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THE BRIDGE AND BRIDGE CHAPEL OF ST. IVES, HUNTINGDONSHIRE.

The bridges constructed wholly or in part by conventual houses and corporate towns have a history peculiarly their own, not the least interesting aspect of which is the connection and inter-relationship that frequently serve to distinguish them in respect of many features that touch the social life of the people. Controversy and litigation in regard to certain bridge rights, privileges and responsibilities, were rife in the middle ages, and formed no unimportant element in the spirit of discord that too frequently prevailed.

It may however be taken for granted that the Church was foremost in the great work of bridge building. The religious order of bridge builders that existed on the continent of Europe* in very early times undoubtedly gave an impetus to similar undertakings in England. Although we have no trace of the existence here of any such particular brotherhood, yet there is abundant proof that the religious houses scattered all over the country, largely engaged in the work of bridge building, not only as a religious work but with a view to the public good and general convenience. In former days when the blending of the religious and social life centred in the monastic bodies, and pilgrimages to places of reputed sanctity were frequent, it was specially necessary that the several approaches to the particular neighbourhood should be interrupted as little as possible and an easy passage through difficult ways facilitated.

There is no record as far as I am aware of any early construction of a bridge at St. Ives, but it may be fairly assumed that at some very remote period a bridge of wood existed, a mere horizontal roadway of timber supported on piers.

* The Order of bridge-builders at Avignon with a proneness for punning that characterised mediæval scholars were not only distinguished as *fratres pontis* and *factores pontium* but *fratres pontificales*!

From the *Placita de Quo Warranto* Rolls (43 Henry III. A.D. 1259) I extract the following, giving in place of the abbreviated Latin, an extended version together with a translation. It serves to show the nature of the structure of the then "great bridge of Saint Ives," from which a way-faring man would be probably precipitated with the greatest ease. It is interesting also as showing the jurisdiction of the Abbot of Ramsey, as well as furnishing other particulars of the locality.*

Presentatum est ecclesia per eosdem quod Ricardus filius Lucie Sancto Edmundo cecidit de ponte Sancti Ivonis et submersit—Et testatum est quod predictus Willelmus de Stowe ballifus Abbatis de Ramesey fecit officium coronae et ultra pontem Sancti Ivonis in quodam prato quod est in villa de Stauntonis ubi corpus defuncti inventus (sic) fuit in terra praefati Abbatis, scilicet in quodam hulmo qui est usque austrum magni [pontis] Sancti Ivonis inter ipsum pontem et pontellum quemdam quod apud Staunton et dicitur quod quidam rivulus transit sub pontello praedicto et circumrigat hulmum illum et desuper cadit in magna ripa de Use, et quia sanctum istud principality tangit praedicti Abbatis, praeceptum est quod facit venire Abbatem ad praedictos diem et locum, &c. Idem dies datus est eidem Willelmo, &c. Willelmas de Stowe obiit.

It was presented in the church by the same persons that Richard son of Lucy of St Edmund's, fell from the bridge of St. Ives and was drowned. And witness was given to the effect that the aforesaid William of Stowe, bailiff of the Abbot of Ramsey performed the office of Coroner, and further, that the bridge of St. Ives is in a certain meadow which is in the town of Staunton where the body of the deceased was found on the land of the aforesaid Abbot of Ramsey, that is to say in a certain island which is to the South of the great bridge of St. Ives between the bridge itself and a certain small bridge which is at Staunton, and it is said that a certain rivulet passes beneath the aforesaid small bridge and flows round that island and falls down on the great bank of the Ouse, and because that touches the sacred principality of the aforesaid Abbot, it was ordered that the Abbot be made to come at the aforesaid day and place, &c. The same day was appointed to the same William &c., William of Stowe died.

* The St. Ives Priory was but a cell to Ramsey, (founded A.D. 1017,) and remained subordinate until the dissolution.

It is highly probable that an improved bridge was made towards the close of the same century when the Charter for a Market was granted (*temp.* Ed. i.) about A.D. 1290, and subsequently assumed its present form.

