The Landmark Trust

IRON BRIDGE HOUSE

History Album

Written & updated by Fiona Deaton

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BASIC DETAILS

Built	c.1835
Listed	Grade II
Tenure	Purchased by Landmark Trust 1972
Restoration work completed	1977
Restoration Architect	George Robb, FRIBA of Chapel-en-le-Frith
Contractor	Messrs W.A. Sherratt Ltd, Church Stretton Messrs Geo Linnecor & Son (Midlands) Ltd, Bridgnorth

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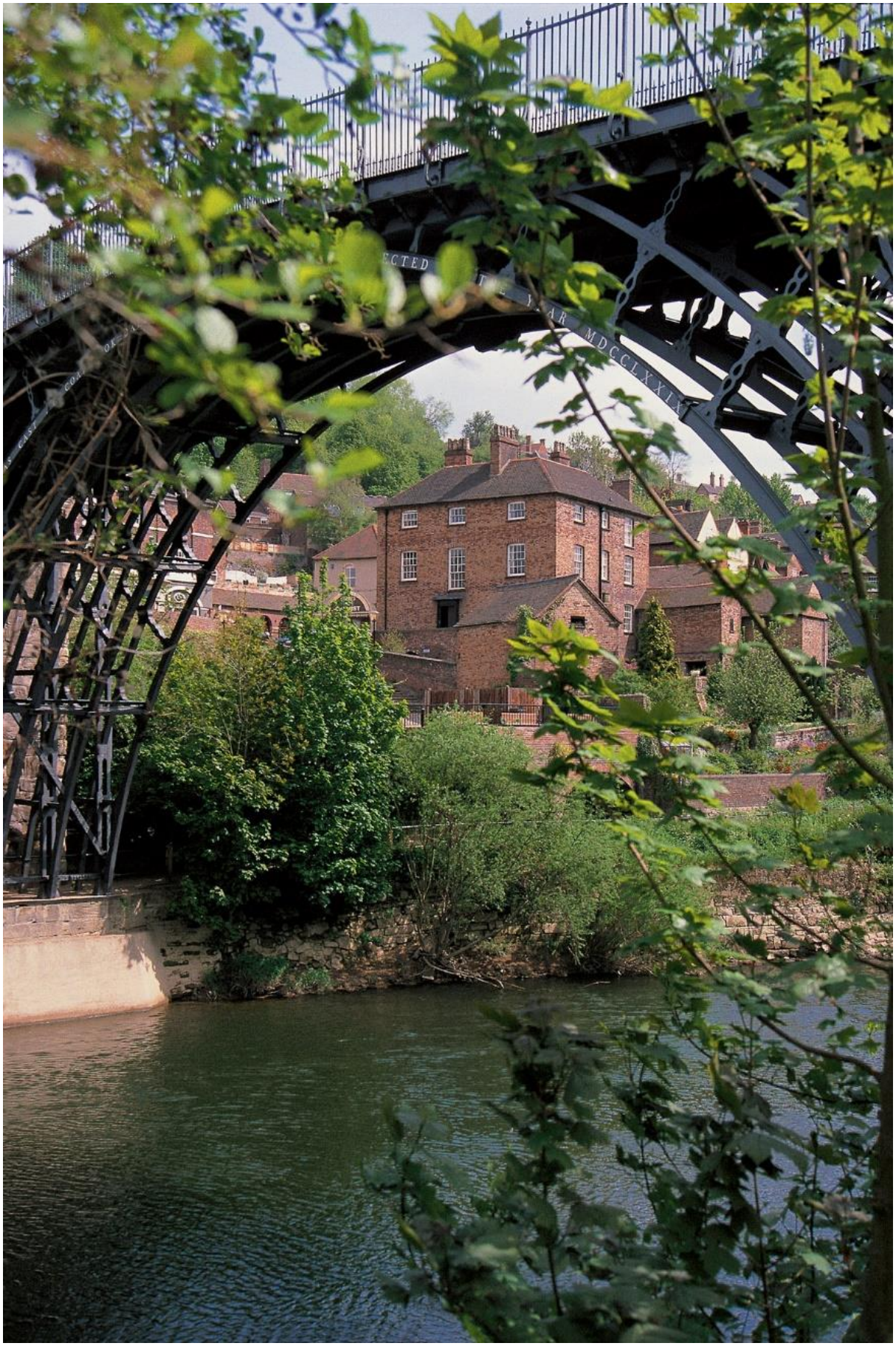


