

Bridge of the Month 147, March 2023

Old Bridge, Bridgend

[Old Bridge, in Bridgend](#), may be medieval in part – but if so mostly in the part that is enclosed between two buildings and inaccessible. [Wikipedia](#) refers to an Engineering Timelines article, sadly currently unavailable (they [appeal for help](#) in getting the site back online), and stating that it was built around 1425 and replaced an earlier structure.



In the late 1920s or early 1930s Jervoise wrote:

“The bridge at Bridgend has been rebuilt since the sixteenth century and is of eighteenth-century design. Only two arches, spanning a distance of 27 yards, are now visible, but from the pair of massive cutwaters on the upstream side it appears that other arches must exist, but are hidden by the surrounding houses. The arches are segmental in shape, and the width between the parapets is about 9 feet.”

Jervoise’ limited observations can be puzzling. Here, he refers to “two massive cutwaters on the upstream side” – but they don’t seem unusually massive, and there is also one on the downstream side that isn’t mentioned. Perhaps the point is that the second cutwater upstream implies at least a third arch. The same location on the downstream side is obscured by a building. The significance of the 16C reference is also unclear – did he assume a construction date?

In the 16th century [Leland](#) listed “bridges on the Ogor [Ogmore]” as including, “Pennebont [Bridgend] of 4. arches of st[one a] ___ miles lower.” This is before the two spans were combined into one. Were there five spans at this time, with one already hidden? Or was there more rebuilding between Leland’s visit and the 18th century?

It is immediately obvious from the photo above that the two visible spans are unequal. My first thought was that two spans were replaced with one, and indeed it seems that a flood took the pier out in 1775, and this was presumably the trigger for the 18th century work.

The construction of the two spans differs enough to suggest that the smaller span was not rebuilt at the same time as the large, but whether it is of 15th century vintage I wouldn't like to say.

The small span is slightly distorted, with a flattening over the crown and a bulge to the right, away from the large span.

The metal fence in this photo is part of a cantilevered walkway along the river bank, necessary because buildings and private yards come right up to the river wall.



Note the silt and gravel (and general detritus) under the smaller span. If we look upriver, we can see the reason for that. We have expensive looking hard engineering works, holding the course of a river that wants to move. It can't get past the sheet piles, but it can still dig down on that side and dump material on the inside of the bend.

Close examination of this view from upstream, like that above from downstream, shows a patchwork of masonry, suggesting some degree of rebuilding.



The concrete skirt at the base of the pier isn't level. How did that come about? It rather looks as if the base of the concrete might be visible with clear space between here and the current river bed.



Looking to the east, an uneven walkway takes us back out to the street. Under here lies the main novelty in this bridge – the buildings either side were built hard against the bridge elevations, hiding further spans from view.

In fact, the discovery in 2015 of one of these arches behind the internal wall covering in the basement of one of the shops suggests that the building walls were built not hard against the elevations, but directly on them.

[Wales Online has a couple of photos](#), not easy to interpret.

They also claim that the bridge was, “Built in 1425 to help pilgrims on their way to St David's cross the River Ogmore.” I wonder what the evidence for this is, other than that the church was instrumental in the construction of most substantial bridges at this time.