

THORNE
GREAT
BRIDGE

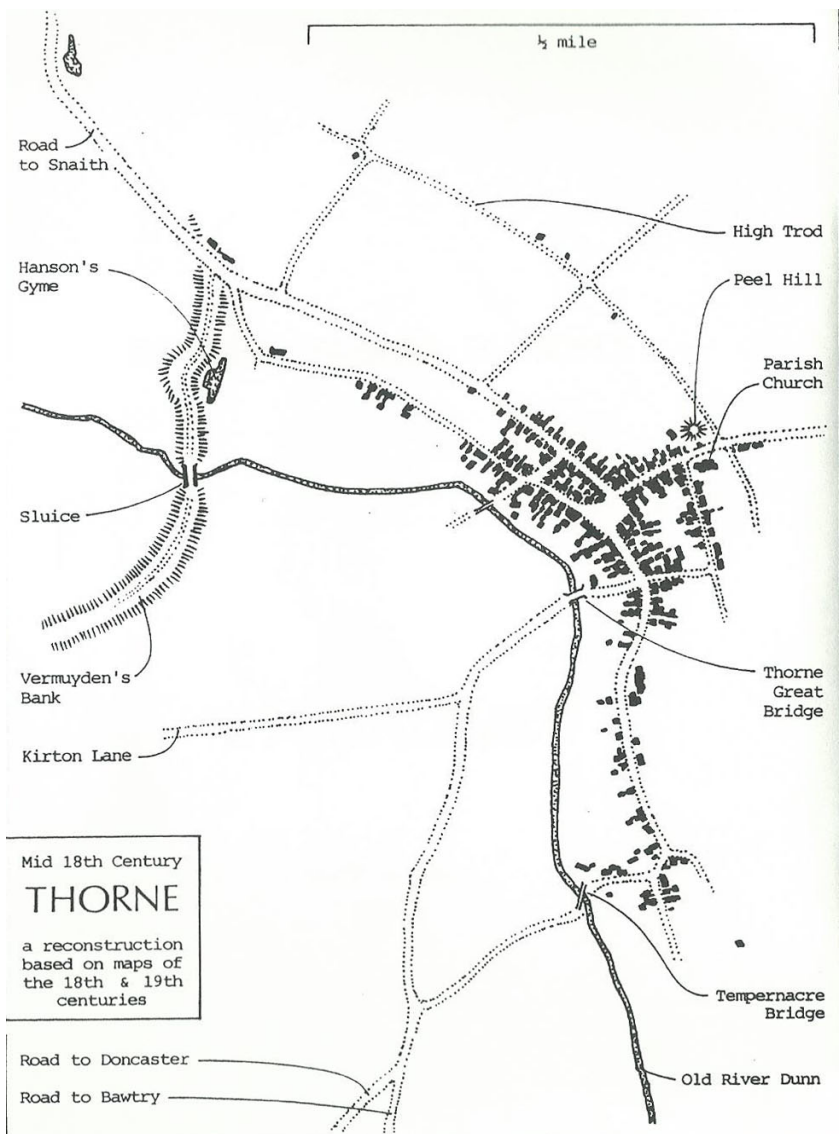
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Thorne Local History Society

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THORNE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY



There are no detailed contemporary maps of the town, but it is possible to make a reasonably accurate reconstruction. The built-up area was centred around the Market Place, reaching no further North-East than the Church, and it extended a short distance to the West. Surviving examples suggest that along at least the main road, there were three storeyed buildings. It was a compact town.

Vermuyden's work was much in evidence. His flood-bank offered protection from the frequent floods which inundated the land along the North arm of the Don. Despite its massive structure, water caused breaches in 1687, 1697, 1698, and 1753.

The other branch of the river, which in earlier centuries had meandered East towards the Trent, was by now serving as a drain, its direction reversed so that it emptied Westwards into the Don, when water levels allowed. The water flow was controlled by a sluice (labelled 'sasse', 'esas' or 'tsas' on maps) built at the point where it crossed the line of the floodbank. It was

still called the Old River Dunn, and it formed the South–West limit of the town.