Iron Bridge House – Summary

The landscape of Ironbridge has a particularly complex history and Iron Bridge House was erected during the proudest and most self-confident stage of that history, when the area could aptly be described as 'the most extraordinary district in the world'. The wealth of the Severn Gorge was founded on its geology. The river cuts through the rich mineral seams of the carboniferous measures and at the same time provided a means of carrying away the produce of those seams. The urge to exploit these made it accruable for technical advance.

As early as the 16th century the Severn was a great commercial highway linking mid-Wales to the Bristol Channel. Large-scale exploitation of the minerals of the Gorge began in Elizabeth I's reign in the late 16th century. Coal from Broseley and Madeley was carried up and downstream by barge to become the staple fuel of the Severn Valley from Welshpool to Gloucester. Numerous industries making use of the local coal grew up in the Gorge: potteries, saltworks, tar distilleries and tobacco pipe manufacturers. Just across the river from Iron Bridge House is a timber-framed building which in the early 18th century was part of a lead-smelting complex, one of several in the district using ore brought downstream from mid-Wales, that was smelted using the cheap local coal and forwarded as pig lead to Bristol. The iron industry was established in the area in the Middle Ages, but it did not achieve any national significance until 1709, when Abraham Darby I first successfully smelted iron ore with coke at Coalbrookdale.

For about half a century, from 1755 onwards, the east Shropshire coalfield was the foremost ironworking area in Great Britain. Many of the most important innovations both in ironmaking technology and in the application of iron were pioneered here. It soon attracted visitors, both those with an interest in technology and those who merely wished to be thrilled by the sight of blazing furnaces in a spectacular setting, from all over the world.

In the mid-I770s the Severn Gorge was a rough, open area, dotted with cottages and pock-marked with coal and iron ore mines. Horses drew waggons along primitive railways, carrying ore to the furnaces at Coalbrookdale and Madeley Wood, and coal to the riverside for sale along the Severn. Where the Iron Bridge now stands there formerly plied a ferry boat but few travellers other than local people used it, for the riverside was almost unapproachable by road. The first steps towards the erection of a bridge were taken in 1774 but it was not until New Year's Day 1781 that the bridge was opened to traffic. The provider of the greater part of the money for the scheme and the manager of the whole construction process was Abraham Darby III of the Coalbrookdale ironworks. This was the first iron bridge in the world and it was recognised and promoted by the proprietors as a unique achievement.

The ancient market of Madeley, which dated from the reign of Henry III, had lapsed by the beginning of the 18th century but was revived in 1763. The north end of the Iron Bridge lay in the parish of Madeley and the market was transferred to it in the 1780s. This seems to have been largely the decision of Richard Reynolds, the Quaker ironmaster, partner of Abraham Darby III at Coalbrookdale and Lord of the Manor of Madeley. He was responsible in about 1800 for starting a short-lived cattle and pig market in the area and the market place still belonged to his descendants in the mid-19th century. Iron Bridge House reflects the prosperity of the market centre that Reynolds and his collaborators established. It is a substantial six-bedroomed house over a double-fronted shop, with store rooms linked by trap doors, a pulley (which still survives) in the roof and various offices, stables, coach houses, cellars and a 'bacon drying house' adjoining. It was probably built by one Henry Smith whose imposing bill headings reflect not just pride in his own premises, but an awareness of their situation, next to the first iron bridge in the world.