It is not unlikely that "the great bridge of St. Ives" as it existed early in the thirteenth century was erected by the Ramsey monks on land which they possessed in their own right, being mainly designed by them in order to facilitate the progress of such as desired to perform religious obligations or had business relations with the Abbey at Ramsey or its dependencies. In due course the old bridge work would give place to improved construction, the timber frame work would disappear before the solid masonry, and elegance would mark a structure that hitherto had nothing but bare utility to commend it. Possibly new conditions created new interests, and the town may have thus acquired certain rights and responsibilities that previously were solely enjoyed by the religious house. There were doubtless occasions when the township vied with the opulence of a powerful monastery, not only in the actual construction of a bridge, but also in its adornment. Conflicting interests, for example, are apparently seen in the particular ornamentation which marks that side of the fine bridge over the Ouse at Huntingdon (probably erected in the reign of Edward I.) for which the Prior of Huntingdon was responsible. It connects Huntingdon with Godmanchester, and it would seem that frequent disputes arose between the County and the burgesses of Huntingdon, and between the Prior of Huntingdon, the Abbot of Ramsey, and the men of Godmanchester, as to where the responsibility for bridge repair and protection rested, with respect both to the large and certain smaller bridges, and led to much litigation. Contentions as to territorial rights often resulted in the display on the part of the stronger party of petty tyranny, which in turn found expression in the very character of the bridge itself. In some such way we may doubtless trace the development of the St. Ives and many another similar bridge.

The meadows by the channel of the Ouse adjacent to the bridge, forming part of the estate of 'Slepe' (as St. Ives was formerly called)*, together with the connected causeway and the bridge itself, including the manorial rights, were evidently possessed by the Prior and brethren of Ramsey. With the ownership was the obligation presumably, to maintain the bridge and its approaches. This duty may have been shared either as a matter of mutual understanding, or for some consideration, with the burgesses of St. Ives. In due time, differences, too often the outcome of joint possession, and the waning power of one of the parties (not always resulting in the survival of the fittest), may have arisen. Pontage and other like dues would in course of time be sure to engender strife and lead to aggression and violence, which even the influence of the Church could scarcely restrain. But presumably the Church maintained a general hold, in one form and another, upon the revenues whatever they may have been, until the dissolution, when the town it may be conjectured would assume full responsibility.

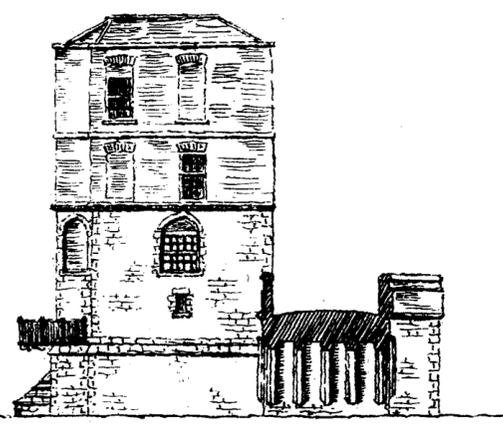
When bridges were subject to the individual jurisdiction of some private landed proprietor or Lord of the Manor, the obligation to repair or reinstate was frequently disregarded, and the religious duty ignored, but certainly in the best days of the mediæval Church the good condition and support of bridges, where the claim existed, was recognized as a religious duty second only to the maintenance of Church fabrics.

It is impossible to say with respect to the S. Ives' bridge what provision was anciently made in regard to the payment of toll, &c., by passengers, but in all probability voluntary offerings made in a religious spirit were received, either by the Prior and Convent of St. Ives, or the Abbot of Ramsey, who as a matter of course undertook the work of maintenance.

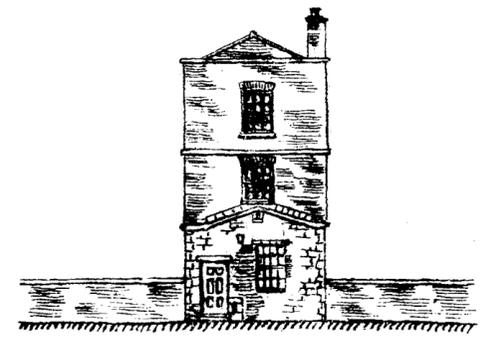
* It was near the channel of the river that the supposed relics of St. Ivo, the Persian Archbishop, were discovered.

