THE HISTORY OF MIDDLE BRIDGE, ROMSEY

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INTRODUCTION

THIS paper attempts to trace the history of Middle Bridge, Romsey. Hitherto unpublished material concerning the building of a new bridge in 1782–84 by the architect Robert Mylne has shed new light on the history of the bridge and on the growth and prosperity of the area. Middle Bridge is situated at the south-west corner of Romsey and carries the east-west traffic over the River Test. It was originally at the end of Middle Bridge Street leading directly to the centre of the town and stood between the town and Broadlands estate. It is now part of Romsey by-pass.

The earliest record of the site appears in a charter of King Edgar, 971–75, defining the boundaries of Romsey Abbey (Grundy 1927, 200–203). The charter mentions 'the street where the Test runs' suggesting that the road now known as Middlebridge Street ran down to the water's edge without actually crossing the river. At this date the site could have been a landing place, for in Anglo-Saxon times the Test must have been an important waterway and a landing place here would have served the small, growing settlements of Romsey, Romsey Abbey and neighbouring villages. The west side of the river would have been much less likely as a thoroughfare as this was an infertile area and very sparsely populated.

King Edgar's charter (Birch 1893 v.3, 450–2) grants a renewal of privileges to Romsey Abbey and does not list the specific obligations for which the Abbey lands were liable. In the tenth century there were three essential services commonly charged to all landholdings; namely the building of bridges and fortifications and military service. Church lands were granted immunities from secular work except for these three common burdens (John 1960, 64–79) and these duties would almost certainly have been incorporated in Romsey's original charter.

The boundaries given in Edgar's charter show the Abbey lands situated on the east bank of the Test, extending to the north and south of Middle Bridge Street without actually crossing the river; even so, the Abbey was liable for any bridge over water reached by its lands. The Anglo-Saxon law of bridges was confirmed in Magna Carta when it was decreed 'No Town nor Freeman shall be distrained to make Bridges . . . but such as of old time and of right have been accustomed to make them' (*Statutes*, v.I, 116). In practice this meant that once a bridge had been built its maintenance was a continuing liability on the builder and his successors. Thus, in 1234 when King Henry III ordered the repair of all the bridges over the River Test (*Close R.* v.33, 197, 198) the Abbey would have been responsible for any bridge previously built on this site.

THE EARLY STONE BRIDGE

Although it is not known when the first bridge was built, it is possible that a stone bridge had existed from the thirteenth century. The County Order Book (HRO Q.O/I, 43) of 1608 refers to 'a greate bridge of stone' and certain factors suggest a thirteenth-century date. For example, in the area north west of the bridge lie two estates with the name Stanbridge and it is possible that these

Proc. Hants. Field Club Archaeol. Soc. **32**, 1976, 49–61.

estates, Stanbridge Earls and Stanbridge Ranvilles, were originally one holding stretching down to and taking their name from the stone bridge. Stanbridge is a derivation of the Anglo-Saxon word stanbrycg meaning stone bridge. In 1251 an Inquisition (*Cal. inq. p.m.* v.15, 109) records 'Stanbrigge juxta Romsey' suggesting the existence of a stone bridge from which it could take its name. Moreover stonemasons are thought to have been working on Romsey Abbey (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967, 478) at about the time when Henry III ordered the general repair of bridges, and the combination of these circumstances could have resulted in the building of a bridge of stone. If this were so, the original stone bridge could have been built between 1235 and 1250. The earliest reference to Middle Bridge comes in an inquisition of 1380 defining the lands of Nicholas Pershute, of the estate now known as Spursholt. These included a 'fishery from a place called Muxene as far as the bridge of Middelbrigge' (*Cal. inq. p.m.* I. 8, No. 4).

Through the years the Church had cared for its bridges – repairing and rebuilding as necessary, but with the gradual decline of the monasteries followed by their suppression and the subsequent dispersal of their lands, many of those bridges were left to decay – mainly because it was not known who was liable for their maintenance. In 1531 Henry VIII provided for these bridges by a Statute (*Statutes*, v.3, 321) which gave authority to all Justices of the Peace to enquire into the condition of the bridges in their own areas and determine who was liable for the upkeep of any bridge in need of attention. Where the legal responsibility for a broken bridge could not be proved it was to become a burden on the inhabitants of the County, City or Town as the case may be. To pay for the work the Justices were authorised to levy a tax on every inhabitant and to use their discretion as to how much it should be.