There were three bridges over this drain. At schoolhouse Lane (now Orchard Street) there was a ‘horse bridge’ and at Tempernacre there was a narrow footbridge, carts being able to cross alongside through a ford. The only crossing which was suitable for wheeled carriages was on what is now South Parade, a much repaired timber structure.

At that time, the repair of roads was the responsibility of local townships. There was an obligation laid on all able bodied townfolk to appear when summoned for Common Day’s Work, when the deepest ruts would be filled with rubble. Similarly, bridges were kept in repair by the town.

In locations where the size or power of a river made the provision of a substantial bridge necessary, but where the local population could not afford the expense, the Justices of the Peace for the County accepted responsibility, and at their Quarter Sessions organised any necessary work. The stone one at Ferrybridge was such a Public Bridge; a timber one spanned the Don at Turnbridge, near Cowick.

There was no housing at Waterside at the beginning of the Eighteen Century; the river was not navigable beyond Stainforth while three low bridges hampered progress along the Dutch River. The chief function of the river was as a drain, and as a source of food, fish and wildfowl.

CHANGES ON THE DON

Upstream of Fishlake, the river was in many places very shallow; it could be forded at Barnby Dun. In 1726 an Act authorised the construction of a canal to extend navigation to Doncaster and eventually Sheffield. The aim was to allow an increase in trade, but the bridges at Goole, Rawcliffe and New Bridge on the Dutch River presented problems.

‘There are three wood bridges over the new River or Cut which were made by the said Participants. The Land Owners and said Participants are at a great yearly expense, obliged to repair and maintain.

To the end that Boats and Vessels may have no obstruction in passing the said New River, the Mayor

Aldermen and Burgesses of Doncaster have agreed with the said Participants and Land Owners to take upon them the Charge of maintaining and repairing the three bridges, and 15 yards of the Banks above and below each, and to rebuild when Occasion shall require, for ever.'

With this aim, they were '*obliged to make leaves to draw up our Drawbridges ... for the more easy passage of Boats Lighters and Vessels ... within two years.'*

Duties to be paid for opening the bridges were laid down in the Act.

The idea of such 'moveable leaves' was not a new one. As early as 1442, in response to a petition submitted to Parliament, a leaf 'for the passage of vessels' had been prescribed for Turnbridge.

With the opening of the canal, the commercial potential of the Don could be exploited, and the passing trade encouraged the growth of Waterside during the second half of the Century.

THORNE GREAT BRIDGE

In 1748, the townspeople of Thorne and neighbouring towns, faced with the need for extensive repairs to, or replacement of, their main bridge, petitioned the Justices of the Peace meeting at Pontefract, asking them to re-classify it as a Public Bridge. The actual document, beautifully written, is preserved in the Court Papers, now at West Riding Archives, Wakefield. The full text is reproduced here.

'To the Worshipful his Majesties Justices of the Peace at their General Quarter Sessions of the peace to be holden at Pontefract in and for the West Riding of the County of York the Nineteenth day of April 1748.

The humble Petition of the inhabitants of Thorne and other places within the manour of Hatfield in the said Riding.

Sheweth That Your Petitioners are charged with and do pay Contribution towards the Repairs of the Publick Bridges within the said Riding; That at the said Town of Thorne in the direct Post road from London to Hull there is an antient Wooden Bridge over the Old River

Dunn for Cart and Carriage without which there would be no Passage over the said River for Carriages; That the Justices of the Peace of the said Riding have heretofore ordered Allowances to be made and paid by the said Riding for the repairing of the said Bridge; And that your Petitioners have lately had the same Bridge viewed by skilfull and experienced Workmen who are of the opinion that it cannot any longer be repaired, but must be entirely new rebuilt:

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that your Worships will be pleased to give Orders for the building thereof as a Publick Bridge, or make such Order herein as your Worships in your great discretions shall think fit, and your Petitioners shall ever pray, etc.

