THORPE HAMLET HISTORY GROUP

Article 23 : Foundry Bridge
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The site of the first Foundry Bridge, opened in 1811, was one of the later crossings over the river Wensum and the first road bridge giving access from the City to the eastern suburb of Thorpe Hamlet. Previously the only other footbridge providing access from the City area to Thorpe Hamlet was Bishop's Bridge, founded in c1275.

The new bridge was named after a foundry which stood just downstream of the crossing on the City side and its tall chimney can be seen in the background of this early photograph of the first bridge. The foundry was demolished in c1850, and the Great Eastern Hotel was built on the site. The building remained there until 1969 when it was replaced by a modern hotel, The Nelson, which was designed by Norwich architects Feilden and Mawson. This hotel recently changed hands and is now a Premier Inn.

The first bridge was built of timber and Portland stone with cast iron railings and was operated as a toll bridge and was constructed by Mendham's of Holt. Unfortunately it gave little room for boats to pass underneath and when the first Thorpe Railway Station



The present Foundry Bridge seen from the river downstream.

was opened in 1844, a new cast iron bridge was installed giving access to the station and vehicles and pedestrians no longer had to pay a toll to use it. It was designed by C. D. Atkinson and rebuilt by Bradley and Co. of Wakefield as a lattice iron arch bridge at a cost of £800.

When the Thorpe Station was enlarged in 1886 the bridge was replaced in January 1888 by the present structure, at a cost of £12,032. The structure is 55ft (16.8m) long and 50ft (15.3m) wide with four girders, each 4ft 2ins (1.3m) deep. The contractors were a local company, Robert Tidman & Sons of 3, Rosary Road, Thorpe Hamlet. The bridge was apparently assembled in the station yard and then rolled across the road onto the existing abutments. The rusticated abutments have stone piers with moulded caps at each corner bearing shields with City of Norwich coat of arms and below the piers are sexfoiled panels. The single-span iron bridge has trefoiled panels under a parapet of circular openwork panels, each with a quatrefoil . There are brick parapets at each corner (except the south-west) ending in brick piers with stone capping.

Later, in 1910, a curved spout was added through the upstream parapet to allow steam lorries to draw water from the river.

Prince of Wales Road was built in 1860 as a grand approach to Thorpe Station. Running south-east from Castle Meadow and Bank Plain it led over Foundry Bridge to the station.



The Norwich city coat of arms and the water spout.

Because of its architectural and historic interest Foundry Bridge is now a Grade II listed building.

A good selection of images of past and present Foundry Bridges can be seen on the Picture Norfolk website at https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/libraries-local-history-and-archives/photo-collections/picture-norfolk - click on 'Search pictures' and enter 'Foundry Bridge'.