

ART. IX.—*Packhorse-bridges*. By W. G. COLLINGWOOD.

Read at Carlisle, July 13th, 1927.

ARISING out of a report that the little old bridge at Throstlegarth in Upper Eskdale had suffered decay, an enquiry was made by H.M. Office of Works lately for particulars about packhorse-bridges, with a view to their preservation. This paper is an attempt at collecting examples in our district, together with evidence as to their date.

Popular opinion calls the Throstlegarth bridge Roman; failing so impossible an attribution, it has been supposed medieval and connected with Furness Abbey's tenure of Butterilket in the 14th century. The question is whether we can date any stone-arched bridges in these North-western counties so early.

At Furness Abbey, the small bridge described and illustrated by Mr. Paul V. Kelly (these *Transactions*, n.s., xxvi, 264) is regarded by him as of a little before 1500. If that is so, it is the earliest arched bridge we can show; and the abbeys were usually in advance of their age in works of architecture. Mr. C. T. Clay has noted (*Yorks. Archæol. Journal*, xxix, 100), that it was due to the enterprise of the monks that bridges were built over the rivers Colne and Calder before 1185 and 1177 respectively; in 1310 an inquisition found that the former was broken, and as the abbot of Fountains had erected it only 'of his special goodness' he could not be compelled to rebuild it. In the foundation charter of the priory of St. Mary Magdalen at Preston Patrick about 1191 (these *Trans.* n.s. xiv, 389) there is mention of Stainbrigge, on the road from Wath Sutton.



FIG. 1.—OLD BRIDGE ABOVE MEASAND (1927).
Photo. by B. L. Thompson.



FIG. 2.—REMAINS OF RAWTHEY BRIDGE.
Photo. by R. G. Collingwood, 1925. TO FACE P. 120.



FIG. 3.—PACK-HORSE BRIDGE, Nr. WINSTER.

Photo. Mr. Bruce L. Thompson, 1925.



FIG. 4.—HIGH SWEDEN BRIDGE.

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TO FACE P. 121.

But these medieval bridges were not stone arches. Force bridge over the Eden, near Salkeld, has been described by the Rev. C. J. Gordon (these *Trans.* N.S. xiii, 169), and seems to be a case in point. It was repaired about 1311-18, renewed about 1530 and rebuilt on a different site about 1770. The last bridge was of arches, but the description of the remains of the earlier (Hutchinson, *Cumbd.*, i, 282), shows that it was of stone piers, across which timbers supported the gangway. Such also, no doubt, were Patrick's bridge at Asby, mentioned in 1374 (*Testamenta Karleolensia*), Lowther and Eamont bridges, repaired in 1380, and other medieval examples. We do not know when the Devil's Bridge at Kirkby Lonsdale was built with stone arches, but Langwathby bridge dates only from 1686 and we shall find that the Restoration period was, in general, the earliest for work of this type.

Instances can be collected from Mr. Curwen's valuable *Records of Kendale* iii, which seem to prove this contention. In 1714 Rothay bridge needed repairs of its *jewell* (or *jowell*), the old name for the stone pier of a wooden bridge. At that time Beetham bridge had four jewels. In 1712 Stramongate bridge, Kendal, had a breach in its jewel; and Miller bridge, Kendal was wooden on stone piers until 1743 (Curwen, *Kirkbie Kendall*, 380). From the late Mr. Francis Grainger's notes on Holm Cultram we learn that in 1624 the tenants petitioned Sir Julius Cæsar, chancellor of the Exchequer, about the four bridges in that parish, which used, they said, to be kept up by the abbot; and that they were wooden, we gather from the following particulars. About 1632, Silloth bridge was decayed, and the XVI Men were asked to provide timber from Wedholme Woods. In 1647, they gave timber to repair the New bridge, which was decayed again in 1718, and the bill shows that the timber then felled in Wedholme was worth £19, the carpenter was paid £13 and the mason

only £6. In 1684, Hartlaw bridge required 40 trees to mend it. These were evidently wooden on stone piers, of the type miscalled Celtic.

