

MOULTON PACK-HORSE BRIDGE.

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We have at Moulton a most interesting relic of bygone days—the centuries old Pack-Horse Bridge—moreover, one in an exceptionally good state of preservation.

Here and there throughout England, Pack-Horse Bridges are still to be found, most of them are in ruins ; the arches in many cases having fallen in, and the abutments crumbling away. But here we have a bridge complete with its parapets, looking much as it did some four hundred years ago.

In this paper, I propose to submit a few remarks on Pack-Horse Bridges in general before dealing more in detail with this particular bridge.

Let us try to visualise England in the 15th century ; so entirely different to the country as we see it to-day.

First of all let us take note that the whole population of England was no more than five million souls.

Five million spread over 60,000 square miles !

Where we now find a village with fifty cottages, we should then have found perhaps a Manor House and only half-a-dozen wretched little timber huts, or clay and wattle walled hovels. Each community or group of hamlets would be well-nigh self-contained in the means of its food supply. The corn thrashed with a flail, winnowed by the wind, and ground at the local mill. A few sheep and cattle and pigs there were, but few could afford to have meat on their board. Such vegetables as were then commonly known, and they were few, were grown in each locality, and therefore the need of communication of the hamlet with the world beyond, and need of transport would be small.

The towns were very few, created perhaps, more by the need of a market centre, than for any other reason, in them cattle and horses, and even labour, could be negotiated, and the towns without shops as we think of shops to-day, though almost every village had its annual fair.

The roads, if roads they could be called, were with few exceptions mere tracks, and in most places in wet weather, little better than miry ditches. All commodities, corn, wool, cloth, poultry, fish, barrels of butter, salt, hops, and household articles were sent to market or transported on the backs of horses, and even manure was carried in panniers to the fields, and peat and wood for winter fuel was brought to the homestead in the same way.

Hence in these days, there came the pack-horse.

Perhaps the 14th century to the end of the 16th century covers the period in which pack-horse traffic was general.

Ellison Hawkes in "The Romance of Transport" says, "The pack-horse was the *only* means of transport until the time of Queen Anne, 1702." In the writer's opinion, however, this is too sweeping a statement, as we have evidence that wheeled vehicles existed, perhaps mostly for local use, prior to the 15th century, and even in Anglo-Saxon times some sort of wagon was in use for transporting heavy weights.

Pack-horse gangs sometimes comprised as many as fifty horses. The Packman or Sumpter would ride his own horse, and sometimes there would be several sumpters in charge of the line of pack-horses depending upon the size of the gang and the need of guarding the goods while in transit. The horses walked in single file, attached to one another. The halter of one horse being tied to the tail of the horse in front of him. The leading horse, as it bore a bell, or collar of bells, to call attention of approach, was called "the Bell Horse." Panniers of wicker work for carrying the goods were very commonly used, but in other cases the equipment of the horse was the "crook" slung over a rough padded saddle, and the goods were hung onto or attached to these crooks. The crooks were formed of two thin poles about ten feet long, bent, when green, into the required curve, and were connected by horizontal bars. See Fig. 1.

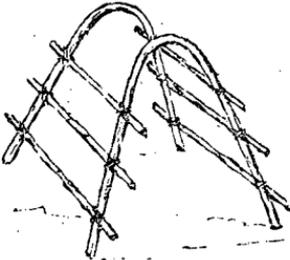
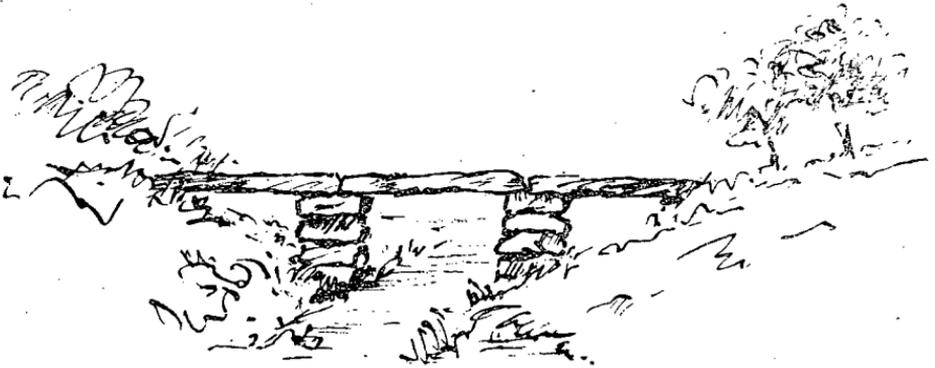


Fig. 1.

