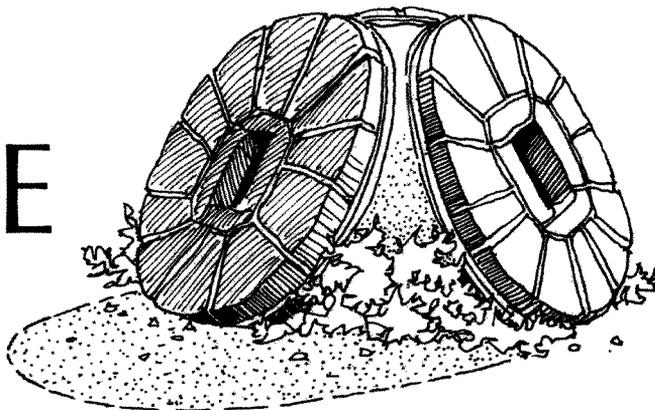


DEAN VILLAGE NEWS



No. 78 Autumn 1984

THE WATER OF LEITH CROSSINGS

The Water of Leith, so useful to Edinburgh, has nevertheless presented a major obstacle to movement between the city and places to the north and west. Most of the crossing places are close to mill sites, since early routes to the mills from the city could be utilised, with diversions to the nearest fording place, for journeys further afield. The road to Newhaven went by the ford near to Bonnington Mills, the Lanark Road by Slateford, and the busy road to Queensferry and beyond was over the fords at Water of Leith Village and at Bell's Mills. In the course of time these fords gave place to bridges. In the vicinity of the Dean Village there have been seven bridges, of which five remain.

For centuries the main crossing must have been the ford still identifiable in the Village, that gave access to the Queensferry Road along the line of the present-day Dean Path. The ford at Bell's Mills would be a subsidiary route. The date of the building of the bridge at the foot of Bell's Brae seems not to be known, but it is likely to have been about the period of the adjacent buildings, one of which is the Baxters' Tolbooth. This dates from 1675, but replaced a building erected in 1582. In a disposition relating to a legal dispute in the Village is the statement: "A bridge has stood here since 1573."¹

Some time in the 18th century, however, the necessity for the steep descent and ascent was removed by the building of a bridge near to the ford at Bell's Mills, approached by a

gentler slope. A plan in Register House dated 1807² shows a bridge at Bell's Mills and a road to the right bank of the river just upstream of it which is described as "Old foot road to a narrow bridge before the present one was built". In "The Water of Leith", John Geddie quotes a description of the bridge shown on the 1807 plan as "a tall, narrow, starved, consumptive object unable to support its own feebleness without the aid of buttressed crutches." This ramshackle structure was built in 1784, and presumably replaced a footbridge or possibly a pack-horse bridge, which was the "narrow bridge" mentioned on the plan. John Laurie's Plan of Edinburgh dated 1766 shows this first bridge.

The next episode in the history of the crossing of the Water of Leith was the building of the Dean Bridge by Thomas Telford in 1832. This was part of a scheme of speculative building by Lord Provost Learmonth. He had bought the estate of Dean with the intention of developing it for housing as an extension of the New Town. His plan was for "a splendid suburb" in a "situation ... one of the finest in Europe." Then as now developers dealt in hyperbole, but here with some justification. The new bridge was largely paid for by Learmonth, with assistance from the Cramond Road Trustees, who nominated Telford as the engineer. It was built by John Gibb and Son of Aberdeen. Professor Youngson says of this most handsome and convenient bridge: "It is remarkable that the

principal bridge over the Water of Leith has been provided by a private developer for his own interest." In a wry reference to the attempted suicides from the bridge a wag has said of it "The construction of the Dean Bridge made life easier for very many of Edinburgh's citizens, and death easier for a few."

No further crossings were provided for half a century. In the 1880's, when Murrayfield and Ravelston were being developed, the old bridge at Bell's Mills was deemed inadequate, and the present Belford Bridge was erected. As a plaque on the parapet intimates, it was built by the Magistrates and Town Council of Edinburgh with the aid of local subscriptions obtained by the Belford Bridge Association. It was opened by the Lord Provost Sir Thomas Clark on 22 July 1887. It is decorated with the coats of arms of Edinburgh and of Scotland.

Soon after, the developments in the Village of Water of Leith gave impetus to the building of another bridge. Well Court had been built in 1884, and the rehabilitation of the village occasioned the building of the iron footbridge beside the old ford. It was constructed by Robert Peddie and Co of Tynecastle Works, Gorgie.

