

TESTON BRIDGE

AN APPRECIATION

by : John Balston

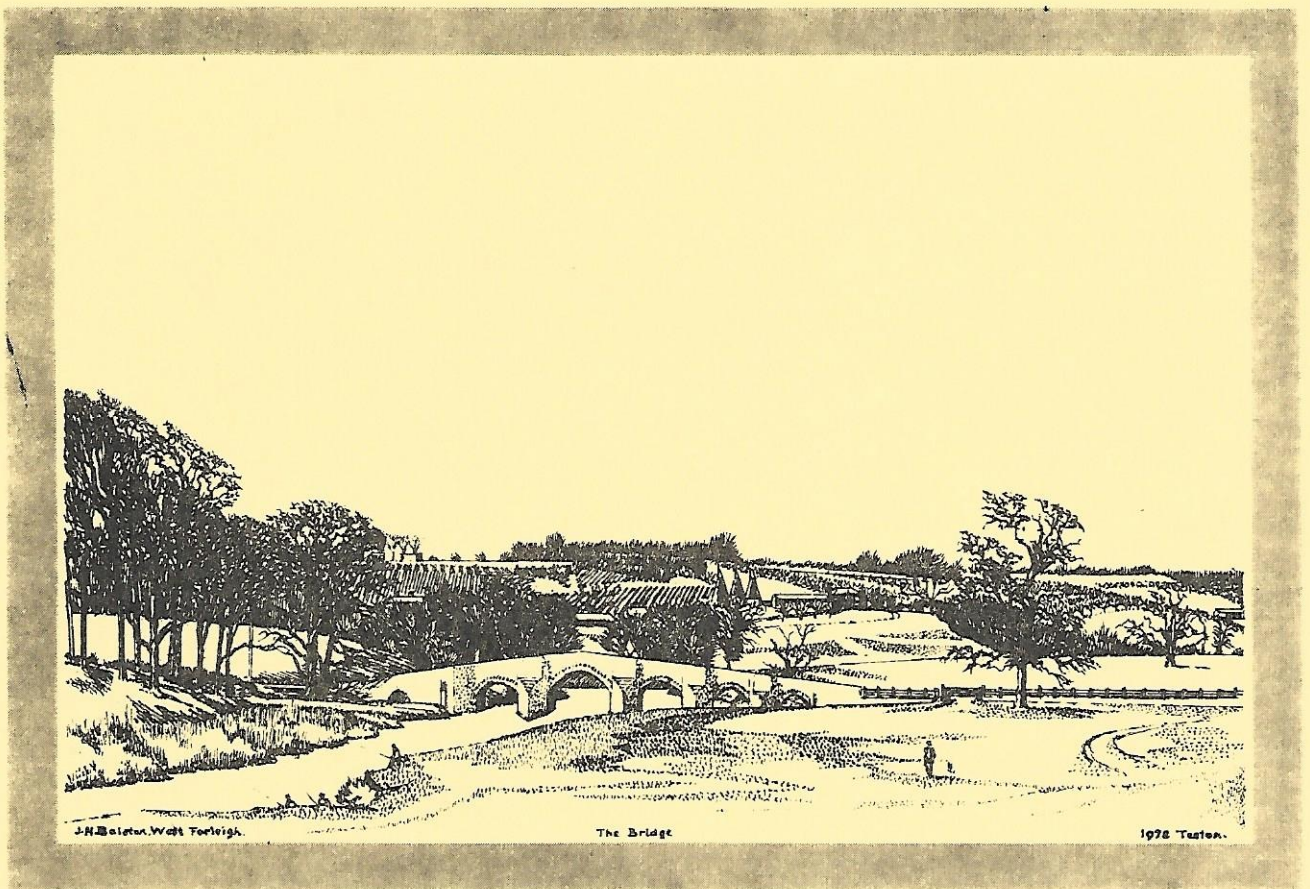
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Introduction

The Bridge is a physical and, just at this time especially, a symbolic link between the parishes of Teston and West Farleigh.

The Bridge is literally on our own doorstep; but, if we are honest with ourselves, how much do we really know about it? Why, for instance, should it have been built at all in the first place? Why here and not there? The following notes and speculations do not pretend to be an exhaustive account of it (indeed a great deal of information remains to be searched out and co-ordinated) but it is hoped that they may in the meantime add to our appreciation of this very fine Ancient Monument.

The Raison d'Être

It has been said that from pre-historic times invaders and travellers have traversed the length rather than the width of Kent and, since the central area of the County was made up largely of impenetrable forest and swamps, early settlements lay along or overlooked the north littoral. The River Medway, obviously, was a major natural obstacle to movement in either direction.

Starting at the estuary, Rochester Bridge undoubtedly had its origins in the military needs of the day. The Romans had the capacity and built a substantial wooden bridge across the Medway at Rochester as part of their main line of communication, Watling Street, to the heart of England. (It is believed that this bridge survived until ca.960 when another timber bridge was constructed resting on the Roman piers). Having established a crossing place here, it was only a matter of time (ca.1392) before the wooden bridge was superseded by a more permanent (stone) structure. (West Farleigh had to contribute supports and planking to this earlier bridge) Gordon Ward Arch.Cant.1934.46.12-15.

Further upstream there were far older crossing places than Rochester. For example, a noteworthy concentration of pre-historic chamber tombs on either side of the river in the region of the Medway Gap may have been associated with the Ancient Trackway, which it is thought crossed the river somewhere near Eccles and Snodland. (Traces of stone causeways at Snodland and Halling have been reported). Close by Aylesford was also a crossing place — a ford in neolithic times — although on foot or horseback it would have only been possible to cross at these places at low tide. Whether Watling Street supplanted this ancient route entirely is perhaps arguable, but for those travellers and pilgrims still using it, a bridge at Aylesford would undoubtedly have been a useful short cut compared to the more circuitous routes via Rochester or Maidstone, particularly for those coming from the south of England. According to Shaw a wooden bridge was standing there in 1331 at a time when Rochester Bridge was passing through a very troublesome stage. So it is not unreasonable to assume that a bridge was constructed at Aylesford at least partly for the use of Pilgrims.