I have, earlier in this paper, spoken of the type of roads in the 14th century. We do not, however, find any scheme of communication adopted in their layout. They simply came about as needs of passage from one place to another arose.

The crossing of rivers and waterways were naturally avoided by pack-horse droves where possible, but of course in the network of tracks all over the country it sometimes happened that a stream had to be crossed, and if it were too deep or the bottom not hard enough for the waterway to be forded, or the banks were too steep for the pack-horse readily to climb, it became necessary to construct a bridge, and thus the pack-horse bridge came into existence.

The earlier pack-horse bridges, some as early as the 13th century, were often of the "Clapper" type, constructed of wood, or in some districts where stone was available, of slabs of stone resting on rough stone piers. See Fig. 2.



EARLY FORM OF CLAPPER BRIDGE

Fig. 2

Later on, from the 14th century onwards, it became customary to construct a more substantial form of pack-horse bridge.

The usual type was a single span bridge with a semi-circular or segmental arch, often of "dry-walling," that is built without mortar. Collingwood in his book, "Pack-Horse Bridges," gives illustrations of a dozen or more of such bridges in Cumberland and Westmorland.

They are to be found, however, in many parts of England. Most of those we see the remains of to-day, were built in the 16th or 17th centuries. Jervoise, however, mentions one at Oakhanger (Hants) over the river Wey, constructed in, or existing in, the year 1215. This is the earliest of which the writer has been able to find a record.

Having now passed in review the history of our early roads and the advent and use of the pack-horse, let us turn to the beautiful example of a pack-horse bridge to be seen at Moulton. See Fig. 3.

We notice it is a bridge of four spans and therefore more imposing than the usual single arch bridge.

It is probable that the width of the river was at the time of its erection greater than we should imagine from the dried up appearance of the site as we see it to-day.

You will observe from the illustration that the arches are of the "pointed" type, instead of, as is more usual, semi-circular, an innovation which I, as an engineer, would criticize as not being so strong or so suitable for carrying a load, the haunches of the pointed arch being more liable under load stress to give way, as it is noticeable has happened here. Is it not possible that the builder, in designing this bridge, and not versed in the science of bridge design, had been influenced by Church Architecture where the pointed arch, so common, is merely an opening in a wall of a pleasing design: but, as a rule, has not to carry what is technically termed a "load"?

There is a difficulty, too, with the pointed arch, to form a proper keystone, where bricks are used in the construction as in this case. The size of the bricks—their thickness—prove that they are of an early make.

I may mention here that although bricks were used by the Romans, it seems—although I am aware it is a disputed point—that the art of making them lapsed and that it was not until the end of the 12th or early in the 13th century that they came into use again in this country. The low parapet walls of this bridge are a feature common to all pack-horse bridges, the reason for this being to allow the packs to swing clear, otherwise a much wider bridge would be required and would greatly increase the cost of construction. The steps which have been formed across the roadway on both inclines to the crown of the bridge are an innovation placed there long after the days of the pack-horse. It is said that undergraduates from Cambridge made use of the bridge in their motor-cycle trials, and to put a stop to this risky practice—risky for the villagers as well as the cyclists—the steps were placed on the bridge.

I find from records in the Society's proceedings, when Moulton was visited by the Society in 1904, that Mr. Josling, the then Rector of Moulton, favoured the members with a dissertation on the subject of the bridge, and gave it as his opinion that the pack-horse route would probably follow the line of villages from Bury St. Edmund's, through Saxham and Higham to Moulton, and then by way of Stetchworth and Dullingham through Fulborne to Cambridge.

In a very old map which is to be seen in the Ipswich Public Library, a road is shown from Newmarket to Clare passing through Moulton, and it is probable that this, as well as that above referred to, was a pack-horse way.

Mr. Josling mentioned an old Charity known as "The Church and Bridges Estate," the title deeds of which are lost, and said that there is little doubt that the date of this Charity is earlier than the Reformation, that is prior to 1532.

Further information in reference to this Charity has kindly been supplied by the present Rector, the Rev. P. H. L. Brereton. He says that the charity is still in existence. The proceeds are halved each year. One

half goes to the repair and upkeep of the church and its services, and that out of the other half such repairs as may be necessary to the two bridges—the pack-horse bridge and a small foot-bridge—are paid for, and the balance goes to the Church, and Mr. Brereton gives the following extract from the report of the Charity Commissioners in 1829 under the title “Town Estate.” “This estate which is under the management of the churchwardens, consists of four acres of land at Freckenham called King’s Fen and of thirteen acres of land in different parcels in the open fields of Moulton, which is let every six years by public auction. The rents of the lands are applied conformably to usage in the reparation of the church and of the bridges in this parish.”

