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Site Name: **CARDIGAN BRIDGE.**

PRN: 5303

My Site File Ref. No.: CARD/BRDG

Site Type: Bridge

N. G. Ref.: SN 2177 2458

Period: Medieval; Post-Medieval; Modern

History:

A wooden bridge probably first spanned the Teifi at Cardigan soon after the establishment of the town in 1110. The original bridge was constructed of timber, and crossed the river immediately to the east of modern Gloster Row. It was certainly constructed before October 10th 1136, when it collapsed beneath the weight of fighting men (or fleeing Normans!) during the Battle of Crug Mawr:

"...When the bridge over the river Teifi was broken down, it was a wretched spectacle to see the townspeople passing to and fro across a bridge formed by the horrible mass of human corpses and horses drowned in the river..."

The bridge must have been rebuilt soon afterwards. Gerald de Barri (Geraldus Cambrensis) and Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury preached at the bridge-head in 1188, whilst recruiting for the Third Crusade, the site of the gathering subsequently being occupied by a new chapel. Repairs to the bridge were conducted at Royal expense in 1228. Maelgwn, the son of Maelgwn ap Rhys, destroyed the bridge in 1231 during the second of three attacks which he made on the town that year. The location of the bridge was moved to the present site as a result of this attack, having previously been closer to the church and too far away from the castle to be adequately defended.

The new wooden bridge was probably repaired in 1247. The same year, Miles de Hope, the retiring Constable of Cardigan Castle, was attacked on the bridge and robbed of his valuables by a Cardigan resident called John the Welshman. The bridge must have undergone numerous periodic repairs and replacements over the centuries that followed.

In 1598 George Owen of Henllys was accused that, as a commissioner nominated by the Council in the Marches to levy a rate for the repair of the bridge, he had appropriated the funds raised and sold inferior timber from his own woods for the work. During the course of construction, the new bridge had collapsed, according to George Owen and to James Bowen of Llwyngwair, not because of poor timber, but because of the force of the river "...for want of heft upon it..." The carpenters

employed on the job confirmed that the oak, from Pencelli Woods, which had been bought from George Owen for 6s. 8d. per tree, was sound, and that all Owen had received was a fair price for the timber. In 1605 the sum of £9. 6s. 8d. came from the inhabitants of Pembrokeshire towards repairs to Cardigan Bridge. The bridge was illustrated on John Speed's map of Cardigan, drawn in about 1610. On March 10th 1639 Rees Gwyn wrote his will, leaving a sum of money towards the repair of the bridge.

The bridge was built in stone for the first time in 1639, and much of that structure still remains standing. In 1641 Peter Haylin described it as a "...stone bridge sustained by several Arches..." On January 4th 1645, during the second Civil War battle being fought over possession of Cardigan Castle, Col. John Gerrard ordered his Royalist troops to demolish the greater part of the bridge, to prevent relieving forces from assisting the Parliamentary garrison in the Castle. On January 22nd 1645 the Parliamentary forces of Col. Laugharne crossed it using faggots of wood. In 1647 the inhabitants of Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire petitioned the *House of Commons*, stating that:

"...The bridge over the river Tivey, which was built about eight years ago at a cost of £1500, has been lately broken down by the enemy to the great hindrance to trade between the two counties...Pray that £500 may be speedily levied out of the delinquent's estates in the county for that purpose..."

