

The Bridge at Upton

By 1930 Upton's bridge, opened in 1854 and pictured here when new, was showing its age. It had not been designed for heavy vehicles, but for horses and horse drawn carts and coaches. In November 1930 *The Upton News* of the time reported that Cllr A. T. Brotheridge had told the parish council of the "condition of a portion of the bridge nearest the swing portion....He had



recently seen a heavy motor going over laden with stone, not drawing one truck but two also laden with stone. The bridge was not strong enough to carry such a load and when it went over it caused the bridge to totter and shake." The weight restriction was clearly not being obeyed. A refurbished or new bridge was urgently required.

What was to be the design? There were various views.

River traffic remained heavy and important: the Severn Commissioners, the navigation authority, regarded the opening span as necessary and efficient and "likely to remain so for many years."

The Severn Catchment Board, concerned with the flow of the river, did not want this impeded more than necessary.

The N.F.U., representing the farmers, were concerned about flooding. Sir Reginald Coventry K.C., speaking for them, advocated a suspension bridge some 4ft 6" above the level of the old bridge: this would give as much clearance for boats as the Worcester bridge.

Uptonians had never liked a bridge which opened. In 1846, when there were proposals for replacing the stone bridge, a "Memorial from the Inhabitants of Upton" expressed great concern about the likely results of a draw or swing bridge: "it would deter people from coming this way if they could find any other." For much the same reason there was opposition to any bridge which would take traffic out of the centre of the town.

First, however, the existing bridge had to be surveyed. It was found that the foundations were good although the scour of the riverbed had partially exposed the wooden piles. Plans were prepared which involved underpinning the piers and the abutment on the town side, replacing the existing girders with new steel plate girders and a new electrically operated swing span. The tenders for this work were invited in 1935. When they were received, they were reported to the Highways and Bridges Committee of the County Council to be substantially above what had been expected.

So it was back to the drawing board and time for more lobbying and negotiation. The Severn Commissioners were willing to make concessions about the minimum clearance required. A single span was now a possibility, but where? The County

Surveyor, Mr B. C. Hammond, proposed a steel bridge with a 200 ft central span crossing the river at an angle on a site upstream of the existing bridge. The current site was rejected because the bridge would be at such a height that the road would be 9ft higher at the Kings Head and 4ft higher at the Star. The parish council, not wanting traffic taken out of the town, asked whether the proposed bridge could be come down on the site of the Old Church: they were told that there were financial, engineering and ecclesiastical objections to this. One parish councillor suggested buying up the properties likely to be affected by using the traditional site. This was rejected. The Severn Catchment Board asked that the piers be out of the river and the Ministry of Transport agreed. Mr Hammond replied that this could be done with the angled bridge only if the Ministry would be willing to take the responsibility of the risks involved in increasing the central span to 260ft. The Ministry would not. So the eastern end had to be moved further upstream and the bridge go straight across the river. A consequence was the need for the viaduct, added almost as an afterthought, at a cost of £18,000 in addition to £50,000 for the bridge itself.

The bridge had been very quickly designed – in under three months, because it was a larger version of that which had been built three years before at Fladbury. This deals with claims that the bridge was especially designed for tank traffic - at Fladbury!?. As for the legend that the bridge was planned as the start of an Upton by-pass, to contemporaries the bridge was the by-pass as it took traffic out of the town. Proposals for purchase of the garage opposite or of the field behind it were only made to ease the link to the Hanley Road which was later and more cheaply achieved by a mini roundabout.



The bridge illustrated above is, of course that at Fladbury.

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