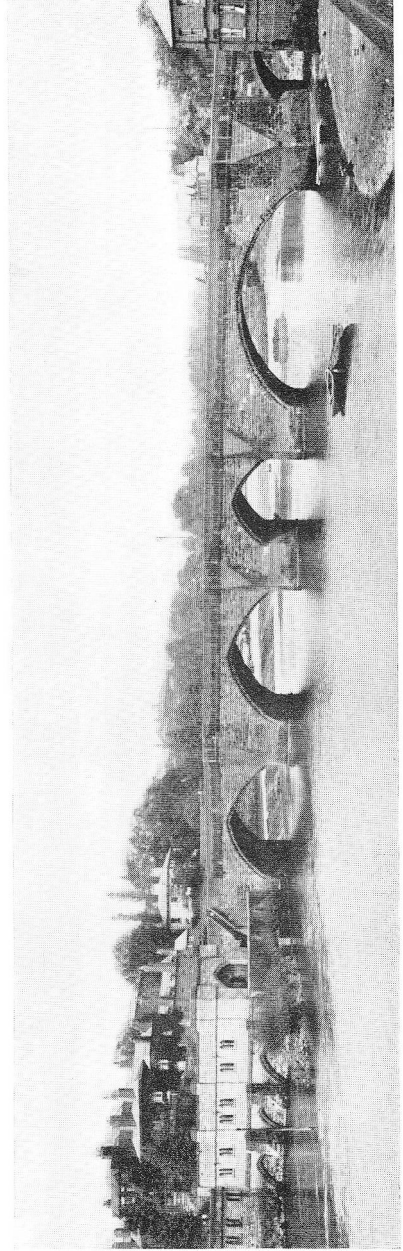
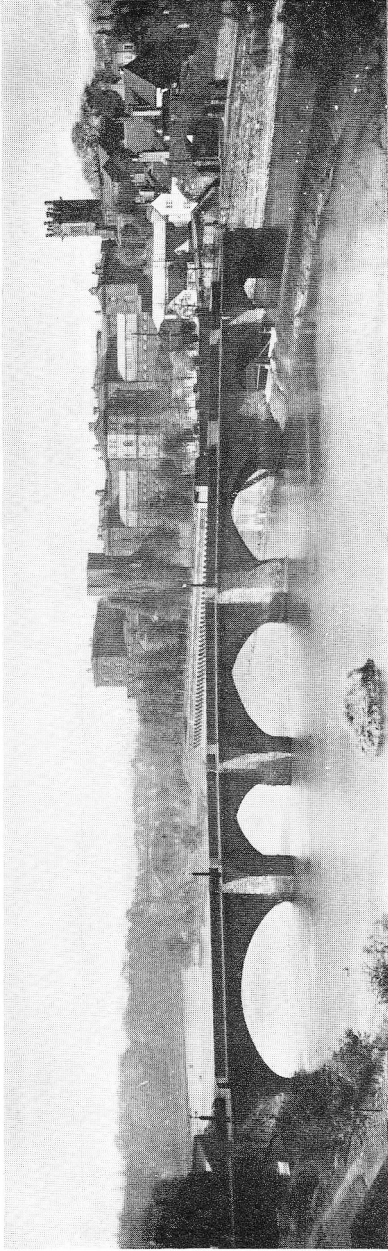


Plate XXIV.



Photos. by Cyril H. Lodge.

OLD DEE BRIDGE.

Above—Down Stream. Below—Up Stream.



The Old Dee Bridge at Chester

By R. STEWART-BROWN, M.A., F.S.A.

(Read 14th November, 1933).



SOMETHING is to be gathered about the practical operation, in post-Conquest times, of the obligation of "bridgework" by examination of records relating to the Dee bridge at Chester. Mr. Round, in a posthumously-printed and rather fragmentary paper¹, seemed prepared to dispute the likelihood of evidence being produced that post-Conquest levies for pontage of county bridges (in the sense of forced payments for upkeep as opposed to tolls for crossing) were based on, or connected with, the ancient obligation of "brycbot." He questioned the antiquity of the pontage at Cambridge for which, according to considerable evidence, hides were the basis of contribution, and also that payable for Rochester bridge by certain manors and lathes. We are not concerned with these bridges but the evidence given below seems to show beyond question that the liability to repair the Dee bridge at Chester, much contested in the thirteenth and later centuries, arose directly out of a pre-Conquest hidal obligation upon the county to do bridgework. The fact that the incidence of this ancient liability was varied at Chester by mutual agreement may perhaps be the solution of difficulties found in tracing the history of bridgework elsewhere.