On October 14th 1647 probate of the will of another Rees Gwyn left monies towards the repair of the bridge. It is likely that the bridge was repaired soon afterwards. In May 1666 Rees Gwyn the younger also left money in his will towards repairing the bridge. According to a plaque, W. Jones rebuilt an arch of the bridge in 1726 – possibly the centre arch. The brothers Samuel and Nathaniel Buck produced an illustration of Cardigan in 1741 which included the bridge. In 1759 Andrew Brice referred to it as "...a good stone bridge..." In 1796 Rev. James Burgess described it as '...a handsome bridge of five arches...' In 1808 Samuel Rush Meyrick curiously described the bridge as having seven arches. In August 1828 John Davies, a labourer, leapt from Cardigan Bridge for a bet, and was drowned. On August 6th 1830 John Morris was paid £20 for macadamising the bridge. The bridge is shown on John Wood's 1834 map of Cardigan. In 1845 James Bowen oversaw £4 worth of repairs to the bridge on behalf of the Pembrokeshire authorities. In June 1849 Cardiganshire allocated another £30 towards completing repairs. In 1852 a further £12. 7s. worth of repairs were conducted. The architect R. K. Penson conducted some repairs in October 1857. A sum of about £17 was spent by the Pembrokeshire authorities on repairs in 1858. Further repairs to the parapets were conducted in 1859. In 1865 a grant of £35 was being sought to be allocated towards more repairs. On July 5th 1867 the following item appeared in a report in the '*Pembrokeshire Herald*':

"...Cardigan Bridge-

At the last Quarter Sessions I made a report (with an estimate of repairs) of a flight of steps near the end of this bridge leading to Saint Dogmells. At that time it was thought the county was not liable for the repairs of these steps, and I was requested to make a sketch of the position of the steps with regard to the bridge. The drawing is appended to this report, and from all the information I have been able to

gather it appears that the steps were erected at the expense of the county, but I cannot find that they have been repaired, because up to this time there has been no necessity for their repairs..."

On November 5th 1869 there were proposals to widen the bridge. On July 8th 1870 there were discussions held concerning the upkeep of the bridge. Cardiganshire claimed that Pembrokeshire were solely responsible for the upkeep! Pembrokeshire offered £500, on the condition that no more payments would be sought at any future time. This was announced at a Rolls Court on Chancery Lane, presided over by Mr. James of Pantaeson, Monington. On November 4th 1870 it was proposed to widen the bridge by six feet.

On June 9th 1871 the bridge was being surveyed prior to widening. Alterations commenced in May 1872, widening the structure by six feet on the downstream side. Mr. Lewis of Carmarthen conducted the work to plans by James Szlumper, the County Surveyor. On May 31st 1872 the following item appeared in the '*Pembrokeshire Herald*':

"...CARDIGAN BRIDGE.

A meeting of the committee of magistrates of the counties of Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire was held in Cardigan on Saturday, when the tender of Mr Lewis, contractor, Carmarthen, was accepted for the widening of Cardigan bridge, each of the above counties paying one moiety. The inhabitants of both counties will be gratified at the conclusion of this long pending affair; it will be a great boon to the public (pedestrians included), and considering the sad state of the bridge, it is next door to a miracle that accidents do not occur daily..."

Work began on the widening and improvements on June 24th 1872 by Mr. Lewis of Carmarthen, contractor. On 28th June 1872 the following item appeared in the '*Cardigan & Tivy-Side Advertiser*':

"...CARDIGAN BRIDGE. The alterations of this bridge commenced on Monday last. In consequence of the recesses on the opposite side to that being taken down being filled up with stones, &c., the difficulty of crossing is for the present greatly increased, and we trust those having charge of the undertaking will take proper precautions, more especially on Saturdays, to so order matters that no accident may occur..."

Widening was completed on January 3rd 1874. On July 6th 1877, £60 worth of damage was caused to the bridge by a traction engine. Steel bars were inserted into the bridge to strengthen it in 1878. By April 14th 1893 there was a urinal on Cardigan Bridge! On June 1st 1894 complaints were made about the inadequate pump and flushing system. On March 18th 1898 the Cardigan Borough Council debated the removal of the urinal from the bridge. Removal of the urinal was agreed on September 8th 1902.

On October 18th 1907 it was proposed to widen the northerly approach to the bridge, and this was done between August 28th and October 8th 1908 at a cost of £150.