Middle Bridge was one of these derelict bridges and by the early seventeenth century its condition was giving cause for great concern. The minutes of the Easter Quarter Sessions of 1608 record that the bridge 'havinge longe tyme bine in greate decaye' was 'nowe growne to be verie perilous and dangerous for travailors and like to fall to utter ruine if some speedie course be not taken for repairinge thereof' (HRO Q.O/I, 43). Middle Bridge was now an important thoroughfare. Travellers were crossing here not only on local journeys but had made it an east-west crossing and it was 'a usuall passage aswell for the Kinges Majesties owne chariages at suche tyme as his highness passeth unto the newe forest' (HRO Q.O./I, 43).

After an enquiry by the Justices of the Peace had failed to find an owner, the County accepted responsibility for its upkeep (HRO Q.O/I, 43) and it was agreed to levy £200 out of the County fund for the repair of the bridge. The minutes of Quarter Sessions of 1607 record 'it is agreed that there shall be Two hundred pounds levyed out of the whole Shire for the repayringe of a bridge called the middle bridge neere Romsey, and that if the same may be levied out of the averages in the handes of the Treasorers for Mayhemed Soldyers and other charitable uses, then it shalbe so levyed and the contrie thereof discharged' (HRO Q.O/I, 8).

It seems that the intention was to use money from the County fund – replacing it when the tax had been collected, but nothing appears to have been done until 1608 when the urgency of the task was perhaps recognised. The court ordered that it be 'speedilie repaired at the costes and charges of the whole countye, And that an equall rate and taxasion be made upon the inhabitants within the saied countie accordinge to the statute in that behalfe provided wherein the Inhabitants of the saied towne and hundred of Romsey are extraordinariely to contribute in respect of the benefite to the saied towne' (HRO Q.O/I, 43). Apparently these repairs were completed but two years later the court

was still waiting for a large part of the tax to be delivered. At the Easter Sessions 1610 the Justices were ordered to take whatever steps they considered necessary to obtain this money.

There is no further reference to this matter and little is known of the history of the bridge during the seventeenth century, apart from a few minor repairs recorded in Quarter Sessions records. Traditionally however, Middle Bridge was the bridge involved during the Civil War when in 1643 Parliamentary troops fought their way into the town over a bridge near Broadlands (Godwin 1904, 140).

Rebuilding, 1782–1784

By the late eighteenth century the condition of the bridge had again greatly deteriorated (HRO Q.M/10, 299) for in 1781 the minutes of the Michaelmas Quarter Sessions record 'that something is immediately and absolutely necessary to be done to the said bridge ... for the security and support thereof ... the said work not to exceed the sum of £300 in whole'. It was ordered 'that a chain of piles be driven across the river twelve or fourteen feet below the bridge and the interspace filled within three or four feet of the common stream with such materials as are not liable to wash away and such other means used for the security of the said bridge as shall appear ... best calculated for the purpose'. These repairs were completed using about sixty tons of stone (HRO Bridges, 6). However three months later in January 1782 the Justices of the Peace advertised in the local papers an adjourned Sessions to be held at the White Horse Inn, Romsey 'to consider what is further to be done respecting the repair of Middle Bridge' (HRO Q.O/19, 194). At that meeting the Justices received a letter from Lord Palmerston recommending Robert Mylne as architect of a new bridge.

Robert Mylne was a well-known London architect with connections throughout the country. His works include the planning of the Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal and much of the old town of Invereray where he was associated with the Duke of Argyll for over thirty years (Lindsay and Cosh 1973). In Hampshire, Middle Bridge was his first assignment; he also designed a bridge at Northam, surveyed the bridges of Christchurch and Ringwood, Highcliffe Castle and the harbours at Southampton, Gosport and at Portsmouth where he advised on plans for improvements. At Broadlands in 1783 he 'Gave Lord Palmerston advice on cornice and pediments of house, etc.' (Richardson 1955, 121). By 1780 he had attended some thirty-eight bridges – designing at least fifteen and ranging from the famous Blackfriars Bridge over the River Thames to the humble foot bridge.