The Dee bridge, which links the city of Chester with the suburb of Handbridge,² is not in its present form of great antiquity, and, as a southern outlet, has been superseded

¹ "Burh-bot and Brig-bot," in *Family Origins*, at p. 262.

² Mr. Henry Harrison suggested this place-name may be derived from A.S. (*aet*) *Héanbriega* "(at) the high or chief bridge." *Cheshire Sheaf*, III., vol. 7, p. 13.

by a modern one elsewhere. But, leaving out of account the probabilities of a bridge at or near the same place in Roman times,³ the well-known reference in Domesday book points to the existence of the bridge long before the Conquest. "For the repair of the wall of the city and of the bridge the reeve used to call up one man from each hide in the county. The lord of any man who failed to come paid a fine of 40s. to the king and the earl. This forfeiture was not included in the farm."⁴

"Brycgeweorc" was one feature of the tripartite obligation, commonly known as the *trinoda necessitas*, which fell upon the thane, the freeman, in Anglo-Saxon days. From "brycgeweorc" to "bryc-bot" was but a natural step and the way was then open for the effects of feudalism under which this duty entirely lost its ancient nature, the provision of labour, and became exigible as a tax due to the exchequer, on a tenurial basis, from holders of fiefs and their tenants. The Domesday evidence shows that it was remembered at the conquest that bridgework had been an obligation upon the hide in Cheshire, and not (except in default) a monetary payment. When the full change took place there is not known.

It seems very likely that the restoration of Chester in 907 by Ethelred of Mercia and Elfreda his wife, described as the enlargement of the city and renewal of its walls⁵, also included the erection or reconstruction of a bridge. There is in fact a statement by Grose that in a MS. account of Chester, communicated to him by a friend, occurred the following passage relative to Chester bridge:—

"After the death of Elfreda [917] her brother Edward [d. 924] finished the bridge over the Dee at Chester

³ See Newstead, *Jour. Chest Arch. Soc.* XXVII (N.S.), pt. 2, p. 151.

⁴ Tait, *The Domesday Survey of Cheshire* (Cheth. Soc.) 84-5. Mr. W. H. Stevenson, in *Eng. Hist. Review*, XXIX, 689, saw in this passage and in the case of Rochester bridge, something like the Roman *munera* charged upon the *patrimonia* (unless they were merely convenient arrangements for collecting the service) but considered a Roman derivation unlikely.

⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Chron.*, *sub dat.*; Higden, *Polychronicon* (Rolls Ser.) vi, 408, 416; and other chronicles.

which was begun by his sister Elfleda, before which time there was a ferry for passengers under St. Mary's Hill at the Shipgate."⁶ But no corroboration of this circumstantial statement has been noticed.⁷

The grant, dated 958, by King Edgar to the secular canons of St. Werburgh, who preceded the later foundation of the abbey of Chester, seems to refer to the Dee bridge. If its authenticity and text, as it survives, can be accepted⁸, the house was made free from the duties of military service, bridge building and repair of fortifications. Professor Tait has reminded us how very rare was such an exemption from the *trinoda necessitas*, and that it is possible that a normal saving of the three customary services may have been converted into an abnormal grant of exemption by a careless or unscrupulous copyist of the charter. It was not a title-deed of the abbey founded in 1093 by earl Hugh, and is not recited in any of its grants, but by the foundation charter the former possessions of the canons were transferred free and quit of service and of all customs⁹ which, it might at least have been argued, freed the abbey from bridge taxation if its predecessors had been immune. But we shall see that the monks had no need to invoke the canons' charter.

Magna Carta had, by clause 23, attempted to rectify exactions for bridge work generally and to confine the obligation to places and persons anciently liable.¹⁰ That the so-called *Magna Carta of Cheshire*¹¹ did not mention this abuse is not to say that there were no complaints there over it and we shall mention some subsequent ones below.

Throughout the thirteenth century, the maintenance of the Dee bridge was of the highest importance. It was the traditional preliminary point of assembly of the men of

⁶ *Antiquities*, (1773) vol. 1., *sub* Cheshire.