By the 1840s Smith was working in partnership with Charles Price and also with a Charles Smith, probably his son, who combined the trades of ironmonger and grocer. Charles Price's household in 1851 was typical of a prosperous Victorian shopkeeper. As well as his wife and three children, it included an assistant and two apprentices, two nurses and a house servant.

Ironbridge was then a thriving commercial centre with several inns, a post office, a printing shop, a subscription library, a dispensary, a bank, various doctors' surgeries, lawyers' offices and a range of splendid shops, of which Iron Bridge House was perhaps the most imposing.

The prosperity of Ironbridge was sustained by the opening of the Severn Valley Railway in 1862. Ironbridge and Broseley station was at the south end of the bridge and the numerous travellers from the Madeley area to Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth or beyond all had to cross the bridge, thus bringing more trade to the shopkeepers at its northern end.

The coming of the railway brought about a decline in river traffic. By the 1860s none of the provisions sold at the shop in Iron Bridge House would have been brought up the river by barge, and by 1900 there were no longer any cargo-carrying barges at all on the Shropshire portion of the Severn. The decline of local industry from the late 19th century onwards diminished the trade of Ironbridge and while the designation of Telford New Town in the 1960s began to restore prosperity to the district as a whole, competition from other shopping centres and heavy road traffic have brought about the closure of many of the shops in Ironbridge. At the same time the growing recognition that the monuments of the Industrial Revolution are as much part of our history as stately homes or ruined abbeys brought increasing numbers of visitors to see the bridge. The Iron Bridge is a monument of international importance. The market place at its northern end was laid out as a direct consequence of the building of the bridge, testament to the creation of something unique, which at the same

time provided opportunities for profitable speculation and demanded an appropriate setting. Iron Bridge House is an elegant and essential part of that setting.

In 1835 the land on which the building now stands was sold to Henry Smith, grocer, for the sum of £1,400. The seller was William Smith, who had bought the land in 1827 from the family of Richard Reynolds, partner of Abraham Darby III.

In 1861 Henry Smith died, leaving the property to his son Egerton William Smith to carry on the business. By 1916 it was bought by R. A. Jones for £550. His widow Mrs Jones sold it to J. C. Lloyd and Sons, a grocery and off-licence business, in 1949. They in turn sold it to Federated Properties Ltd., who in 1972 sold it to the Landmark Trust. The Trust leased the ground floor shop to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust until 1975, when restoration work began.

Introduction

Iron Bridge House is the complete establishment of a substantial grocer, with a large house over a double-fronted shop, and all the offices behind, from storerooms to stables. Today it contributes to the historic setting of the famous Iron Bridge within the World Heritage Site area.

The house dates to the 1830s, built on a plot of land overlooking the Iron Bridge which was completed in 1779. Situated in a prime position in the Square and market area on the north bank from the Bridge, the building provided a profitable retail business for its occupiers during the 19th century.

The Landmark Trust purchased the property in 1972.

Background to Iron Bridge House and Ironbridge

At first sight Iron Bridge House appears part of a mature urban landscape, the sort of building one might expect to find in a proud and ancient borough which prospered in the late 18th century. It would not be out of place in Ludlow or Bury St Edmunds or Abingdon. But the sophistication of the townscape is no more than skin deep. On the hillside to the north of the Square, houses, workshops and places of worship stand amid a bewildering maze of ancient trackways, footpaths and primitive railway routes, on which the present pattern of main roads was imposed only after the building of the Iron Bridge. On the opposite bank of the Severn the prospect is not one of town streets but of woodlands, which mask many relics of former industrial activities.

The landscape of Ironbridge has a particularly complex history and Iron Bridge House was erected during the proudest and most self-confident stage of that history, when the area could aptly be described as 'the most extraordinary district in the world'.

