geo. IV.) receiving the

royal assent 20th May, 1825. A second Act was obtained 20th June, 1842, the legal cost of the two Acts being nearly £2,000. The Commissioners made an order in 1858 for widening the town approach to the bridge, and in 1870, £150 was paid for widening the street at the "Bull" Corner. During the past few years substantial repairs have been effected, many of the piles being re-spliced with new oak, the metalling removed, and a bed of thick concrete laid down, and the road-way new metalled. The work has been satisfactorily executed by Mr. Thomas Elliston (Sudbury), to whom the writer is much indebted for valuable assistance in measurements and in various other ways. The piles were cased half way up, about 30 years ago. The first three bays on the Sudbury side have joists quite different from all the others. They are evidently tie-beams and girders from old buildings, and are laid nearly close together, and are very strong, if not very sightly. Some have chamfered and grooved edges, and are not unlikely 300 years old. They may have been built in their present position 50 years ago.

The piles of two wooden bridges are plainly visible just below the water level, as well as the foundations of the stone structure already described. One of the bridges was a 3-pile, and another a 4-pile bridge. A row of three is seen on the west side of the second row of the present piles on the Sudbury side, equi-distant from each other. In a similar relative position near the third row are four broken piles in a line, also at equal distances. In the first bay from the centre on the Ballingdon side is another row of three, and in the next bay one of four, but only two can be seen in the third bay. None are discernible in either of the bays next the brick abutments.

The construction of the two halves of the present structure varies considerably. On the Sudbury upstream side there are wooden brackets of about 2 ft. in length, apparently added as an after-thought to make the bridge wider. There are none on the county portion, but here

the upper part of the piles are tied together with iron braces. The width of the respective spans or bays, starting from the town side, are as under:—14, 12, $11\frac{1}{2}$, 12, and 2 (the last piers on the Sudbury side, and the first on the Ballingdon, almost touch at places); 13, 18, 16, and 18 feet respectively. There is a balustrade, divided into seven bays on the Ballingdon, and into five on the Sudbury side; the height of the uprights being 4 ft. 6 in., and there being a top rail and two intermediate ones. There is a rise of about 2 ft. on the town and of about twice that height at the other end; the height, in the centre, from the water line to the timbers is 8 ft. The length between the abutments is 53 ft. from the town side to the centre, and 69 ft. the other "half," making 122 ft. in all. Width, 20 ft. at the Sudbury end, 21 ft. in the centre, and 22 ft. 6 in. at the Ballingdon end. The width of the stream is 104 ft.

The Stour was made navigable from Sudbury to Manningtree in 1705, when the Navigation Company was incorporated. The old minute and other books contain some curious entries and local information. Here are the autographs as shareholders of a number of old Sudbury families, now extinct as far as this town is concerned—the Unwins, Burkitts, Gainsboroughs, Scarlins, Dansies, Humphrys, Hasells, &c., many of the members being described as "Clothiers." Some of the same names occur in the Town Charter of Charles II. In the Corporation Minute Book of 1658, under date 4th October, is an entry to the effect that Mr. Raymond offered, on certain conditions, to make the river Stour navigable from Manningtree to Sudbury. He was to obtain the consent of the owners of lands adjoining the river for the purchase of the necessary land. The town offered £5 towards a Commission of Sewers for the cleansing of the river. Apparently the projected scheme, for some unexplained reason, fell through, but was taken up and carried out about fifty years later.

The Corporation have always exercised fishing rights

over the Stour within the borough boundary, and all the free burgesses can claim this right, the river-side owners having no jurisdiction. As far back as 1671 we find that the Corporation granted a Mr. John Blower a lease on the royalty of fishing for fifty years from Michaelmas of that year, for the annual rent of *xxd.*, the liberty to extend from King's Marsh to the corner of Daniel's meadow. The freemen's rights were reserved. In the annual statement of Town Accounts for the year 1635, there are entries of sums paid for "fyshinge lines" and for "helpes to fysh."

The Stour is a very pleasant stream, attractive alike to boatmen and fishermen; to those who float on its placid bosom, or saunter by its rippling waters. The Reaches from Henny to Cornard, and the long Reach from the Ozier Islands to the Quay, have attractive features and surroundings, while the windings of the stream from the bridge over the railway on Friars' Meadow to that at Ballingdon, are noted for the picturesque scenery on either side. The glimpses of pastures of lush grass, in which knee-deep, cattle are grazing; of the Middleton woodlands, with the shining tapering spire of the little Norman church peeping from the churchyard trees, and the venerable tower of the ancient church of All Souls, with its bold southern turret-stair, framed in swaying aspens, standing out boldly in the opposite direction; and of the river itself dotted with light canoes and graceful boats, many managed by ladies, form a charming picture of sylvan beauty such as the Suffolk painters, Gainsborough and Constable, loved to contemplate and reproduce. Like its name-sake in fair Kent, the Stour pursues the even tenor of its way, and "slow winding through a level plain of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er, conducts the eye along its sinuous course, delighted." Flowing on with sparkling ripples and gentle eddies between rush and reeds, the handsome willow herb and the strong-scented feathery meadow sweet; the lover's forget-me-not, and the regal iris; the graceful

flowering rush and the silky bog-bean; it toys with the lily cups, white and golden, and sharp-bladed arrow-heads, and delicate water violets that coyly look up from its placid depths, or from its luxuriant submerged world of vegetation, where the teeming roach and bream and minnows, lead merry lives in quiet lagoons, regardless of the angler's rod and line, or poacher's snare or net. The shy, but merry moorhen, hides in the reedy banks, and the tiny eyots, and here and there a pair of otters bring up their family in some honey-combed bank, near a glassy mill pool, undisturbed by the click-clack of the dripping, mossy, cumbrous water-wheel, which has slumbrously turned, ever round and round, like its ancestors, from the days of the Saxon miller serf, who ground corn for his lord before Duke William fought King Harold at Hastings. Old Michael Drayton (born 1563) in his "Poly-Olbion," a "Chorographical" description of England in verse, writes thus of the Sudbury stream:—

"For Stour, a daintie flood that duly doth divide
Faire Suffolk from this Shire, vpon her other side;
By Clare first coming in, to Sudbury doth show
The even course she keeps, when far she doth not flow.
But Orwell cumming in from Ipswich, thinkest that shee
Should stand for it with Stour, and lastly they agree.
Besides all other Roads and Harbours of the East,
This Harbor where they meet, is reckoned for the best."