

# BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL BLAKE MUSEUM



## THE RIVER BRIDGES OF BRIDGWATER

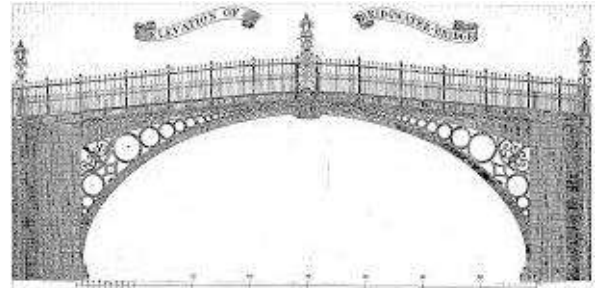


*The Stone Bridge: engraving after John Chubb*

The building of the stone bridge over the River Parrett at Bridgewater was begun in the time of King John, by William Brewere, and finished in Edward the First's reign, by Sir T. Trivett. When Bridgewater was stormed and taken by Cromwell's forces in July, 1645, this bridge obstructed the successful advance of the storming party for two or three days. There was at that time a gate at the bridge, where the royalists made barricades, and drew up a drawbridge.

There are medieval records mentioning a Frog Lane Bridge. The location of this is unclear, but it might have crossed the Durleigh Brook near the junction with the Parrett. There was also a Lyme Bridge, perhaps near lime kilns mentioned then but whose location is not known.

The passage of barges up the river was obstructed and often occasioned much damage at high tide, so in 1795 it was taken down, and a Coalbrookdale - made cast-iron arch erected in its place.



*The Coalbrookdale-made iron bridge of 1795*

*'Bridgewater Bridge — 'This structure, which is principally composed of cast-iron brought in pieces from Coalbrook-Dale, Shropshire, by water carriage, is now pretty well completed: it consists of one arch, the span of which 75 feet; the road-way is 24 feet wide in the clear, including two foot pave-ways; it is lighted with six lamps. The expense of erecting the bridge is about £4000 which was collected by additional toll on all the turnpikes leading to the town. The former bridge had stood 500 years, and was built by an ancient Lord of Bridgewater; the piers are not yet quite taken away. The iron-bridge is one of the handsomest in the kingdom.'* From a newspaper report of 1798

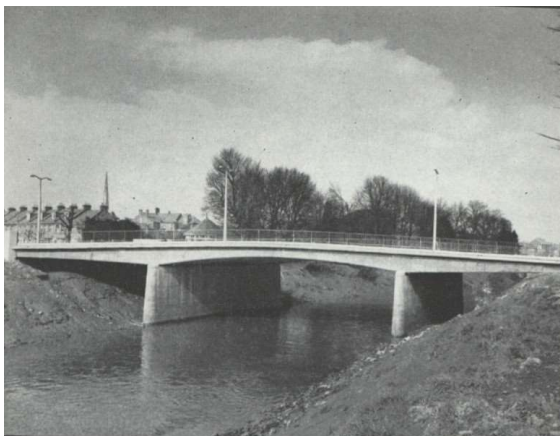
This bridge was replaced by the present Town Bridge in 1883



*The present Town Bridge*

The bridge, was designed by Mr. R. C. Else, C.E., of Bridgwater, with a 75 feet span and 36 feet wide in the clear, having two footpaths each six feet wide. It consists of seven wrought-iron arched ribs drawn together by transverse and diagonal braces, and rests upon, and is built into, masonry abutments. The panelling consists of ornamental cast-iron railings, fitting into Ham Hill masonry piers each end, and surmounted with cast-iron lamp brackets carrying Sugg's patent lanterns and burners. The road is practically level, only rising six inches in the centre of the bridge, and the new bridge is 12 feet wider than the old one.

