

Barley Bridge

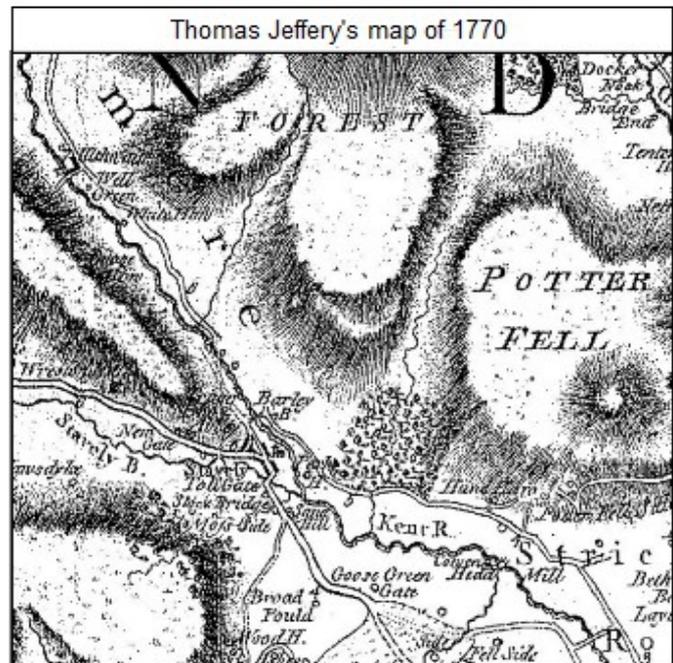
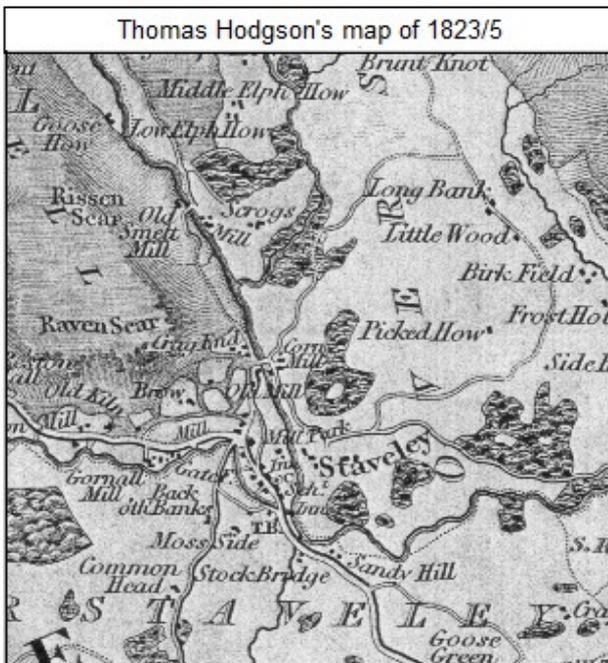
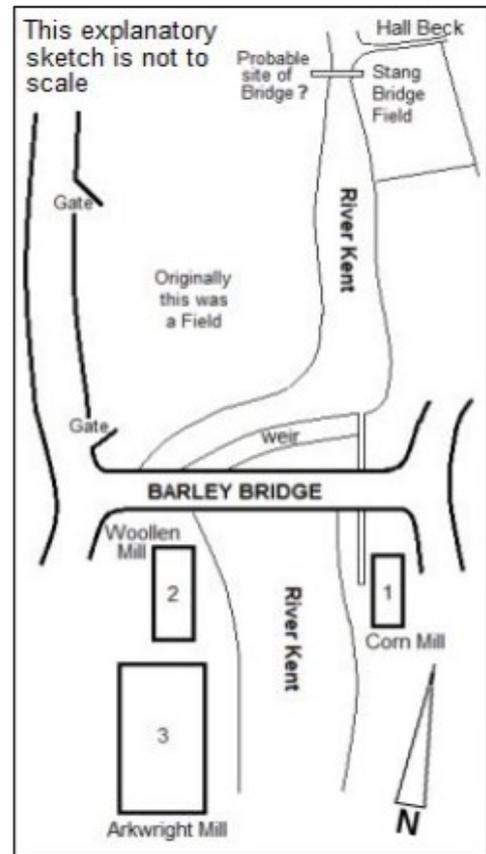
Alan Lord.

Barley Bridge, spanning the River Kent, is approximately 350 metres north of the centre of the village of Staveley. In earlier times, there being no intervening development, it was somewhat detached from the village and so the bridge also gave its name to the small mainly industrial area nearby.

