

Downham's Bridges

A History by Elizabeth Howard.



Figure 1: copyright Eastern Daily Press : Images of Norfolk 1995.

The Great Ouse Flood Protection Scheme was a massive undertaking . The river rises in Northamptonshire and runs 165 miles out to King`s Lynn.

The first of the very bad flooding in living memory came in 1947 following the thaw of a record breakingly cold winter when snow and ice persisted for months . The second and more damaging with extensive loss of life both here and in the Netherlands was in 1953.

Authority to make the Great Ouse navigable was granted by Letters Patent in 1617 though there is evidence of the Danes paddling their warships up river to Bedford in 921AD. Alan Faulkner writing an Historical Profile in the magazine The Narrowboat, Autumn 2013, lists a very useful time line beginning with this authority. Denver Sluice was first created in 1650 so was the product of the Civil war and the Protectorate of Cromwell . Floods and high tides destroyed the original sluice in 1713 and it was not rebuilt until 1750.

The navigation of the rivers was bought and sold as a profitable business opportunity and over the centuries it has changed hands many times . It was the responsibility of the owners to make certain the rivers were navigable and to maintain them and if possible enlarge and deepen them .

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Vermuyden instructed by the then Duke of Bedford , dug out the Old Bedford river in 1637 a twenty mile stretch of river from Earith to Denver . A second river was dug out in 1651 both wider and deeper called the New Bedford or Hundred Foot river which ran parallel to the Old Bedford At this point a sluice was built at Denver to prevent the tidal river surging back to Ely . However in 1713 this first Denver sluice was destroyed by spring tides and flood waters and was not rebuilt until 1750. Various other Cuts were dug out from this time to the 19th C including several to create better access to King`s Lynn . The Alexandra Docks were built in 1869 and the Bentinck Docks in 1883.

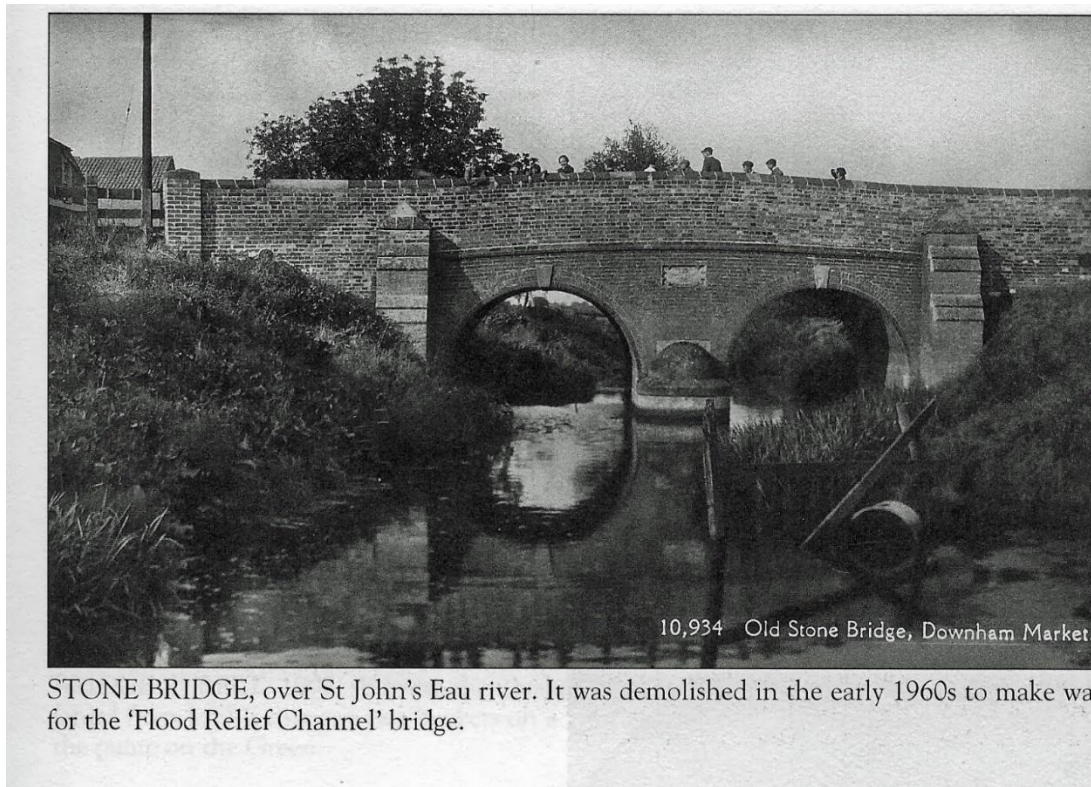
In the Cambridge Chronicle and Journal of Friday 25 July 1834 there is an advertisement for builders and engineers to quote for "Tenders for executing and performing the said Works according to plans and specifications of such Works which ...are to be seen at the office of Mr Charles Burcham in King`s Lynn , civil engineer .

