

CROPREDY BRIDGE



The first written record of a bridge at Cropredy dates from 1312. This was written in Latin and relates to the construction or repair of the bridge. But we know that there would have been a bridge of some sort here before this time.

The original structure was probably a narrow packhorse bridge without parapets. The river would have been wider at this time and some traffic would have used the ford next to the bridge.

At the beginning of the Civil War the bridge was apparently in sound condition as it was crossed by Charles I and part of his army on the way from Edgecote to Edgehill in 1642.

It is possible that the bridge was restored in 1691. That date, with some initials (? S S or J J), appeared on a stone in the coping on the north side of the cutwater (a cutwater is a bulwark surrounding the supports of the bridge). This carved stone has been incorporated in the masonry of the new bridge (on the north side).

At the Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions held in 1776 a jury presented that:

‘a certain Common ancient Bridge over the River Charwell commonly called Cropredy Bridge being in the parishes of Cropredy and Wardington in the King’s Common Highway there leading from Brackley to Warwick on the first day of May in the sixteenth year of the reign of our sovereign lord King George the Third etc., was and yet is in great Decay broken and ruinous’ so that it was not possible to pass without great danger.

The parishes of Wardington and Cropredy were deemed to be responsible for the necessary repairs which took place in 1780. During this restoration the western arch was rebuilt and made rounded-headed, in contrast to the earlier eastern arch which was pointed.



Cropredy Bridge in the Early Nineteenth Century

The sketch above shows Cropredy Bridge, looking from the south east. If you look carefully you will see that the two arches are different. Note also the wooden rails carried by struts on either side of the bridge.

In 1886 the bridge was widened on the south side, the work being carried out by Thomas Cherry of Cropredy. When work was being done on the bridge at this time wooden piles were found a little further down stream than the present site, probably the remains of a former bridge.



We are also told that while Thomas Cherry was working on the bridge a flood occurred which demolished the scaffolding. This was washed down stream and when it was being retrieved and reinstalled they unearthed armour from the Civil War. This armour was put on display in Cropredy church.

By 1937 the bridge was becoming unstable as two large trees were forcing the cutwater away from the bridge itself. By this time the work had become the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council who decided to demolish the bridge and construct a new one, re-using much of the stone from the old bridge. It is interesting to note that during demolition they found evidence of an even older arched bridge below the present water level.

The inscriptions on the current bridge read:



BRIDGE BUILT 1314
BY THE
BISHOP OF LINCOLN
ALTERED 1691, 1780, 1886
RE-BUILT 1937

THE SITE OF THE
BATTLE OF CROPREDY
BRIDGE
JUNE 1644
FROM CIVIL WAR GOOD
LORD DELIVER US