⁷ The reference to the ferry perhaps comes from a list of streets attributed to the time of Edward III. See Morris, *Chester, etc.*, 256.

⁸ For this and the charter see Tait, *Chartulary of Chester Abbey* (Cheth Soc.), 8-9. Also note 35 below.

⁹ *id.* pp. 15 and 21. See also the "Testimony of Archbishop Anselm," (page 37).

¹⁰ McKechnie, *Magna Carta*, 299.

¹¹ Tait, *Chartulary of Chester Abbey*, 101.

Cheshire for many of the musters against the Welsh, before proceeding to the camps on the Saltney plain. Chester was the base of several of the Edwardian expeditions into North Wales, and the collection there of men, animals and stores required the southern points of entry and exit by bridge, ford and ferry to be kept open. But the forces of nature intervened several times in this century. In 1227 *pons Cestrie totus cecidit*.¹² Repairs about 1256 are mentioned,¹³ and on 2 Feb. 1279 *mare erupit insuper pontem Cestrie confregit et asportavit, cursum solitum supra modum excedens*.¹⁴

There is reason to suppose that the successive Dee bridges of these days were mainly built of wood, and that the traffic over them was confined to foot passengers and horses, iron-shod wheeled vehicles certainly in later days having to pass the fords or be taken over the ferry. The ancient obligation of personal labour on the bridge works had by this date long been transmuted into the provision of the money required to pay the carpenters and artizans. According to an official statement of the middle of the fourteenth century, mentioned below, and probably representing ancient custom, the earl was bound to provide the necessary timber, and as stone had come into use, his officials then obtained it, in lieu of timber and at his expense, from a local quarry on the south side of the bridge. Stone for the embanked approaches was used in the thirteenth century, as we shall see.

Randle Holme has preserved the following copy of an entry, under the date of 1280, in the lost *Liber Ruber* of Chester Abbey:—

Rex Edwardus, propria ductus voluntate, comitatem¹⁵ Cestrie, contra libertates sibi concessas, coegit communes

¹² *Annales Cest.* (Chron. St. Werburgh) (Rec. Soc. Lancs. & Chesh., Vol. 14), p. 54.

¹³ See below, p. 73.

¹⁴ *Annales Cest.*, 106. A grant of the fishery of Dee, to Master Ric. the engineer, was vacated on 13th November, 1279, because of this destruction of the bridge. *Cal. Fine Rolls*, i, 119. A grant issued in 1281 and another in 1284, *id.* 153, 206.

¹⁵ Presumably for *comitatum*, or perhaps *communitatem*. There are no marks of abbreviation.

*Anglie leges admittere et pontem ultra aquam de Dee sumptibus suis construere.*¹⁶ The reference to the common laws of England is doubtless to the bridgework of the *trinoda necessitas* and the statement is elucidated by the litigation which followed.

The *communitas* of the county (upon whom we think the passage cited shows that the sole responsibility for the bridge of Dee had been thrown, ignoring that of the city of Chester) were forced to take action outside their own county court, a step for which no parallel has been noticed.

In 1285 they entered a plea *coram rege* in Parliament against the city, claiming the latter as joint contributors to the *auxilium* for making and repairing the bridge. They were ordered to produce their evidence but as they failed to appear at the adjourned hearing, judgment in default was given for the city, and the justiciar of Cheshire was ordered to exonerate it then and for the future from all responsibility.¹⁷ Further difficulties and disputes seem however to have arisen, which culminated in an important agreement, made at the Exchequer sitting of the Chester county court on 8th April, 1288. To settle manifold matters of dispute, the following arrangements for the future were come to by the barons, knights and free tenants of the county on the one part and the city, headed by the mayor, on the other part. Whenever necessary, the city was to repair and maintain that part of the bridge nearer to the "vill" of Newbolt¹⁸ 8 feet long, of

¹⁶ Harl. MS. 2071, fo. 88d.

Ormerod, Helsby ed., i, 231, translates as if the obligation had been thrown upon the city, but that it was the county seems more likely. The point was that the city was also liable by ancient custom.

¹⁷ *Coram Rege* Roll 95 (K.B. 27) m. 8. Hence *Abbrev. Plac.*, 209. The county could hardly be judges of their own case in their county court. Why they did not go on with the plea does not appear, but it may well be that reference to Domesday book did not make clear the city's share of liability.