The Works referred to aboveof which separate Tenders are to be delivered are :- 1st – For the Erection of a New Sluice in the Bank of the River Ouse , on the east side of the said river, between Denver Sluice and Downham Bridge ; and for the Erection of a New Bridge over the Drain or Cut to be cut from Saint John`s Eau to the said New Sluice . 2nd – For Repairing the Sluice at Stow Fall , and the Bridge over St John`s Eau, in the parish of Downham Market. 3rd – For Scouring out the Drain or Cut called St John`s Eau , Cutting the New Drain from the said St John`s Eau to the scite (as written) of the said New Sluice and for Scouring out the other Public Drains leading from the said New Drain or Cut to the Boundaries of the parish of Wrettonand for Taking down and rebuilding a certain Bridge over one of the said Public Drains near a Mill in the parish of Fordham , the Property of Edward Roger Pratt , esq. ; and for the Repairs of the other Bridges over the said Public Drains where necessary"

The 1960s saw the last major drainage scheme completed , with the 11 mile Flood Relief channel from Denver to King`s Lynn in September 1964. The Cut Off Channel swept up the waters of the rivers Lark, Wissey and Lt Ouse and delivered them back to Denver . The Flood Relief Channel runs toward King`s Lynn and rejoins the Great Ouse just south of Lynn . Originally neither the Cut Off nor the Flood Relief Channels were intended to be used for pleasure , but from 2001 they have been opened up to boats in the summer months .

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The following are various articles and reports from the Eastern Daily Press concerning the far bridge, over the tidal river Gt Ouse from 1957 – 1964.

Newspaper cuttings EDP

30 May 1957 No new bridge for Downham

There is no immediate prospect of a new bridge for Downham Market Mr G Nugent, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Transport told Mr Sidney Dye Labour M. P., for South West Norfolk in the Commons yesterday .

In 1954 the County Council had been told there were no funds for a new bridge. Mr Dye said the old bridge was condemned nearly 25 years ago and a temporary one put up . They were using the old one whilst the temporary one was being repaired.

Mr Dye said it was possible for a firm now building bridges in the area for flood protection schemes to build a bridge cheaper than at any other time . Mr Nugent said the wooden bridge which was being repaired would give useful service for many years to come . The old bridge was safe to use .

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2nd Sept 1957

Fresh Downham Bridge Site Lease Approved

Because it appears unlikely that a new bridge will be built at Downham for some years , the committee approved the sealing of a fresh lease of the foreshore and bed of the Ouse for a further 10 years. The present temporary bridge was erected in 1938 . The lessors were the Board of Trade.

The great Ouse River Board has agreed to contribute £9,000 towards the £23,000 which is the estimated cost of provision of a new approach road to the bridge from the west . The Board has said that the diversion should be ready for use by April 1st to fit in with their construction along the west bank of the Ouse near the bridge .

The committee confirmed the decision of the Western Highways Sub Committee to take no action for the time being on a request from Downham RDC for repairs to Severals Road , Methwold . It was felt stated a report that a further appropriation of funds beyond the £15,000 allocated for the repair of the nearby Decoy Road would result in an undue proportion of the available money being spent in that area.



Figure 2: from the Mike Bullen collection.

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15 Sept 1961 Concern expressed at Downham Bridge delay

Hopes for an early start to the road diversion planned by NCC at Downham bridge were expressed at a Great Ouse River Board meeting in Cambridge yesterday.

Downham and Stow Bardolph Internal Drainage Board was reported to be concerned at the delay in carrying out the strengthening and heightening of the left bank of the tidal river at this point .. This flood protection work , it was explained, could not be begun until the road diversion was completed.