It is interesting to note that Moulton — called MULETUNA in the old map previously referred to — was in the remote past a market town, a grant for a market having been made in the reign of Edward the First in 1298.

There is no definite information by which the date of this bridge can be fixed, but in the opinion of the writer it was probably erected in the 14th century.

The Ickneild way, a road well-known to antiquarians, crosses the country diagonally from Norfolk into Wiltshire, where the track is lost, though it may conjecturally have reached Avebury or turned south to Old Sarum. In a treatise on the Ickneild way by Edward Thomas, he quotes Guest, the historian, as saying “Your guide will talk of the long line of pack-horses that frequented the *Ickley* way.”

This road was pre-Roman, though there is very little doubt the Romans used it during their occupation of the country, probably improving it and diverting it in some places. Traces of the Ickneild way can be found throughout most of its course. We may claim a Suffolk portion of this interesting old trackway between Thetford and Newmarket—in part, however, not identifiable—and where it crossed the river Kennett at Kentford there are to be seen the remains of an old bridge alongside the modern structure. This bridge was said

to be Roman, but upon a recent visit, for the purpose of critically examining the old bridge, the writer discovered it to be, not Roman, but the ruins of a pack-horse bridge and, owing to its length and number of archways a very fine example of a pack-horse bridge, it must have been, too. The remains of the arches of which there were at least four, are of brickwork; an interesting feature being the rather remarkable central rib. The rest of the construction is of flint rubble.

The similarity of this bridge to that at Moulton is such that it may reasonably be assumed to be of the same period, and as far as the writer has been able to ascertain, these two are the only pack-horse bridges to be found in Suffolk.

Another interesting ruin of an ancient bridge is to be seen on what was once a part of the Ickneild way near the village of Cavenham. See Fig. 4. The bridge is a single arch span crossing a tributary of the River Lark. At this spot, no doubt, in early days there was a ford, the bridge being erected, possibly, when wagons first came into general use, as it has a width of $7\frac{1}{2}$ -ft., giving approximately a 5-ft. roadway between traces of what at one time were parapet walls. The span of the bridge is 10 feet and the arch bricks are of a very early type from which one may assume the date of erection to be not later than the 15th century.

What was at one time a Pack-Horse Inn is still to be seen in Ipswich; an ancient gabled house in St. Margaret's Plain—now a general shop.

This was in olden times known as The Pack-Horse Inn, and we are glad to find, in these days of destruction for road widening, that this old house is not to be given into the hands of the spoiler, but is in fact, to be restored and retained as a memento of the past.

It might be apposite to conclude with a few general remarks pertinent to the subject of this paper.

Before the advent of the Romans there were some well-devised, if not well-constructed, roads almost crossing the country from coast to coast. Those claiming interest to us of East Anglia being the "Peddars'



Fig. 3.