¹⁸ "Newbold dike," between Claverton ford and Handbridge and thence to the bridge of Chester, is mentioned in a charter of 2 Jan., 1285, to Ralph de Sutton (*Cal. Charter Roll*, ii, 283); the *inq. p.m.* of Sir Hugh de Holes, 1415, states he was seised of lands in the fields of Claverton, Newbold and Handbridge, within the liberty of the city. (*Cal. Chesh. Recog. Rolls*, 37 Rep. Dep. Keeper, App. 370). Newbolt "beyond the bridge" occurs in 1257, *Cheshire Sheaf* III., vol. 13, p. 5, vol. 15, p. 36; Newbold lane in Handbridge is mentioned in 1543, *op. cit.*, vol. 18, p. 62. The name seems lost now.

compressed earth and stone-work, and 49 feet of timber-work in the bow or hollow (*conccavitate*) of the bridge next to this stone-work. The county was to be responsible for the rest of the bridge.¹⁹ "Yet so that all the outside townships and lands which, in the book called Domesday in the Exchequer in London, are reckoned in the 52 hides within the city of Chester and found geldable,²⁰ shall contribute" to that part of the bridge undertaken by the city authorities. For this agreement and towards the expense already incurred by the county, the citizens gave two tuns of wine.²¹

To understand this agreement it is necessary to refer to the Cheshire entries in Domesday book. The passage has been mentioned above which shows that the obligation of bridgework had once lain upon the hidated portions of the whole county (the assessment for the Danegeld), but the respective shares in bridgework of county and city were not distinguished. It was stated as a collective liability. We know, however from the records²² that the city itself gelded for 50 hides, and that "with" it (whether as an addition in numbers it is not clear) gelded three and a half hides in places adjacent to the city proper, which, later, are found to be comprised within "the liberties" of Chester.

¹⁹ The present bridge, of seven arches, spans approximately 400 feet of water which, being rock-girt at this point, is not likely to have varied very much. The portion of the bridge undertaken by the city was not on its side of the river.

²⁰ Compare the bridge at Cambridge, for the repair of which, according to several 14th century pleas, hides were the basis for contributions by the pontagers. The community of the "vill" of Cambridge was bound to repair one head of the bridge and certain lands in the county paid for the rest. Efforts as late as 1718 to shift the onus on to the corporation failed. In 1752 the Duke of Bedford paid £36 portage in respect of six hides of land at Dry Drayton. Flower, *Public Works in Mediæval Law*. (Selden Soc.), vol. 1, pp. 32-42; Maitland, *Township and Borough*, p. 37. Also Round, *Family Origins*, 262. For the repair of Rochester bridge in 1340, one pier (out of five) was repairable by lands in eleven townships, the township liability varying from 1s. to 7s. Hides are not mentioned. Flower, *op. cit.* i, 203.

²¹ *Cheshire Fines*, bdl. no 1, no. 9; trans. in *Cheshire Sheaf*, III., vol. 21 (1924), p. 32; Ormerod, Helsby ed., iii, 891.

²² Tait, *The Domesday Survey of Chester*, p. 79. The reduction to the 52 hides of the agreement cannot be explained. Something had dropped out.

So long as bridgework was simply a matter of a man from every hide, in days when hides were recognisable units of a definite assessment, the city could, we suppose, have been called upon, if necessary, for a certain number of labourers and the county outside for the balance, making up the hidal assessment of the whole of Cheshire. This was perhaps 600 at the date of Domesday, but, according to the "County Hidage," originally 1,200.²³

When a levy was substituted for personal labour, there must have arisen many grounds of dispute over its apportionment. The ancient hidage assessment of the county had been varied, by "waste," by reductions, by "beneficial hidation," by exemptions, by the throwing of hidated lands into the forests and in other ways. Chester itself had been enlarged and the hidated portions of the city may well have claimed contribution from others, and there were evidently disputes over the liability of the hides which gelded "with" the city. In future the city, as such, with the "liberties," was to be the unit for repairing a defined part of the bridge, the county as a whole doing the rest. The hidal basis seems to have disappeared in favour of a levy or "mise," distributed perhaps in a more equitable way,²⁴ and, except in one instance²⁵ we hear no more about hides in connection with the bridge.