Lord Palmerston recommended Mylne as 'an experienced architect conversant in bridge building' (HRO Q.M/10, 312) and the Justices lost no time in acting on his advice ordering that 'Mylne be immediately applied to requesting him to attend at Romsey as soon as possible ... and to inform the county whether the said bridge can be safely repaired or whether it will be necessary to rebuild'. Documents in the Hampshire Record Office include Mylne's report on the condition of the old bridge and his complete instructions on the building of a new bridge. As these are of historical and architectural interest they will be quoted as fully as possible. Mylne's diary (Richardson 1955) records that he was at Romsey on March 4th and on March 13th he sent in a report on Romsey Bridge, advising against its repair. He writes (Bridges, 4)

'... it is highly improper to proceed to the repairing of the same on account of the General bad State in which the whole of the work is at present either on account of its old age or other Circumstances and that to repair in its present Form of three Arches and two Piers standing in such deep Water and in so violent a Current will cost as much if not more money than if it was rebuilt of a proper form less bulky and more convenient to the Passage over it and under it And after all if

it was so repaired it would be still be liable hereafter to the same disorders which have brought it to ruin without one single improvement on the passage of the publick over it which the Business and Traffick of the present Age require.

The Whole Bridge from end to end leans and inclines down the river 9 Inches out of an Upright and level across the same This must be owing to a general failure in the foundation and that by the great Velocity of the Water having scooped out a very deep hole below the Bridge and removed the Strata of Ground which supported and maintained the Soil on which the structure itself stands and is charged.

The side Walls of the Bridge with the parapetts erected on the Back of the Arches have expanded and widened 6 Inches the original breadth of the bridge from 13 feet and have split the Arches longtitudinally from end to end on both sides of the bridge so as to detach a foot or 18 Inches of the Stone Work from the middle part of the Arches, One of these parts on the South side of the Westernmost Arch is down and shews what is the internal state of all the others.

The Middle Arch is in a worse state than all the others for besides the Cracks or Rents along each side of it as abovementioned it has another Rent from Corner to Corner diagonally. This is owing to the Pier next the Town having inclined down the River more than the General Inclination of the other parts of the Work.

Besides these general Points in which the Whole Construction is affected there are partial defects in the Piers Arches and Abutments which are too Numerous to mention here. Enough has been said to shew it will be unwise to think of repairing this Work and that of Course the proceedings hitherto carried on are very improper and without having a settled principle for their Intention have run and would have run the County to a great Expence without the prospect of obtaining an adequate advantage. The method which has been followed is as improper as the End for which it was applyed and thereby much Money has been Consumed by Ignorance.'

It is interesting to note the style of the original 3-arched stone bridge as described in this passage by Mylne. His report continues:

'... I now proceed to State what would be in my Opinion a proper Method of Proceedings for the County to take in this Business all Circumstances considered.

In the first place a Temporary Bridge (merely a scaffold) should be constructed below the present Bridge and to which I understand Lord Palmerston will give his Consent. The said Bridge to be erected by a responsible Person under Contract to maintain the same and to remove it when done with at his own Expence the making the Approaches and Fences thereof not being forgot.

2ndly To take down the whole Superstructure to the Springing of the Arches and the Materials thereof to be sorted at the same time into Servicable, and what may not be so. The Ashler Stone by itself and the Rubble and Gravel used at once in and removed to the approaches of the Temporary Bridge.

3dly To erect one single Arch over the whole Opening of the 3 Arches and two Piers of 46 or 48 Feet in Width which will be five or seven feet more Water Way than that of the Present Bridge which is only 41 Feet take all the Arches together.

4thly To do this at the least Expence the present butments may serve as a part of the New Structure and left to be worked up in and make a part of the new Ones. The Spaces under the butment Arches will contain a New Work when built up against the Face of the old Work. By this means a Sufficient Breadth of Bridge may be obtained and no expence incurred in pulling up the old Foundations or digging for new ones.

5thly The new Butments surrounding embracing and containing the whole of the old

Butments and being brought up to a proper level, The Centre for building the new Arch may be constructed on and be supported by the two old Piers: And lastly the New Arch be erected of a proper form without any of the probable precarious, or contingent Expences which in these sort of Works run away with a great deal of Money.