The most recent of the bridges is the footbridge that was provided by Cala Homes to give access from their housing development at Sunbury to the new Walkway between Belford Bridge and Dean Path.

As you enjoy the Water of Leith Walkway and the delights of the Dean Village, don't be too quick about crossing your bridges when you come to them! Linger and ponder the history of these diverse crossings of the Water of Leith.

Stanley Jamieson

Notes:

¹ Quotation from 'Artist's House in Dean Village' by William Buchanan. *Glasgow Herald*, May 7 1963.

² John Hay's Plan 1807 (Register House Plan 246) "relative to a dispute with James Haig of Sunberry before the Sherrif of Edinburgh".

³ A.J. Youngson: *The Making of Classical Edinburgh* (1966) p.272.

A Chronology of the Crossings of the Water of Leith at the Dean.

Ford at Water of Leith Village —	probably from at least 12th century.
Ford at Bell's Mills —	unknown, but pre 18th century.
The 'Village' Bridge —	16th century.
Narrow bridge at Bell's Mills —	Early 18th century.
Old Belford Bridge —	1784
Dean Bridge —	1832
New Belford Bridge —	1887
Water of Leith Footbridge —	1889
Sunbury Footbridge —	1982

LETTER FROM AMERICA

"We had a fascinating guided tour with Lawrence Walker through Dean Village and then returned for the ceilidh, walking back to our b. and b. around midnight in the twilight. Of course that was June 23rd, your "Day of Festivities" and the beginning of three lovely weeks spent in Scotland. There were so many highlights to our trip that I would not know what to mention. We concluded our last week with four days in Lamlash in Arran. However, our introduction to Dean Village was very special. Well Court was delightful. We enjoyed the smallness and cordiality — and of course we enjoyed the crazy and lively fun which the children seemed to be so much part of as the adults." Meg and Bill Waugh, Riverdale, Maryland, who sent the Association a gift of £20.

THE EXHIBITION

The centre-piece of the exhibition in the Art College was the fine painting of the Village in 1878 by Sir William Fettes Douglas. How it glowed!

Sidney Mitchell's plans for Well Court showed that the first phase included only the flats on three sides of the square. (Plans dated May 1, 1883). Careful inspection revealed that these must have been modified, for they do not show Well Court exactly as it was built. The "Club-Room, Caretaker's House and Shop" (i.e. No 1) are on a later plan dated April 10th 1884. (The Hall was opened on July 4th, 1885). The massive and handsome retaining wall appears for the first time on that plan. John Ritchie Findlay's project

seems to have become more grandiose as it went on.

Another important element in the exhibition was Thomas Telford's drawings for the Dean Bridge. There too there was a change, but this time in the direction of simplicity: the castellated "Gothic" trimmings were omitted.

There were also the plans for Hawthorn Buildings, drawn in 1895 for George Auldjo Jamieson, who also owned the old inn (now 30-32 Belford Road). The architects were Dunn & Findlay of 94 George Street. (That Findlay was Sir John's son).

Dr Michael Cuthbert had assembled an interested collection of water-colours and old photographs. These stimulated conversation about the old days, when Deanhaugh Cottage still stood on the north bank of the river just above the footbridge, J. White had his market garden above Hawthorn Terrace, and there were shops in Dean Path (Crawford's, Granny Dougall's ...) and where was "A. Harris, Grocer"?

We are grateful to Crawford's the bakers and Robert Hutchison & Co of Kirkcaldy (who incorporate Leggate's the tanners) for their help towards the cost of the exhibition, to Dr Michael Cuthbert for arranging it and to the Principal of the College of Art for the free use of a fine room.

POETIC ENGINEERING

Though the installation of large sculpture out of doors in public spaces is hardly a novel idea, one must commend Adam Zyw for his enterprise in Inverleith Park, Edinburgh, where he has sited no less than nine biggish works in the little rose garden on the slope adjacent to the boating pond: Signposted *Wood in the Park* the pieces stand sentinel, lurk in the shrubbery or, as in the case of a high Wall snake across an end of the lawn ...

Good humour, wit and a certain amount of poetic metaphor can be read into many of the highly individual pieces ...

There is, indeed, a romantic air of clever improvisation and a light-heartedness in the variety of formal invention he achieves — but that in no way detracts from the serious and poetic dimension he is able to create. Held clearly in tension, for example, *Aerial* is an eloquent bit of poetic engineering.