St. We's Bridge. Hunts

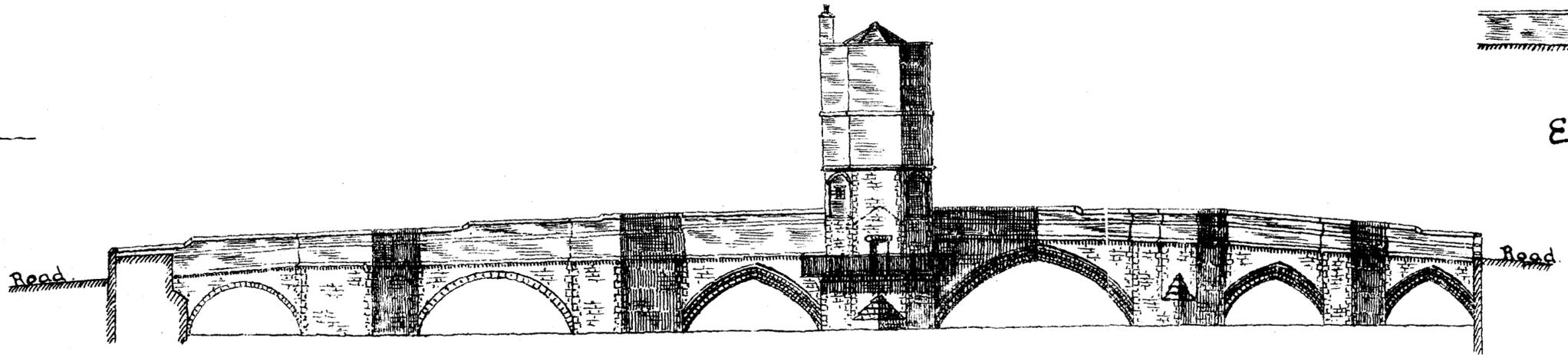
Scale, 16 feet to 1 inch.



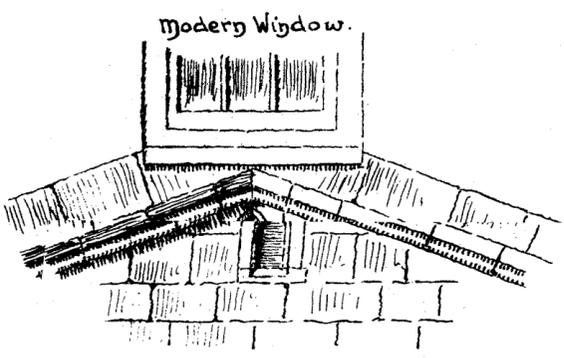
Elevation & Section. A.A.



Elevation. B.B.



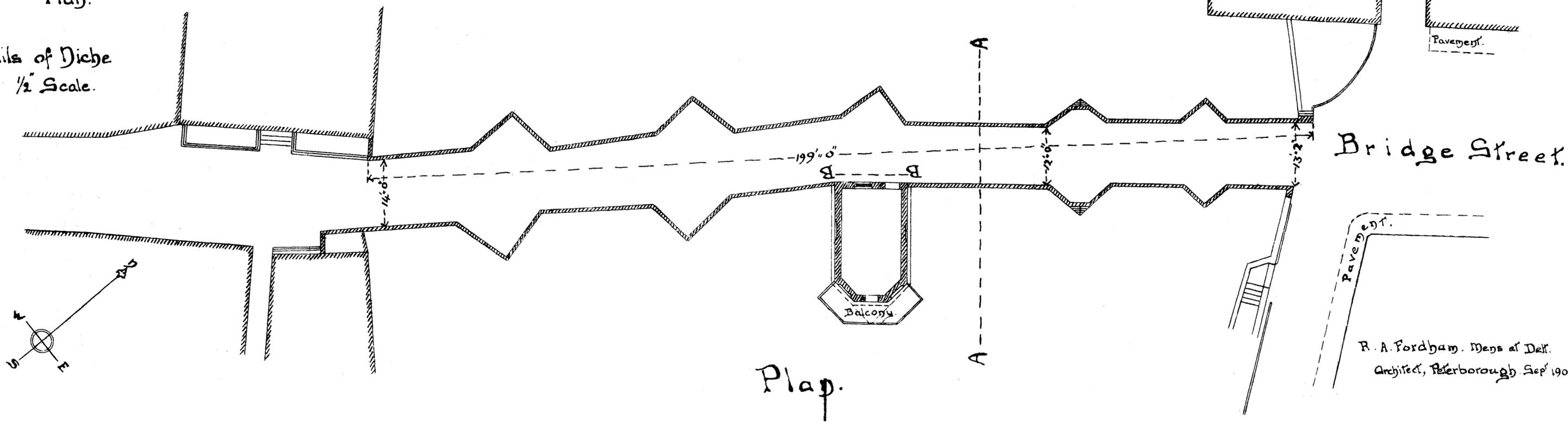
East Elevation.