This is the best and only advice I have to give on this occasion ....

In a general View of the matter and considering the Value of stone from the Isle of Wight the price of Oak Timber and labour in general I think the Expence of such a Work will not amount to less than 1400£.'

This amount made no allowance for the wings and walls at each end of the bridge or for '... the works of the foundations from the Common Water downwards, together with the Piles, dams, Pumping or throwing out Water for the Construction of the new parts of the two Butments as well as the removal of the two old Piers out of the Water Way of the River.' (HRO Bridges, 8.)

Mylne's report was considered by the Justices at the Easter Sessions where it was decided that 'a new bridge is absolutely necessary'. The court approved of his design and ordered the erection of a 'stone bridge consisting of one arch' with the request that Mylne undertake the building of it. This he refused but offered to direct and survey the work as it progressed.

His diary records that on April 8th he sent 'a design of 2 plans, one elevation, and 2 sections (all washed neat) for Romsey Bridge and wrote on method of executing and contracting for building the same'. (Richardson 1955, 117.) Unfortunately these plans cannot be traced but his detailed instructions to the stonemason for building the new bridge read as follows:

'As soon as a Temporary Bridge shall be made and Constructed and found by some Trial fit and Commodious for the Publick Passage the whole Works of the old Bridge shall be pulled down to the Medium Surface of the Water ... leaving so much however of the Mason Work of the butment as may be deemed Sound and Proper to be left and made a part of the New Butments.

All the Parts of these Butments above Water up to the springing of the Arches and on the Haunches thereof shall be good solid Ashler of Swanage Stone well squared with every joint breaking bond with those of the Course below 6 Inches at least and no Course to be less than a foot thick.

The Rim and whole breadth of the Arch throughout the Soffite thereof shall be executed in Courses no less than a foot thick each and the thickness of the Arch not to be less than 21 Inches from the Soffite to the Back thereof every part of each Stone being compleat in the whole Bed thereof to that demension without defect although the rough End thereof upwards may be more than this demension And each Course to be worked true of an equal thickness from End to End exactly and true to the Mould of the Arch whose Radius is thirty feet No cross Joints in the said Arch to be within six Inches of that of the Course on each side of it.

The Bands in the Rim or back of the Arch shall be worked with the level in front and according to the true sweep or Circle of the Arch the Stone thereof not to be less than 18 Inches from the face inward and two feet and an half stretching longways.

Both fronts of the Bridge to be Executed alike in all Respects except as to the Wings and Walls at each End which are not part of these Particulars.

The Spandrill parts over the haunches of the Arches the Square parts with the Circular pannells therein over the Butments shall be executed with Square Ashler of Isle of Wight Stone set in level Courses not less than ten Inches in height 15 Inches in Depth from the Face inwards and stretching in front 18 Inches at least along the Courses.

Behind the said Ashler Work last men-

tioned and also behind the fatia over the same the Spandrell Walls shall be constructed of sound Ruble Work carefully put together and composed of the old Stone taken down from the old Work which Walls shall be four feet thick from the face of the Ashler work inwards and having the tails of the said Ashler Stone projecting into and worked up with the same in a sound but irregular manner.

The said Rubble Work to be levelled and Grouted at each Course of the Ashler Work and fatia.

The fascia or Band along the Whole Length shall be executed of Swanage Stone a foot in Breadth with two Inches and a half projection ¾ of an Inch Drip; and of Stones not less than 20 Inches in Depth inwards and stretching two feet along the Extent thereof each Cross Joint to have a Nine Inch Cramp let in and run with lead.

The Parapets to be executed of Square Solid Ashler of Swanage Stone in Courses of one thickness not less than 12 Inches in height and two feet and a half Long and each Stone to be crampt with an Eight Inch Cramp run with lead.

The Coping to be worked with the Mouldings, projection inwards and drips on the Back thereof of One Inch Height and executed with Portland Stone in lengths not less than 3 feet with a Cramp one foot long let in each Cross Joint.

All the outer face of the Work exposed to the open Air to be worked fair with plain Work The Soffite of the Arch to be Stript with the point of the Tool, longways of the Courses and the Joints neatley pointed with Stiff mortar after the Centre is Struck and taken down.