It is of interest here to note that, in addition to the reference in 1288, on one other recorded occasion at least (and probably on others) the entry in Domesday relating to the bridge of Chester was referred to officially. In 1251 Alan de la Zouche, while justiciar (1250-1255) and holding as usual the farm of the county, received an order that if the duty of repairing the bridge fell on the King, the justiciar was to do it himself by view and testimony of lawful men,

²³ *id.* p. 5, etc.

²⁴ No details of these early bridge levies have been noticed and it must be admitted that the basis of the assessment to the "mise" in Cheshire is not yet explained. Mr. Brownbill considered it was not based on hides, *West Kirby and Hilbre*, 32. See also *Cheshire Sheaf* III., vol. 8, p. 33, vol. 11, p. 51. A levy of a third of a "mise" for the county bridges was made as late as 1594. (See below, p. 79).

²⁵ See p. 74.

the cost to be allowed him in due course.²⁶ He disbursed £20 19s. 2½d. in repairs and as it appeared by inspection of *Liber de Scaccario qui vocatur Domusday* that the men of the county were liable to do this work, orders were issued in 1256 for the allowance to Zouche of his payment, and for an immediate levy upon both the "vill" and the county of Chester for re-imbusement of the Exchequer.²⁷ Then in 1335 the men of Macclesfield forest petitioned Edward III, showing that they held lands of his ancient demesne and heritage in the forest by certain services, but that neither when such lands were in the hands of the crown or the earls of Chester, nor since approvement, had they ever been tallaged or charged with taxes. However, the bailiffs of the earl (the Black Prince) were distraining them for a mise levied for the repairs of the Dee bridge, although (they said) they held nothing of him nor owed him suit or service.²⁸ The bridge, they alleged, was built by ancient custom by those men of the county who held *terres geldables* and had done it before any land had been put into cultivation in this forest. They prayed for an order to the justiciar that the royal demesnes should not be taxed without the King's assent, and for freedom from their distrains, as at no time had such a levy been made on the forest. The earl and his justiciar were ordered to hear the complaint and do justice.²⁹

The question of the liability of the abbey of Chester (situated within the city but with many outside manors) for bridge and other work was raised after the disaster of 1279 and a claim was made upon it both in respect of the Dee bridge and for the repair of a causeway on the main road out of Chester.³⁰ The abbot, however, obtained a royal order, dated 19 March 1283-4, to the justiciar, ordering inspection

²⁶ *Cal. Close Rolls*, 1251-3, p. 17.

²⁷ L.T.R. Memoranda Roll 31, m. 12d. (E. 368); *Cal. Close Rolls*, 1254-6. pp. 264-5; also Madox, *Firma Burgi*, 89.

²⁸ He had, however, been created earl of Chester in 1333. The petition may have been lodged before that date.

²⁹ *Rot. Parl.*, ii, 94.

³⁰ The Watfield or Wetfield pavement for which see *Cheshire Sheaf*, III., vol. 17, etc.

of the charters of his house, and exemption if they showed that it was so entitled.³¹ But this only postponed the issue for a few years.

On Tuesday, 19th Oct. 1316, Thomas the abbot of Chester, at the county court presided over by Hugh de Audley, the justiciar of Chester, complained³² that the sheriff (Richard de Fouleshurst) had in September levied an improper distress at the abbot's grange at Sutton-in-Wirral, taking ten oxen to the value of £10. The sheriff justified his action under the earl's writ, ordering him to distrain bishops, abbots, priors and all the freeholders of the county for the repair and maintenance of Chester bridge, then broken down. The abbot's reply was that the sheriff's action was unlawful and he set up in answer the abbey's foundation charter by Hugh earl of Chester.³³ Agreeably with this charter, he said, neither he nor his predecessors had ever contributed to the reparation of the bridge. An interesting feature of this case was that the abbot produced in court the charter of earl Hugh (1093) as confirmed by Edward I on 12th June, 1285.³⁴

Inspection of the charter revealed the clause³⁵ beginning *Hec sunt itaque dona*, by which earl Hugh stated that the foundation gift of lands had been made by him, his son Richard, Ermentrude the countess, his baron and men, *libera et pacata et quieta ab omni consuetudine et omni re, nichil retinentes in his omnibus nisi orationes et beneficia monachorum in hoc loco commorantium, et tam liberum et quietum honorem Sancte Werburge dedimus et constituimus, . . . ut nullus post nos aliquid libertatis vel quietis addere*

³¹ Harl. MS. 2071, fo. 89 (old 74), an extract by R. Holme from the lost *Liber Ruber* of the abbey.