It is unlikely that the other important mediaeval bridges still further upstream, such as Maidstone, East Farleigh, Teston and the two at Yalding were built for either of these reasons. These bridges were obviously not casually selected crossing places spanning the river Medway. They must have been built for good enough reasons to justify the effort and the expense of building them. There may have been a trickle of Pilgrims to Canterbury from the South of England; but it is more likely that they owe their existence to their lying on Trade Routes of some importance. In fact they would have been used for the movement of commodities like Wool and Woollen Cloth for fulling in the Maidstone district; Iron from the Weald; Timber, especially for the Dockyards; Stone from the many quarries in the area; Farm produce and (perhaps of special importance in the context of building a bridge) Milled Goods (see Note 1). Naturally there would

the existence of bridges at Yalding and a ford at Nettlestead may have been that these places were once upon a time the first convenient crossing places to be met with to the north of a large area of marsh (see Note 2). Maidstone as well as being a local centre had been a Port from early times.

The Site of the Bridge

As soon as settlements had made their appearance in this area, the people that lived in them would have wanted increasingly to cross the river on a more regular basis than might have been the case in, say, hunting or raiding expeditions. From the meaning of the Place-Names — Fernleage, Ferlaga etc. (Wallenberg) — it seems likely that both East and West Farleigh were known for their crossing places over the Medway from very early times. There seem to have been several of them in this area (for example, if one assumes that the present bridges originated from such crossings, then in addition to these it has been repeatedly said that there was an ancient ford somewhere above Barming Bridge just to name one that has now disappeared) — (see Note 3).

The old crossing places would have been selected for a variety of reasons based, for instance, on the narrowness of the valley; the avoidance of marshy areas; the width and the depth of the river; and the degree of assistance afforded by unusual physical features on the river banks and, perhaps, by the presence of eel dams. In some degree all of these reasons may be said to apply to the site of the present Teston Crossing.

The river in those days would have been at a much lower level than it is now; there were no locks then — indeed it was tidal as far up as East Farleigh. Moreover this stretch of river seems to have favoured the construction of eel dams. It has been claimed as a matter of Fact that there is a crossing (a ford) over the river near the present bridge (The late Mrs Joan Severn in 'The Teston Story' 1975 p.7). Unfortunately, no evidence is presented to support this statement (see Note 4) although few would deny the probability of this being the case.

However, it may have had a rival? A timber bridge was constructed for the convenience of the Amhursts (probably in the 1760's) to connect Court Lodge, West Farleigh with Barnjet on the north Bank of the river. This bridge was built 'in the room of an Antient Ford across the river a few rods above it' (Hasted) — (see Note 3).

As Teston had been a settlement from Belgic times at least (Arch.Cant.1974.89.206.TQ69835024) and West Farleigh probably before 800 AD, it is obvious that the settlements determined which of the crossing places predominated rather than the site of their respective churches, which were built at a later date. Once there the presence of the churches on either bank would have confirmed the importance of these places. When the stone bridge came to be built it is most likely that the crossing at Teston was regarded as the most important (see Note 4), although once again the question may be asked, were the builders confronted with an alternative?

A glance at the map shows that West Farleigh Church (which one might assume was built in the place of an earlier settlement) is situated above a convex bend in the river and it is about equidistant from Teston and East Barming churches on the opposite bank. In between the latter there is the site of a 'ruined chapel', which lies close to a road or track (shown in the Ordnance Survey of 1801 and discussed in Note 3), which runs in a north-westerly direction from West Farleigh Church across the river and up towards East Malling Heath passing on the way one of the largest quarrying sites in the area (and possibly close to a Belgic site too? Kelly.Arch.Cant.1974.89.213). Even in John Harris' day (1719) this chapel was a ruin; in his History of Kent he describes it (under Barming) as follows — 'about half a mile more to the southwest (of the church) lies West Berming, where Kilburn saith, the Ruins of a Church and Churchyard were visible in his time near the Court Lodge'. From all these points one might reasonably deduce that this had been an ancient crossing place of some significance sufficient perhaps to have presented the builders with a choice.

Whatever the truth of the matter may be, it seems obvious that a well established crossing place must have existed near the present bridge. For early travellers a boat or a ford would have been either an inconvenient or a muddy experience, but sufficient for their purpose. For merchandize something less hazardous would, in time, have been demanded — first, perhaps, a stone causeway or clapper bridge (Shaw) to keep the loads on packhorses dry; it is doubtful whether a wooden bridge (if considered at all) would have lasted long in a place which had such a formidable reputation for floods. Stone was the answer.

Where the present bridge stands, there is no geological feature, such as an out-crop of rock, which would have provided a natural advantage for either a crossing place or a footing. The foundations of the bridge rest on the Weald Clay (a stiff to hard material sufficient to support a structure of this size — correspondence Inst.Geol.Sci.). Neither is the bridge sited in the narrowest part of the valley (although quite close to it — the Barnjet and Barming bridge areas are much narrower); but it is certainly lower down than the much wider and more marshy area below Tutsham. In point of fact the Bridge Builders seemed to have had an uncanny knowledge of the terrain because both above and below the site there are quite extensive areas of landslipped ground (see Note 5). They chose their site well and it is indeed a tribute to them that for some 700 years this bridge has withstood the force of countless floods of no mean dimensions aggravated at times by the additional weight of pack-ice. (See Note 6).