The fascia to be worked broad tooled up and down across the same. The Justices are to be at Liberty of cutting an Inscription on one side and the Arms of the County on the other if they shall think proper to order the same at their own expence.

All the Cross Joints on the Back of the projecting parts of the Butments and also of the Coping shall be run flush with Lead and well beat and fastened in with a Tool.

The Joints of the Ashler Work in the Butments above the Water shall be executed with good Tarriss Mortar for 9 Inches in depth from the face inwards.

All the Mortar shall be composed in due Proportion of good clean screened Lime, and Sharp well washed and clean River Sand; The whole well beat and incorporated together.

After the Structure is finished the whole Stone Work to be cleaned down pointed and cleared of all Materials and Rubbish.'

Mylne also wrote detailed instructions to the carpenter (Bridges, 11) for a temporary wooden bridge to be built on Broadlands and the method of constructing and striking the centering on the new stone bridge. His instructions for building the temporary bridge read as follows:

'. . . on the South side of the present Bridge where the River is about 80 or 85 Feet broad little more or less.

The Bridge to consist of 4 Rows of Piles from side to side of the River each row 5 Feet distant from one another and each Pile at Eight Feet distant from one another.

The Piles to be 9 Inches square Pointed and well drove into the Bottom of the River 5 Feet at least: The two Middle Rows of Piles to be cut of 3 feet above the level of the water and the outer side Rows of Piles to wit one each side to have their heads left 8 Feet 6 Inches above the Water. A plate or Bearer 8 Inches Square shall be laid one to each 4 Piles up and down the River upon the Heads of the two middle Piles and well fastened with treenels to the same.

On these plates or transverse Bearers which will be 8 in Number long bearers or Girders 10 Inches deep and Eight Inches thick shall be laid Edgways the whole length of the Bridge and extending six feet on each Bank.

These Bearers or Girders must be 4 in Number corresponding to the four Rows of Piles above mentioned and lapt half and half into one another for 3 feet at each Butting Joint which must be over a Pile and well fastened together with treenels and Spikes.

The Bank and Shore of each side must be raised with small piles, Stones, Slabs of Oak, and other rough Materials to support the ends of the said Bridge and make the same sufficiently strong for the Stability of this Temporary Bridge and the passage way over it.

Upon these Bearers or Girders Slabs of Oak or any other strong Timber not less than 3 Inches thick in the middle part shall be laid across the Bridge so as to make a Floor 20 Feet broad from side to side of the River the said Timber or Slabs to be well spiked and fastened down to the long bearers.

At the outer Edge of this Floor and on each side shall be fastened and pinned down a Ribbon or Gravel piece 6 Inches Broad and four Inches thick from end to end of the Bridge.

The whole of this Floor so constructed shall be covered with hard Rubbish and Gravel, laid Convex in the middle and six Inches thick on a Medium well ramed and Beat together.

Along each side of this Bridge a Double Rail shall be fastened to the heads of the said Row of Piles so as to be 4 feet 6 Inches high from the Gravel and to have short uprights to steady the same in the Spaces between each Pile.

From the Gates of the Bridge to the Gates of Lord Palmerston's Park at one end, and to the side of the Turnpike Road at the other a Temporary Rough Post and Rail shall be set down on both sides in an easy circular manner so as to conduct the publick passage out of the road at the West and into it again, at the Bark Mill towards the East.

The whole of this Carpenter Work may be executed with any sort of Materials old or new provided they are sound and the whole is sufficiently strong.

The approaches at each end shall be formed within the said Rails with Gravel into a Temporary Road and made where necessary into a strong support and bearing so that Wheels of heavy Carriages shall not sink into any part thereof.

The said Temporary Bridge railing fences and Gravelled approaches shall be maintained and kept in good Order during the whole time of the Pulling down the old Bridge and the Building the New Bridge and when the latter is completely finished and the Publick passage has been made over the same in one Month thereafter the said Temporary Bridge shall be taken to Pieces and removed with all Convenient Dispatch by and at the Expence of the Contractor.

And the whole Materials thereof including fences shall be considered as his Property.