There were also bridges wholly of wood. The Stang bridge at Esthwaite, 1582 (these *Transactions*, N.S., iv, 148), Gibson stang bridge in Lupton, decayed in 1669 and the 'private stang' bridge of 1706 at Ings in Stainton (mentioned in Mr. Curwen's book) seem by their name to have been such. To these may perhaps be added the 'stock bridges,' which at Ambleside and Grasmere have been thought so called as being near fulling-mills or 'stocks.' But 'a place called Stockbridge . . . 1100 yards from the Marsh bridge between Ulpha and Milnthorpe,' in the Gilpin valley, is mentioned in 1773 and must have been near the corduroy road (these *Transactions* N.S., iv, 207); it was not near any fulling-mill. Indeed, we have the word in a charter of St. Bees, about 1247, in the place-name Stockbrigholm, S. Cumbd. (these *Trans.*, N.S., xxvi, 124 ff), where there was a bridge, apparently supported on stocks or logs. The name of Millbeck Stock bridge, Windermere, repaired in 1816, suggests that originally it was of this kind. To replace the posts with stone piers was the first step to more permanent structure; but the further step to stone arches was not taken, in this district, until a period which we can infer from the following dates (chiefly from *Records of Kendale* iii):—

1665 was the date, according to Mr. J. B. Bailey, on Sepulchre bridge, Dearham; our earliest local instance.

1670. Ogilby's map shows stone bridges (possibly arches) at Staveley, Ings, Grasmere and Dunmail Raise.

1681. Sir Daniel Fleming noted that the arch of Brathay bridge fell; and in this year the people of Preston Richard intended to replace the narrow wooden Tatebeck bridge with a stone one.

1683. Burras stone bridge at Egremont was built.



FIG. 5.—PASTURE BECK BRIDGE.



FIG. 6.—THE DEVIL'S BRIDGE Nr. HORRACE.

Photo. by Mr. Colvin White, Nov., 1927.

TO FACE P. 122.



FIG. 7.—HIGH WATH.
High over the Calder.

W. L. Fletcher.

TO FACE P. 123.

1685 is the date given for Calva Hall packhorse bridge in West Cumberland, still remaining.

1700. Mary Chamney bequeathed £20 towards building the bridge at Pool house, Lindale; probably a stone bridge, because of its expected cost, though in 1720 it was out of repair.

1702. Elterwater bridge was ordered to be new built with a high arch.

1707. The battlements of Mill bridge, Ambleside, had been mischievously thrown down, suggesting that it was a stone arch.

1708. Pelter bridge, between Ambleside and Rydal, was rebuilt as a stone arch with 7-foot roadway for £25, showing the cost of such work in this period.

1710. Skitterbeck bridge, Egremont, was built in stone.

1711. Stockdale bridge, Middleton, decayed in 1671, was rebuilt with an arch and battlements or ledges.

1715. Gurnell bridge over the Sprint rebuilt (formerly wooden) in stone 'for man and horse.'

1716. Sprint bridge, decayed in 1695, was rebuilt in stone with a 9-foot road, for £47.

1717. At Sadgill, Longsleddale, a bridge was ordered because the ford sometimes overflowed in wet weather and stopped traffic (packhorse traffic over Gatescarth).

1719. Rydal bridge was ordered to be new built in stone, 4 yards broad over all; and while the work was being done 'two or three trees' were thrown over that end of the bridge which was fallen and a plank gangway provided.