³² Chester Plea Roll 29/30, m. 1 d.

³³ Tait, *Charterulary of Chester Abbey*, pp. 13 and 83, and *Cal. Charter Rolls*, ii, 316.

³⁴ *Profert etiam cartam predictam domini Hugonis comitis confirmatam per dominum E. regem predictum.*

This seems to mean that the confirmation of 12th June, 1285, was produced, not the original charter of 1093.

³⁵ See Tait, *op. cit.* p. 21. The decision in this case shows that exemption from bridgework could be given by general words, so that this may not have been so rare as usually supposed.

possit. Et quando nos hanc cartam confirmavimus nullum opus, nullum servicium, nullam consuetudinem, nullam omnino rem, preter orationes retinuimus.

Moreover, an examination of the rolls in the treasury of the ancient contributions by the men of the county showed nothing had ever been contributed by the abbey to the reparations of the bridge. Judgment was therefore given for the abbot on the tenor of the charter and the distress cancelled. The sheriff was amerced but his fine was afterwards condoned by the justiciar. The abbot was also successful in the same plea the following year in respect of a similar distress taken at his manor of Saughton.³⁶

Res judicata was not an effective defence in those times and in spite of these verdicts, when the bridge was under repair from 1346 onward, a demand was again made for contributions from the abbey and distraint levied or threatened. The earl (the Black Prince) was sympathetic and an order issued in the year mentioned to stay the demand until Christmas. When the judgment of 1316 had been examined a further stay was ordered as the earl was patron of the abbey and wished to aid and maintain its rights and prevent hardships so far as he could.³⁷ About 1351, the abbey included in a petition (on other matters) the statement that, although they could show by their charters that their predecessors had been quit of all manner of work, yet a distraint was again being made for money towards repair of the bridge.³⁸ The general release (mentioned below) of those liable, provisionally granted in 1351, included the abbey, but in 1353, the prince's councillors were advised that, before discharging the abbot, they ought to give notice to the other interested parties to show cause, if they could, to the contrary.³⁹ Probably the result was in favour of the abbey but the

³⁶ McConnell, *The Abbey of St. Werburgh (Trans. Hist. Soc. Lancs. & Ches., vol. 55, p. 52)* using the entries noted in an abbey roll formerly at Aston Hall, and now in B.M. (Add. Charter 51, 525), on which both these cases appear.

³⁷ *Black Prince's Register* i, 13, 37.

³⁸ *id.* iii, 22.

³⁹ *id.* p. 87.

necessary evidence has not been noticed, though its absence is significant.

The bridge was evidently in bad repair in 1346 and Sir Thomas de Ferrers, the justiciar of the county, then took in hand, with the earl's council, to repair the arches, the parapet of the earl's fishery by the bridge, one tower at the head of the bridge "against" the county of Flint, and one column between the mill of Dee and the causeway by the bridge at the city end.⁴⁰ The cost of these works was to be £150 and orders were issued to the workmen not to damage the earl's weir and fishery and to make the bridge according to the advice and survey of Henry de Snelson, the earl's mason and surveyor of works for this part of his estates.⁴¹

The breaking down of the bridge brought both the "passage" (the ferry) and the ford above the bridge into greater use and the *custos* of the former answered for tolls amounting to £11 4s. 8d. in 1349-50, and for £14 19s. 3½d. next year. The smallness of the amounts was (he said) because the ford was sufficient for horsemen and foot-passengers, and apparently the latter could also get over the broken bridge. It was sufficiently repaired for men, horses and animals by 6th Dec. 1355, to affect the revenue from the ferry,⁴² but the work remained to be finished, as in 1357 and in 1358 the mayor and citizens were ordered to repair and make with stone their part of the bridge in the same manner as the rest, the earl having heard that they were delaying it as much as they could.⁴³

Evidently stone was largely used in the repairs of this date, as a quarry was purchased or hired belonging to Stephen de Merton (who owned land near the south end of the bridge where a hermit established himself about 1358 between the river and the quarry within a walled hermitage).⁴⁴ The chamberlain of Chester was allowed 36s. in his

⁴⁰ *Cheshire Chamberlains' Accts.* (Rec. Soc. Lancs. & Chesh., vol. 59), pp. 126 and 129, where £141 13s. 4d. is shewn as paid.