The Form of the Bridge

If the task of trying to picture the origins of the bridge and its site has been a difficult one, it is nothing compared to the problem of trying to make sense out of the available information on the past Form of the bridge. So it is perhaps as well to start with a general description of the bridge as we see it to-day. (See Note 7).

The bridge is built of Kentish Ragstone and consists of 6 segmented arches (3 over the river and 3 over the land covering the eventuality of moderate flooding). The arches rest on piers supporting a carriage way just under 11 feet wide at its narrowest point (Arch No. 2 from East Bank) with low parapets and no footways but having refuges at intervals along its length for pedestrians. Nearly all descriptions remark on the massive cutwaters that protect the piers. Their position corresponds with the recesses in the bridge above; and their upper surface is covered with tapering and descending stonework known as tabling or weather stones.

The eastern end of the bridge butts on to a gently convex projection of the river bank and moderately rising ground in the parish of West Farleigh. The western end descends on to a causeway, which leads across the flood plain of the Medway to a steep incline ascending to Teston Village. The bridge then is in the strict sense a river crossing (216 feet in length) and not a viaduct, which carries the traveller across the valley; and it is in this fact that we may find clues to its mode of development ?

The stonework is of three kinds — Ashlar, Coursed and Random. There is no rubble construction. It will be noticed that some of these stones are quite sizeable pieces of rock. These help tie the structure together and give it stability. (For the purist it is a sad fact that some of the repairs to the bridge are being carried out in Portland Stone. This is not only on account of Kentish Ragstone being very hard and difficult to work, but also because it is no longer economic to quarry it in this country for this type of stone work).

The shape of the arches over the river has been described as cycloidal (that is not based on a single radius as in a semi-circle but on radii where the centre has moved resulting in a smooth curve); the arches over the land are described as having a gothic point. (Ireland 1793). Technically this description of the shape of the arches may once have been correct, but visually it is not easy to agree with it to-day. In the case of some of the arches the shape on the south side differs from that on the north. Starting from the West Farleigh bank

arches 1, 3, 5 and 6 appear to have varying degrees of pointedness on both sides; arch 4 is unequivocally round on both sides; and arch 2 seems to be something of a mixture. A feature of the outer face of each arch is the concave moulding confined by a course of radiating stones, known familiarly as 'soldier' stones — a nice and sophisticated transition from the horizontal to the vertical plane. During the recent repairs to the bridge it will have been noticed that although the under surface of the arches is smooth, viewed from above the stones are irregular and angular and one can see the river below through gaps between them. The space above was filled in with well compacted sand. The piers are filled with large stones also in a matrix of sand. (In 1939 a nine inch apron of reinforced concrete was placed round the base of the river piers as they showed signs of cracking).

The bridge carries a spring water main from Tutsham across the river to supplement the mains supply. This was laid in 1898. The stone parapets were raised to a uniform height of 3 foot 4 inches in 1906 and this undoubtedly contributes aesthetically to the subtle curve of the bridge as it spans the river. The parapets are lower than in many bridges. Finally, as everyone knows, the bridge is not straight, but may be roughly described as forming a very shallow curve pointing upstream.

The bridge has been known as Teston Bridge certainly as far back as 1526 when it is mentioned in the will of Thomas Spooner, a Teston man, who left money for its repair (Severn op.cit.p.29). He may have been the last of its private benefactors, for in 1531 the maintenance of bridges in general became the responsibility of the county in which they were situated. Through an Act of Parliament the Justices of the Peace had powers to levy rates for repairs. It is clear that by the 18th.C the County authorities were responsible for Teston Bridge — probably much earlier than this (but in the time available, it has not been possible to search any records prior to 1692. The first estimate for repairs that has survived seems to be one for 1705, KAO Q/AB 56/1. The West Kent Quarter Session Order Books Q/SO W 1-4 ranging from 1625-91 have not been searched, but may contain orders for repairs to the bridge indicating that it was a County responsibility. Helpful information on this subject is to be found in Miss E Melling's 'Kentish Sources - some Roads and Bridges' KCC.1959). Also it has not proved possible in the time to determine whether the bridge to-day lies entirely within one parish boundary or not. Views on this seem to differ. The Ancient Monument Record states that the south-east half lies in the parish of West Farleigh and the tithe map of 1843 (KAO.CTR.365 A.B) also shows the boundary running down the centre of the river.

No documents appear to have survived from which one can date the building of Teston Bridge. It is said to be contemporary with the Twyford (two ford) and the Town Bridges in Yalding. A document of 1325 records an enquiry into the upkeep of the Yalding bridges (Shaw) and from this it has been assumed that these bridges had probably been in existence for at least a hundred years prior to this date. By inference Teston Bridge may also have been built before 1300; but according to other accounts the bridge is XIVth.C and only three of its arches are mediaeval (Newman).

From this point on one plunges into a veritable quagmire of uncertainty. At the time when the bridge was built 3 (pointed ?) stone arches would have been sufficient (as to-day) to cross the water. Because the level of the river would have been very much lower at this time, it might be argued that the only ancillary structure needed would have been ramps of wood or earth connecting the stonework with the roadway. (Shaw states that 'the bridge was originally built in the form of six flat pointed arches' but he does not present any evidence to support this statement).

The original bridge may have been mainly for the use of pedestrians and pack-horses; but at some point (if not in the first place) paved wheelways were incorporated (repairs to these are itemized in 1730) and this would have necessitated some form of continuously graded road structure between the bridge and the land. It is at this point that alternative models for the form of the

bridge have to be visualized. Did it continue to be a 3 arch bridge with ramps ? or were additional arches provided to ensure this continuity of surface ?