There were three mills at Barley Bridge. The oldest must have been the corn mill¹ on the east bank of the River Kent. It would have been built on the east side because that was the main flow of the river and it appears from the level of the millrace that there was sufficient head of water to operate a wheel without the need for a weir.

The second mill would have been the two storey woollen mill later extended northwards to include bobbin manufacture². On Thos Hodgson's map of 1823 it was named as "Old Mill" even then, but there were no mills shown at Barley Bridge on Thos Jeffery's 1770 map of Westmorland so the corn mill may have been built about 1780 and the woollen mill a few years later.

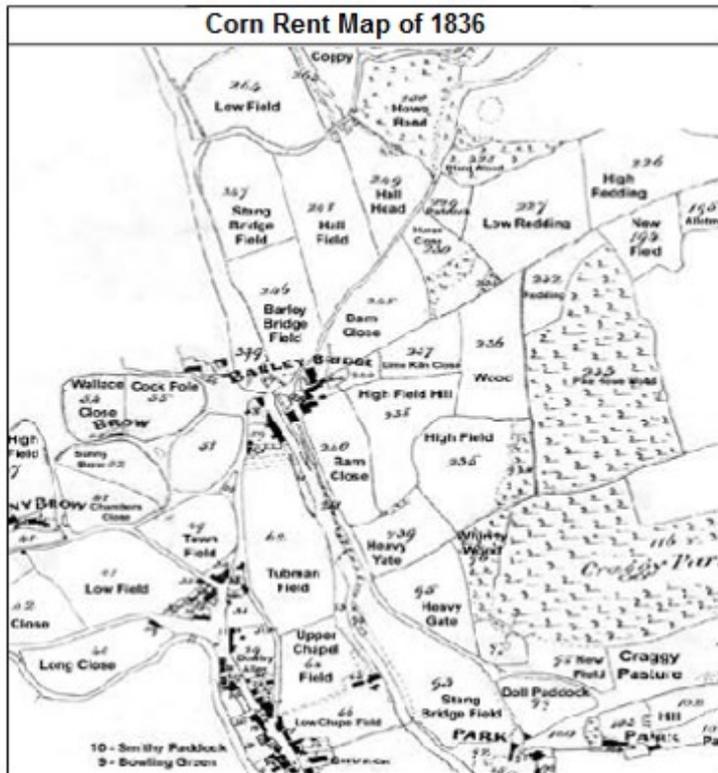
However the bridge is named Barley Bridge on Thos Jeffery's map which implies that there was a mill there prior to 1770 which may have been disused at the time of mapping, or perhaps thought not to be of sufficient importance to be shown¹. His map also shows the mileage from Kendal via Burneside along the back road and over Barley Bridge which may have been a clever way of avoiding the two toll gates at Plumgarths and the Eagle and Child in Staveley. So it would seem that this had become an established route by 1770 and that Barley Bridge was, by then, adequate enough to cope with the traffic



The woollen mill built on the west bank required a low weir to divert some of the river flow across to the west side. It is clear from the curve of the weir that it was not built for the corn mill or it would have curved the opposite way. The 1859 OS map shows a sluice in the new weir to regulate the flow to the corn mill race so it must have been capable of operation as a mill throughout that period.

The third mill was a cotton mill, built in 1874 to Arkwright's design³, on the west bank downstream of the woollen mill and adjacent to it. This was a four storey mill with a wheel 9 feet wide and 14 feet diameter and the earlier