*Jacob Lenard Jnr James Dent M Cutts
Wm Williams Robt Womersley Edwd Forster
Joseph Howard John Moxon Jno Hatfield Jun
Peter Taffinder John Dobson W Drake
Geo Hopwood Isacc Dobson A Parkinson
Tho Dalby Tho Horberry R Ellison
Jos Doughty Thomas Mitchell Jno Parkinson
Wm Lenard Wm Haller J Atkinson*

Thorne Great Bridge by Laurie Thorp

*Richd Woodford Wm Smith Juner Simpson
Emanuel Cade Abr Hawksworth
Richd Middlebrook John Hill Abr Venny
Robt Atkinson Thos Middlebrook Tho Brown
Henry Casson Stepn Staniland John Simpson
Thos Mapples Jno Moody Wm Simpson
Jno Dowson Robt Copperthwaite'*

To the Worshipful
Quarter Sessions of the
of the County of York

The humble petition of the Inhabitants
the said Riding,

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That your petitioners
towards the Repairs of the publick Br
Thorne in the direct Post road from Don
the Old River Durn for Cart and Ca
the said River for Carriages: That the
ordered Allowances to be made and pa
Bridge: And that your petitioners
and experienced Workmen who are of
must be entirely new built:

The decision of the Justices of the Peace is recorded in their Order Book –

'19 April 1784. Ordered that the Deputy Clerk of the Peace do search the Entry Books & authorities in the Clerk of the Peace's Office for proceedings relating to the Bridge at Thorne & report what he finds to the next Session.'

There is no record of his reporting back the following year. However the subject was raised again at Pontefract in 1751, when another petition was sent from Thorne. The document itself no longer exists, but the Court's decision was jotted down by the Clerk on a scrap of paper about the size of a playing card which has survived –

'If the inhabitants of Thorne want stone for rebuilding their Bridge the Riding will supply 'em with what they have lying at Ferrybridge and at one 3d less than the same cost the Riding and this by way of Encouragement & Gratuity to the inhabitants of Thorne to rebuild their Bridge at Thorne over the River

Dunn & that Mr Watson & Mr Carr see it measured off & delivered to the Treasurer.'

In the official Order Book, the same information is couched more formally. Robert Carr and John Watson had been appointed West Riding Bridge Surveyors in 1743.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

So Thorne Great Bridge was built, but no drawings have survived. We do however know the cost, which is quoted in yet another petition sent to the 1753 Quarter Sessions.

'An account of the Charges and Expenses of Building the New Stone Bridge Over the River Dunn at Thorne in the West Riding of Yorkshire; as follows

<i>To Witt</i>	<i>By W Lenard & I Oxley's Accnts being</i>	<i>£ s d</i>
	<i>Constables of Thorne for the year 1751</i>	<i>4-10-0</i>
	<i>By Mr Parkinson and W Smith's Accnts</i>	
	<i>being Constables for the year 1752</i>	<i>183-10-0</i>
	<i>By 33 loads of Stone fetched by</i>	
	<i>Common Days Work @ 7s 6d p load</i>	<i>12-7-6</i>
	<i>Several Other bills Yett unpaid About</i>	<i><u>20-0-0</u></i>
	<i>Total Amount</i>	<i>220-7-6'</i>

The petition was to some extent successful, as this entry from the order Book shows –

‘Pontefract. 1st May 53. Upon the petition of the Inhabs of Thorne in the sd Riding, it is ordered that the Treasurer of the sd Riding do on notice of this order pay or cause to be paid unto the sd Inhabs the Sum of Twenty Pounds which this court hath allowed them as a gratuity in consideration of the great expense which the sd Inhabs have been put to in rebuilding Thorne Great Bridge providing that this Order nor anything therein contained shall be no precedent or authority in time to come to charge the Inhabs of the sd Riding with the repair of the said Bridge or any part thereof.’