The Gravel and Rubbish to be carted and conveyed away and the Situation of the Whole to be left in the same manner as before the Construction thereof.

When the Temporary Bridge shall be opened and used for the publick passage way Fences of Post and double Rail shall be placed across the Road at both Ends of the Bridge, 5 feet high so as to prevent any dangerous accident during the Reconstruction of the Stone Bridge and to admit free access for Workmen to both ends of the Bridge with Materials etc. and a free passage way up the River on the West Side thereof.'

The Justices advertised the work in the Winchester, Portsmouth, Salisbury and Reading newspapers and the following tenders were received:

1. Mr. George Goldwyer Hookey for the Stone Masons Work at 750–0–0
2. Mr. Christopher Routlidge for the Carpenters Work at 225–0–0

3. Mr. Henry Weddel Stone Mason Mr. John Hayes Carpenter for the whole of Carpenters and Masons Work 1247–0–0
4. Mr. Thomas Mackrel for the Carpenters Work 220–0–0
5. Mr. Joseph Brownjohn for the Carpenters Work ... 210–0–0
6. Mr. William Grover for the whole of Carpenters and Masons Work 1554–13–0

At the request of the Justices, Mylne attended a meeting on June 4th to consider the tenders and choose the craftsmen concerned, with the result that George Hookey of Southampton and Joseph Brownjohn of Romsey were given the work of rebuilding Middle Bridge. Both had to sign contracts (Bridges, 9–11, 12–14) and give security for the work to be satisfactorily completed.

Timothy Jones of Romsey was appointed by the Court as superintendent of works (Bridges, 15, 18). He was to receive 10/6 per week out of county funds and to work under the direction of the Earl of Banbury – a Justice of the Peace. His orders were to 'inspect the Works and the Number of Labourers employed' and to approve and verify on oath the bills delivered to the Court for payment.

On September 30th Mylne's diary records 'Begun throwing water out of foundation. Found it very easy, and the Coffer Dam very tight. Determined the foundations to be 6 feet below.' and on October 1st 'Laid the first stone of Romsey New Bridge with Lord Palmerston.'

Palmerston's diary (HRO 27M60) records that during this period Mylne stayed at Broadlands arriving on September 30th and leaving on October 9th. On October 8th the architect wrote the following progress report and this was presented to the Michaelmas Sessions (Bridges, 16).

'... the workmen have been employed first of all to make a Coffer dam round the Foundations and inclosing the Work new as well as old of the West Butment. That piece of Business done (which has been Executed in a very compleat manner) and all other matters being put into a proper train of preparation Piles have been driven in a very substantial manner in the Area or foundation part of the said Butment.

On Monday last the Water was thrown out of the said Inclosure and the Ground and Soil Part natural of peat or hardened Moss and part of factitious matter thrown in at the several Repairs of this Work being removed or taken away: the foundation of the new work was laid 6 feet below the level of the Water in the River. This was done by working Pumps made for the purpose of a very easy construction which once the Water being thrown out in the morning two men could with one pump keep the Work perfectly dry the whole day. The masons then proceeded to lay the foundation Courses with the Stone purchased last year for the repairs, And two Courses of the said Work are now finished. The Work under Water of this Butment on the Westside will therefore be soon done.

I have thereupon given directions that all the dams pileings etc shall be removed on that Side of the River in order to make as much waterway as possible for the Course of the Stream And in the beginning of next spring I propose to begin and perform the Works of the Butment on the East side of the River in the same manner and in a similar method of Operation as that in which this Butment on the west is now performing.

I have ordered Bills for these Extra Works to be prepared every Quarter and made up for three months successively. When they are collected I shall Examine them and transmit them regularly to you for payment. Something must be done with respect to the present situation of the Bark Mill the Stream of

which will be an empidement to the Executing the Works of the End next the Town.'

The Bark Mill was situated on the south east corner of the old bridge with the mill stream running into the Test close by the foundations and was an obstruction to the building of the eastern side of the new bridge. Quarter Sessions minutes record that 'the concern of diverting the stream be referred to some future adjournment' (Bridges, 16). Records do not refer to this matter again but it is known from a copy of an agreement (HRO 27M60) that the stream was diverted at the county's expense via a new channel cut through Broadlands, and Mylne's final report shows that this work was included in the overall cost of the bridge.