1721. At Coombeck on the Wrynose track a stone bridge was built.

1725. Rossell wooden bridge, between Whinfell and Selside, fell down.

1727. Scandale bridge, Ambleside, was rebuilt as one

arch, 4 yards broad, costing £26. Stock bridge, Grasmere, was to be rebuilt as a single arch for £4.*

1729. Winster bridge was built in stone as one arch of 9 yards span, and 4 yards breadth, for £25.

1730. Beech hill bridge, Longsleddale, formerly a footbridge repaired in 1699, was built in stone.

1731. Grasmere church bridge, repaired in 1667, was rebuilt with stone arches 5 yards wide, for £40.

1734. Doctor's bridge, Eskdale, already a narrow (packhorse) arch, was widened by Edward Tyson, surgeon, of Penny Hill, to take his trap (information from Miss Fair).

1752. Roberts' bridge, Egremont, used in 1726 'for horse and load,' was begun in stone (these *Trans.*, N.S., xvii, 60).

After about 1760, when the turnpike roads were beginning to be made and carriage traffic came into use, wider and stronger bridges were required everywhere. But some of us remember Shopford, Bewcastle, before there was a carriage bridge over the wath, and a few places, as on the Brathay between Tilberthwaite and Little Langdale, still show the old-fashioned wash alongside of a footbridge. St. Sunday bridge in Hutton was wooden in 1671, repaired in 1686 'soe as a horse may be led over it,' repaired in 1709, and only in 1818 rebuilt 'in a substantial and commodious manner.' Sweet bridge in Whinfell, decayed in 1692, was still wooden until it was washed away just two hundred years later. Many more instances could be cited, but these show how recent our smaller stone arches are. It is to be remembered that the art of the mason, for ordinary domestic purposes, did not come into the district until the Restoration of 1660. Earlier than that, churches, castles, gentlemen's seats and no doubt

* This is the price as quoted in *Kendale* iii, 172; but the specification suggests that there may be some error in the MS. authority, for £24 would be more likely to be the cost.



FIG. 8.—THROSTLEGARTH BRIDGE, ESKDALE.

Photo. by Miss Fair.

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TO FACE P. 124.



FIG. 9a.—CALVA HALL.

Photo. by J. R. Mason.



FIG. 9b.—PACK-HORSE BRIDGE, CALVA HALL.

Photo. by W. L. Fletcher.

TO FACE P. 125.

town-houses had been in stone; but in country places there were no stone houses, built by local masons; still less anything requiring such skilled labour as the arch of a bridge. We may take it, therefore, that our old pack-horse bridges date from the Restoration until the time when traffic on the new roads superseded the packhorse gangs, that is to say roughly, after 1660 to a little after 1760.

By the kindness of Miss Fair, Mr. W. L. Fletcher, Mr. R. G. Collingwood, Mr. Bruce L. Thompson, Mr. G. R. Colvin-White, and the late Mr. J. R. Mason, we can give illustrations of a number of old packhorse-bridges still existing and worthy of preservation; or in the case of old Rawthey bridge, where only a fragment remains, the fragment is of interest.

Fig. 1. Packhorse-bridge on Measand beck, Westmorland. A rude type, formed of a great flagstone supported by rough piers; but note the use of the cantilever principle, as in Swiss wooden bridges. This illustration is the outcome of the kindness of Mr. S. W. Partington in sending a reproduction of an old print which he thought might be meant for the packhorse-bridge at Measand beck. Mr. Legh Tolson kindly identified the print with one in Thomas Rose's 'Westmorland' etc., published in 1833, and there ascribed to Longsleddale slate-quarry, the subject exaggerated to an Alpine scale; and he mentioned the real bridge which Mr. Bruce Thompson was so good as to photograph for this purpose.