The county surveyor for Norfolk, Mr CJ Macdonald told the Board that considerable delay had occurred in completing the agreements with the owner of the land.

The chairman of the Flood Protection Scheme Committee Mr AG Wright , stated that these difficulties had been overcome and the County Council expected to take possession shortly.

The MAFF had approved three revised schemes for sea defence works at Heacham and Snettisham . Gales last December followed by a severe storm with a tidal surge in March caused damage which has increased the cost.

Strengthening of a shingle bank against erosion at Heacham Dam will cost £1,350 . Emergency works and a groyne sends up the bill for Snettisham South Beach to £4,700 compared with the original £2,400 estimate . Reinstatement and other works at Heacham North Beach involves a £3,600 bill instead of £2,100..

Arrangements with the Hockwold wash right owners for the Board to enter on land required for the third part of the flood protection scheme – the excavation of a cut off channel 28 miles long from Denver to Barton Mills – has involved what were described as unusual legal circumstances.

The land not required would eventually be sold and the proceeds credited to the accounts of the scheme.it was stated. It was important therefore that the Board should obtain a good title of the land which was now being purchased so that it would be acceptable to subsequent purchasers .

To ensure this it was agreed to ask for counsel`s opinion on the form of conveyance , on the powers of the wash right owners to convey land outside the scheme`s Parliamentary limits and also on the payment and distribution of the purchase money .

11 Jan 1962

County Council and Downham Bridge

At the quarterly meeting of Norfolk County Council in Norwich on Saturday the Highways (King`s Lynn) committee reported having been advised of the unsatisfactory condition of the temporary wooden bridge at Downham Market. Letters had been sent to the M.P.s for South

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West Norfolk and the Isle of Ely asking them to urge the Ministry of Transport to give approvals and monetary grants so that immediate action could be taken.

Mr R R Bennett asked if, in the event of the approach to the Ministry being unsuccessful it would be possible for a deputation to go to the Ministry . Plans, he said, had been prepared for the new bridge and the last estimated cost was about £75,000 . Even if approval and grant were immediately forthcoming from the Ministry , it would be some time before the new bridge could be constructed. On grounds of urgency and safety something should be done immediately to the present temporary bridge which needed to be completely re-decked . The Chairman of the committee said re-decking of the bridge was in hand and the committee was pressing for a new bridge . If the wooden bridge fell in then the old iron bridge would have to be used.

Letter to the Editor 14 April 1962

Downham Market Bridge

Dear Sir – My attention has been drawn to a statement in Friday`s EFP . At a special meeting of the Ouse River Board in Cambridge , Mr A G Wright , the chairman , when asked for my reasons for being unwilling to sell land needed for the Downham Market Bridge Scheme , replied that I said I did not like the County Council . This statement is entirely untrue. I have not made any reference to the County Council to any of the River Board officials or anyone else.

The Norfolk County officials have always treated me with every consideration . My own objection to the proposed scheme is that I consider the bank can be adequately strengthened without taking a main road through my farm yard , causing great inconvenience and considerably reducing the value of the farm . – Yours truly , Alfred Haylett. . Trafalgar House , Downham Market.

10 July 1962 Temporary bridge request by Lord Wise.

Lord Wise asked in the House of Lords yesterday what steps were proposed to relieve the abnormal road traffic passing through King`s Lynn owing to the unsafe condition of the river bridge at Downham West.

Lord Chesham, Parliamentary Secretary , Min of Transport , answered that the existing wooden bridge at Downham Market was still usable , one way , for vehicles up to five tons.

The old iron bridge had recently been reopened with similar restrictions and this permitted the route through Downham Market to be used again as an alternative route to the East Coast holiday resorts and to reduce traffic through Lynn. It had been signposted again last week.

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Lord Wise said the understood that heavy traffic had to go out of its way to get to Wisbech and other places and he asked if a temporary bridge could not be made other than the iron bridge so as to carry heavy traffic and save time.

Lord Chesham agreed that the heavier traffic had to go the other way but he understood there was a further route which could be used through Stowbridge which meant going about five miles to the north .

Lord Chesham added " I think what we have decided to do is a better answer rather than construct temporary bridges because the wooden bridge has deteriorated rather faster than anybody thought. "

The reconstruction of a permanent bridge which was in the programme for 1963/4 had been brought forward into the current year`s programme.