⁴¹ *Black Prince's Register*, i, 83.

⁴² *Chamb. Accts.* pp. 141, 179, 221.

⁴³ *Black Prince's Register*, iii, pp. 275, 298.

⁴⁴ *Cal. Chesh. Recog. Rolls*, (36 Rep. Dep. Keeper, 439).

account of 1350-1, and a further 25s. in 1357-8, for his payments to Merton, the reason for this being stated to be that the lord (the earl) provided, and was bound to provide, timber for the bridge so often as necessary, but had agreed to pay for the quarry in order to save his timber in Delamere forest where it was wont to be taken.⁴⁵

During the earlier progress of these works, an order was issued in March 1351 to the justiciar and chamberlain which had important results. Inasmuch as both the city and the county round it were much injured because the bridge was in such a plight that no one could pass over it, the officers were to find out what persons were responsible for it having been so long defective, and compel them to repair it so far as they were bound to do so.⁴⁶ In May another order⁴⁷ gave the result of the inquiry. The prince, in consideration of the very great costs which his people of the "country" near the city had often borne, and needs must have borne in future from time to time, in making, repairing and maintaining the bridge, granted that all those of the country who were anciently and by custom so liable and their heirs, as well as the abbot of Chester and his successors, should forever be discharged therefrom and of all forced contributions thereto. Letters patent were to be issued under the seal of Chester to this effect but, as the prince willed that the parties responsible should complete the bridge on this one occasion only, the letters were to remain with the chamberlain, under the seals of the justiciar and Sir Richard de Stafford the prince's "bachelor," until the bridge was finished and surveyed by testimony of them and others of the council. When this was done, pontage tolls were to be taken by the chamberlain for the future maintenance of the bridge, but the grantees of the letters patent, having hitherto been contributors to the repairs, were to be quit.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Chamb. Accts.* pp. 169, 242. Several early instances where a landowner was bound to supply timber are given in Flower, *Public Works in Mediæval Law* (Selden Soc.), e.g. i, 97, ii, XLIII.

⁴⁶ *Black Prince's Register*, iii, 8.

⁴⁷ *id.* pp. 15 & 19.

⁴⁸ *id.* p. 15.

As we have seen above, this order did not extend to release the citizens of Chester, who were called upon in 1357-8 to make and repair that part of the bridge for which they were responsible as of old. The obligation is stated to have greatly impoverished the city and, apparently following upon a subsequent breakdown of the bridge when it is recited many were drowned, Richard II on 25th July, 1387 gave the profits of both the ferry and the murage taken for the walls towards the fabric and repair of the bridge until it was completely restored.⁴⁹ Half of the murage granted in 1407 was to be used to complete the bridge tower,⁵⁰ begun long before, and the murage of 1409 was for the repair of the walls, bridges and gates of the city.⁵¹

The later history of the bridge has not been closely investigated. Local records show that in 1499-1500 the "further end" was newly-built,⁵² that planks were used in some repairs in 1557, and that orders were made by the city council in 1574 for the repair by the treasurers of an arch and other parts then in ruin and decay.⁵³

If the exemption of the county from bridgework in the fourteenth century had not the effect of saddling the city with complete responsibility, as seems likely, this would presumably have been made clear by the statute of bridges in 1530 (22 Henry viii. c. 5) which threw the liability to repair bridges within a city upon its inhabitants, unless there was evidence to the contrary, and empowered the justices to authorise a levy. For the repair of the county bridges of Cheshire generally a tax of 1000 marks (one third of a "mise") was made in 1594⁵⁴ and the next year a commission

⁴⁹ Morris, *Chester in the Plantagenet and Tudor Reigns*, p. 503, where the grant is wrongly dated 1367.

⁵⁰ *id.* p. 509.

⁵¹ *id.* p. 510.

⁵² Webb in *King's Vale Royal*. Harl. MS. 2125, 203.

⁵³ Morris, *op. cit.*, 231, and *Cheshire Sheaf*, vol. 1, 32.