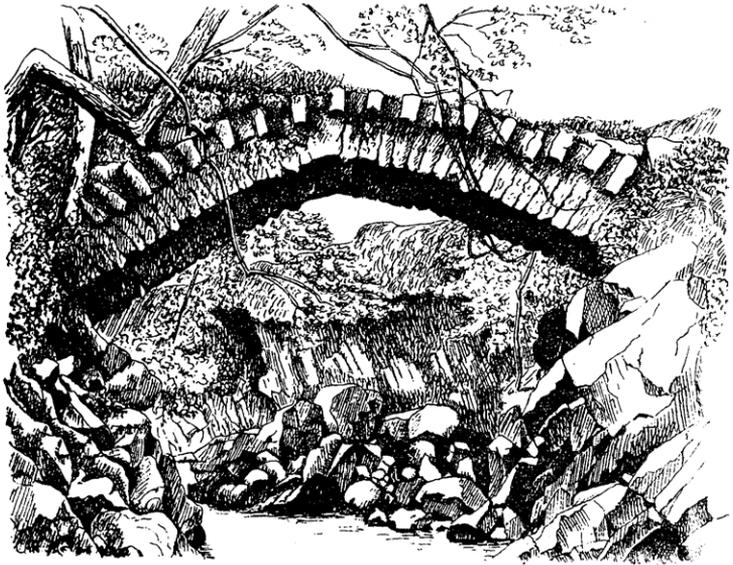
Fig. 2. Remains of Rawthey bridge, on the border of Ravenstonedale. The fragment of masonry still clinging to the steep bank is no doubt that of the bridge which was reported as needing renewal in 1584 (these *Transactions*, N.S., xxv, 377 f). It is doubtful whether there was an arch at that time, and more likely that from this pier to one on the opposite side, but now entirely swept away, a timber gangway crossed the river.

Fig. 3. Near Winster; a well built arch carrying a narrow-path.

Fig. 4. High Sweden bridge in Scandale, well known to visitors at Ambleside. It took the horse-track going north over the fells.

Fig. 5. Pasture beck in Patterdale, between Low Hartsop and Hayeswater. All the above are in Westmorland.

Fig. 6. The 'Devil's bridge' near Horrace in the parish of Pennington, Lancashire-north-of-the-Sands. Here the carriage-road runs through the wath, while the old track climbs the bank and crosses the narrow but still solid bridge. The following are in Cumberland.



PACKHORSE BRIDGE AT HIGH WATH, CALDER.

From a photograph by John Barnes.

Fig. 7. The 'Monks' bridge,' High Wath on the Calder, about 3 miles up-stream from Calder Abbey. This view shows the very narrow roadway, only 2 ft. 8 in. wide; the sketch from Parker's *Gosforth District*, 2nd ed. p. 93,



FIG. 10.—PACK-HORSE BRIDGE AT ULLOCK.

Photo. by W. L. Fletcher.

TO FACE P. 126.

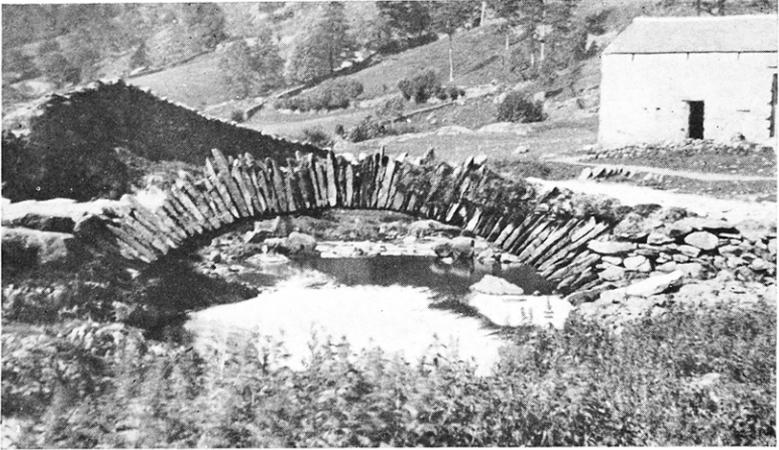


FIG. 11.—WATENDLATH.

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FIG. 12.—WASTDALEHEAD.

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TO FACE P. 127.

shows more distinctly the pointed arch, from which the bridge has been supposed to be mediæval 'Gothic,' an attribution which is by no means convincing.