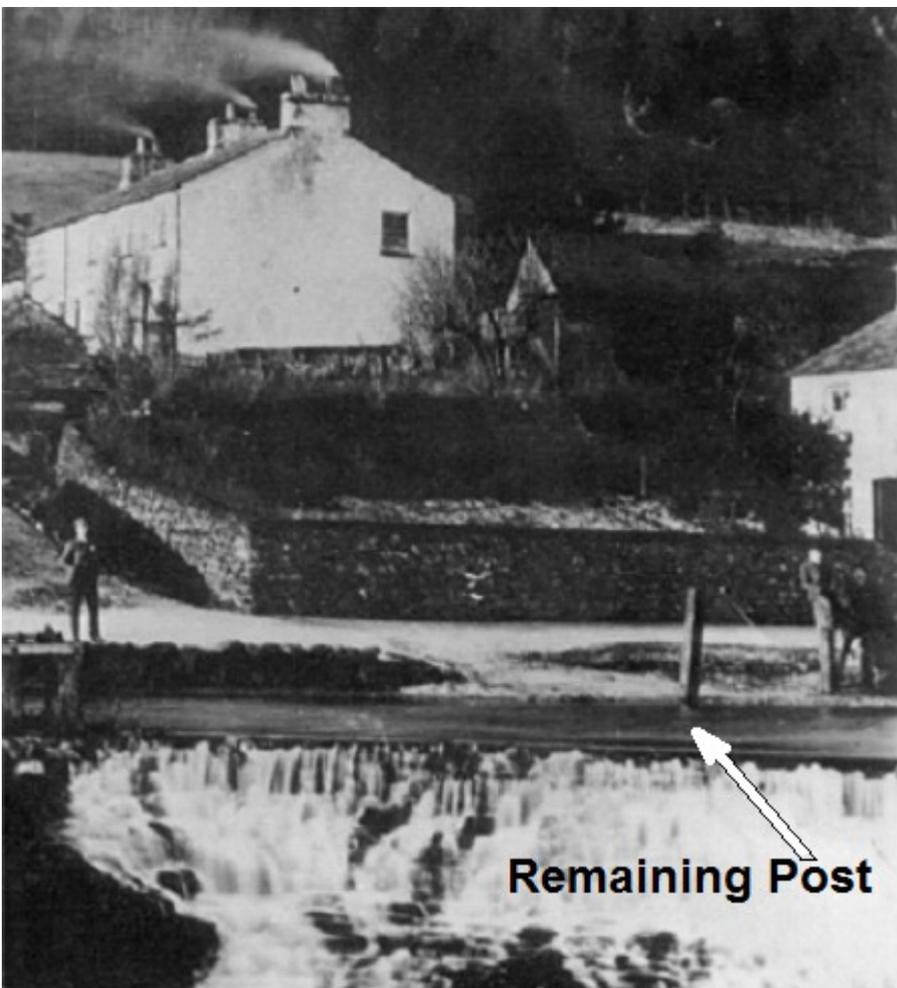
weir had to be raised to provide a sufficient head of water to operate it. At this time the corn mill was bought out and was used for the preliminary stages of the cotton spinning in the new Arkwright mill. The water supply to the mill must have been retained to provide power for these operations and the sluice was presumably refitted into the raised weir at the time of the takeover.



A few hundred metres upstream of Barley Bridge at the confluence of Hall Beck with the River Kent is a field shown on the 1836 Corn Rent map as Stang Bridge Field. The River Kent narrows at this point and would be a convenient site for a bridge.

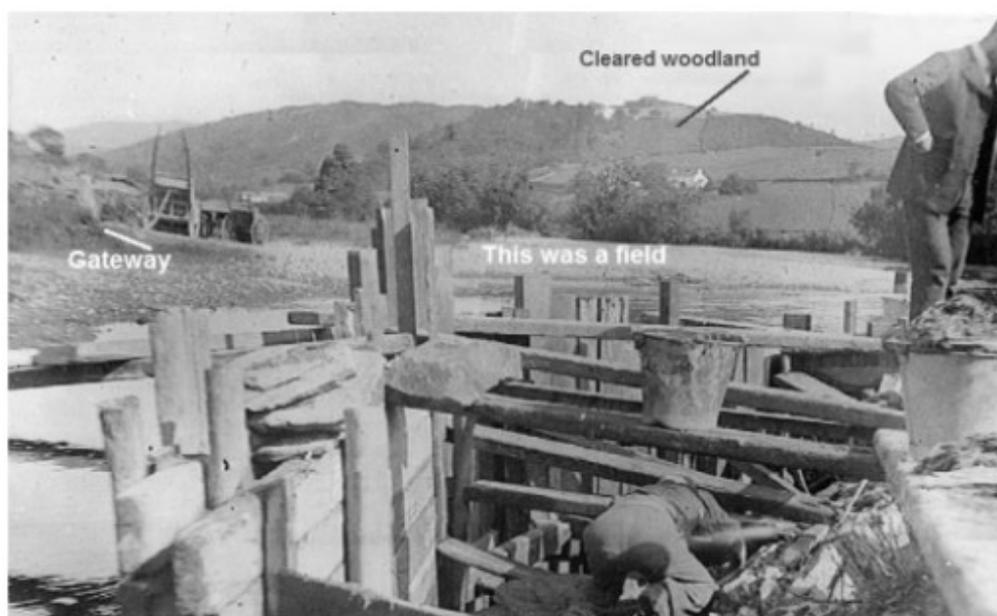
Stang” comes from an old Anglo Saxon word “stæng” meaning a wooden pole⁴. Just how substantial such a bridge would have been we don't know, but it is unlikely to have been much more than a footbridge or possibly adequate for a horse to be lead over the river.