Edward Gage "The Scotsman", July 16

MISS JEAN BEVERIDGE

The oldest inhabitant of the Village will be 100 on November 2nd.

ANOTHER CENTENARY

The distinguished firm of Whytock & Reid have been celebrating 100 years at Sunbury; but Richard Whytock had set up in business back in 1807 at 9/11 George Street. He pioneered new techniques in the weaving of carpets and damasks, and his products were highly prized. He received the Royal Warrant in 1838.

In 1876 his son Alexander went into partnership with Robert and Hugh Reid, whose father had built up a cabinet-making and upholstery business in Ayr and Glasgow, and who had already been in business in Edinburgh for some years. The new firm of Whytock & Reid had their showroom and offices at 9/11 George Street. As for workshops, the Reids already had theirs at Bell's Mills, but in 1884 the present Belford Cabinet Works were built at Sunbury, on the site of Sunbury Distillery and Sunbury House, which were demolished at that time. In 1851 Sunbury House was described in the Ordnance Survey's records as "a neat cottage residence with garden and plot of ornamental ground", occupied by Mr Menzies of the distillery firm.

There are still Reids in the firm, although there have been no Whytocks since 1886. In 1934 the firm moved from George Street to 7 Charlotte Square, which is now the National Trust's "Georgian House". Ten years ago new showrooms and offices were built at Sunbury on part of the old timber yard and near the workshops. For this handsome modern building the name of Sunbury House was revived.

THE SCHOOL

Lothian Region has sold it to James Potter Construction, who are applying for consent for a change to residential use (not demolition). They propose to make two houses, two maisonettes and 14 flats. The Association will scrutinise the plans, which will be available for anyone to see, at 18 Market Street, probably until October 19 at least.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday October 23: The Changing Role of the RSSPCC. Douglas Turner.

Saturday November 3: Fireworks! in the Village at 7.30 p.m. Adults £1; children 50p. (Including hot soup).

Tuesday November 20: Wildlife in India and Nepal. Kenneth Sanderson, who delighted members by his previous slide show.

Indoor meetings are held in Dean Church Hall, Ravelston Terrace, at 7.30 p.m.

HIGH GREEN ETC

We have already described and commented upon McTaggart & Mickel's plans for High Green (DVN No 77). They have now submitted a plan for the adjoining site at 45-49 Belford Road, part of which is used as a car park. The architects for this scheme are Morris and Steedman. The DVA has criticised the design, which is inferior to that for High Green. There are good points: for example, most of the car parking space would be in a basement and sub-basement. We think there should be none in the "back-green" area; a garden there would be a little consolation for the residents in Belford Mews who will lose their open outlook.

We have not objected strongly to the high density in the excellent plans for High Green; but the two plans together amount to gross over-development. The proposed pattern of roadways and footpaths seems reasonably sympathetic to the character of the Village, but there is a danger there might in the future be an irresistible demand for "improved" access, wider roads and more circulation and parking space for vehicles. The number of dwellings permitted now must be low enough to ensure that this will never happen.

We are glad to hear that the two applications are being considered together. It is likely that they will be laid before the Planning Committee some time this autumn.

CONVENING COURT

For several years we have been imploring the authorities to stop neglecting this potentially delightful by-way, which is the responsibility of the Highways Department of the Regional Council. They are unwilling to do much before redevelopment of the Tannery site was finished. We are now trying to ensure that a complete renovation will not be delayed much longer, and that the Highways Department will consult the Conservation Section of the District Council's Planning Department (and us too, perhaps) about the design and materials.

Stop Press: A working group, involving the Highways Department and the District's Planning Department, has been set up to look into surfacing in environmentally sensitive areas in the city. They will consider Convening Court.

VANDALISM

Please report to the police even minor damage to cars etc. Otherwise they won't know that our streets need more frequent patrols. (This is what the police themselves say.)

GUIDE TO VILLAGE

The leaflet has been carefully revised, with an attractive drawing by Ian C. Macpherson and a new map drawn by Paul Harding. It can be bought (15p) from Belford Road Post Office, Alex Hastings in Queensferry Street, Stockbridge Bookshop, from the Chairman, Treasurer or Secretary, or from Mrs Kirkwood, 19 Well Court, or Mrs Turner, 44 Well Court.

THE DEAN VILLAGE ASSOCIATION

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SUBSCRIPTIONS (1984-5)

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Life Membership £20