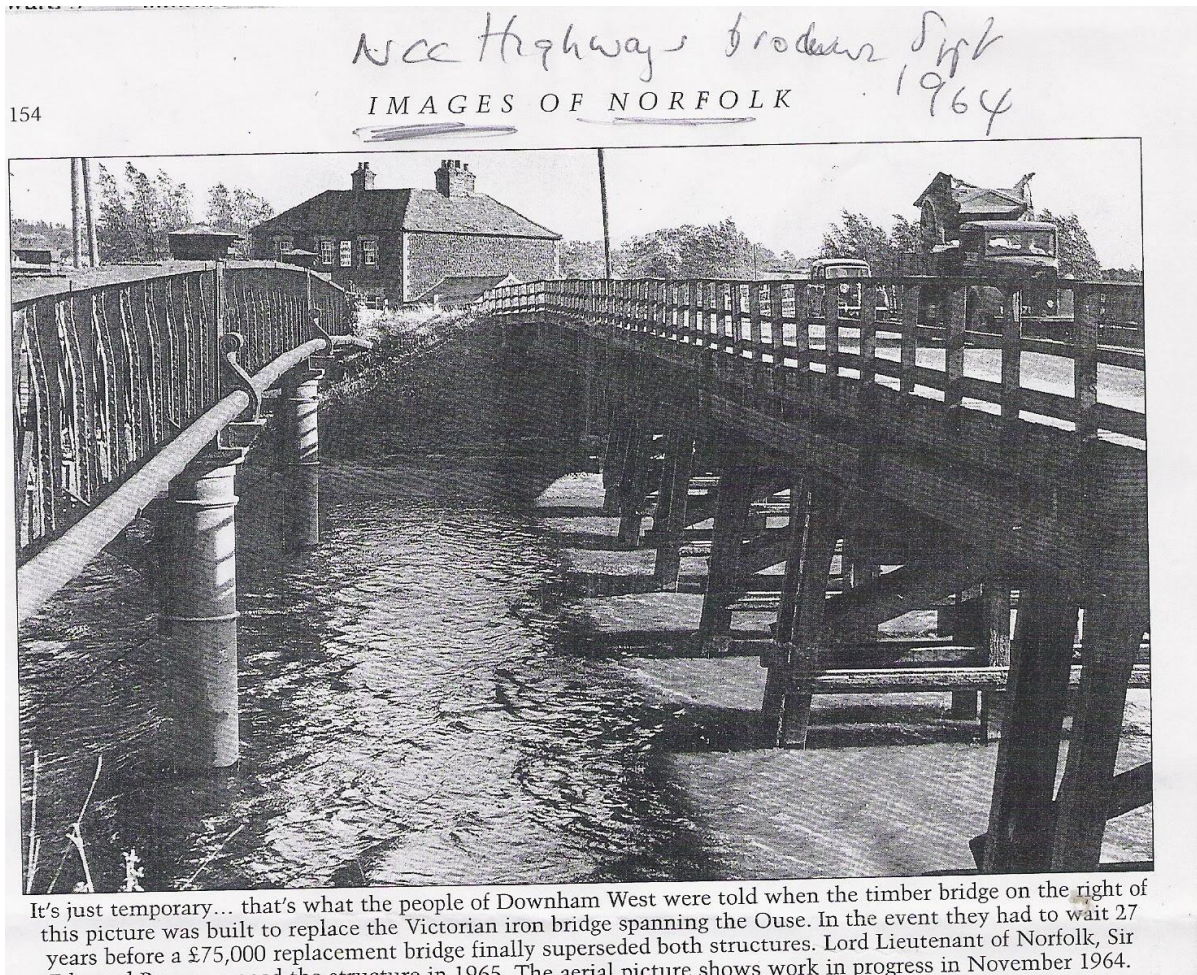


Figure 3: No date ? 1962 . Weaknesses in Downham west bridge.

A routine check of the Downham West bridge , which is scheduled to be replaced this year at a cost of £72,000 , has revealed the weakness in the structure which will probably need

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emergency repairs . Police were patrolling the bridge yesterday when heavy traffic was diverted. The authorities placed a five ton limit for vehicles using the bridge.