Further downstream was another Stang Bridge Field opposite the present footbridge which provides access to the path alongside St Margaret's Churchyard onto Main Street. It is reasonable to assume that Barley Bridge could also have been a Stang Bridge in those earlier days. The name Barley Bridge implies that it was a bridge giving access to the mill for farmers growing grain. The climate being too wet and the season too short for wheat, barley and oats were grown for animal feed, some of which was milled for flour for bread making.



The woollen mill on the west bank of the river was presumably built with access from the road, as it then was, but the present stone bridge and the road to the west of it are about a metre above the ground floor of the mill which suggests that the earlier bridge must have been at a much lower level.

Early photographs show that there was a large field between the west bank of the river and the road, with two access gates from the road. One shows a boy sitting on top of a stone gatepost. The other gatepost to which the gate was hinged is now only partially above road level, so that side of the roadway has been raised by almost a metre, probably after the raising of the weir, to prevent water flowing down the Kentmere Road in flood conditions. The date of these photographs is not known, but the original weir would have been built long before the invention of photography. Also, the woodland beyond Scroggs Farm on the other photograph is



one continuous wood on the 1859 OS map, but the cleared area appears on the 1899 edition. Both of the photographs must have been taken sometime between 1859 and 1899, probably in 1874 during the final phase of raising the weir and fitting the sluice because the field was evidently then still in use.

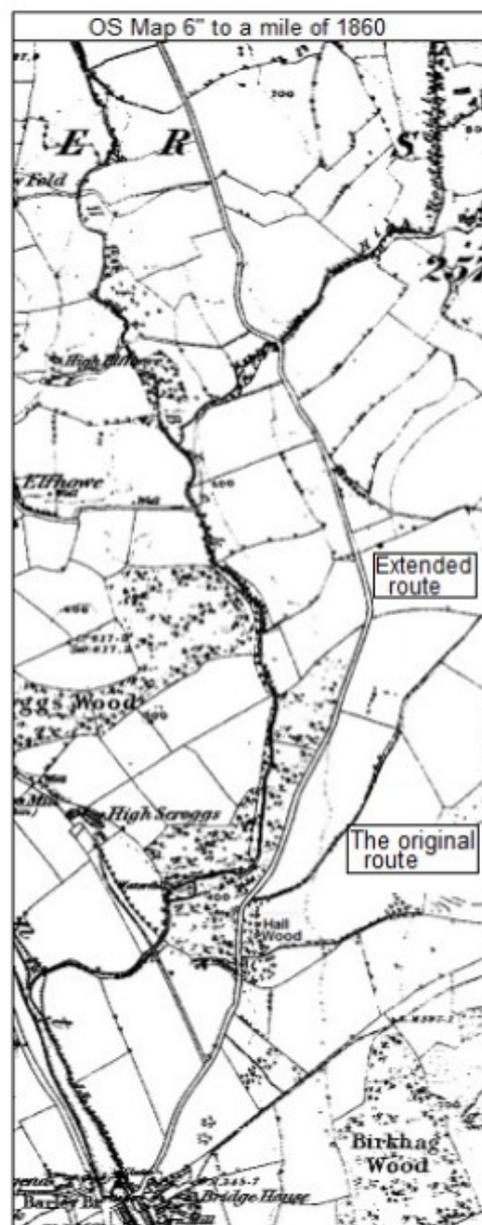
The road network also suggests that Barley Bridge was primarily intended for access to the mill.

Thomas Jeffery's 1770 map of Westmorland does not show a road along what is now known as Hall Lane. Thomas Hodgson's 1823/5 map and the Corn Rent Map of 1836 both show a road, but only as far as Hall Wood, where it links up with the old track which is now a footpath and stile. This may have been to provide access onto the fell at Brunt Knot for peat cutting. There is no connection to Scroggs Farm from this road. The only access to it at that time was by the long lane out to near Scroggs Bridge which implies that Scroggs Bridge was a much older bridge.

The first edition OS map of 1859 and the 1/10560 (6") map based upon it and published the following year shows Hall Lane, as we now call it, continuing much further and cutting through the existing field pattern. Since the earlier portion of Hall Lane, shows no further alteration during the 13 years prior to the 1836 Corn Rent Map, it does not appear to have been built with a view to further extension.