This still left £200 to be found. Who paid? Hatfield and Stainforth had joined in the original petition, but there is no mention in the Hatfield Township Book of any payments being made towards a bridge. The inference that Thorne alone was concerned with its building is strengthened by a couple of other references. Firstly, the 1753 Order quoted above only mentions the ‘Inhabs of Thorne’.

In addition, a map prepared by J Westerman and J Gott in 1752 pinpoints all road bridges in the Riding and allots to each a number. An accompanying book lists in each case the river crossed and the authority responsible for its upkeep. Thorne's entry is unique in that a date is given – 'Built by Thorne Town 1752'. There is no other township mentioned.

How did the inhabitants of Thorne raise £200? It is unfortunate that the Township Book for Thorne, which would supply at least some of the answers, is no longer available. In the 18th Century, business affecting the whole town was still carried on at what was called Vestry Meetings conducted in the Church. This was long before the formation of Local Government Offices, Rural or Urban Districts. Minutes of the meetings were kept and the decisions recorded. In the 1950's Dr J S Taylor was given access to the Vestry Books and referred in his essay 'Thorne 1723-1785' to an entry of '4 May 1752' Assessment of 4d in £ for building of Thorne Great Bridge'.

How much of the £200 would be raised by a 4d Rate? It is possible to compare this figure with the situation in Hatfield. In the 1730s the Thorne Constables'

expenses amounted to £20:17:6, requiring a 2d Rate: the Hatfield expenses were similar, about £20 but, apparently because the town was more prosperous a Rate of only 1 and a half pence was necessary.

By 1746-7, the Hatfield expenses had risen only marginally to £21, but the Rate had doubled to 3d in the Pound. Obviously there must have been a change in the basis of the valuation of the property in the intervening years. It may have happened in 1741. A list exists of all the landowners and tenants in Thorne that year, with the value of each building and piece of land. It seems to be a definitive list in that another of 1784 still highlights cottages 'erected since 1741'.

Presumably, if there was a re-evaluation throughout the manor, the Hatfield figures for 1752 will give an approximate value for the 4d Rate in Thorne. In fact, in 1752 Hatfield's 5d Rate raised £34:2:10 and a half. Thorne's 4d can hardly have amounted to more than say £35.

The 1741 list already mentioned shows that the total Rateable Value of Thorne was around £2250. On that basis a 4d Rate would raise about £37:10:0. Obviously

the 1752 levy met only a small part of the £200. Who financed the bridge remains a mystery.

TURNBRIDGE ALIAS THURNE BRIDGE

What sort of bridge could be built in 1752 for £220? Mention has already been made of Turnbridge. In 1743, as the first of their duties as Bridge Surveyors, Carr and Watson had visited Turnbridge and recommended its replacement by a single span bridge. The Old River Dunn it crossed was no longer used by vessels, so the moveable leaf had become redundant. A tender by John Carr and John Watson for the new structure was accepted by the JPs in September 1743. Headed 'An Estimate of the Charge of Building Thurne Bridge of Brick with one Arch 42 foot wide' and detailing the brick walls and timber planking, the construction cost was estimated as £135, or £270 'to execute the Same in Ashler Stone ... if well done'. The cost included upkeep for the bridge for its first five years.

Carr's scale drawing of the bridge is bound in the West Riding's 'Book of Bridges', the definitive account of those for which the County was responsible in 1752.

The 1743 bridge was itself replaced in 1805, possibly by the present stone one whose 12 foot span is more than adequate for the virtually dry Old River Dunn it crosses.