Traffic from the Wisbech direction has been diverted over the iron bridge which adjoins the temporary wooden structure . Vehicles going from Downham are using the downstream side of the wooden bridge only.

The authorities are awaiting instructions from the Ministry of Transport to start building the new bridge . The present temporary one has been there for nearly 30 years . It is expected that both the iron and the wooden bridges will eventually be demolished.

The iron bridge will have to be removed before work on the new bridge can start. While the building is carried out the temporary structure will have to continue to carry its present heavy burden of traffic to and from the Midlands and the North.

There have been several accidents at the bridge which is regarded as an accident black spot by both motorists and boat owners. Two vessels have collided with the bridge in the past year and one capsized .

Work on the £30,000 diversion at Downham West on the A1122 Downham Market – Wisbech road has started. This begins just beyond the Downham West bridge and will divert traffic towards Barroway Drove instead of turning immediately left to Wisbech . The diversion will be for half a mile . It is not expected that work on this will affect the Downham West bridge traffic.

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Figure 4: from the Mike Bullen collection.

4 June 1962. West Downham Bridge `precarious` .

Downham West bridge is in a very precarious state . This frank admission came from Mr C J Macdonald , the County Surveyor, in reply to a question from Mr G P Kisby at a meeting of the County Highways committee on Saturday .

Mr Macdonald said that the bridge which was built just before the last war as a temporary structure, had deteriorated considerably over the last three years. " We have been pressing the Ministry just as hard as we can to rebuild it ." When two of the piles failed last week and he had to introduce one way traffic and impose a weight limit , he immediately got in touch with the Ministry to ask if the grant for next year could be moved forward to this. He was still waiting for an answer.

Nine months ago when he became worried about the bridge he asked the Ministry to send its headquarters bridge engineer to look at it . " He has not been yet . " Mr Macdonald said. Mr Barnes asked if there was any danger to the public . Mr Macdonald said there was not provided vehicles kept to the right side of the bridge , did not exceed five tons in weight and there was no further deterioration . " If it becomes really dangerous I shall have to shut it , "

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Mr Macdonald said . At the moment the old iron bridge which was worn out 30 years ago has been re-opened to take one way traffic.

A very close eye was being kept on the wooden bridge and if there was any sign of deterioration , it would be shut. Police were then patrolling the bridge and heavy traffic was diverted.

9 June 1962. Downham traders with bridge delay .

Traders at Downham Market are annoyed at the delay in building the new bridge at Downham West where emergency measures , including the introduction of single line traffic , have followed the discovery of weaknesses in the structure of the " temporary" 30 year old wooden bridge .

Shopkeepers are only partly satisfied with the Minister of Transport`s written reply to Mr A V Hilton, MP, that he will give immediate priority to the building of a new bridge to replace the wooden one .

With trade at Downham on the decline traders feel that it will be another nail in the coffin if anything happens to the bridge. A member of the Urban council , Mr Alec Clarke , described the bridge as the town`s lifeline., while another councillor Mrs I M Burbeck , said Downham would be isolated if it were closed.

Mr Cyril Stebbings who is chairman of the Chamber of Trade said that six years ago the authorities had been warned that the bridge could not continue to carry its present heavy burden of traffic. Nothing had been done and now Downham was suffering through the inactivity and lack of foresight of the County Council .

Mr Cyril Wiseman who has a cycle shop commented. " It`s imperative that we have a new bridge and soon. That bridge is a vital link between the town and surrounding villages . It would be a tragedy if we lost it ." Mr Clifford Beckett a shoe repairer, said " I would hate to see the bridge close down. It would not do the town any good at all and would be the cause of considerable inconvenience to many people living in that area . Wholesalers came into town via the Downham West bridge.

Of local business people possibly the worst hit by traffic restrictions at the bridge is Mrs Doris Harrod of the Anmer Transport Cafe at Bridge Road , a popular meeting place for drivers to and from the Midlands and the North. They are all being diverted.

Mrs Harrod commented " Trade has hit rock bottom. We are going through a bad patch and this is the final straw . I have had nothing but trouble since taking over the place seven years ago .. First of all there was the dispute with the County Council over the provision of a car park and now this has happened. Honestly I don`t think I can take much more. "

Mr R N Bates a member of the RDC whose farm at Barroway Drove is on the Wisbech side of the bridge, has been one of the most forceful campaigners for a new bridge. He described the

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delay as scandalous . Many people in his area relied on Downham traders for their foodstuffs and other goods.

