

I'm currently writing a book partly of my memoirs as a boy in Tewkesbury, because I am no longer certain that the youth of today have any conception of what life was like in the "Old Days". I shall, of course, cut a fresh goose feather when I pen my copy of the book to the THS. I don't know what you want to do with this email and attachment. Whether to give it to one or two interested people, read it out at the end of a meeting, or to add it as a letter in your estimable Society Journal.

These are my thoughts, and I would be very interested to hear what people's views are.

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### **Appendix Three**

But there is another iron bridge in Tewkesbury which may just possibly be the oldest iron bridge in the town. It is called the Iron Bridge and it crosses the Swilgate. It must always have been a foot bridge, because of the comparative narrowness of the bridge, and it may indeed be "about 1850", as suggested by Verey. (Reference 2). It depends on what you consider is "about"

The first clue that it might be older than the two others is the siting of the bridge. (I had a conversation with Alan and Wendy Snarey about this, a few years ago, when they visited Australia.). We considered that if the bridge were to be routed from the town, via an alley to Perry Hill, there would be no need to site the bridge at an angle. There are several sites where the bridge could be positioned north-south rather than north east-south west which is its current orientation. This would suggest a path straight from the end of Orchard Court to Lower Lode Lane, the old main road to Gloucester. Does the bridge predate the Gloucester Road via Gupshill? Also, why was it built? Now it serves as a way of reaching a Housing Development (Priors Park, 1946), but in 1850 there were no houses there, and so it is more likely to be heading towards Lower Lode.

Secondly, its construction is primitive. It is almost as though the builders weren't of properties iron built like stone brick bridge. (The very first Iron Bridge, built by Abram Darby in Coalbrookdale, which was opened in 1781, was constructed using methods used in wooden bridges).

Thirdly, if you look at it, it consists of two very short primitive spans and reminds me of any Clapper Bridge found in the West Country, where there are short spans because of the lack of strength of the stone walkways.

Clapper bridges are ancient.

The fourth thing of interest are the abutments with their elliptical brick arches. They are brick and not iron, and they are elliptical and not circular. I.K. Brunel built a large elliptical arch in brick over the Thames at Maidenhead in the mid-1830s. He was probably familiar with small elliptical arches like these, where there was a small load, because although there would be a slight increase in sideways thrust compared with a semi-circular arch, it would not be significant, and the arch would have fewer bricks in it. The central pier with its cutwater probably causes more sideways thrust on the bridge through water resistance from debris, than it would receive from water currents.

Also, the iron parapets are joined together by scrollwork in common use from about 1780 to 1810, although the fashion may have continued to be used until later in provincial towns. These also appear to have barley sugar twisted vertical rails, rather ornamental for such a primitive

bridge. The ends of the hand rails have been rounded. It is almost as though we have reference to wooden balusters and newels, as for instance found in staircases in the town. The bridge walkway is made of four sections. Only the inner two are made of wrought iron plate. The outer two sections taper inwards to the narrower iron sections, as though the designer were a little suspicious about the new material.

And finally, why is it decorated and not absolutely plain? Why is it substantial, when a simpler form would have sufficed? Why is it not made from wood or stone unless it were important? Did the Iron Bridge have an importance which has been lost in the last two centuries?

I am no historian, and I may be completely wrong about this, but as a Chartered Materials Engineer, I would estimate not Verey's "about 1850" (however he came to that year), but about 1800 to 1810, which if accurate, would make it a very early iron bridge indeed, and almost half a generation before the Mill Bridge and Mythe Bridge of the 1820s.

David Verey *Buildings of England Gloucestershire* (Pevsner series)