For the next two years Quarter Sessions records mention Middle Bridge only in connection with payments to the craftsmen concerned but on April 8th 1783 Mylne's diary records 'Called on Lord Banbury and gave him a report to be laid before the Quarter Session at Alston'. This report is not extant and county records make no reference to it.

Mylne was at Romsey several times through 1783 and 1784 staying at Broadlands from October 31st to November 5th 1783. On October 5th 1784 he sent the Justices a report on the complications of rebuilding Middle Bridge (Bridges, 27). The bridge was he states one of his most difficult assignments. To begin with he had been given to understand from a reliable source that the subsoil was of gravel or other hard material and on this information he had formed his plans for rebuilding the bridge; however he soon discovered it was nothing but a depth of peat and on this he had to stand the new structure. As an architect of great ingenuity he was able to overcome the problem but the extra work involved added considerably to the final cost.

Another difficulty was the position of various properties around the bridge. To the east was the bark mill on the southern flank and two houses opposite on the north; the Bark Mill belonged to Broadlands, and this was demolished by Palmerston as were the two houses opposite which he bought for the purpose, giving the necessary land to widen the road and eastern entrance to the bridge. On the west was a similar difficulty – lawns of a house to the north and Broadlands estate to the south – but here again Palmerston gave land so that the road could be widened and the whole bridge satisfactorily completed.

Demolition of the Bark Mill enabled the mill stream to be moved away from the foundations of the bridge and this was an additional burden on the overall cost of the bridge as Mylne explains in his final report:

'. . . I have Erected and Compleated a New Bridge over the Teste at Romsey and . . . have to the best of my power and Abilitys finished an Undertaking of as much a Difficulty as I have Generally met with. (Pl. 1.)

The Total Expence of it by the Account hereunto annexed amounts to £3039 18 3.

At first setting of I reported to you the Old Bridge could not possibly stand any longer and it was pulled down to its foundations.

I reported pointedly that the Bridge Works could only be Contracted for from the Surface of the Water Upwards and by drawings Confined to the limits of 4 Points one at each Corner since at that period of Time it was impossible to know how the Wings could be extended beyond and through the various Incumbrances that then fettered its Enlargement for the publick Convenience and above these and within these Boundaries (as to the Extent of the Work) Contracts were formed for £960 including a Temporary Bridge.

The Old Bridge required very little pulling Down It was a Compleat Ruin for when the new Foundations were Sunk inclosing the Old Ones they were found totally incapable of Repair.

On forming the Scheme for rebuilding the Bridge the Intelligence most to be depended

on represented that there was a Stratum of Gravel or other hard Substance at a certain Depth.

The Fact turned out quite otherwise there is nothing but an Endless Depth of Peat and on that Substance the new Bridge is Erected and stands very well – But then the Means to make it stand securely became of course a material Cause of Expence in Addition to all that was to have been and is under water.

The Bridge being Erected attention was paid to the Wings of it, in Order to support the Road leading to and from it On Getting out of some of the Difficultys Wings of a Quarter of a Circle were adopted as the best form and least in Expence. They are built in that Manner all except one and in a rather Slight manner to save Expence.

Lord Palmerston on seeing the Difficultys which the Publick Convenience laboured under by the property (which we could not touch) being so near the old Work very Generously came forward and gave us every Assistance publick Spirit could Exhibit.

The Passage of the Old Bridge within the Parapetts was only 13½ Feet And the entrance leading to it was but 26 Feet barely. The present Bridge being made to the Enlarged Dimensions of 18 Feet for the advantage of the Publick the Approach or Entrance to it required a Suitable Width or Opening – Lord Palmerston gave up entirely a bark Mill, house over it and a kiln for Drying Bark besides divesting himself of this piece of Property he pulled it all down at his own Expence and Surrendered the scite thereof for the Opening at the South East Quarter and for the Wing Wall Extending 50 Feet from the Contract part of the Structure.

At the North East Quarter he purchased at a Considerable Expence two Dwelling Houses and pulled them down and Surrendered up as much of the Scite thereof as was Necessary for a Similar Opening on the West Side and for the same Sort of Circular wall on that Quarter.

