



Staines Bridge

“COLONIA CLAVDIA VICTRICENSIS”

Staines bridge owes its existence to the Romans. In fact, the original name for the area we now know as Staines was Ad pontes- ‘at the Bridges’. The Roman invasion of Britain, commanded by General Aulus Plautius on behalf of Emperor Claudius, came about after an appeal from an ousted tribal ally-the exiled King Verica of the British Atrebates. At that time, Britain was governed by Celtic tribes like the Atrebates and the more dominant Catuvellauni. Although the tribes already had strong trading and political links with the Roman Empire, tensions were growing and inter-tribal conflict meant that the Romans could use the excuse to invade.

The tribes had always been aware of the importance of a river crossing at the area we now know as Staines (the ‘stones’) where the Thames meets the Colne. The river itself connected with the important trading routes of the Icknield and the Ridge-Way and so could be used for trade and safe transport. The river is shallow at this crossing point and the bed is gravel. There had been a thriving community here since at least 750BC. Whoever had control over the causeway at ‘the stones’ would have the Thames Valley, with its flat and easy travelling country, open to them.



[London to Bath Roman Road]

General Aulus Plautius quickly made progress with four legions (one commanded by the future Emperor 'Vespasian') and the British defending forces were pushed back to the Thames. Eleven tribes of South East Britain surrendered to Claudius and the Romans prepared to move further West in the same year, taking the crossing point at the stones (Ad Pontes) at Staines. They quickly established a fortified settlement at Ad Pontes to protect the bridge. It is generally thought that this first Roman 'Pont' was probably a rough earthwork causeway supported by stone.

The Roman 'Ad Pontes' bridge soon became a vital part of the Roman Road that connects London to the West. Although this road does not have a common name (unlike, for example, 'Stane Street' that runs to Chichester) it does connect, in a straight line, a route from Staines to the London Wall via Hounslow, Brentford, Shepherds Bush and Holborn. If you have driven down the A30, A315 or even Oxford Street, you have used this old Roman route.

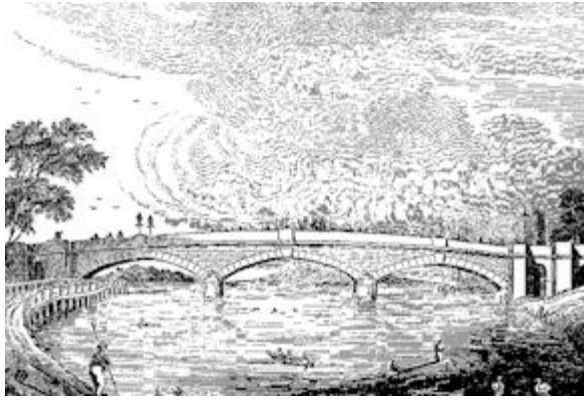


[Claudius denarius]

How long this first Roman bridge survived is not known but the position of a river crossing-point on this important main road from London to the southwest, and its proximity of the settlement to Windsor and the seat of sovereign power, led to the town being involved in national affairs (not least the signing of the Magna Carta.) The need for a more permanent wooden bridge could not be overlooked and a wooden structure was built in 1222. This first recognisable bridge was constructed using piles of oak driven into the bed of the river and covered with planks. There were four more wooden bridges built after this very first attempt- all failed to survive for very long. Eventually, in 1796, when the first modern stone bridge was built at the present site.

This bridge, made of three semicircular arches of stone, from the design of the celebrated Paul Sandby, lasted only five years, when it was replaced by a very elegant bridge of one arch, of 180 feet span, constructed of cast iron, from the design of Thomas Wilson. This bridge, like its predecessors, did not last long and had to be closed to the public after just one month! His Majesty King George the Third was said to have been among the last to pass over it.

The current bridge with three arches was designed by George Rennie and construction started in 1827 (it was opened in 1832 by their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Clarence - later William IV.) George Rennie constructed the Grosvenor Bridge over the Dee at Chester and was the 'less-famous' son of John Rennie the Elder, the Scottish civil engineer who designed the famous London Bridge that now can be found at Lake Havasu City, Arizona. The Staines railway bridge - spanning the Thames parallel to the road bridge, was opened in 1856.



[Staines New Bridge- 1827]

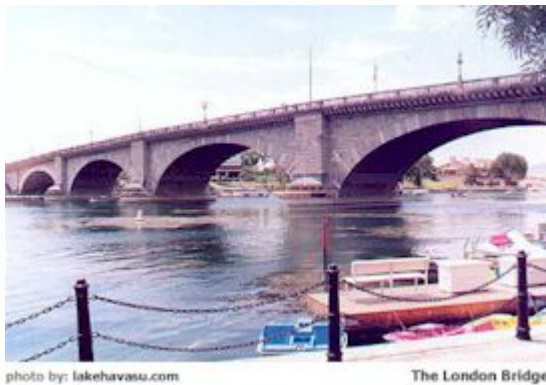
There is now support for an elegant pedestrian/cycle bridge to be constructed beside the existing bridge (like the popular Hungerford footbridge) to ease traffic flow and provide a safer more enjoyable route for pedestrians.

Sources:

<http://www.lakehasasu.com>

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>

<http://www.rotherhamweb.co.uk/m>



Bridge at Lake Havasu City- remarkably similar?

[London Bridge at Lake Havasu City, Arizona]