Elevation.



Details of Niche
1/2" Scale.



Plan.

R. A. Fordham. Mens at Delt.
Architect, Peterborough. Sep. 1901.

The St. Ives bridge is mainly built of Barnack stone* and is supposed to be the work of the monks of Ramsay, having been erected early in the fifteenth century, at a time when the art of bridge-building was in a high state of perfection. Together with the bridge at Huntingdon it may be regarded as one of the oldest and most interesting bridges in the district.

Of the six arches of which the St. Ives bridge is formed, the two semi-circular arches next the "Dolphin Inn" are modern having been rebuilt from the foundation in the year 1716. The remaining four are pointed and of varying dimensions; the irregularity may perhaps be attributed either to the fact that the piers are buttressed against the stream and formed so as to be in a direct line with the current, or as possessing an element of additional strength. Anyhow the diversity gives a quaint touch to the structure. The brick parapets of the bridge are modern. The bridge is 199 feet in length, with an average width of 13 feet, the narrowest part being but 12 feet wide, but an ingenious contrivance for the convenience and safety of passengers is found in the nine curious irregular recesses of angular form, on either side. No central recess exists on the South-east side of the bridge owing to the fact that the space over the pier is occupied by a building; now a three-storied dwelling house with a balcony on the three projecting sides facing the river, and cellars in the thickness of the piers below. The lower portion, previous to the dissolution, was the ancient bridge Chapel of St. Leger or Leodgarius.† At Wilburton Church, Cambs., the Saint is commemorated in a fresco on the North wall. The rood-screen of St. Mary's Church, Woodbridge (Suffolk), has a representation of St. Leger, who is generally seen in sacred art with eyes or tongue plucked out, a bodkin, hook or

* The Abbey of Raucey had a right in the Barnack quarries, subject to the Church of Peterborough in whom the actual ownership rested.

† I am indebted to the Rev. W. M. Noble for this dedication to this little known Saint. The information is derived from the Will of one, James Fuller of St. Ives (11th Sept., 1779), who directed that a priest should celebrate for his soul and the souls of his parents and relatives in the Chapel of Leodgarius on the bridge of St. Ives.

pickaxe being in his hand. The recognition of St. Leger in this locality, seems to point to some foreign influence and a connection with marshy surroundings. I am at a loss fully to understand the connection, unless we are to regard St. Leger as a travellers' patron Saint; the Chapel would thus be suitably placed under his particular protection.

The bridge Chapel of St. Ives is the only like structure remaining in eastern England. Formerly there were bridge Chapels in this immediate neighbourhood, on Huntingdon bridge (St. Thomas of Canterbury) and on Earith bridge (St. Mary), and probably others. The actual remains of the St. Ives Chapel are of no particular importance, but enough remains to establish the interesting character of the main structure. On the three several sides a bricked-up arch may be seen, and I am told by Mr. R. A. Fordham of Peterborough, that the apsidal end of the Chapel is towards the east, so that the position of the altar may be conjectured. The basement below the road level, has also traces of mediæval work. Over the present entrance to the house is a small niche, and a trefoil-headed opening of Barnack stone which may have originally served a like purpose, is now relegated to the mean position of a door-scraper opening. There are traces of former windows, and indications of the pitch of a previous roof appear at the west elevation where the slope of the original roof is shown by the inclination of the stone string course. A stone bearing the initials T. D., and the date 1735, may indicate the time when the modern additions were made.*

The bridge of mediæval days, especially when found at or near the entrance to a town, frequently had a Chapel and sometimes the addition of a tower either for the purpose of defence or to carry a beacon light. I think it extremely likely that the upper part of the

* An engraving of S. Thomas the Martyr's Chapel on the great pier of London Bridge, facing the Tower of London, (*Gent. Mag.* xxiii., 482, A D. 1753,) affords an excellent example of what the St. Ives Bridge Chapel may have been. It consists of (1) a lower Chapel (converted into a paper warehouse), (2) a Chapel above (subsequently chambers) and (3) additions above, dating from A D. 1209.