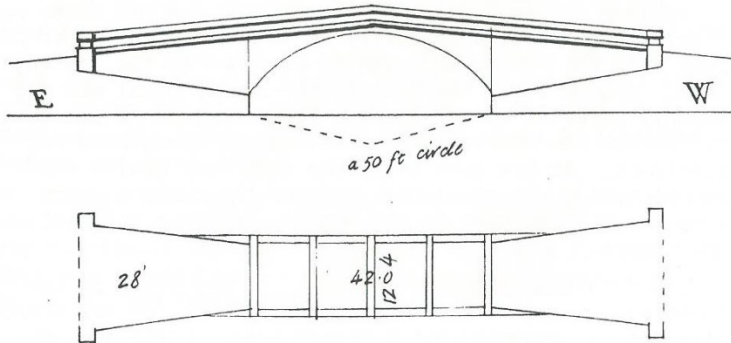
THORNE'S SMALLER BRIDGES

Dr Taylor quotes an entry in the Vestry Book, that on '8 February 1746 a public notice was given for a meeting to consult about Tempnacre Bridge and whether it should be made 4 feet wide.' Ten days later it was agreed to repair it, but not to make any alteration to the bridge, which presumably means that it was less than 4 feet wide previously – a mere footbridge.

Another entry announces that on December 28th 1752, notice was given 'for a meeting to consult about the repairs of the School House Bridge and it was agreed that it should be made a horse bridge – as before. This may indicate that it was suitable for packhorses, having its parapet rails low enough to allow the use of side panniers on the horses.

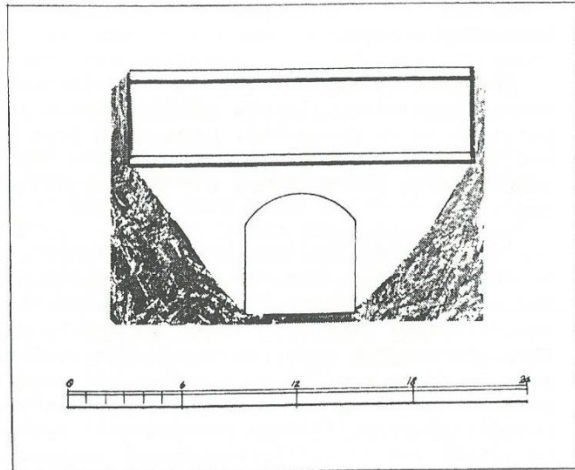
Thorne Great Bridge by Laurie Thorp

Thorne Bridge over the old River Dun at Cowick in Snaith Parish is built of Brick, the Battlement cap'd with Stone, is fram'd with Timber and plank'd under the Arch, gravelled on the Top & repair the Road each way from Springer 28 feet.



[Above] Drawings of Turnbridge from the 'West Riding Book of Bridges' 1752
[WYAS: QD1/461]

[Right] Drawing by Makin Durham of the Boating Dike Sluice, c 1850
[WYAS: C559/58]



[Both drawings are reduced to c75%]

THE STAINFORTH – KEADBY CANAL

Besides continuing as the main drain, the Old River was itself used by boats specially built for the transport of peat from the moors, and came to be known as the Boating Dike. Around 1790, the Stainforth – Keadby Canal was dug roughly parallel to the Boating Dike and East of the town, cut across its course, so curtailing its usefulness for transport. At the same time, the deep soak drains which ran alongside the canal took much of the surface water, so that the Boating Dike in dry seasons became a stagnant open sewer.

Its condition prompted changes. In May 1817, it was ‘unanimously agreed that the Constable with the assistance of Mordecai Casson do get a Waggon Bridge built over the present fordstead (at Tempernacre) and that they have the use of the old bricks and other materials of the Present Bridge towards building of the new one.’

THE STONE BRIDGE

The same year, 1817, it was felt that the Stone Bridge needed repairing. A town vestry meeting asked for a petition to be presented, requesting West Riding help, but there is no record of its reaching the Quarter Sessions. Seven years later, the Town organised the rebuilding –

‘At a Vestry Meeting, held 1 September 1824, the propriety of taking down and rebuilding the bridge known by the name of the Stone Bridge. Resolved that it is advisable to take down the bridge ... and to rebuild the same. That the roadway over the new bridge or Tunnil shall be made 24 feet in width within the walls and the archway or passage for the water 6 feet in width. The New Bridge or Tunnil to have sufficient parapet wall on each side 3 ft in height and of sufficient length to guard the bridge and approaches thereto, the Coping of the parapet to be fixed with Iron Cramps and dowels. That the Surveyors of the Highways be authorised to let the work at such times and in such manner as they think proper.’