The construction of one and a half miles of road from Barley Bridge to end on open fell land at Staveley Head would not have been of benefit to the local population so it would not have been undertaken at public expense. The cost of purchasing the land and amending the existing field pattern would have been extremely expensive. The most likely reason for this new road seems to have been to provide easy access from the lead mines to the new railway. It is reasonable to assume that Barley Bridge was redesigned as a substantial stone bridge to cater for the increased usage. The construction of such a bridge could not have been funded by a small corn mill and could hardly have been thought necessary for the convenience of connecting the corn mill to the new cotton mill. So it appears that the new stone bridge would have been built in about 1846 with the coming of the railway.

The upstream side of Barley Bridge was re-built in 1968, maintaining its character, for which it received a Civic Trust award⁵. The re-built wall of the bridge blocked off the old mill race which by then had ceased to have any purpose.

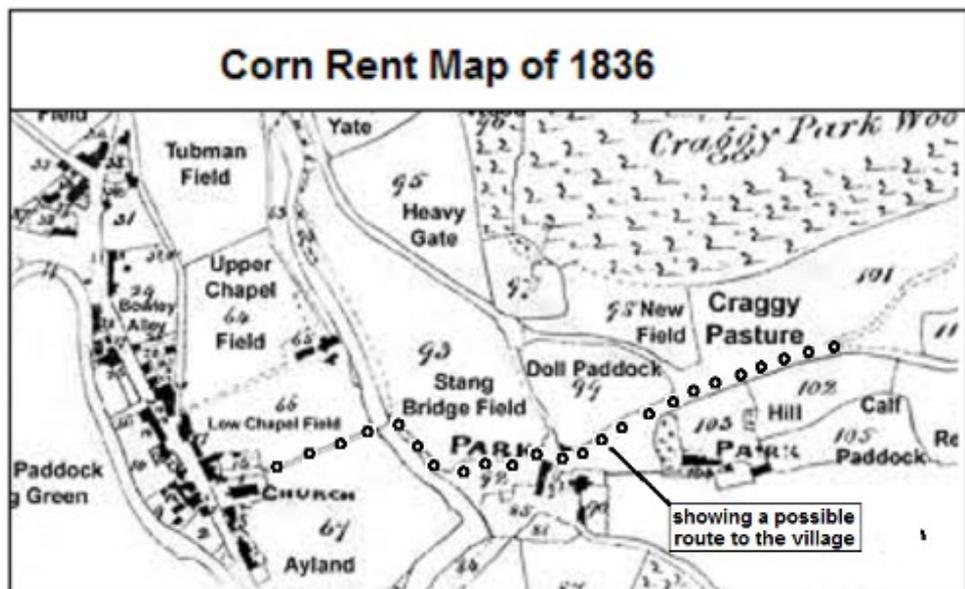


The corn mill on the east bank is referred to in various documents as a former fulling mill which must have been during the time when the woollen mill was operational, since fulling has no place in the cotton industry. Corn milling being perhaps a more seasonal activity, the mill must also have had the capability of fulling when required.

The cotton industry ceased in Staveley in 1810 when the mill was sold to Thomas Cookson of Kendal who returned to woollen manufacture. The sale notice refers to a small three storey mill on the east bank used in the preparatory operations of the cotton trade. It is possible that it became a fulling mill again with the return of the woollen industry which continued under several manufacturers until it ceased in 1906.

However, the mill must have retained its milling capability since it is shown as a corn mill on the 1859 first edition OS 1/2500 large scale map and continued to be described as a corn mill on the later revisions of 1899 and 1920.

The Stang Bridge further downstream led to St Margaret's Church and the main road. The construction of a field wall alongside the track must have been to keep people and animals straying into the field. That implies that it was a well used and long established public way into the village, rather than access just for Park farm. From the south the wall curves to approach the bridge and the width of the remaining buttresses of the bridge suggest that the original stang bridge was subsequently widened for farm carts to get at least onto the Ayland, then just a field, and perhaps also to Main Street. There being no burials in earlier times at St Margaret's there would perhaps then have been wider access alongside the church.



In earlier days the track to the east of the river did not continue on the east bank beyond Barley Bridge and the downstream bridge would have been a more convenient route into the village. It would appear therefore that in those earlier days the back road would probably only be a track just to provide access to the corn mill from the south, rather than a through route as it later appears to have become.

References:

- 1....For details of the history of the mill see page 10 of "Water Power Mills of South Westmorland" by John Somervell, 1930.
- 2....Advertisement in the Blackburn Mail of the 8th November 1797 states that it is both a woollen mill and a bobbin mill
- 3....For details of the history of the Arkwright mills see "The Water Spinners" by Chris Aspin, Helmshore Local History Society, 2003.
- 4....Brewers Dictionary of Phrase and Fable.
- 5....See small plaque on the bridge.