

## Cromford Bridge and Bridge Chapel.

By T. L. TUDOR AND P. H. CURREY.

IN pursuance of an enquiry in Council concerning the remains of a bridge chapel attached to Cromford Bridge, Mr. Percy Currey, F.R.I.B.A., and the present writer made an examination of the ruins during the summer. Mr. Currey wrote out a report which he asks me to use, and made a sketch plan which is useful for the present purpose, although not to scale. In his letter he expresses an intention of making a plan to scale.

Mr. Currey writes:

“Cromford Bridge is a particularly graceful structure, in an equally beautiful situation, of three arches spanning the River Derwent. The steeply pointed arches suggest an early date, but the fact that the soffits of the arches are not ribbed rather contradicts this. The width of the bridge has been doubled at a later date. The masonry of the parapets and the tops of the cut-waters appears to have been altered; possibly the bridge was originally even more hump-backed than at present, and before the bridge was widened refuges would be formed over the cut-waters.

The chapel seems to have consisted of a rectangular building projecting eastwards from the southern approach to the bridge. Little now remains of it

beyond a portion of the northern and southern walls, the latter containing a nicely moulded doorway and a small two-light window suggestive of 15th or early 16th century work. It seems likely that what now remains is an undercroft and that the chapel itself would have stood on a floor above, level with the road. This fragment of the building has been at one time occupied as a cottage, comprising a little living room, pantry and closet.

The remains are in a deplorable condition and will doubtless soon disappear unless steps are taken for their preservation. The stone is in excellent condition but ivy is disturbing the foundations and working its way over and through the walling, while trees are growing on the tops of the walls and sending their roots down into their heart.

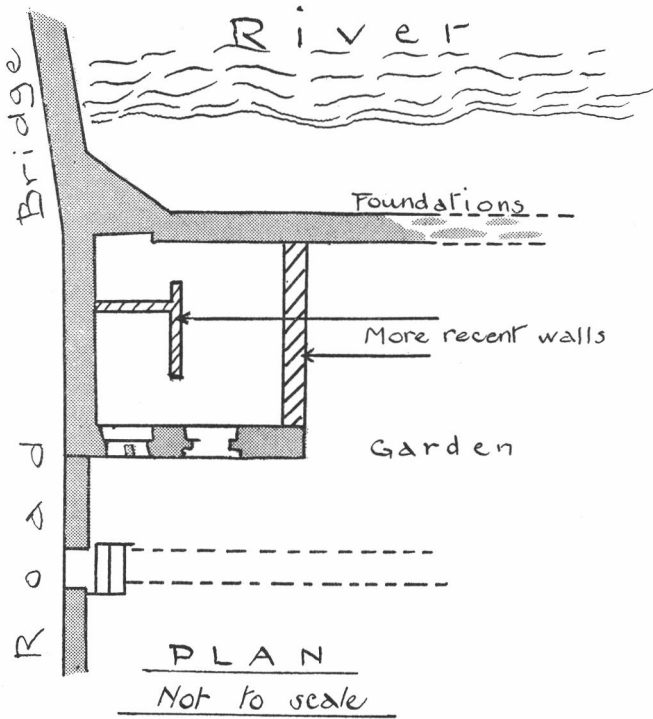
To secure the preservation of the remains it would be necessary to remove the trees and the ivy and to kill their roots, to point up the masonry and to protect the tops of the walls with flag stones or rough rubble copings. Great care would be needed in carrying out this work, but there is so little of it that the cost would not be great.

In view of the scarcity of the remains of Bridge Chapels in this country it seems very desirable that this small relic should be preserved."

P. H. CURREY.

Notwithstanding that the bridge is scheduled by H.M. Office of Works, the remains of the chapel are unprotected by any such provision. When the late Mr. Vassall, of Repton (my predecessor as County Correspondent), sent up the recommendation form for the bridge no mention was made of the chapel. In fact, the existence of this little sanctuary was hardly recognised at that time. The late Dr. Cox gives some interesting particulars about this chapel in *Churches of Derbyshire*, vol. 2, p. 573, in

which he suggests that its architecture is later than the bridge. But in any case its masonry is strongly bonded into the oldest portion of the bridge structure which has been added to on the up-stream side. However, the chapel ruins are important enough to be preserved as relics of one out of, at least, three bridge chapels once



existing in the county, the others being at Swarkeston and Derby. According to Dr. Cox, quoting from the Wolley MSS., the chapel was at one time made into two cottages but was demolished by Richard Arkwright, esq., in 1796. The semi-modern church in Willersley Castle grounds was then built to accommodate a rapidly growing population.

It seems clear that the chapel by the bridge was not only a bridge chapel with the usual functions in relation to wayfarers, but also a parochial chapelry for this outlying portion of the extensive parish of Wirksworth. It would, no doubt, be quite adequate to the needs of the old and thinly populated hamlet before the arrival of the cotton mills. But its original dimensions were much greater than the standing walls now indicate. My observations on many occasions lead me to believe that the existing ruins only represent the west end of the chapel, with a south entrance. Along the adjoining shore there are foundations of strong walls extending some thirty feet eastward, quite plainly the foundation work, and footings of a well-built structure. If these impressions are correct what we miss to-day is the main body of the sanctuary, and especially its east, or chancel end. An interesting feature not mentioned by Mr. Currey is a look-out aperture in the north wall from which a view of the river is obtained. This detail is usual in bridge chapels, and seems to indicate a watch over the river-crossing, probably a ford, before the building of the bridge. As to the date of the chapel we have to remember that we have lost the portion which would more precisely date its foundation, i.e. the chancel end. It is, therefore, relevant to suppose that the chapel may have preceded the bridge in days when a ford was the only way across, or when, notwithstanding the bridge, travellers sometimes chose to take a neighbouring ford so as to avoid dues or other demands for maintenance. This state of things was general all over England. Further, bridges out of repair, a frequent trouble in the Middle Ages, were sometimes more dangerous than fords.

I have had some correspondence with the County Authority to ascertain how the Society would stand if we wished to save the ruins from further decay, and I have explained that this could be done quite effectually, with-

out any interference with the bridge structure. Mr. C. G. Millican, M.Inst.C.E., the County Surveyor,<sup>1</sup> whom I have always found courteous and reasonable in all matters concerned with the old bridges of the county, has replied "there will be no objection to the carrying out of the work suggested." It now rests with the Derbyshire Archaeological Society to take the necessary steps, when circumstances permit.

Some few years ago the County purchased a strip of land on this side of the highway. This strip butts up against the wall of an eighteenth century fishing house, an evident imitation of the Fishing Temple in Beresford Dale. This building stands alongside the chapel with a small enclosure between. At the time of the transfer of this strip I interviewed the authority named above and was assured that what seemed to be an intended widening which would destroy the chapel and the older half of the bridge, was not in contemplation. The strip was acquired merely because it was obtainable from the neighbouring cricket field. At present it is just a wayside spare.

<sup>1</sup> Since this article was written, Mr. Millican has died, and his sympathetic attitude to the work of the Society will be greatly missed.—Ed.