The wealth of the Severn Gorge was determined by its geology. The river cuts through the rich mineral seams of the carboniferous measures and at the same time provides a means of carrying away the produce of those seams. As early as the 16th century, the Severn was a great commercial highway linking mid-Wales to the Bristol Channel. In the reign of Elizabeth I, large-scale exploitation of the minerals of the Gorge began, with coal from Broseley and Madeley carried up and downstream by barge, becoming the staple fuel of the Severn valley from Welshpool to Gloucester. By 1635, annual production from Broseley and Benthall was around 100,000 tons per year mainly for export but also for fuelling local clay industries and lead as well as other Gorge industries, including potteries, saltworks, tar distilleries and tobacco pipe manufacturers.

Just across the river from Iron Bridge House is a timber-framed building which in the early 18th century was part of a lead-smelting complex, one of several in the district using ore brought downstream from mid-Wales fuelled by the cheap local coal, forwarding their pig lead to Bristol. The iron industry was established in the area in the Middle Ages but it did not achieve any national significance until 1709 when, at Coalbrookdale, Abraham Darby I successfully smelted iron ore with coke for the first time.

For about half a century from 1755 onwards the east Shropshire coalfield was the foremost ironworking area in Great Britain. Many of the most important innovations both in ironmaking technology and in the application of iron were pioneered here. It attracted visitors, both those with an interest in technology and those who merely wished to be thrilled by the sight of blazing furnaces in a spectacular setting, from all over the world.

Iron Works, Coalbrookdale, hand-coloured aquatint 1805, by William Pickett

In the mid-I770s the Severn Gorge was a rough, open area, dotted with cottages and pock-marked with coal and iron ore mines. Horses drew waggons along primitive railways, carrying ore to the furnaces at Coalbrookdale and Madeley Wood, and coal to the riverside for sale along the Severn. The nearest bridge was two miles away at Buildwas. A ferry boat operated where the Iron Bridge now stands but few travellers other than local people used it as the riverside was almost unapproachable by road and it was dangerous especially in winter.

The first steps towards the erection of a bridge were taken in 1774. The project was made public in 1775 and an Act of Parliament was obtained in 1776 with construction commencing in November of the following year. The chosen crossing point, where the ferry had crossed from Benthall to Madeley Wood, had the advantage of high approaches on both sides and relative stability. The abutments were erected in 1778 and the ironwork was completed in the summer of 1779, using 378 tons of iron. It was formally opened on New Year's Day 1781 to traffic, having cost more than £6,000.

The instigator of the project was the Shrewsbury architect Thomas Pritchard, who drew up the designs, but he died in 1777, a month after work had begun. Construction of the bridge also gained the backing of the great ironmaster John Wilkinson and Edward Harries, Lord of the Manor of Benthall. The provider of the greater part of the money to continue the project and manage the whole construction process was Abraham Darby III of the Coalbrookdale ironworks, where all the iron for the bridge was cast.

This was the first iron bridge in the world and it was recognised and promoted by the proprietors as a unique achievement who commissioned engravings of it by London artists. Their pride was shared by local innkeepers who quoted the proximity of the bridge among the attractions of their hostelries and by the operators of stage coaches who named it among the scenic attractions on their routes.

View of the mouth of a coal pit near Broseley

Upper Works, Coalbrookdale, Telford, 1758. In the foreground a road runs across left to right, with a wall and shrubs in front. Along this a large metal boiler is being pulled on a cart by six horses.

It is against this background of the erection of the Iron Bridge bringing the attention of the world upon the Severn Gorge, that the development of the Square must be seen. As soon as the Bridge was built, tourists were encouraged to come from far and wide to see it. The first building of consequence erected at the northern end of the bridge seems to have been the Tontine Hotel, constructed by a partnership which included most of the bridge proprietors. It was opened in 1784, the original building being designed by the Shrewsbury architect John Hiram Haycock. Haycock also built a handsome stable range topped with a cupola on the opposite side of the road to the hotel, close to Iron Bridge House. In 1786-7 the hotel was extended by Samuel Wright of Kidderminster, who probably designed the eastern elevation, with its splendid Venetian and oriel windows, which reflect the best provincial taste of the period.


