

# ***The Other Humber Bridge***

**I wonder how many Barton people among the Visitors to the Waterside Bridge Viewing point know that had it not been for the precarious state of the Nation's Finances in 1930 they could well have been looking at a different sort of bridging altogether!**

**Many would be surprised to learn that at that time, if one looked to the East from the Point, then beyond the Haven mouth the first thing to note would have been the Farmers Co. Ltd Jetty. This was very strongly build and consisted of 12 or 14 heavy doubled wooden piles in 2 rows. Heavy beams across the tops of opposite pilings carried a double 3-plank width road from the 'gap' to the main bank out into the river. Sloops, keels, motorised vessels moored to this, there was a small derrick used for handling a very heavy thick board plank, a 'baulk', which ran from the jetty end to the planks placed across the holds of the barges. This derrick was not used in the unloading. Gangs of men hoisted, 'whipped', baskets of heavy material from the holds to be barrowed ashore into the factory. The middle planks of the runs along the jetty had substantial lengths of iron running down the centres. Such was the weight of the loads carried on the iron wheeled barrows that unprotected planks would have been damaged. This unloading is a story in itself.**

**BUT if Parliament had gone ahead with the Hull City Council's proposals for a Bridge, they would have seen a multi-span bridge just 120 yards beyond the FCL site, this was to have run from Barrow Road, the A1077, in Barton to Hessle. It was a 16 span Bridge borne on 15 Piers 10 of which were on the South, Barton side. These piers were 265 feet apart with a headway, giving a clearance, of 70 ft. The majority of the spans were on the South side because of the distance from the only useable road to the low water mark. It also maintained a gradual lift from the road to the Centre higher span. This main Span was sited over what was thought to be the main channel; it had a clearance of 80 ft and was 365 ft in width. This span and the two adjacent ones had a superstructure to carry the load and stress of the extra width. The others were of level girders. From the centre spans the other piers ran on a shallow slope to the Hessle shore.**

**May I draw attention to that excellent publication - The Official Directory and Guide to Barton-on-Humber - this gives a succinct account of the History of Barton. In my opinion it provides a firm base from which anyone wishing to learn more about the Town may proceed. It is Good Value! There is much in it about the trade of the Town and the Ferries and it follows that anyone seeking**

to write about bridging the River has to make reference to other means of crossing this, at times, quite dangerous stretch of tidal water.

Much has been written about the Humber Ferries and Crossings that existed and were brought into use from the time of the Romans to the present. The Barton Ferry was valued in the Domesday Book at £4. P.A., Charters were granted to various Bodies allowing them the right to convey passengers and goods across the River. Stage Coaches ran scheduled journeys from London along the Main County Turnpike Road via Bourne, Sleaford and Lincoln terminating at the end of Waterside. (Two Guineas or so inside, much less outside)

It must have been a sight to behold when the laden stage, the 'Imperial' perhaps, took the Waterside Road and Holydyke then taking Beacon Hill and the road to Brigg, Redbourne and Lincoln at a handsome clip. The Coachmen, skilled men, were the equivalent of the later mainline Express drivers. Respected, envied perhaps, no doubt small boys in Barton determined to emulate them when they grew up!

There are some excellent publications about the Humber Ferries and the spread of the Railway systems. I do not propose to go into detail but suffice it to say that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century there was growing pressure for a regular, reliable and affordable means of crossing the River. Traders and Councils presumably felt that the Railways were holding them to ransom, naturally they wanted a cheaper service, not dependent upon the vagaries of the weather.

Schemes for tunnels were mooted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Railway Companies built a wooden pier at New Holland for steam paddle boats, in the early 1920's they build the present Pier structure of caissons to carry railway lines to the Pier head. Many in Barton and District will have heard of family members who worked in the compressed air in these caissons. George Cressey who lived the 'Row' at Sandersons brickyard in Barrow Haven used to speak of the severe nosebleeds suffered by the workmen due to that pressure.

In the late 1920's Hull City Council, supported by the East Riding CC and Lindsey CC, put forward a Bill to Parliament asking for approval and finance for a multi-span 'TOLL' Bridge to be built from Barton to Hessle. Fox & Partners were the Consulting Engineers; interestingly enough a Mr Freeman was one on the Engineers involved! The estimated cost was £1,725,000. Other options were Railway Tunnels, £4,600,000. Road Tunnels £7,200,000 and a

## **PROPOSED HUMBER BRIDGE**



**combination Road/Rail £4,000,000. No contest was there at that price. Test bores were carried out along the Barton side, lots of water was found at 25ft and I feel sure the depth of the silt and clays gave the Consultants pause for thought.**