If a 3 arch bridge is an acceptable model for its original form, then there is no particular reason why this should have been modified until the river was made navigable (as far up as Tonbridge) in 1740/41, when locks were constructed, one of them being at Teston, and the level of the river thereby raised.

It is possible, however, that the presence of eel dams in the river, which had evidently been a feature since the Conquest and which were known to have caused local flooding (Severn op.cit.p.38), may have made it necessary either to reinforce or to raise the approaches to the bridge (e.g. with a number of additional arches) prior to 1741. If arches were added, being over the land the builders may not have considered it necessary to enclose them with stone parapets, but used posts and wooden rails instead. One can propose 3 models of the bridge then before 1741 — a 3 arch bridge : a multi-arch bridge with stone parapets : or a multi-arch bridge with part stone parapets and part wooden railings.

After 1741, the river level would have been raised and it follows that both erosion of the upper parts of the river banks and the areas liable to flooding would have been increased. It is not difficult to imagine that wooden structures and earthworks would very soon have been proved to be inadequate for connecting the stone arches with the land. That there was trouble is indicated in a letter addressed to the Bench by a Mr. Lawrence Foster and dated 28:Apr:1767 (KAO Q/B 56) which reads as follows :-

Honourable Sirs,

I was desired by several gentlemen in this neighbourhood to represent to this Honourable Bench that by the vast quantity of water, in times of flood, running on the land side of Teston Bridge has in length of time made such a considerable hollow that in a great flood no person can pass without Hazard of their lives And that if each side was raised about 15 inches with small stones all persons might, at all times, pass in safety, which I humbly presume may be done for about fifteen pounds, and would be a great Publick Good, if the Honourable Bench thinks proper to give an order for the Doing of it, I will with the surveyors of Teston and Farleigh endeavour to see it done in the cheapest best manner I can.

I am your Honours Dutiful servant
Lawrence Foster

One might interpret Mr. Foster's proposal as the need to construct a causeway (such as we have to-day) leading across the flood plain. It is clear that more permanent approaches to the bridge were necessary (some action was taken in this case — see page 7 under Q/AB 56/16). But we are no closer to a solution to the question of the form of the bridge around 1741. A search through the Quarter Session Order Books might indicate whether any proposals were made for extending the bridge or not (This has not been completed as yet). In the meantime we are left with such descriptions of the bridge as have come down to us and the accounts for the work actually carried out, both of which will be briefly examined.

As illustrated in Note 7, by the turn of the century there seem to have been two sharply conflicting descriptions of the bridge — either a 3 arch or a 7 arch version. Taking the information in chronological order we first of all have Harris (1719), who in speaking of Teston merely says somewhat ambiguously 'At this village is a fair large Stone-bridge over the Medway'. Sixty three years later Hasted, writing in 1782 (Vol.II) states that 'Here is a lofty stone bridge of 7 arches'; and he repeats this statement sixteen years later in 1798 (although in the meantime it will be noticed that he amended the data on the rate at which the river rises from 48 to 24 hours — perhaps as a result of the spectacular flood of 1795 ?). In support of this description there is an (undated) engraving by R. Godfrey incorporated in the folio edition (Hasted 1782) depicting the seat of Mrs. Bouverie (d.1799) and 'the lofty bridge', in which 5 arches are visible and 2 further ones implicit, being

across the Medway, in the valley beneath, is of stone, and consists of 7 arches, the principal of which are properly denominated cycloidal, the others Gothic'. This too is supported by a (not very good) plate, which clearly shows that the bridge has more than 3 arches. It would be as well to note at this point that recent investigations at the bridge, with trial boreholes, have not revealed any evidence of a seventh arch. And yet, is one to doubt the evidence of two completely separate contemporary accounts of the bridge backed, implicitly at any rate, by two different illustrations ?

In contrast to this Mrs. Severn (op.cit.p.16) quotes from a MS in the Maidstone Museum (dated 1806) written by the Rev. Beilby Porteus, in which the scene from Teston Park (Barham Court) is described and which refers specifically to 'the river Medway, winding at a right distance through rich meadows (with) a venerable grey stone bridge of three arches over it'. The text of the manuscript implies that Mrs Bouverie was still alive when these observations were made, i.e. before 1799. Can one doubt the veracity of this statement made by a man, who was later to become Bishop of London ? A modern description (Newman), after stating that only 3 of the arches are mediaeval, adds that the remaining arches were added early in the 19th.C and match the others well. This account would fit in with the Rev. Porteus', but is there any evidence, which might reconcile these conflicting observations ? In this context it may be noted that several modern accounts of the bridge refer to a major rebuild of 3 arches in 1830 (e.g. Severn op.cit.p.38 : the Ancient Monuments Record : and one description, no date no source, goes so far as to say that 'at first the bridge had 7 arches, 3 over the river and 4 flood arches, but one of the flood arches was lost when they were extensively repaired in 1830'), but in no instance do any of them provide documentary evidence. The most that can be said is that in the Order Book for the Court of General Sessions (KAO: Q.GO.4 p.161) on the 15:June:1830 Teston bridge was reported to be in a dangerous state and repairs were ordered to be done immediately.

It is difficult to accept the Rev. Porteus' description of a bridge with 3 arches particularly as neither Hasted (1798) nor Brayley (1806 — Severn op.cit. p.40) make any reference to the loss of 4 arches in the disastrous flood of January 1795, which swept away both the Barnjet and the Barming bridges. It would have been a noteworthy event if it had. One can only make the rather lame suggestions that either the Rev. Porteus was alluding to the fact that only 3 of the arches in the bridge were venerable, the rest being modern additions ? or that perhaps the view from Teston park was so foreshortened that he could only see three of them ? Although severe floods continued to be a feature of this area in the early part of the 19th.C (people may remember that the levels of some of these were recorded on the gateposts of Mason's Brewery, formerly at the bottom of Faith Street in Maidstone), many different Prints of Teston bridge belonging to this period all illustrate a bridge with more than 3 arches (see note 7) — one very early one shows a 6 arch bridge.