THOMAS B. WILSON,

THE TONTINE,

Family and Commercial Hotel,

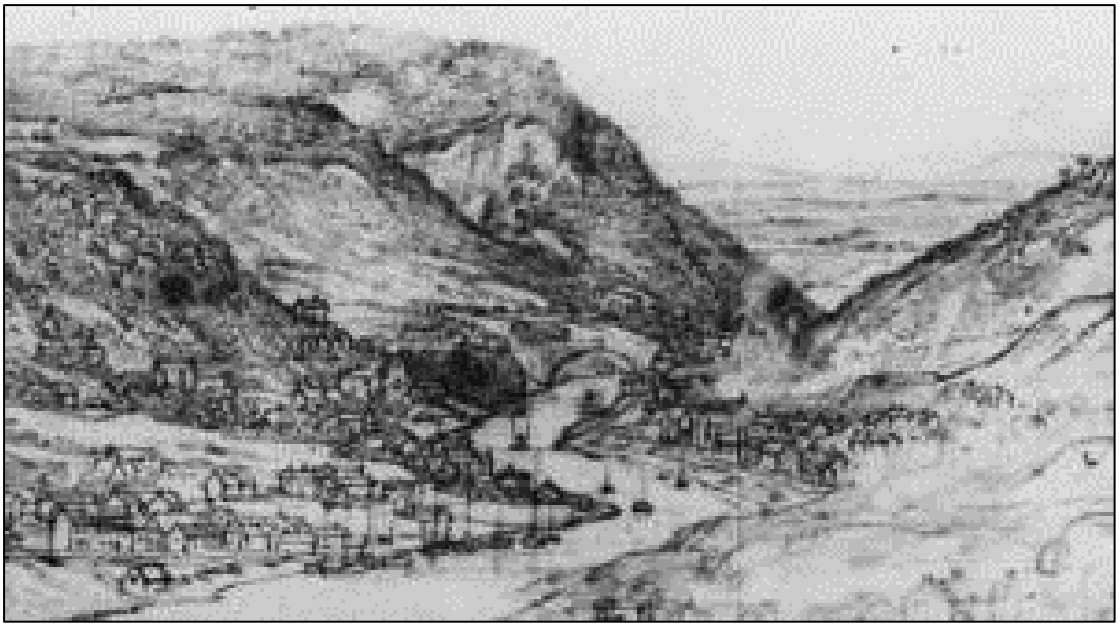
IRONBRIDGE, SALOP.

Coalbrookdale, Benthall Edge, Buildwas Abbey, Hodge Bower, Broseley, Coalport, Jackfield, Madeley, Wenlock, &c.

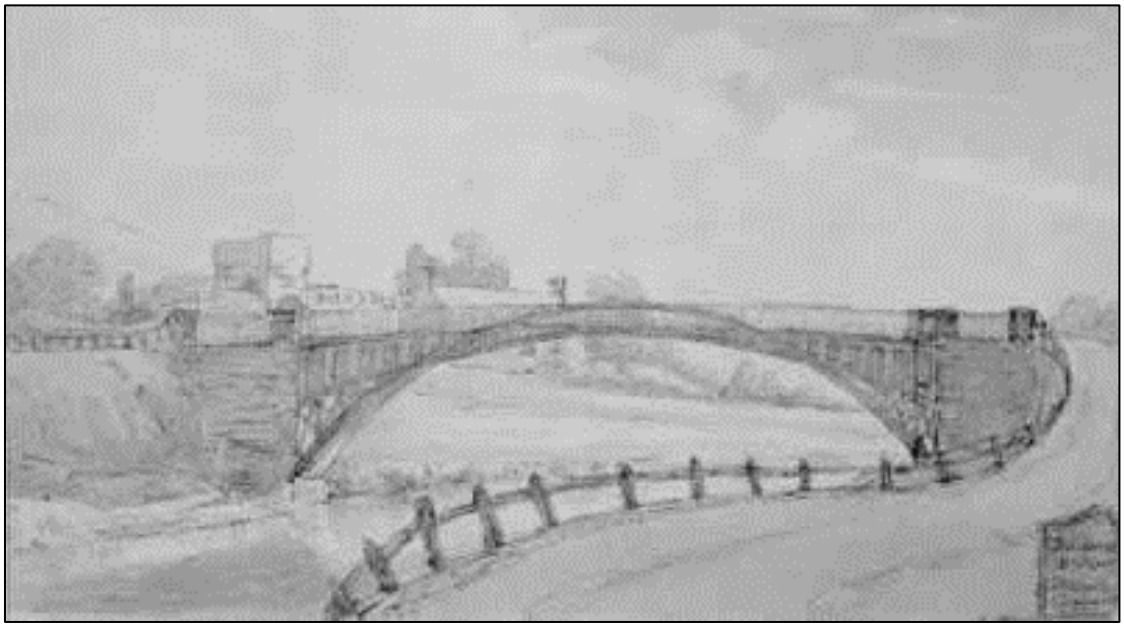
IRONBRIDGE — "The Brighton of the Midlands."