⁵⁴ *Chesh. Recog. Rolls*, 11 Oct. 1594.

was appointed to inquire what persons or corporate bodies were liable by ancient custom or tenure of lands.⁵⁵

In 1608 Arthur Agarde, the antiquarian deputy-chamberlain of the Exchequer, seems to have supplied the citizens with an exemplification⁵⁶ of the *coram rege* suit of 1285 and some precedents from Lincolnshire, for the purpose of assisting them in questions of liability for the repair of the bridge, perhaps raised by the commission of 1595, but whether the later palatine records which we have used were also referred to does not appear.

The present bridge is said to have been widened by several feet on the west side in 1826, a raised footpath being erected on corbels on the other,⁵⁷ and it is kept in repair entirely at the expense of the city.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

Inspection of the fabric leaves little room for doubt that the present Bridge dates from the latter half of the 14th century, the period of extensive re-building referred to by Mr. Stewart-Brown in his paper. Originally uniform in width throughout its entire length of 380 feet the bridge has seven arches each with double splayed arch rings built in two orders, the spans successively from the Bridegate end being approximately 25, 30, 50, 50, 30, 63 and 25 feet. Of these the first two and the last two are segmental, while the third, fourth, and fifth are pointed. With the exception of the fifth and seventh, each arch has two broad flat ribs characteristic of 14th and 15th century bridge-work. Whether or no the "further end," described as newly built

⁵⁵ *id.* 25 Sept. 1595. The report has not been found. Orders for the justices for the repair of Acton and Warrington bridges were made in 1579 and 1625 (*id.*). Reports in 1618-21 to the justices by the constables on the bridges in the Hundreds of Macclesfield, Northwich, Nantwich, Bucklow and Wirral have been printed in the *Cheshire Sheaf*, III., vol. 22, p. 59 *sqq.*, but not for the other Hundreds or for the city of Chester. These reports seem to have been filed upon the county sessions rolls and the city report (if any) may be among the borough justices' records at Chester.

⁵⁶ Harl. MS. 2003, f. 103 (old 724).

⁵⁷ Hemingway, *Hist. of Chester* (1831), vol. 1., 372.

in 1499 had reference to the last arch, timber continued to be used for either a draw-bridge or carriage-way to this span well into the reign of Elizabeth. The soffit is now mainly of brick not earlier than the latter half of the 17th century. The tower, for the completion of which half the murage granted in 1407 was to be expended, stood on the large pier between the last two arches and prior to 1499 at all events was doubtless approached by a draw-bridge. It was so ruinous in 1593 that it was taken down and replaced by a stone gatehouse. This gatehouse which appears in Holmes' drawing of the bridge, reproduced by Hemingway and by Morris, and in Lavaux's 1745 Map of Chester, was designed for the use of a portcullis in conjunction with a draw-bridge, with which it was in fact equipped during the siege of Chester. In 1782 the narrow mediæval Bridgegate in the City Walls was replaced by the present structure and within a year or two the Gatehouse in its turn was demolished to facilitate traffic (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd ser. XIII, 11; XX, 106).

Early in the last century the traffic problem became so acute that consideration was given to the provision of another bridge across the Dee—the Grosvenor Bridge—and to some widening of the Old Bridge. The widening in question was carried out in 1826 by building above the cutwaters and by turning additional plain arch rings of about two feet projection on the east side of the first three arches and two feet nine inches projection on the west side of the seventh. In each instance the earlier arch is still to be seen below. At the same time the footpath four feet four inches wide over the iron railings by which it is protected was corbelled out an additional two feet nine inches along the east side and the parapet wall was rebuilt on the opposite side. The two pointed arches and segmental arch to the seventh are still of the original width of about eighteen feet, and apart from the corbelling, have undergone no change. The carriage-way in this portion is fourteen feet ten inches wide. Some repair work to the facings on the west side of the first two arches, possibly occasioned at

a re-building of the Dee Mills, mask the splayed arch rings of the mediæval work, effecting a slight widening, and their cutwaters and buttresses have been re-built in recent years. The bridge is disfigured on this side by a make-shift cast-iron rain-water head and downspout.

In the main it may be said that the appearance of the bridge from the west must closely resemble that of five and a half centuries ago, before the tower was built, and apart from the incongruous railings on the east, the general character of the bridge on that side has not been impaired. It is one of the most interesting structures of its kind in this country and has been scheduled as an ancient monument by H.M. Commissioners of Works.

P. H. L.

