



Bridge of the Month No68, August 2016 Charles IV Bridge, Prague



Preliminaries

Here we are two thirds of the way through year six and still no shortage of bridges. But first an important announcement.

On 3rd October, Freyssinet, assisted by Bill Harvey Associates, will be Lifting the arch of a bridge at Moco Farm in a trial to save money on increasing clearances for electrification. There is a fuller description [here](#).

If you haven't already heard, there is a new version of Archie-M issued and a new mailing list to keep you up to date with [sign up here](#) for emails and a link to the new version.

And now on to this month's bridge, pdf version in the archive at <https://goo.gl/crU7aZ>

Charles IV Bridge

I have long wanted to visit this, though I knew far too little about it. [A conference of bridge historians](#) gave me an opportunity, and what an opportunity! This magnificent bridge, even from a distance, needs a modern camera with sweep panorama capability to capture most of it. There are several more spans to the right hidden over land these days. The river is, of course, the Vltava, immortalised by Smetana as Ma Vlast. It is also worth looking at [Google Maps](#) to see the scale.



Those really are people on the bridge. The spans are up to about 23m, In Britain, perhaps Framwellgate in Durham is the nearest with 2 spans of 5m but it really rather pales against this.

The pedestrians become more visible when we concentrate on one span. This one is actually quite distorted.

Like any structure of this age, it has been much repaired. The most recent efforts are condemned quite vigorously on the web with collections of video and photographs. It does seem rather sad that it didn't get the full conservation care but there is still much of value.

We actually know the name of the man who began the work Peter Parler was recruited by Charles IV to build his new cathedral. He had trained with his father who was foreman at Cologne then Gmünd, Augsburg and Ulm. Peter was working in Nuremberg on the Imperial Chapel of the Virgin Mary, founded by Charles. He took charge of the cathedral in Prague in 1356 at the tender age of 23. He was architect and the leading carver of wood as well as stone.



The bridge was begun in 1357 as a replacement for the Judith bridge built between 1158 and 1172 but damaged by flood in 1342.

Many spans have been reworked at some level. The one shown above is obviously more modern stonework. Luckily, some of the most interesting work is over land at the western side.



Here is much older looking stone work with each course of different thickness matching whatever beds were available in the quarry. The scale of the spans is particularly evident in this picture.



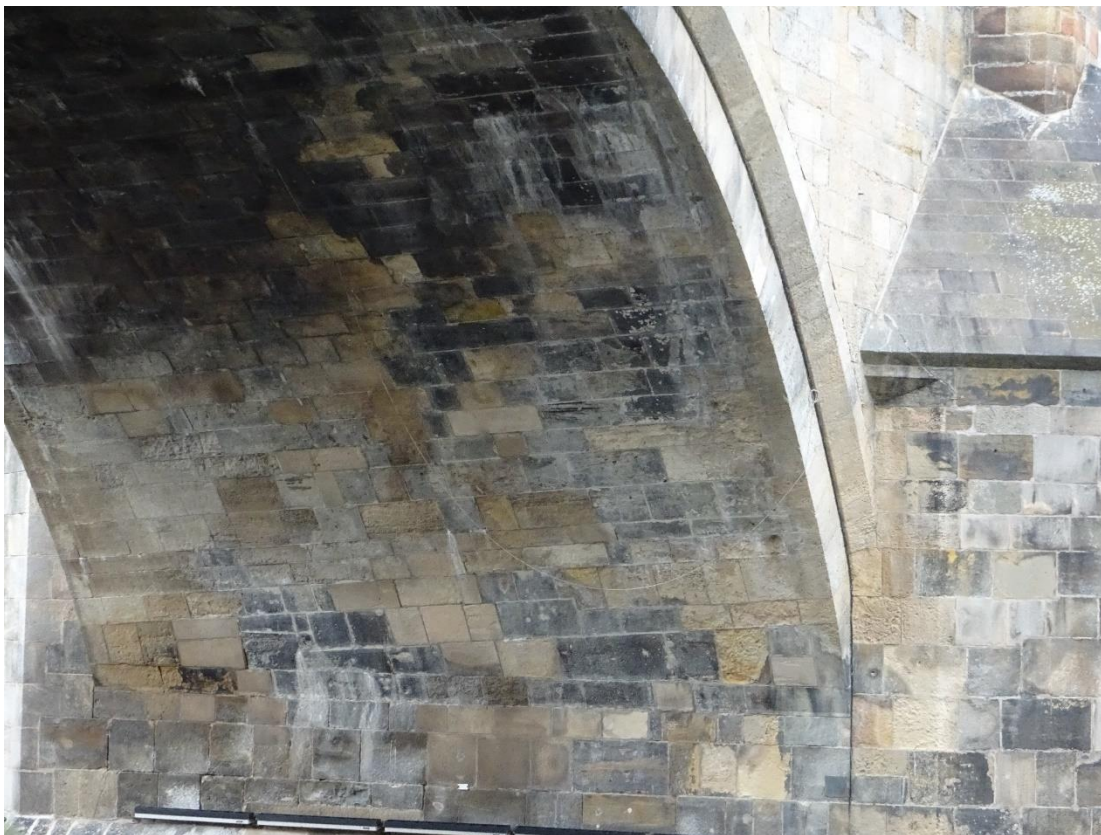
Looking closer, though those are surely modern scotch marks on the stone.



And is this fire damage under the land span? Certainly a car park seems a sad use for such a magnificent bridge.



This cutwater has had an awful lot of reskinning.