The contractor was Mr George Moss, of Liverpool, the cost amounting to £3,214 11s 4d, the iron work of the old bridge was disposed of to the contractor for £175, and he provided a wooden temporary bridge for the sum of £150



*Blake Bridge, opened in 1958*

The Blake Bridge, opened in 1958, was part of the Town bypass scheme – the Broadway – initially linking St John Street/Eastover junction with Taunton Road, and later from there to West Street. The bridge was made of reinforced concrete. 160 ft long, with a centre span of 70 ft and two side spans of 45ft.



*Chandos Bridge, opened 1988*

Chandos Bridge, parallel with the discontinued telescopic bridge was opened in 1988. It is on a new road built on the line of the Docks Railway, and connects the Clink with the northern side of town



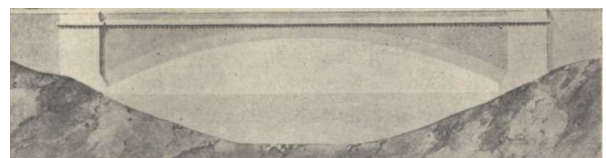
*The Drove Bridge, 1992*

The Drove Bridge which marks the current extent of the Port of Bridgwater, is the nearest to the river-mouth and the newest road bridge to cross the river. With a span of 184 feet (56 m), the bridge was constructed as part of the Bridgwater Northern Distributor road scheme (1992), and provides a navigable channel which is 66 feet (20 m) wide with 8.2 feet (2.5 m) headroom at normal spring high tides. It links Bristol Road and Chilton Street.

### **RAILWAY BRIDGES**

The Bristol and Exeter Railway reached Bridgwater in 1841, and in 1842 the line had reached Taunton.

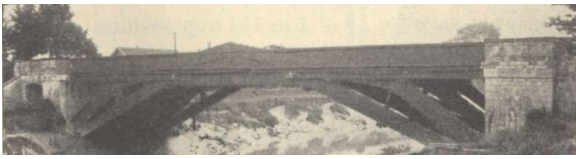
The river was crossed by a masonry bridge at Somerset Bridge, to the south of the town, having a 100ft span and a rise of only 12 ft. Construction had started in 1838 and took 3 years.



*The masonry Somerset Bridge 1841-1843*

There had been some movement of the bridge foundations, so Brunel delayed the removal of the wooden centerings which had supported the masonry as it was being built. There was an outcry at the restriction of barge traffic on the Parrett, which caused some fatal accidents to barges so it was

replaced in 1843 by a timber bridge, the work being done with no restriction to traffic.



*The timber Somerset Bridge 1843-1904*

The present iron girder bridge was erected in 1904. There is a footbridge running alongside it.



*The present Somerset Bridge*

### **The Black Bridge**

Also known as the Telescopic Bridge. It could be withdrawn into a recess after another section of the bridge was moved sideways to allow the section which spanned the River Parrett to be drawn back. The bridge is no longer required to move, and serves as a footbridge.

The bridge was opened in 1871, and was an ingenious solution to the problem of allowing rail traffic access to the floating dock at Bridgwater, while still allowing shipping to use the short stretch of tidal river downstream of Bridgwater Town Bridge.

After closure, British Railways set about scrapping the bridge, disregarding its historic interest and rarity. Fortunately the main span was saved following a public outcry, and is now Grade II\* listed. The side-shifting span was cut up, and the engine partly destroyed. Fortunately part of the engine frame survives in situ, while the boiler and one of the cylinders were rescued and donated to Westonzoyland Museum.

The bridge was designed by Francis Fox

(1818-1914) (not Sir Francis Fox, a different engineer) for the Bristol and Exeter Railway. The main span was 127-feet (39 m), and the approach section was 80-feet (24 m) long. It was manually operated for the first eight months, and then powered by a steam engine. The bridge was taken over from the Bristol and Exeter Railway by the Great Western Railway in 1876. The contract for the masonry was let in 1869, and the bridge opened in 1871. The masonry was built by Warburton Brothers Ltd. of Bristol and the ironwork by Lloyds, Foster and Co. of Wednesbury.



*The Black Bridge as a footbridge*

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