

Post Medieval Masonry bridges in South Munster 1550-1900

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Introduction

Masonry arched bridges began to be built in Ireland in the later Medieval period before this bridges were built of timber.

There was a period of over lapping when both timber and stone were used to build bridges however by the 18th century Stone had replaced timber as the main building material for these structures.

Today there are roughly 16000 masonry arched bridges in Ireland that is excluding Northern Ireland and the majority of these were erected in the first half of the 18th century and the later half of the 19th century.

In the 18th century as road networks expanded for larger vehicles, more elaborate bridges with sophisticated arches and larger spans began to be built; this research will be focusing on these large bridges focusing mainly on the bridges in urban areas.



(St Patrick's Bridge)

Importance of these bridges

Bridges are important for a number of different reasons. The first is the obvious fact that they were a crossing points at a river. Through-out the 19th century a number of large multi- arched masonry bridges were constructed over wider rivers like the Shannon. These were for communication and trade. They also created new crossing point into Ireland's main cities.

Post medieval bridges are important in an Urban context. They were one of the important factors behind the expansion of trade and settlement on both sides of the river in areas like Cork, Dublin and Limerick.

During the Plantation periods of the 16th and 17th century bridges became vital from a military point of view. Road communication was vital during these turbulent times, an example of this is to be seen in Sir Henry Sidney (lord deputy in the 16th century) letters to Francis Walsingham the secretary of state, in which he mentions that all major bridges were to be financed by the war treasury. Before this they would have been financed by local lords and monasteries.

The building of a masonry bridge in the Post-Medieval period was a big deal. These are expensive structures. In some town they would have used stepping stones or ferry crossings in place of a bridge because they simply could not afford it. Therefore there is no doubt that these structures were used to highlight commercial centres and to create a sense of civic pride in the Urban areas that could afford them.



(Fermoy bridge)

Research aims

The aim of this study is to look at some social and economic theories relating to these bridges. Another aim is to create a typology of the Post-Medieval bridges in South Munster.

Social Theories

The social issues relating to these bridges include Technological choice, Social construction and Civic identity.

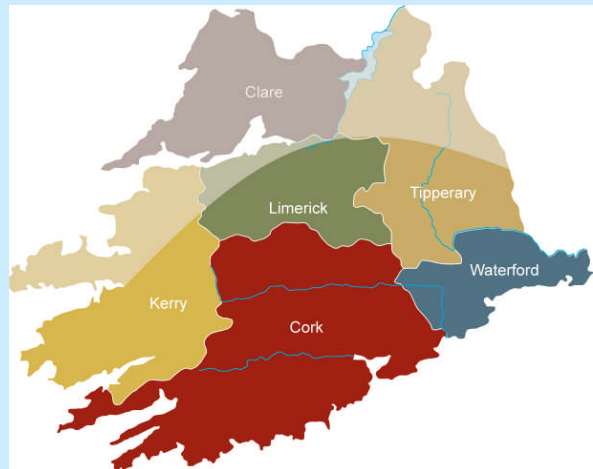
Economic Theories

A systematic study of medieval bridges in Munster may offer a way of recognizing Post-Medieval trade routes that are of as yet unidentified. It may also be a way to track the development of these trade routes. In addition to this looking at trade might be away of understanding the rapid growth of bridges in certain areas.

Typology

An important question that this research will deal with is what type of bridge would one expect to find in 18th and 19th century Ireland? It is also important to answer whether the various featured of medieval bridges continued to develop into the post medieval period? And if so what are they? Creating a typology of the post medieval bridges in South Munster may help in answering these questions.

Survey area



(South Munster)

This research will focus on the South Munster area (highlighted in the map above). Selected bridges in this area will be surveyed to a level to inventory. This area was chosen because there is a diversity range of Bridge context here. There is an interesting rang if port towns like Cork and Limerick, and market towns like Bandon. There is also areas were settlement has built up on both sides of the bridge like Fermoy in Cork.

Conclusion

These structures are becoming more and more damage over time due to the increasing number of vehicles and flooding. Hopefully this research will highlight the significance of these bridges and help outline a much needed conservation plan as without one we are in danger of loosing a valuable part of our heritage.