This span is obviously skew, if only slightly. I am often told this is an 18th century invention but The Exe bridge is also skew.



This span looks to be very modern stonework.



This grand staircase, remarkable conceals a complete span.



The other side is closed off as a store.



The end of the bridge coincides with that of the Judith bridge. The gate tower visible hereto the left of the road sign was originally the entrance. The new bridge takes a different direction and needed a new gate and a second tower.



The tower at the city end was entirely new and substantially decorated by Parler himself.

The roof structure may not be strictly a bridge but it is near enough and very spectacular.



It also provides a wonderful view of the bridge zig-zaging slightly across the river. These days it carries only pedestrians, perhaps the same sort of loading as when it was built.



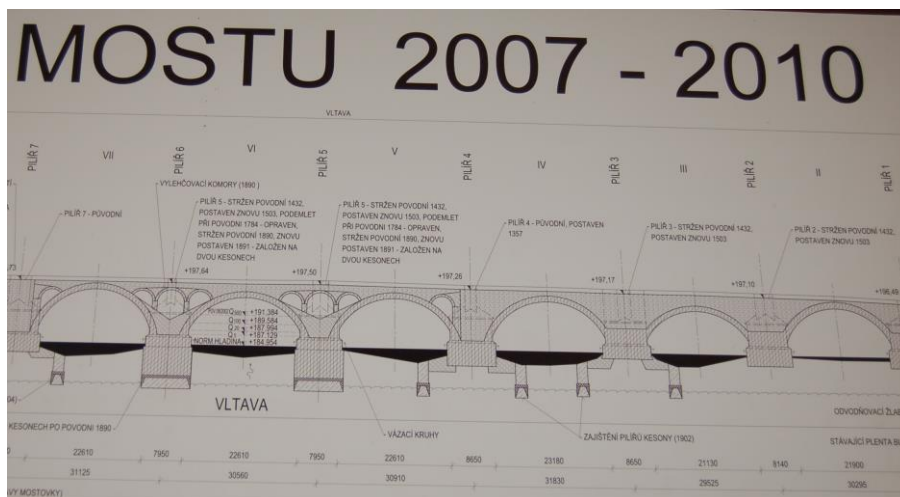
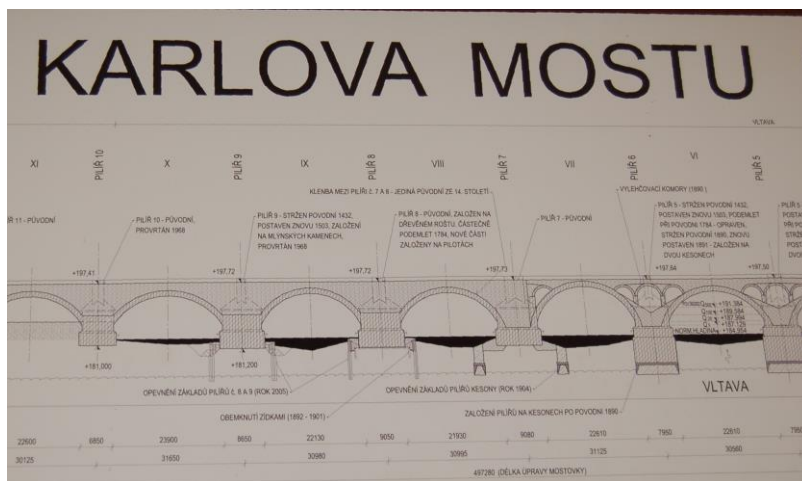
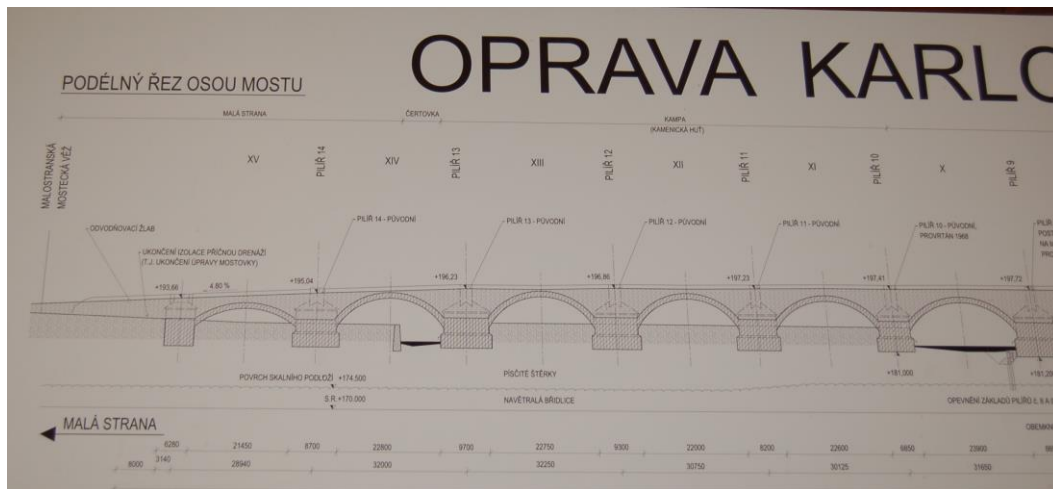
The swing at the far (west) end is rather marked.



And there on the hill above is the Cathedral in the Imperial Palace/Castle. Peter Parler's day job.



And to finish, not my own photographs, but some drawings from the museum which I didn't have time to visit. For which thanks to Peter Cross Rudkin who was also responsible for getting me into the International Bridges Group in the first place.



- 2010