At a further meeting on the 2nd of March 1825, the full specification was given, with additional information –

‘Arch to be a counter Arch 6 ft in diameter within. 30 feet long – bottom half of brick, 1 and a half bricks thick and the other or top part all of stone. Stone round the arch at each end. Contractor to pull up the Old Bridge and leave spare stone for the use of the Parish. New road to be made passable before 26 March and the whole to be finished before 2nd April 1825.’

‘George Armitage of Thorne, stone mason, having received the above specification, gave in the following Estimates for fulfilment thereof – approved. Estimate for pulling down and rebuilding ... according to specification given me by William Newsam for the sum of £36.’

He was paid on June 10th 1825. In the absence of any picture of the bridge, these repairs provide some evidence of its original form as well as its rebuilt appearance. Firstly, the limit of one month allows little time for the radical reshaping of the individual stones to form an arch of reduced span. While a large workforce might have been able to achieve this, the

cost – around £1 per day – shows that only a few men were employed. The inference is that the rebuilding was little more than re-erecting the old structure, adding a semicircular brick base to the arch.

Did the original Great Bridge, despite its high cost, have only a six feet wide span? How wide was the Boating Dike which ran through it? Once again there is only circumstantial evidence. William Casson describes the peat boats as having a beam limited to six feet. Makin Durham local landowner and civil engineer, made a series of scale drawings of the neighbouring bridges and watercourses (but apparently omitting the stone bridge!). None is wider than about six feet, including the sluice which controlled the flow along the Boating Dike. Perhaps it would be wise to moderate any grandiose impressions we may have formed of the Great Bridge. ‘Great’ may have simply indicated that it was the biggest in Thorne.

THE END OF THE BOATING DIKE

The 1825 changes effectively transformed the bridge into a conduit or ‘tunnil’. As the century progressed, stretches of the dike were culverted, but the precise

location of each section cannot always be established by the terms used. Thus in 1853, it was decided to ‘carry on the Tunnel from Paupers Bridge to the Union,’ and ‘Resolved – it is desirable to arch the Boating Dike from Mr Thompson’s Orchard to the Union. Paupers Bridge to the Northern side of Mr Brown’s Garden to be done immediately.’ The Poor Law Union building was near the Sluice.

Ten years later, a hot summer made the ‘stench of the Boating Dike unbearable. To be covered over from the pond to tempnacre.’ The pond was otherwise called the Horse Pond, near South Parade in the Horse Fair. It is mentioned as a health hazard in both 1858 and 1863, when ownership of the pond and an adjoining manure heap was queried.

It was agreed to cover 100 yards of the Dike in 1863. The following February a more detailed scheme was arranged when Mr Makin Durham was instructed to ‘arch over the Dike from the termination of the present arch to the property of Mr Matlins’ receiving in return the Pond site and £100. Sand and gravel was to be taken from the ‘Gravel Hole’. As only £75 could be

raised at that time, he was ‘only at present to arch to the South wall of Palmer’s Garth’.

It is around the turn of the Century that the lake, now the central feature of the Park, appears on maps. It is sometimes asserted that the Park Lake was made by widening a stretch of the Dike. In view of the unpleasant state of the Dike at that time, this is most unlikely. It has an oddly angular shape, reminiscent of the ‘delves’ left where soil was dug out to form railway embankments. The culverted dike still runs about 5 yards to the East of the lake (which it drains) and it seems a reasonable assumption that the lake was in fact a shallow quarry to provide soil to top the brick vault of the drain.

So bit by bit, the Boating Dike disappeared and the need for identifiable bridges passed; only the name Bridge Street now preserves the memory of Thorne’s Great Bridge.

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