Summarising the evidence of the various descriptions, a 7 arch bridge existing in the latter part of the 18th.C (and perhaps much earlier) would seem to be the most favoured representation. If correct, then the question remains as to just when it became a 6 arch bridge (opinion seems to favour 1830). A specification for minor repairs in 1879 (KAO CSU 3/119/1) contains a drawing showing that it was definitely a 6 arch bridge by this date.

Turning now to the records relating to the administration and the repairs to the bridge, the surviving documents relating to the latter may be summarised as follows :-

<u>KAO ref</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Summary of Work Carried Out</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>d</u>
Q/AB 56/1	1705	Estimated expenditure for repairs	35	00	00
56/2	1715	E. Farleigh Bricklayer paid	2	14	00
56/3	1722	'Bricklairs' work on <u>new</u> buttresses, mending arches 31 ft. coping stones <u>and</u> other stone work	31	5	8
56/4	1730	Work done att Teston Bridg by Panckhurst a paving of Wheelwais <u>new</u> from one end to ye other with large heded stones etc.	6	1	4
56/5	1739	Carpenters, post and rails — 30 posts varying from 9½ ft. to 5 ft. and 30 rails 11 ft. long (Blackbourn)	8	14	3
56/6		24 loads of great stones (Thomas Miller)	7	0	4
56/7		A bill of work don att Teston Bridg what I have paid for metirels yoused their July ye 11 for 6 load of heded stones for mending ye wall (labour, beer etc.)	35	5	4
56/8		Freemasons work at Teston Bridge including Wagginers, Beiar, and 87 ft. of Eshler and 65 ft. of coping for the Parpin walls (parapet wall — OED 3b) etc. (James Taylor)	27	14	00
Total for 1739			78	13	11
56/9	1755	Labour (Bricklayers — mainly pointing etc.)	33	6	7
56/10	1975/6	Bricklayers, Carpenters including 16 wagon load of stone @ 1/6d. a load	46	11	5
Total 1755/6			79	18	00
56/11	1765	4 separate Bills including Lawrence Foster and small stones : Bricklayers : Carpenters and their Beear etc.	16	6	3
56/14		<u>Total</u>			
56/15	1767	Letter from Lawrence Foster already quoted			
56/16	1767	Work done May/June raising paving, paving stones and post and rail gard.	27	0	1
56/17	1776	Minor stonework (Edw. Elliott)	8	19	2
56/18	1783/4	John Wedd and Edw. Burr carrying stones and moving earth	52	00	00
56/18	1784	Geo. Prentis Carpenters work — large amounts of fencing and stiles 23 rod of 2 rail fence on the West Farleigh Bank : 36 rod on the Teston side with moveable gates to take away in case of flood. 4 rod of other fencing; 2 stiles and 1 gate. (A rod is 5½ yd. so 63 rod = approx. 346 yd. of rail fence).	89	10	00
56/19	1794	(May-Aug) ~ 250 tons of stone were used (obviously for the raising of the centre arch).	225	12	4
56/20	1795	Lime, ashes, gravel (21 ton), hair, tarris, ashley stones (4 ton) — probably required to repair damage from major flood in January.	59	5	8
56/21	1807	Minor repairs — stones	2	6	10
23		— carpenters	3	7	7
Q/GAB/3/35	1820	Specification for miscellaneous repairs.			
Q/GO	4 1830	Minute recording that Teston Bridge was in a dangerous state and ordering repairs immediately			

From the above it would seem that the only sum of money commensurate with a major alteration is that for the year 1794, when it is known that the centre arch was raised for improved navigation. The expenditure for 1783/4 is also significantly large: but a great deal of this seems to have been spent on gates and fencing

We know from Hasted that by this date the bridge had 7 arches; and it is clear from Godfrey's engraving that the parapets above the 5 arches that are visible were of stone, so it is unlikely that any of the expenditure on posts and rails was connected with the bridge structure itself. This supposition is more or less confirmed by a reference in the West Kent Quarter Sessions Order Book for 1783 (KAO. Q/SO W.11 p.448), which states that certain parts of the King's Highway in West Farleigh and Teston, 100 yards long by 20 feet wide adjoining to each end of a certain Publick bridge called Teston bridge, were out of repair etc. and the matter was referred to Anthony Blomer Esq. and the Rev. Robert Style for action. This would account for both the loads of stones and earth and for posts and rails.

Examination of the Court Order Books between 1714 and 1796 (KAO. Q/SO W7-12) has not revealed any evidence of a major rebuild, in fact there seems to be no reference either to the raising of the centre arch in 1794. Orders were made from time to time authorizing small bills for repairs to be paid. In addition to these a more or less standard formula was employed for initiating action to be taken in the case of larger scale work. For example, in 1738 (Q/SO W8 p.158), 1744 (Q/SO W8 p.416), 1755 (Q/SO W9 p.134) and 1765 (Q/SO W10 p.177) references are made, of which the following may be regarded as a typical sample :-

Teston Bridge a common county bridge is very much of out repair and in great Decay insomuch that it is dangerous for his Majesty's subjects to pass and travel over the same and it is ordered by the Court to be referred to Sir Philip Boteler Baronet and Sir Roger Twisden Baronet to inspect and view the said bridge and the insufficiency and want of repairs and to contract with and employ able workmen etc. and report at the next General Quarter Session.