For those desirous of indulging in the luxury of a row upon the river, Punts, Canoes, and other Pleasure Boats are kept for hire.

Early advertisement for the Tontine Hotel.



The Iron Bridge near Coalbrookdale and surrounding country, 1789. This sketch was drawn eight years after the Bridge had opened to traffic, by which time Madeley market had moved to Ironbridge.



Buildwas Bridge - The great floods of 1795 washed away the medieval bridge at Buildwas. An iron bridge, designed by Thomas Telford and cast by the Coalbrookdale Company, was its replacement, a sign of growing confidence in the use of cast iron.

Full documentary evidence for the construction of the rest of the Square does not survive, but the minutes of the Tontine proprietors show that they were concerned with the development of the area as a whole. They determined the extent of space left in front of the market house in 1784 and were responsible for levelling the ground between the Square and the river plus the steps leading down from the market area.

Ironbridge the town began to grow around the Bridge immediately after it opened to traffic, stimulated by tourism and the permanent river crossing. After the Bridge survived the great floods of 1795, cast iron was used widely and imaginatively in construction of bridges, buildings and aqueducts.

The ancient market of Madeley, which dated from the reign of Henry III, had lapsed by the beginning of the 18th century but was revived in 1763. The north end of the Iron Bridge lay in the parish of Madeley and the market was transferred in the 1780s. This seems to have been largely the decision of Richard Reynolds, the Quaker ironmaster, partner of Abraham Darby III at Coalbrookdale, and Lord of the Manor of Madeley. He was responsible in about 1800 for starting a short-lived cattle and pig market in the area and the market place still belonged to his descendants in the mid-19th century.

Iron Bridge House reflects the prosperity of the market centre established by Reynolds and his collaborators. It is a substantial six-bedroomed house over a double-fronted shop, with store rooms linked by trap doors, with a pulley (which still survives) in the roof, and various offices, stables, coach houses, cellars, and a 'bacon drying house' adjoining. It was probably built by one Henry Smith, whose imposing bill headings reflect not just pride in his own premises but an awareness of their situation, next to the first iron bridge in the world.

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prosperous Victorian shopkeeper. As well as his wife and three children, it included an assistant and two apprentices, two nurses and a house servant.

Ironbridge was then a thriving commercial centre with several inns, a post office, a printing shop, a subscription library, a dispensary, a bank, various doctors' surgeries and lawyers' offices, and a range of splendid shops, of which Iron Bridge House was perhaps the most imposing.

