

The Old Bridge over the River Tas



The old bridge at Newton Flotman is a five-arch road bridge that carries Old Street (the former Norwich to Ipswich road that runs through the village; now bypassed) across the River Tas.

The midline of the river originally formed the boundary between Newton Flotman parish on the west bank and Saxlingham Nethergate parish on the east, but the river's course has been heavily altered since that boundary was laid out, first by a channel or leat (now infilled) dug to bring water to Saxlingham Thorpe Mill that stands close to the southern end of the bridge and, since 1968, by channel realignment both up- and downstream of the bridge carried out as a flood-alleviation measure. The old course of the Tas – which the original bridge was designed to span – later acted as the mill bypass channel.

The old bridge is a complex, multi-period structure of at least five principal phases. The arches are numbered 1 to 6 from north to south (the 6th arch lies buried in the southern riverbank).

The phase-1 bridge

The western (upstream) side of the bridge is clearly the earliest. The style of architecture and masonry suggests this phase-1 bridge is late medieval in date. It consisted of four stone arches: the current spans 2-5. This early bridge was probably only a maximum of 1.8m or 6 feet wide at deck level. It also clearly had a slightly humpbacked profile.

The phase-2 bridge



The phase-2 bridge is that depicted in a drawing of *circa* 1830. The drawing also shows an additional arch (here called arch 6) through the southern causeway close to where it departed the south bank. The causeway and arch were likely constructed to accommodate the outflow from the tail race of the nearby Saxlingham Thorpe watermill.

The mill leat has since been filled in and the riverbank extended forward across its line (Norfolk Mills 2024) to enlarge the mill car park, but both causeway and arch must still exist buried within the bank.

At some point in phase 2 (certainly pre the *circa* 1830 drawing), the bridge had been strengthened by iron tie rods inserted above the crowns of arches 2-5 and secured by circular pattress plates.



The A140 in the early 1960s

The phase-3 bridge

In 1838 the bridge was widened by *circa* 2.67m towards the east (downstream) by the construction of a new, brick-built bridge directly up against the old stone structure. The arches of the bridge are elliptical verging on four-centred to match those of the phase-1 structure.



A stone in the centre of the upstream parapet contains the inscription

S | N
1838

The letters 'S' and 'N' are the initial letters of the two parishes Saxlingham Nethergate and Newton Flotman, and the 'I' as just a vertical line denoting the (then) position of the parish boundary.

The phase-4 bridge

In 1848 the bridge was once again widened downstream, this time by an additional *circa* 3.45m or 11 feet 4 inches: in effect, a third bridge was built alongside the second making the overall width of the bridge 7.92m or 26 feet between elevations. The spans of this third (i.e. phase-4) bridge have a more definite pointed, four-centred-arch profile, as may be seen in the visible downstream elevation

The phase-5 bridge



View of the upstream elevation from the north bank. Arch 1 is closest to the camera

Arch 1 is a totally modern affair, built in 1976 when the bridge was lengthened as part of channel realignment works. Most of the river's flow is now directed beneath arch 1, for arches 2-5 all have concrete inverts poured between steel shuttering laid in the bed of the river to protect the older parts of the bridge from scour.

Flooding in the Tas Valley

In August 1912, severe flooding in the Tas valley caused pier 4 and parts of the adjacent arches 4 and 5 on the upstream elevation to collapse. The repairs had been completed by November 1913 at a cost of £778 11s 1d. (equivalent to £5,402.92 in 2026).

Source: The old bridge at Newton Flotman, South Norfolk Architectural and historical assessment, Jecock M 2025 Historic England. Scan the QR code to view the fill report



Newton Flotman Parish Council



Saxlingham Nethergate Parish Council