At the South West Side he allowed me to take as much Ground of a Field as amounted to 100 Yards in Length and 30 Feet broad next the bridge so that the wing on that Quarter was extended to the same form and limits as the others already mentioned. This enabled the Road at the West End to be raised by being thus widened which never could have been done by reason of the lawness of the Old House on the North Side thereof.

To these Instances of Solid and Permanent Good done to the Publick in this work It is necessary to add that his Lordship has paid for all the additional Ornament and Embellishment on the Side fronting to Broadlands where the same is an Expence over and above the Work Contracted for.

The Bark Mill being totally removed an Opportunity was thereby Obtained of removing the Mill Stream at some Distance from the Bridge and to throw the Discharge of its Waters at a Distance from the Foundations.

This removal making a proper bed for it and Arching it over was a Considerable Cause of Expence but gave a Security to the Work at all times hereafter which could not otherwise have been obtained.

In this manner and for these Reasons the Works have been Conducted and in lieu of the narrow Confined Passage cross the River Teste in which the Publick was much hampered the Publick will hereafter enjoy a Wide and easy access better Suited to the great Traffick and business carried on in this Quarter of the Country.'

Quarter Sessions records show that Mylne received £251.2s.0d. for his work on Middle Bridge and Hookey and Brownjohn £1731 19s.4d. and £1041.5s.10d respectively. The blacksmith Richard Pearce was paid £78 6s.11d. and the foreman Timothy Jones £30.14s.0d.

It is interesting to note the extent of Palmerston's involvement in the rebuilding of Middle Bridge. Firstly it was he who

Plate 1. Middle Bridge, Romsey (from *Views of Romsey*, B. Bedford, c.1910)

recommended the county to employ an architect, naming Robert Mylne; he then gave permission for the temporary bridge and road to be placed on his property. He disposed of a bark mill, its house and drying kiln, demolishing all at his own expense; he bought two houses, demolished them and gave land to the county on three sides of the bridge. He entertained the architect at Broadlands and four times went to see Mylne in London, writing in his diary on April 7th and 21st 1782, and again on April 18th and 30th 1784 – 'Rode to Mr. Mylnes at New River Head . . . '. He also paid for some extra work on the south face of the bridge facing Broadlands and one wonders why he should go to so much trouble and expense on behalf of a public bridge.

A possible answer is the situation of Middle Bridge: it lies on the boundary of the Broadlands estate at the end of a stretch of water and within sight of the house. Palmerston was particularly interested in the effects of water in landscape gardening (Connell 1957, 25) and this was an age when the well designed bridge was an integral part of the landscape. Mylne created a bridge of one arch to span the Test, of a simple but elegant design with a decorative band running the length of each face. Composed of three types of limestone – the spandrels and square parts over the abutments in creamy coloured Isle of Wight stone, the remainder of the bridge in pale grey Swanage stone with Portland coping – resulting in a durable pale grey bridge with a creamy central area and a line of off white

coping running along the top. The bridge was not only an improvement for the travelling public but a pleasing addition to the view at Broadlands.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the ever increasing volume of traffic had become too much for the bridge situated as it was at the end of Middlebridge Street. Its narrow width and gradient of one in eleven created a bottle-neck thus increasing the congestion in the narrow streets of Romsey.

In 1912 plans were drawn for its rebuilding; however at a public meeting held in Romsey it was decided that the bridge was more of a nuisance than an actual danger and as the county surveyor had reported there were no signs of its collapsing the matter was dropped. By 1928 a new bridge was necessary and the County Council planned its reconstruction as part of the proposed Romsey By-Pass. The bridge, designed by W. J. Taylor M.I.C.E., kept as closely as possible to the original design but was widened and the gradient reduced. It was enlarged to the south and built of ferro-concrete with the stone of the old bridge refixed to the new structure. Rebuilding was completed by July 1931.

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due to Miss J. M. H. Mylne; the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives; Mr. D. F. Lamb of the Hampshire Record Office; Mrs. S. Hill of the Southampton Record Office; Mr. A. W. Jacomb, County Surveyor, and I am deeply indebted to my tutor Mrs. B. Peacock, Extra-Mural Studies University of Southampton.

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