

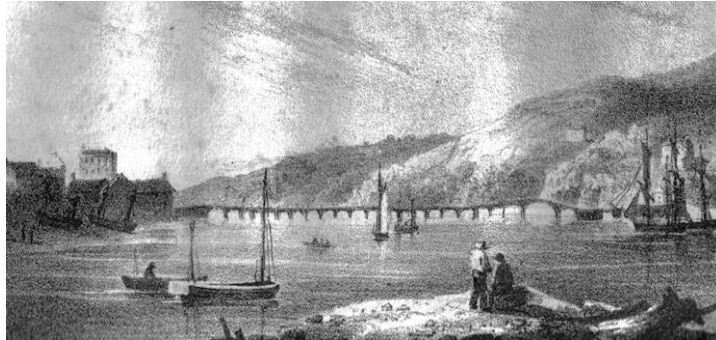
Shaldon Bridge – Teignmouth

The River Teign rises high up on Dartmoor at Leigh Bridge where the North Teign and the South Teign join to form the river as we know it today. At around 31 miles long it's not the longest river in the UK but it has played an important role in the history of Teignmouth as a port.

A bridge crossing from Teignmouth to Shaldon was believed to have been made by the Romans but it isn't until much later that the recognisable structure we see today was built in position. Before this bridge was erected, travellers had a 12-14 mile detour up to Newton Abbot to cross the river and access the villages between what is now Shaldon and further south to Torquay along the coast road.

A company was formed – the Shaldon Bridge Company – which built and opened the bridge in 1827. A gentleman by the name of Roger Hopkins designed and built the structure, made from wood and was believed to be the longest wooden bridge of the time in England at 1632 feet in length with 34 arches. Stone abutments at each end provided a solid foundation for the structure. Also incorporated was a swinging section to allow tall-masted ships to pass further up river.

It cost around £19,000 to build, but the overall total came to around £26,000 due to the costs of the act of parliament and the purchase of the old ferry-rights from Lord Clifford.



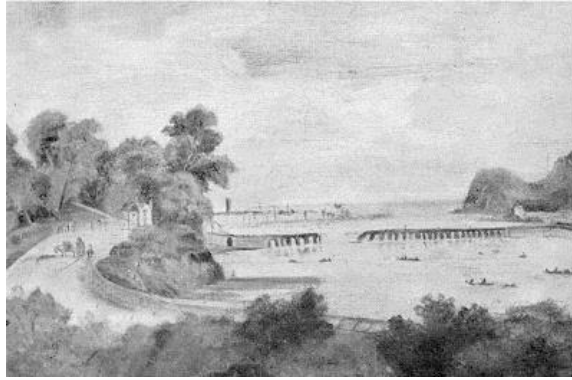
Very early sketch of the original bridge



1828 etching of Shaldon Bridge

This first construction lasted only until 1838 when it collapsed and was found to have suffered attack by shipworm, a seawater based mollusc which bores into timber immersed in seawater.

A new bridge was then built between 1838-40 from stone and by Act of Parliament collection of monies from a toll were introduced, probably to help pay for this new construction. Foot passengers originally had to pay 1d. each. Traffic was reduced considerably after the railway opened.



Shaldon Bridge in 1838. Courtesy of Devon County Council.

This construction lasted until 1893 at which time a complete refurbishment was carried out.

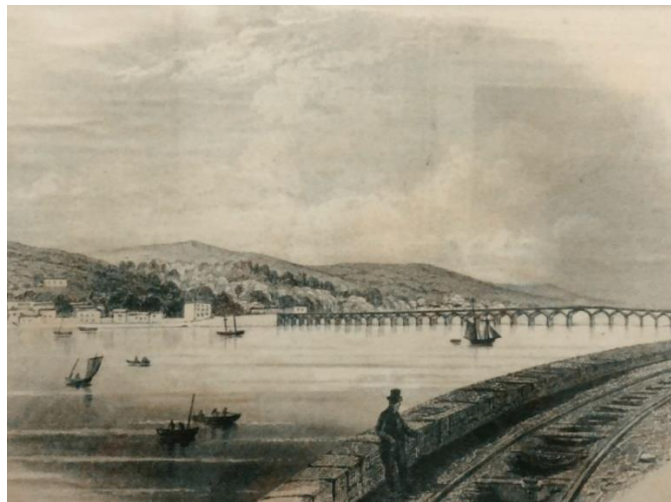


Illustration from mid 1800's showing the bridge and broad gauge railway. The broad gauge railway was lifted in 1892 so we can date this illustration prior to this.



An early black and white image of the bridge.



An early colour image of a view down river. From the late 1800's.

This better constructed bridge crossing lasted to the 1920's but due to the advancement of transport from horse and carts to heavier lorries, cars and buses a further upgrade was required. In 1926 an Act of Parliament was passed enabling a structure from concrete encased girders to be provided which supported a reinforced concrete deck. This was completed in 1931.



View across the Teign from Shaldon showing the bridge in the 1930's.

A further weight restriction was imposed after WW2 when traffic volume increased again.



WW2 gun placement on the bridge.



On 28 October 1948 Devon County Council bought the bridge from the Shaldon Bridge Company for £92,020 and tolls were abolished.

The original paintwork was inadequate to deal with the harsh environmental conditions and repairs were required in 1960 and in 1980.

Apart from the paint problem noted above, no other problems were encountered for close on 50 years until in 1998 a close examination of the bridge showed that a further upgrade was required due to some serious defects which affected the safety of the bridge and would allow for even heavier axle weights to use the crossing. The decision was made to strengthen the fixed spans, widen the carriageway and strengthen the lifting span at the Teignmouth end with work eventually completed in 2002. The importance of this crossing to the area was such that one way traffic was allowed throughout the works.

After this work was completed, residents nearby noticed that in certain wind conditions the bridge “whistles” – a problem which remains today.

On the spookier side the bridge has reportedly had a number of ghost sightings. Apparently, a young boys clothing was found on the bridge – no one ever owned up to owning the clothes and no body has ever been found. Another person reported seeing a tall, cloaked figure in the middle of the bridge. Seconds later, he had disappeared as quickly as he showed up.



The bridge as it is today with the toll house at the Teignmouth end.

The toll house is now a Grade 2 listed building and is used as a holiday let.

In March 2024 further checks were made on the bridge after a 2022 inspection found defects which resulted in underwater scour repair work which was carried out to four of the concrete columns that support the bridge. Work to do this was finished a year ago and a one-year inspection is now due. Further investigation was considered necessary to determine the significance of defects to the superstructure, which is all elements of the bridge construction above the concrete columns. The outcome of these investigations will determine what remedial works are now needed. Devon County Council are currently undertaking further investigations and will carry out an underwater dive inspection.

While on site, engineers will also take the opportunity to remove loose concrete to the underside of the main beams for safety.

The above information has been collated from the following sources:

Devon Heritage; Wikipedia; Teignmouth online; Teign Heritage Centre; Mid-Devon Advertiser.

Teignmouth In Verse.