On October 11th 1912 the widening of the east side of the bridge was considered. On September 21st 1917 the following item appeared in the 'Cambrian News':

"...CARDIGAN. A tramp, who stated that he had been working on farms in Pembrokeshire, is alleged to have committed a sensational act at Cardigan on Saturday evening. He was seen too be sitting on the parapet of the bridge and to suddenly drop into the water 26ft. below. The tide was out. The man landed in about a foot of water and was rescued by two men in a boat. But for slight injuries to his legs, he was none the worse. He was brought before the Cardigan magistrates on Monday when he expressed sorrow. The police found two notes in his pocket, on which was written "No friends, no home, no heart, no work," and "John Harding, aged 60, born Haselburry, near Crewkerne, Somersetshire. Nothing to live for. Good-bye, boss, friends, one and all." He was committed for trial at Quarter Sessions..."

In June 1925 a crumbling section of wall on the east side of the bridge, was repaired. On January 4th 1935 Cardiganshire County Council considered widening and strengthening the bridge. On October 4th 1935 there were calls for a new bridge, 40 feet wide, to be constructed, or for the widening of the upstream side of the existing structure. On November 8th 1935, it was agreed to widen the bridge to 40 feet on the downstream side.

On January 10th 1936 it was announced that the bridge would be widened the following year, to a width of forty feet, creating a 30ft carriageway. On February 19th 1954 investigations were made into a crack at the north end of the bridge. Experts declared it "...good for a century yet..." On June 17th 1955 Major Eric Gordon died attempting to save Miss Iris James, who fell into the river from the bridge and was drowned. By February 2nd 1962 vandals had flung coping stones from the parapet walls into the river. On July 6th 1962 further repairs to the bridge were proposed as stones were falling and there were said to be cracks and gaps in the buttresses, and began within a week. There was said to be a hole in the masonry.

On March 15th 1963 the replacement of the bridge was considered. On July 15th 1966 replacing the road bridge was considered again. The adjacent Cardigan Footbridge was officially opened by the Mayor of Cardigan, Cllr. Owen M. Owen on July 23rd 1976. On April 15th 1977 the installation of permanent traffic lights on the bridge was considered. By September 9th 1977 the Welsh Office were planning to widen the bridge and work began in December. Work was completed before June 2nd 1978 at a cost of £90, 000. The bridge was 'listed' in 1992. It was already a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

On August 18th 1994 it was revealed that erosion was damaging the bridge through undermining. In September 1995 it was announced that the bridge would be closed for three weeks for repairs. On February 11th 1998 it was revealed that the bridge needed £900, 000 worth of stabilising works, which began later that year. On June 16th 1999 it was revealed that over £1 million was to be spent on reinforcing the bridge. In August that year, 'Alun Griffiths (Contractors) Ltd.', began work on stabilising the bridge, which involved laying concrete slabs between sheet pile walls to both sides of the structure. Unhappily, the 17th Century timber and stone under-piece beneath each arch was mechanically removed, and concrete laid down. Part of the parapet wall was damaged by vandals in late 2002 and this was repaired early in

2004. The bridge was closed briefly for minor repairs in 2015 and January 2016. In November 2018 concerns were raised about the potential of damage being caused to the bridge by flood debris, including fallen trees., and the problem was not resolved before the end of January 2019.

Description:

In 1992 the bridge was described by CADW:

“...Probably early C18 road bridge, widened 1872-3. Blue lias rubble stone 5-arch bridge with recessed cut-stone voussoirs to arches, cutwaters on both sides, those on west obscured in 1872-3 widening. On east side cutwaters are carried up full height to form pedestrian refuges, except for one to south of centre which is capped short with plaque above ‘This arch was built in the year 1726, W Jones’, but plaque may be reset as cutwater is shown full height in mid C18 prints. A small flood arch is at south end.

On west side original arches can clearly be seen under 1872-3 more elliptical arches, springing from the cutwaters. Similar cut stone voussoirs...”

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