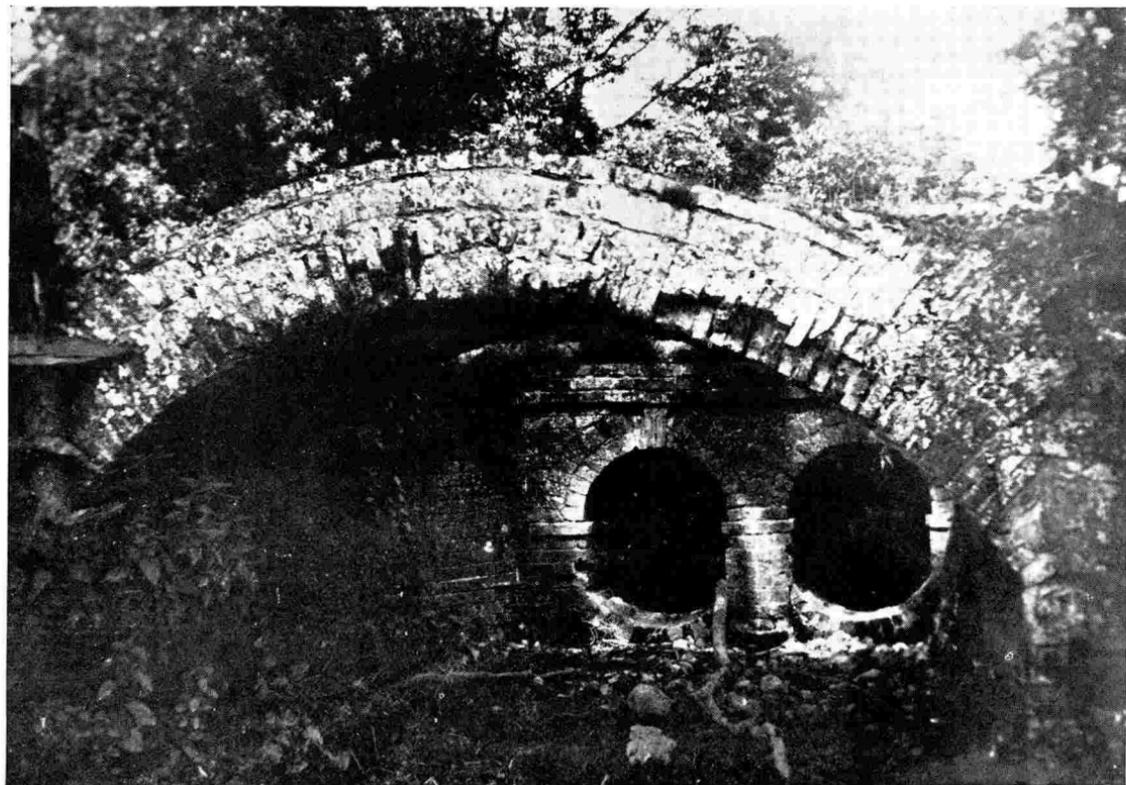


Fig. 4.

Way" from *Holme in Norfolk to Thetford*,* short lengths of it incorporated in the modern system of roads, and elsewhere stretches of it, in wild grass-covered state, still to be found, and the famous "Ickneild" way from the neighbourhood of Thetford (can we not surmise at some time connected with the former?) crossing England in a South Westerly direction into Wiltshire to which I have already referred. Then in A.D. 45 came the Romans who in the centuries following traversed the country over.

We cannot fail to be cognizant of the fact that the Romans were good road makers, and at least in their own country were skilled bridge builders. Their well-known roads, Watling Street, Ermine Street, Akerman Street, Stane Street, and the Fosse way, do we not use them to-day?

Roman villas are to be found all over the country, so there must have been many minor or branch roads in use by the Romans. But how is it, that it is almost unheard of, the finding of even the trace of a bridge on all these roads? The answer presumably is that most of the Roman bridges in this country were entirely of timber construction.

Such bridges would have vanished after the Roman evacuation, in that misty time of English History when Jute and Angle, Saxon and Dane were striving to conquer and in turn were conquered.

A slightly more substantial bridge, than that of wood only, was sometimes constructed by the Romans, having stone or brick piers with wooden longitudinal timbers resting on these piers, with cross-timbers forming a "decking" to carry the roadway. These were of the "Clapper" bridge type, which is described earlier in this paper. One such Roman bridge, recently restored in the interests of Archæology, is to be seen between Halifax and Rochdale in Yorkshire, and the remains of another crossing the Tyne.

*The generally accepted course of the Peddars' Way is from Holme, straight to Castleacre, leaving Swaffham on the west. It then passes through Merton, goes on to Roudham Heath and thence to Riddlesworth, after which its course is conjectural.—Editor.

Owing to the scarcity of bridges dating in the period between the withdrawal of the Romans and the Norman Conquest, it is evident that bridge building was avoided, perhaps through want of skill, perhaps through want of expediency, and it must be inferred that most streams and small rivers were forded in Anglo-Saxon times.

Can we not find confirmation of this in the terminal "Ford" of place names? There are over twenty such place names in Suffolk alone ending in "ford."

Incidentally, can it not be deduced from this that most of our villages in East Anglia received their designations in Anglo-Saxon times, "ford" being an Anglo-Saxon word, though the Danish "fjord" is not so dissimilar as to exclude such place names being given during the Danish occupation.

Turnpike roads came into existence about the middle of the 17th century. At first these roads were made by private individuals or companies charging tolls for their use.

The first Act by which such individuals or bodies worked under Parliamentary authority, was enacted in 1663, and as in the years following wagon traffic came into more general use, the pack-horse and his burden, the sumpter and his drove, were seen less and less, gradually vanishing to live only in the story of "Olden Times."

NOTES.

1. The author is indebted to Rev. H. A. Harris for his photograph of the old bridge at Cavenham.
2. Thomas Codrington in his book, "Roman Roads in Britain," states that "The Peddars' Way" is a Roman road, and I am aware that other antiquarians, though perhaps of lesser distinction, agree with him.

However, Dr. Guest and Bishop Bennet do not, and W. G. Clark, author of "Prehistoric History of East Anglia," and E. M. Beloc in his paper published by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society seem very definitely to have established its pre-Roman origin.

3. It has been stated that the Romans in some places (strategic?) preferred the use of a ford to a bridge as being more easily defended. As, however, there are hundreds of miles of their roads without the sign of a bridge having been built by them, we are driven to the conclusion, as stated in this paper, that most of their bridges were of timber construction.