(As a matter of interest the extract above is for the year 1744 only six years after the quite extensive repairs of 1738). Unfortunately, none of these reports appear to have survived or been discovered, so one is left with nothing more than the record of the Bills, which were paid (and it is perhaps noteworthy that there is no account for 1744 — nothing between 1739 and 1755).

Of those that remain, the accounts for 1755/6 and for 1739 are the only two of any significance. In 1755, the bricklayers were at work from June till August; but apart from items such as 'puling down ye wall and building up of ditto', 'Bricklayers and too laborers att new buttriss', 'pointing arches' etc. there is nothing to suggest the addition of 4 new arches to the bridge (in fact the only point of interest is that out of the 81 entries in this particular account 40 are for 'beer'). There is nothing in the 1739 account either — the Freemasons used 87 feet of Eshler for the Arches, Butments and Foundation; 42 feet of Watertable; 5½ foot of Splay to Heal (?) the Buttrises; and 65 feet of Coping for the Parpin Walls (they had their beer deducted).

Unless further documents are discovered (and there is plenty of scope left for this), on present evidence it would appear that the bridge already had 7 stone arches by the beginning of the 18th.C (Harris' "fair largestone-bridge" of 1719) — and indeed, it may have had them from the beginning. The fact that only 3 of them appear to be mediaeval to-day may be due to the alleged rebuilding of the 'Flood' arches in 1830, when, it has been said, 4 of them were converted into 3 making a total of the 6 arches in the bridge as we know it now.

Most of, if not all, the 19th.C engravings of the bridge view it from the West Farleigh side of the river. Consequently we have little idea what the view in the opposite direction looked like (it is hoped that some of the drawings exhibited on this occasion will go a little way towards rectifying this state of affairs). It is a pity because the rapidly disappearing trees on the south bank of the river are a notable feature in this landscape (and were evidently so in Hasted's day). Photographs taken in 1924 show the bridge disappearing into a wood.

Communications with the Bridge

(In the time available for preparing this Appreciation, it has not been possible to make more than the most cursory examination of this subject).

Alterations to the roads in and about Teston Village are discussed in Mrs Severn's book in some detail (op.cit.p.42). On the face of it, it seems unlikely that the way down to the bridge has altered substantially with time (The Railway would have crossed it ca. 1844). From engravings there appear to have been tracks leading down to the river's edge at the side of the bridge on the West Bank — maybe for unloading barges, or for watering cattle etc ?

On the West Farleigh bank, however, there is a noteworthy difference between the roads as they exist now and as they existed at the end of the 18th.C. It has been known for a long time by the various people who have farmed Court Lodge Farm, that the plough skates over the remains of a roadway running from the bridge towards the church. This roadway is clearly shown in the Hundred of Twyford Map ca.1782-90, and in Andrews, Drury and Herbert of 1769; but it has disappeared in the 6 inch Ordnance surveyed in 1789 and the 1 inch of 1801. (No doubt a study of the Enclosure of Land in this parish would reveal just when this road was closed). The branch road leading off south to Tutsham Hall (shown in Kips engraving of 1719) seems to have fallen into disuse at a point beyond the Mill Cottages on the river Ewell towards the end of the 18th.C — probably after Tutsham became a ruin as it is not shown in either of the Ordnance maps. The central road leading on towards Coxheath etc. is present in all these maps largely unchanged from the form we know it in to-day. It seems likely that this was the sort of Road pattern that had existed from the Middle Ages. (See Note 8).

Historical Events

Unlike a building in which people live or a place where they meet, records of happenings on a rural bridge (not even on a frontier) are likely to be non-existent or scarce. As in the previous section, it has not been possible to search for such records as may be connected with Teston Bridge. No doubt there have been countless romances and tragedies, which have occurred within its recesses or over its parapets; and many adventures connected with the floods that have beset it; but alas any such records of these that survived would take a lot of time to bring to light. In the event only two facts, which may be of interest, have been discovered. The first is that in 1596 Corn Robbers were trapped and arrested at the Bridge (KAO QM/SB 137.138 plus a Latin Dictionary). The Second, that part of a film about the fall of Dunkirk was made in the vicinity of the bridge and a model of the latter was used for a scene showing its demolition. It had been hoped that there might have been some record of, perhaps, a troop of Royalist Cavalry being sent to guard the Bridge, when Fairfax's Army crossed the river at East Farleigh and stormed Maidstone. Russell's 'History of Maidstone' 1881. pp. 257-274 gives a detailed account of this occurrence but a search for a mention of Teston Bridge was unsuccessful. There must be many stories connected with the Bridge, which local people know about and perhaps some of these will be forthcoming ?

The Aesthetics of the Bridge

In situation and appearance this bridge is probably unrivalled aesthetically along the length of the Medway — and perhaps in the whole of the South of England. The numerous accounts in the literature, the engravings of it made in the past and the works of art which feature it to-day together with the people that may be seen there at any week-end or holiday bear witness to this fact. (It is hoped that these pages together with the watercolours and drawings of the bridge and its environment will do something to enhance this.) The Bridge is both graceful and venerable and it is most fitting that it should be preserved as an Ancient Monument. Perhaps we should let Hasted have the last word ? Speaking of West Farleigh 'This parish is situated on the southern bank of the Medway,

from which it rises with a gentle ascent as far as Cocks-heath. The soil of it is very fertile, especially the meadows near the river the situation of it is preculiarly adapted for health, pleasantness and profit, from which and from the continued plantations of fruit trees, filberts and hops, this part of the county may well deserve the character it has acquired, of being the Garden of Kent'.

And long may it remain so

J N Balston

April 1978

see over for Notes

NOTES

Note 1 Milled goods — not every village had its Millstream — that is a stream with a sufficient fall to drive a water wheel. It follows that, before other industrial sources of energy came to be developed, sources of effective water power would have been at a premium.

