

Bridge of the Month 119. Nov 2020 Cowley Bridge

25 years I have lived in Exeter and for the first time I got up close to [Cowley Bridge](#). This week I had occasion to. It's a rather grand bridge, designed by James Green, the first County Bridge Engineer of Devon in 1808. Green was a pupil of John Rennie and built the first large span bridges in Devon.



The spans at Cowley, 50, 55 and 50 ft were the biggest over the Exe at the time.



Here we can see the general form, the different stones, and the detailing.



The first thing I noticed on my visit was this crack over the western pier. It looks worthy of note but not a sign of real damage.



Some of these colour differences are changes due to weathering, others are different stones.



The piers are of granite, the better to resist the effects of the river.



I believe the arch to be a veined Limestone. It doesn't seem to take well to runoff from the volcanic stone above which are the volcanic Trap, available from various quarries in the neighbourhood.



Those big slabs are demanding of the quarry. The two courses below seem to be the same as the stone below, where those over the pier seem quite different.



On the north side, the weather has had a go at the wall stone somewhat.



A broader view suggests that the spandrel might be tilting out but I think it is just erosion of the voussoirs.



No sign of a crack in the niche on the north, but is that a step in the arch above?



A closer look says no, just more weathering.



The vegetation on the northern cutwater is quite something. I suspect that the surface is flat enough for soil to deposit when the river is high. With the natural drawdown through the width, it is likely that the river covers this side when it doesn't cover the other.



And finally, the north side of the west abutment where vegetation, both surrounding and on the bridge itself, is really taking a hold. There is an urgent need here for a bit of gardening.