There is a limit of five tons on the weight of traffic using the wooden bridge . A small area has been railed off for pedestrians to use. Traffic from the Wisbech direction to Downham is using an old iron bridge which was declared unsafe 30 years ago .

Letters to the Editor July 1963

A Precarious Bridge

Sir – In your issue of 4th June you

In 1961 when I was a County Councillor , Mr Macdonald stated publicly that he had informed the Minister of the bad state of the bridge and said that he thought he had now rung a bell and made them realise that there was danger.

The statement by the Surveyor was made eleven years ago and nothing was done . Now traffic agriculture and the town`s business will suffer seriously for a prolonged period of improvisation and traffic diversion because of the inability of the County Council to get the Ministry to deal with the matter.

Since the temporary bridge was erected in 1926 it has been a problem and both my late father and myself as County Councillors pressed on every possible occasion for action to be taken .

The bridge started to show serious signs of depreciation in 1951 and I have a copy of an EDP report of a County Council meeting held in that year which says . ` As soon as persistent Mr Bennett mentioned Downham bridge there were outbursts of laughter and he could not refrain from smiling himself before solemnly telling the members It gets lots of laughter once more but it is a very serious matter.

As a County Councillor I got tired of trying to get anything done to the bridge and the frustration was partly responsible for my giving up County Council work.

The so called temporary bridge was erected 36 years ago and there has been much shelving and putting off but the time has now come when full priority should be given to the immediate erection of a modern permanent bridge.

I hope that before there is a serious accident or too much disturbance to the commerce of the district the new bridge will be erected.

Yours faithfully , R . R, Bennett. Bridge Farm , Downham Market.

April 1963 Start soon on Downham Bridge

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Work on the new Downham Market bridge held up by the " abnormally cold weather " should start within a month it was stated at Saturday`s NCC meeting by Mr F H Eaton. He added that the weather had stopped nearly all work on the roads.



Figure 5: courtesy of Norfolk Heritage Centre Norfolk County Council MC 2194/ .

Aug 1963. Downham bridge

The Minister of Transport has at long last sanctioned the building of a new bridge for the A1122 across the Ouse at Downham Market . The 19th C iron bridge was condemned before the war as unsafe and a temporary wooden bridge was built alongside . The temporary structure has now had to serve for so long that it too has become unsafe for two lines of traffic . So the two bridges both of which have been condemned are exerting their last remaining strength in carrying each a single line of traffic.

Downham bridge is important as an alternative route for traffic between the Midlands and Norfolk. At the expense of a detour through Peterborough and Wisbech , holiday traffic in particular avoids the bottle neck on the A47 trunk road at Lynn or on the A11 at Thetford. However, Downham is only an alternative for knowledgeable drivers. To those two main approaches and by no means a substitute for either of them. . The need for a new bridge and by-pass at Lynn and a by-pass at Thetford is still clamant and the work should surely be put in hand now before the proposed closures of railways , b oth in East Anglia and the Midlands make confusion more confounded on the roads .

1963 Downham bridge design approved.

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Since my remarks recently on the Downham West bridge , I have now heard from Mr Paul Hawkins , Downham`s county councillor , that the Fine Arts Commission have approved the design of the new £72,000 bridge.

Although this is good news, one must not be too optimistic that work will begin immediately . There will be a lot of preliminaries and with the winter coming it is unlikely that work can start before next spring . It looks as if we shall have to be satisfied for the present with conditions as they are at the bridge and hope that the work done in recent weeks to the temporary bridge will suffice until the new one is constructed .

Better news about other construction work in the district is that about the Downham West diversion which is being carried out not many yards away from the bridge . This new road will do away with the sharp bend from the bridge toward Wisbech .

From some time work has been progressing well and it has now reached a point where one can see the sheer beauty of the gentle natural sweep of the road as it leaves the Barroway Drove road from the bridge and curves gently to the point where it links up again with the Downham-Wisbech road , thus cutting out a very bad corner indeed.

