

## New Bridge for Old

As the new Mill Bridge edges towards completion it is worth a glance at its history. Those who had a close inspection of the old one just removed could see that the girders and beams put in to carry American tanks for D Day were rotten. What they could not see was that buried in the mud still stood the stumps of the original wooden piers probably first put in in the 13th Century.

In 1209 the Bishop of Winchester, Peter de Roche, wanted to stimulate trade so he created a Downton New Town which we call the Borough. The line of the Borough went south of the old drovers' way which ran from Wick Lane along Long Close behind the new 'Free Burgage tenure' plots, nowadays the Borough's gardens. This lane for driven cattle crossed at a hard ford up river from Catherine or Iron Bridge. From there it ran up between the Church and Parsonage Manor via Doctor's Alley up onto the downs and away to Winchester or London.

His new mills, a handsome source of revenue, needed a leat to give them a head of water and so a second bridge was built across it to the new island so created. He divided the responsibility for its upkeep between the mill tenants, the freeholders of Wick and the lease holders of what was later the paper mill. The Bishop provided the replacement timber.

This confused responsibility proved to be a handicap. In 1898 the bridge was 'Unsafe' and had been for a long time much to the chagrin of Downton's Parish News which reckoned 'the Council' should do something.... So, nothing changes much.

Let's hope the replacement bridge will last more than sixty years.

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