The distribution of watermills to the immediate south and west of this district seems to have been low. Although mention is made of a mill or more than one mill in the Domesday Book account (1084) of many villages in this area, it does not necessarily follow that these mills were watermills. For instance, they may have referred to places where millstones were rotated by animal power. (R.J. Spain and C.P. Burnham — McRae and Burnham p.197).

There were, however, noteworthy concentrations of Watermills in the Loose and Len River valleys; in addition, Harris (1719) records the fact that 4 Mills were operating on the River Ewell in West Farleigh before 1700. (Nodules of iron have been found along this stream, which might indicate the former existence of a water powered hammer forge here). There was certainly a Mill at Wateringbury and others are referred to at Teston (Severn op.cit.p.50), Nettlestead, Hunton, and Yalding. (Some of these are indicated in the 1782 Hundred of Twyford map; and the Mill Ponds on the Ewell are shown clearly on the 1789 6-inch to the mile ordnance map). Though small the latter no doubt made a significant contribution to the industrial requirements of this area in the Middle Ages; and, together with Windmills situated on the escarpment above, they may have been an important factor in determining the decision to build substantial stone bridges at Yalding, Teston and East Farleigh.

Evidently the decline of the Wool and Iron Trade in Kent and the change in the pattern of agriculture in this area that took place in the 16th and 17th Cs. led to the eventual extinction of the smaller mills. It should be remembered that Teston Bridge was probably built some three centuries before fruit was grown commercially in this country (at least on any scale) and before the advent of Hops in the 16th.C.

As a matter of interest, at about the time the Bridge may have been built, West Farleigh had 102 acres under Wheat; 8 under Barley; 94 under Oats; 5 under Rye; and 51 acres under peas and vetch. This was in 1291 (Smith.Arch.Cant.1963.78.151). A contrast to the many Cherry Gardens, Orchards and Hop Grounds described in a Lease of Loveshall's Farm (better known to us as Smith's Hill) dated 1766 (KAO U.47/20 T 1 Bundle 5).

In addition to the movement of commodities, such as milled goods, across the river, the place had probably been a well established crossing place for a long time — see under Note 4.

Note 2 Mr Kenneth Banks of Yalding has drawn my attention to the fact that little seems to be known about the early history and the appearance of Bow Bridge, Wateringbury. Can anyone throw any light on this subject or produce early pictures of it? Jervoise says that Bow Bridge is not mentioned by Leland and therefore feels that there may not have been a mediaeval bridge between Twyford and Teston. On the other hand, the Quarter Sessions order book for 1701 (KAO Q/SO W5) records that 'the common stone bridge' there was in need of repairs.

Note 3

A distinction between Barming and Barnjet Bridges. It would seem that most authors have been unaware that a bridge crossed the river in the Barnjet area and this has led to some confusion concerning the name of Barming Bridge and possibly the existence of a ford there. For instance, Goodsall (1955) calls it Kettle Bridge where there has been a 'ford time out of mind'. Shaw (1970) calls it Amherst's Bridge; and others have called it St. Helen's or just Barming Bridge.

Hasted (1782), however, refers to a wooden bridge 'besides the above bridge (Teston Bridge) there is another of timber built a few years ago for a passage from Barnjett to West Farleigh Court Lodge, in the room of an Antient Ford across the river a few rods above it'. The Amhursts originally occupied East Farleigh Court Lodge; but by 1760 Stephen Amhurst had moved to West Farleigh and another descendant was living at Barnjet in 1756. One assumes that Hasted's 'a few years ago' would probably mean a date somewhere in the 1760's. In fact no bridge is shown on Andrews, Drury and Herbert's map of 1769. A bridge is shown, however, on the 2 inch to the mile map of the Hundred of Twyford (ca.1782-95); the 1789 6 inch to the mile Ordnance Survey drawing; and the 1 inch to the mile Ordnance Survey of this area (the survey was carried out in the 1790's). The existence of a bridge is also mentioned in W.E. Brayley's account of the 1795 floods (written in 1808 and quoted in Severn op.cit.p.40). This account describes how 'the furious current carried away the wooden bridge at Barnjett and St. Helen's at Barming'. This inevitably leads to the question as to whether there were one or two fords in this area? and, if only one, whether it was at Barnjet? (For further comments on the maps referred to here, see Note 8).

Note 4

Evidence of a Ford at Teston Bridge? It is almost without question that there must have been an early crossing place here, but evidence for this has not so far been forthcoming. Mr. Kirby, who has had 40 years service with the Kent River Authority (Southern Water Board) has no recollection of ever having seen any traces of a causeway or the like at this point. In fairness it must be said that even when this pen is let down, there is always water flowing in the centre of the river bed. The Bridge Wardens at Rochester have not come across any evidence in their records either and these date back to the middle ages. Several other possible sources of information have been tried, but so far without success.

Although Dr. Plot (1640-1696) claimed to have discovered part of a Roman causeway crossing the Medway at Teston — a claim, which has been discounted by later authors as no evidence for this seems to have survived. However, the concept of such a crossing is a very plausible one. For Roman citizens living in villas on the West Bank of the Medway (one being at Teston), a track leading across the river at this point would have been their quickest way of reaching the only North/South Roman Road in this area (the Rochester/Maidstone/Hastings Road : no others until one reaches the Stour Valley to the east and the Darent Valley to the west). The track would probably have run along the ridge through Coxheath to a point just beyond Boughton (Amber Green) where it would meet this road. Moreover, there would have been another advantage namely that it is believed that this road forked here, one branch leading to the Roman port of Lemanis (Lympne) as well as to an alternative route to Canterbury.