building which was destroyed by fire in the year 1639, was originally devoted to this latter purpose.* The present structure in its modernized form offers no clue to any such definite object, but the advantage of a friendly light to assist travellers across the marshes, and navigators in following the river course, is sufficiently evident to make some such arrangement probable. Offerings in recognition of mercies received would be presented at the altar of the Chapel by the grateful. Occasionally the bridge Chapel would assume the character and importance of a Chantry with one or more Chaplains whose special office would include intercession for benefactors and others. Such chaplains receiving revenue from the bridge, may, under the supervision of the religious house, have incurred the responsibility of providing all things necessary for Divine Service.†

The following petition entered on the Rolls of Parliament (A.D. 1334,) may serve to explain the position in which a bridge Chaplain was sometimes placed, both with respect to the bridge and the Chapel.

“To our lord the King and his Council, Showeth, their poor Chaplain Robert le Fenere, parson of the Church of St. Clement of Huntingdon, of the diocese of Lincoln, that there is a little Chapel lately built in his parish on the bridge of Huntingdon, the keeping of which Chapel our lord the king has granted and delivered during pleasure to one Sir Adam, Warden of the house of St. John of Huntingdon, who receives and takes away all manner of offerings and alms without doing anything for the repair of the bridge or of the said Chapel, as he is bound to do. On the other hand it seems hurtful to God and Holy Church that offerings should be appropriated to anyone except to the parson within whose parish the Chapel is founded. Wherefore the said Robert prays, for God and Holy Church and for the Souls of our lord the king's father and his ancestors that he may have the keeping of the said chapel annexed to his Church, together with the charge of the bridge, and he will take heed

* In *Rot. Parl.*, Henry vi., 6, 7, 8, reference is made to a tower, kept by a hermit in a similar exposed situation, having a beacon light.

† Plutarch derives the word *Pontifex* from sacrifices made upon bridges. An indispensable part of the priest's office in Roman times was keeping the bridges in repair. The later annexation of Chapels to bridges (under Christian influence) may be traced back to this remnant of antiquity. But both such customary observances were the outgrowth of a religious spirit that recognized the obligation of bridge provision, and the advantages and benefits likely to accrue.

with all care to maintain them well, with better will than any stranger, for the profit and honour of Holy Chureh, to please God and all people passing that way."

Bequests in old wills, and other forms of religious beneficence to aid the work of bridge maintenance and the like are frequent. The entire revenues (possibly merged in the priory of St. Ives) were confiscated upon the dissolution (36 Henry viii) when the last prior of St. Ives (Robert Hutchinson) had a yearly premium of £12 per annum assigned to him "over and besyde the Chappel and Chamber standing on the brygge of St. Ives during his lyffe." This would seem to indicate that one story only (the Chamber) surmounted the Chapel proper, but of course a lantern, or hold for a beacon light for use as already indicated, may have been placed above this.

Mr. R. A. Fordham, to whom we are greatly indebted for the excellent plan drawn to scale (copies of which he has generously furnished for the illustration of this paper) has bestowed much attention upon the structure in its present condition, and has made some excellent suggestions with the object of a probable widening of this narrow and (in view of the necessities of the times) inconvenient bridge.* He proposes to extend the arches river wards, so that they impinge on the piers, thereby making the recesses shallower; the arches would in fact work out on the piers exactly as the inside arch of a church window does when there is a wide splayed jamb. This would of course necessitate setting back the front wall of the dwellinghouse; then it is proposed to take off the two upper stories and restore the roof to what may have been its former state, but my own conviction is that originally there was not only the story above the Chapel but surmounting it the lantern for a beacon light. While meeting the difficulties with respect to the requirements of the present day the suggested plan offers the distinct

* Accidents, occasionally fatal, have not been infrequent on this bridge owing to its narrowness. Visiting the bridge some time since a man told me how his father who was accustomed to bring goods from Kettering to St. Ives by waggon, and return with other produce, met his death, as did not a few others, owing to the limited space available for a waggoner.

advantage found in the retention of the old landmarks and the conservation of the structure in the beauty and entirety of architectural features as well as antiquarian interest, matters of the greatest importance.

The St. Ives bridge is a structure of which the county may well be proud, and its historical associations and importance alike call for that careful and discreet handling which while mindful of the wants of the present generation shall do no violence to past traditions.

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