Fig. 8. The 'Roman' bridge near Throstlegarth, on Lincove beck, Upper Eskdale, named above. It may be noted that the packhorse road which it served ran from Butterilket, north of which Miss Fair has recently pointed out the still visible track, to the Ure Gap, and was used for the iron-miners' and smelters' business. On the suggestion of H.M. Office of Works that something was desirable for the repair of the bridge, Miss Fair kindly engaged the interest of Mr. Joseph Harrison of Butterilket who under instructions from the Muncaster Estate Office undertook to do the work required.* (Figure repeated from these *Trans.* n.s. xxvii, 222.)

Figs. 9a and b. Two views of the packhorse-bridge at Calva Hall (one mile N. of Branthwaite), dated 1685. The first photograph shows its narrowness, now supplemented with a wooden bridge; the second gives the unusually wide span of its low arch.

Fig. 10 (repeated from these *Transactions*, n.s., xxiv, p. 375). The bridge at Ullock, 2 miles S.S.E. of the last.

Fig. 11. Watendlath, a famous subject for sketchers; a drawing of 1841 is reproduced in *Lake District History*, p. 160.

Fig. 12. Wasdalehead, the bridge over Mosedale beck

Fig. 13. Smaithwaite, N. of Thirlmere foot and about 200 yards from the Ambleside-Keswick road.

Fig. 14. Boot in Eskdale; the old bridge and mill (still in use) on the Whillan beck; showing the transition from the very narrow bridge to the rustic type of cart-bridge.

We have noticed Doctor's bridge in Eskdale, a packhorse arch before 1734 and then widened; and the traces of

* May, 1928, Miss Fair reports that the work has been done.—ED.

widening can be seen in Rowend bridge at Santon and Street bridge at Calder (*Gosforth District*, 49, 127), or Brathay bridge, where the seam under the arch is a bit of local history. Many more could be quoted, but as ancient narrow bridges, still 'unspoilt,' we might name:—

Barbon, High Beckfoot, a packhorse bridge pointed out to us by Miss Margaret Gibson of Beckfoot. Of this Mr. Curwen (*Records of Kendale* iii, 297) says that it must be the narrowest in the Barony of Kendal. It is only 2 ft. 5 in. wide between the parapets and 4 ft. wide over all. It has a single span of 23 ft. across the beck, and the crown of the arch rises 6 ft. above the mean water-level.

Willie Goodwaller bridge, Far Easdale, Grasmere; of which a legend is related by Miss Gertrude M. Simpson that the old bridge was built without mortar over Willie's back, while he stood in the stream acting as the templet to support the stones! A flood washed it away, and it was renewed by George Dixon, Willie's brother.

Slater's bridge, near Stang End in Little Langdale, well-known to visitors and sometimes called 'Roman,' though it is not on the line of the Roman road (these *Transactions*, n.s., xxi, 28), and probably, as its name implies, was built for the slaters of the Mossriggs or other quarries on the south side of the valley.

Drigg, which Miss Fair says carried the ancient packhorse road from near Drigg church to Bell Hill and the ford across the Mite.

Seathwaite and Stockley bridges on the Borrowdale side of the Styhead track, well-known and picturesque features in a landscape not yet 'improved.'

Birks bridge on the Duddon, 2 miles above the Dunnerdale Seathwaite; also a favourite subject with artists; and (though we do not pretend to a thoroughly exhaustive list)—

Torver beck on the Walna Scar track, which seems to be marked in William Brasier's map of 1745 (first edition of West's *Furness*) as the New Bridge.



FIG 13.—SMAITHWAITE.

W. L. Fletcher.



FIG. 14.—THE ANCIENT MILL AND BRIDGE OVER THE
WHELAN BECK AT BOOT.

Photo. by Miss Mary C. Fair, July, 1926.

TO FACE P. 128.