**It was to be a simple road bridge, 2 way traffic, and goodness only knows how Lindsey CC thought the roads infra-structure at Barton could carry the flow of traffic into and out of the bridge.**

**The mind boggles, Barton UDC could see the light and an increase in Rates so they joined, with others, as Petitioners to stop the Bill.**

**It was not a universally popular move, widely opposed and the Farmers Company of Barton spearheaded the promotion of a Petition to deny the Bill in its passage through the House. The objections raised were of sufficient weight and validity as to require the House of Commons Committee to sit for 39 days before giving their approval. I will anticipate a little by saying that by this time the state of the Nation's finances was such that the Bill was dropped. In these years the Farmers Company were considerable manufacturers and employers in Barton producing some 12 to 13,000 tones of Fertiliser and 2 to 3,000 tons of Sulphuric Acid annually. Their plant at Brigg produced approximately 10,000 tons of Oilcake, oils and feedstock annually. The raw materials for the plants came into the Humber Ports, mainly Hull, seagoing cargo vessels brought in cargoes of Linseed, Super-phosphate, Phosphate, Potash and Copper Ore. The Copper ore, (CuFeS I believe), was used to manufacture Acids. Sloops and Keels, mainly under sail, were used to transport the materials to Barton where barges were livered (unloaded). Workers heaving loaded baskets out of the holds and onto hand barrows, which were wheeled along the wooden jetty. A berth in the Haven near the Maltings was also used. It was grinding, back breaking work I can assure you, but there was always a supply of labour in those years.**

**Times were hard, men stood in line at the hut used by the Labour Exchange being required to 'sign on' twice daily and most were only too glad of a chance to work. Linseed went to Brigg by water. Coal for both factories came from the pits by water. Acids were made at Barton by the Lead Chamber process (one such plant was still operating at Widnes not so many years ago!). The Copper Ore was burnt in banks of kilns, the gases passed over Nitre and other substances and huge head chambers received the resultant gases which became Acids to be led away for mixing with the other materials. Some which were ground finely in a stonemill. I was allowed into the kilns and chambers because my Grandfather was a Kilnburner there. My Father and Brother worked at FCL at various times.**

**Back to the Bridge. Plainly any interference with the supply of materials could seriously affect production at FCL and the Petition sets out their arguments against what they, and others, saw as an ill-conceived project. The 'others' included more County and local Councils, Chambers of Shipping, Railway Companies who obviously had an axe to grind, also the very powerful Humber Conservancy Board. The Humber Conservancy Act gave the Board wide powers that they still have and still use. Barton land and property owners were apprehensive and the minor sloop and keel owners feared interference with their livelihoods.**

**The main objections were:-**

- 1. The river had a shifting bed and the navigable channels moved as river conditions changed, there are still many people in this area who have seen large cargo vessels passing majestically between Reads Island and the main road, the A1077, opposite the Cement works. The Bill contained provision to re-site the main span so this was a possibility not unknown to the Engineers.**
- 2. The Petitioners said the design and construction methods were defective on Engineering grounds. The Geology was such as to cause problems in construction, increasing costs. (Freeman and Co. could have remembered that could they not?)**
- 3. The piers for the spans would cause silting. Look at the build up at the modern Barton Tower.**
- 4. Navigation would be rendered hazardous particularly in very bad weather or in fog.**
- 5. Insofar as the FCL was concerned they feared that raw materials would not reach their plants. The many spans on the Barton side would have been a real problem to sailing vessels. This is a dangerous river at the times of bad weather and big tides.**
- 6. There were other lesser objections but I have, I hope drawn attention to some of the problems envisaged by the Petitioners.**

**At the time this construction was proposed the river was a hive of activity, sloops and keels under said, powered barges, seagoing vessels moved up and down particularly at the time of High water.**

**I condensed this article from notes I prepared for a talk on the subject for there is much of local interest in this proposal. It may be thought that Mr Freeman took on board much that he had learned about the river and the problems involved in Bridging it when he came to be concerned in the construction of the present Humber Bridge, even so he and his Company still had many problems to solve.**

**In 1937 the question of the Bridge was raised again, this time a Suspension Bridge but, of course, war clouds loomed and there the matter rested.**

**I will add one note about the dangers of this river. In about 1935, or so, I am not sure of the date, a distant water trawler, the Edgar Wallace, came back from the fishing grounds and when manoeuvring to enter the Fish Dock at Hull the vessel was rolled over by the fierce flowing tide when it struck a sandbank that had built up in the River during the relatively short time they had been away on the fishing grounds and was therefore not known to them. The vessel was sunk with the loss of lives in sight of many waiting for it to berth.**

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