June 1964 Ouse Bridge builders one man lifeboat

For eight months Mr Derek Powell , aged 30, has sat in a boat in the middle of the river Ouse waiting in case one of his fellow workers falls into the river . He is happy that none of them have . There are 17 of them at work on the £90,000 bridge over the Ouse at Downham Market where the river is 200 ft wide. Mr Powell of Barroway Drove is being paid £14 a week by Norfolk County Council to be their lifeboatman .

It is a safety precaution he said yesterday , I haven`t had to pull anyone out . I hope the situation doesn`t arise . Its an easy job and I like it . I spend my time watching the others at work and rowing around to keep warm . I`m a boatman and that`s my official work. I wasn`t engaged to do any work on the bridge but sometimes I do give my mates a hand. "

Mr Powell who holds a life saving certificate always has a lifebelt in his boat. Yesterday he had to be especially on the alert because workmen were fitting a temporary Bailey bridge over the 70ft gap in the middle of the new concrete bridge.

The Bailey bridge will be used when the centre concrete beams are erected on the bridge shortly . The bridge which will take road traffic between Wisbech and Downham Market will replace an obsolete wooden bridge.

24 Sept 1964 Designed to relieve Cut Bridge at Lynn

Downham gets bridge after 27 years.

After a 27 year wait Downham got its new bridge yesterday . The bridge carrying the A1122 over the Ouse at Downham West was opened by the Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk , Sir Edmund Bacon. As Sir Edmund and Lady Bacon arrived at one end of the bridge for the ceremony , a

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gang of workmen were putting the finishing dabs of silver paint on the parapet railings at the other end. After cutting the tape , Sir Edmund drove his black Humber car across the £75,000 structure. As the large crowd of camera carrying residents followed on foot workmen blocked off the road to the old bridge. – opened in 1937 as a temporary replacement for a Victorian iron bridge. No one was more delighted to see the new bridge than Mr R R Bennett a Downham West farmer. Mr Easton , chairman of Norfolk County Highways committee introducing Sir Edmund recalled that they had heard nothing but Downham`s iron bridge from Mr Bennett when he was on the County Council.

Mr Bennett at the opening ceremony as chairman of the Downham West parish council told an EDP reporter , it is an excellent bridge and is what we have been fighting for . He recalled that his father before him had campaigned for a new bridge and he paid tribute to the work of Mr Paul Hawkins in taking over his role as the Downham Bridge campaigner when he left the County Council . Also present was Sir Bartle Edwards, Chairman of the County Council who welcomed Sir Edmund Bacon.

The brochure for the opening said the County Council agreed to Downham UDC`s request to build a new bridge in 1937 , and from that day to this the story is the usual one of planning, designing , consultation and discussion with the various Ministries , Fine Arts Commission , River Board and other interested authorities .

Mr Easton said they had started pressing the Ministry again in 1960 and work was started 18 months ago . . He congratulated all associated with the work and commented that there had always been fewer than 20 men on the project. The new bridge will provide an alternative route to the Cut Bridge at King`s Lynn for heavy loads crossing the Ouse and it has been specially designed to conform to the Ministry of Transport`s specification for heavy and abnormal loads. It is a three span skew bridge , the total length being 223ft 6ins and the width is 41ft 6 ins.

The brochure gives some further details of the bridge , its history and the new constructed bridge. Brochure NCC Highways committee
For the opening of the bridge at Downham
24 Sept 1964.

Official opening , Wednesday 23rd Sept 1964 at 3.30 p, by Sir Edmund Bacon , bart, OBE, TD.
H.Ms Lieut for Norfolk.

Norfolk County Council . Chairman Colonel Sir Bartle Edwards, CVO, MC. Chairman of the Highways Committee. Alderman F H Easton. ; Vice Chairman of the Highways Committee ; Chairman of the Western Highways Sub-Committee , Alderman J T Coe, MBE , JP.

History . The Downham Market bridge is situated one mile west of Downham Market and carries the road A 1122 over the river Ouse. For centuries there has been a bridge at this point ; at one time the bridge was a wooden one belonging to the Lord of the Manor of Stow Bardolph who in 1454 leased it to certain Bridge Reeves at a rent of 13s 4d per annum to maintain it at their own charge. From time immemorial a bridge toll was exacted by the Bridge

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Reeves from all who used the bridge , except the inhabitants of Downham Market .
 In 1877 the old wooden bridge was replaced by one constructed of wrought iron lattice girders described at the time as being " strong and commodious " .
 In 1891 the Downham Bridge Trust was set up under the Charitable Trusts Act to maintain the bridge and the trustees consisted of the former Bridge Reeves and several gentlemen of Downham Market. The Bridge Trust continued until the Norfolk County Council took over a s successor to the Bridge Reeves under the Bridges Act of 19929.