Note 5

In a letter (8:Mar:78) from Dr. D. Millward of the Institute of Geological Sciences it says 'Upstream from the bridge the river has cut into the South Bank resulting in landslips in the Weald Clay'. This area can be clearly seen and lies on the south bank of the river stretching from a point immediately below Tutsham Hall down to

the Mill cottages. 'Downstream from the bridge the valley becomes very narrow with steep sides, and near Barham Court the river cuts into the north bank. Well developed springs at the base of the Hythe beds may have assisted undercutting to produce the landslips'. Maps were enclosed illustrating these areas. In addition to these, there is an even larger stretch of landslipped ground on Court Lodge Farm running from a point about 300 yards NE of Teston Bridge to a point roughly opposite Barnjet — in fact lying across the area where there may have been 'an Antient ford'. (Dr. Millward did not comment on this area).

Dr. Millward also said that the following quarries had been identified by the survey — TQ 710 544 half a mile north of Barham Court : possibly TQ 716 523 near Ewell Manor : and possibly Quarry Wood TQ 716 518 just to the NE of Foxpits. (For those interested further details of the geology of the area may be found in Worssam, B.C. 'The Geology of the Country round Maidstone' HMSO 1963).

Note 6

The Laws of Stream erosive power. Hasted writing in his History of Kent (1782) of Teston Bridge says 'Here is a lofty stone bridge of seven arches over it (the Medway), which notwithstanding its great height, is frequently rendered impassable from the sudden overflowings of the river, which here at such times frequently rises near 18 feet above its usual surface in the space of 48 hours, and as quickly falls again, unless it is again augmented by repeated rains'. He repeats this description of the bridge in his second edition (1798), but this time he corrects the rate at which the water rose from 18 feet in 48 hours to 24 hours. There are many other accounts of the formidable floods, which this bridge has had to withstand and it is not perhaps generally realised that the effects of flood water are not related directly to its velocity. The laws of stream erosive power are as follows :-

- (a) The maximum diameter of the individual rock fragments a stream can move varies as the square of the velocity
- (b) abrasive power varies between the square and the sixth power

This means that if the velocity of the river increases from 1 to 2 knots the size of fragment it can move increases fourfold; and the abrasive power can be increased as much as 64 times. So it is not surprising that the bridge has had to be repaired from time to time during its long history.

Note 7

The Number of Arches. Accounts of these differ quite considerably.

Hasted (1782 & 1798) gives it	7 arches
Ireland (1793)	7 arches
Porteus (probably before 1800)	3 arches
Godfrey (engraving ca.1782)	7 arches implicit
Plate in Ireland (1793)	5 arches plus (indistinct)
Early 19th.C engraving	6 arches visible
Other Engravings including)	
J. G. Gratt (after 1813),)	5 or more implicit
Tombleson (ca.1830) etc.)	
Ledger entry (KCC) re)	5 arches (later corrected in pencil to
state in 1830)	6. The ledger is made up of
	paper watermarked C Ansell 1888)
Finch (1929)	5 arches

Shaw (1970)

7 arches (The idea has been put forward that a 7th Arch might have been filled in and is now concealed in the block of masonry between arches 1 and 2; but modern surveys and boreholes do not support this suggestion).

Other Statistics (1976)

The narrowest point of the bridge is the western end of Arch No 2 from the West Farleigh bank — just under 3.3 m (approx 10.8 ft).

Span of the Arches from east to west approx 14.4 : 20.4 : 23.9 : 20.6 : 16.4 : 13.8 ft.

Max height above river bed 26 feet.

Foundations — footings of river piers extend 2 ft 6 in. below river bed into Weald Clay.

Note 8 Reference Maps.

The Hundred of Twyford Map (engraved by Bayly) is not dated; but from the fact that Tutsham Hall is described as a 'ruin' (a fact mentioned as a sort of stop-press footnote in the 1782 Hasted): that the church at West Farleigh has a steeple; that the Barnjet bridge is still indicated : and that the road direct from the bridge to the church is shown (not shown in Ordnance Survey Drawing 6 inch to mile surveyed in 1789) — all these point to a date somewhere between ca. 1782 and 1790. Scale of this map is 2 inches to the mile.

Drawings were made for the Ordnance Survey 6 inches to the mile in 1789 for parts of England, but were never printed. Sheet 119 in the British Library Map Room shows Teston and West Farleigh parishes.

With regard to the 1 inch to the Mile 1801 Ordnance Survey, Harley and O'Donoghue point out that the trigonometrical survey for the whole series was carried out between 1791-1800; the topographical 1787-1800 : and that Kent was completed by 1799. It is understandable, therefore, that it still shows the Barnjet bridge, which was supposed to have been washed away in January 1795.

Andrews, Drury and Herbert is a standard work (1769) and has been reproduced in facsimile.

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I also wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Kent County Council for the use of their Archives. Quotations from the Kent Quarter Sessions records in the Kent Archives Office used in this appreciation of Teston Bridge are Crown-copyright and appear by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

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In addition to the above, I have had a number of helpful discussions with people living in West Farleigh; people working on the restoration of the bridge; and Mr Kenneth Banks of Yalding. A number of other sources have also been tried but regretfully information on specific points was not found there — these included the Bridge Wardens at Rochester (a ford at Teston); the Southern Water Authority, Tonbridge, Mr. Kirby (a ford at Teston); Mr. Lacey of the Medway Ports Authority (a ford at Teston); Miss A. Oakley, Cathedral Archives and Library, Canterbury (a ruined church at West Barming). I would like to thank Mr. J. P. M. Richards (Local History Librarian at Springfield County Library) for help given me in locating printed sources of information. I am also greatly indebted to Mrs Pamela Longhurst for the assistance given me in the preparation and printing of this document.

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Other sources of information are given in the text and in the Notes.