However the iron bridge was not sufficiently strong to cope with heavy motor traffic and in 1937 a weight limit of 3 tons was imposed. A temporary wooden bridge for two way traffic was constructed with a weight limit of 12 tons and the old iron bridge was closed to all traffic other than pedestrian . In the same year Downham Market Urban District Council requested that the County Council to construct a new bridge to meet modern traffic conditions . This the County Council agreed to do and the story from that day to this is the usual one of planning, designing, consultation, and discussions with the various Ministries , Fine Art Commission , River Boards and other interested authorities.

The outbreak of the Second World War and the economic crisis that followed in the post-war period only made matters more difficult for the County Council in obtaining Ministry of Transport approval to go ahead with the new bridge/. Eventually in 1962 the Ministry of Transport approved the scheme for grant purposes.

Work on the construction of the new bridge began on 6th May 1963 alongside the old iron bridge which was demolished during the work and sold as scrap.

The new bridge has been designed for heavy and abnormal loads . It is a three span skew bridge with two side spans of 67 ft and a central span of 89ft . The total length being 223ft and width 4?, ft . It is founded on 127 14 inch diameter cased piles driven to the Kimmeridge clay stratum , and consist of steel tube driven by internal hammer until a safe bearing load of 40.5 tons was obtained. The tubes were filled with concrete and abutments of reinforced concrete. The deck is constructed of seven rows of factory made post tensioned concrete beams and a reinforced concrete deck tied to the latter by mild steel hoop shear connectors. Each beam was tested before leaving the factory with a load of 50 tons applied at the mid span and the cantilever end. The method of erection was to offload the side span beams from a transporter by using one of the largest mobile cranes in the country – a 75 ton Coles. The beams were then rolled into position across a temporary bridge . On completion of the side spans and cantilevers , a Bailey bridge was launched across the central opening to convey the beam transporters and two large cranes one on each approach span , off loaded the beams and placed them in position . These two cranes also lifted the Bailey bridge from one side of

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the new bridge to the other to complete the positioning of the beams.

At the present time , the Downham approach is a temporary arrangement until the tenants of the riverside cottages are rehoused next year. The cottages will then be demolished to enable the approach to be constructed as designed.

The substructure construction was hampered by the tidal conditions of the river Ouse which has a tidal range of 16 ft on the spring tides and advantage was taken of the low water conditions to construct the pier foundations.



Figure 6: From Denver Sluice copyright Ben Rutterford.

For further details on the Flood Relief Channel and the Cut Off Channel , see Eddy Edwards site www.ousewashes.info/sluices/denver-sluice .

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Figure 7: copyright Eastern Daily Press 1964. Picture norfolk

Finally the perils of an unsafe bridge are highlighted by a report in the Norwich Mercury of April 1803 . courtesy of the Downham Heritage Society.

Norwich Mercury April 1803

On Friday sennight , Mr Thos Farrow, innkeeper, was standing on the bridge at Downham Market, in conversation with Mr Wales, surgeon , of that place. And incautiously leaning his back against the rail of the bridge , it suddenly gave way . And he was instantly precipitated not less than 12ft into deep water. Mr Wales immediately threw off his coat and hat and plunging in to his assistance caught him , (after many efforts) as he was rising the last time, exhausted, spent , and yielding to his fate. In that perilous moment Mr Wales providently (and with an almost unparalled presence of mind) sprang at one of the piers of the bridge and clinging to the same with one arm , supported the drowning man with the other till further assistance arrived. And relieved them both from their hazardous situation.

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We too often read of medals awarded and dignities conferred for deeds of little import but what honour is not due to that man who at the imminent peril of his own life nobly preserves that of a fellow creature.

Thomas Wales was born in Walberswick in 1765 and married Sarah Garneys . He died in 1835 aged 74 and she died in 1820 aged 54. They are buried under the marked pew in St Edmund`s Downham Market and a plaque records their lives on the wall opposite.