The main roads that approach the Bridge and the Square all date from or after the construction of the Bridge. The proprietors constructed the 'Bridge Road' up the valley of the Benthall Brook on the south bank, to join the turnpike road from Much Wenlock to Broseley. On the north side they built what is now called Church Hill, to connect the Bridge with the Madeley-Build was Bridge turnpike road on top of Lincoln Hill, albeit by an awkward dog-leg bend. The Bridge trustees received the permission for the Coalbrookdale Company to use the Wharfage as a route to the bridge in 1782, but it was not until 1806 that this formally became part of a turnpike road, and even then those who had been accustomed to stack coal and other goods on it were allowed to continue to do so. The present main road from Ironbridge to Madeley was built between 1806 and 1810. It is a substantial feat of engineering, and cuts across most of the ancient tracks running along the hillside. The final road link to the bridge was the road along the south bank, at first parallel with the river and then climbing to the Foresters Arms at Broseley, which was completed in 1828.

Not everyone welcomed the new Bridge and many locals objected to paying the tolls. Instead, they used their coracles to cross the river as well as to fish and poach. Tommy Roger was well known as a poacher and the local newspaper reported his appearance in court on poaching charges. He also helped to build the new police cells and court room in Ironbridge in 1862 - only to be one of the first people to use them!

The prosperity of Ironbridge was sustained by the opening of the Severn Valley Railway in 1862. Ironbridge & Broseley station was at the south end of the bridge, and the numerous travellers from the Madeley area to Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth or beyond all had to cross the bridge, thus bringing more trade to the shopkeepers at its northern end.

Tommy Rogers, born c.1845, coracle maker of Ironbridge. A coracle is a small, lightweight boat with a loosely woven frame traditionally covered in animal hide, but in more recent times they are made from calico, canvas and coated with a substance such as bitumen.

The coming of the railway brought about a decline in the river traffic. By the 1860s none of the provisions sold at the shop in Iron Bridge House would have been brought up the river by barge and, by 1900, there were no longer any cargo-carrying barges at all on the Shropshire portion of the Severn. In 1934 the Iron Bridge was finally closed to vehicles and designated an Ancient Monument.

Early illustrations of the bridge at Ironbridge show that shops and houses grew up around the northern abutment soon after the bridge was completed. After several phases of rebuilding these shops were finally demolished in the 1940s – luckily, the Iron Bridge House was not included in the demolition. A brick toll house was built at the same time as the Bridge which still survives today and has been converted into an information centre.

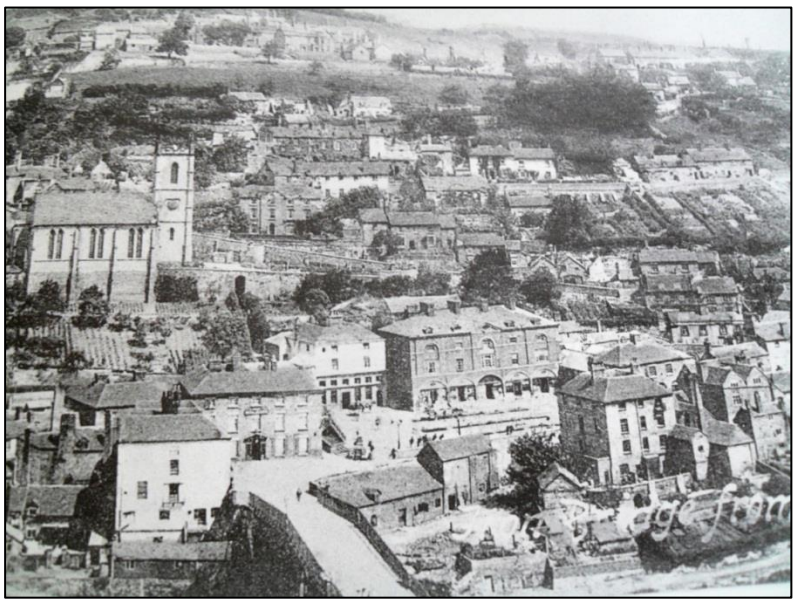
A late nineteenth century view showing how much the town of Ironbridge had grown. The church was built in 1835-6 and assigned the parish of Ironbridge and Coalbrookdale in 1845.

A heavily laden cart makes its way up Tontine Hill and three men weigh wool on the north bank. Iron land arches were built on the south side of the river in 1821 to reduce the weight of the abutment.

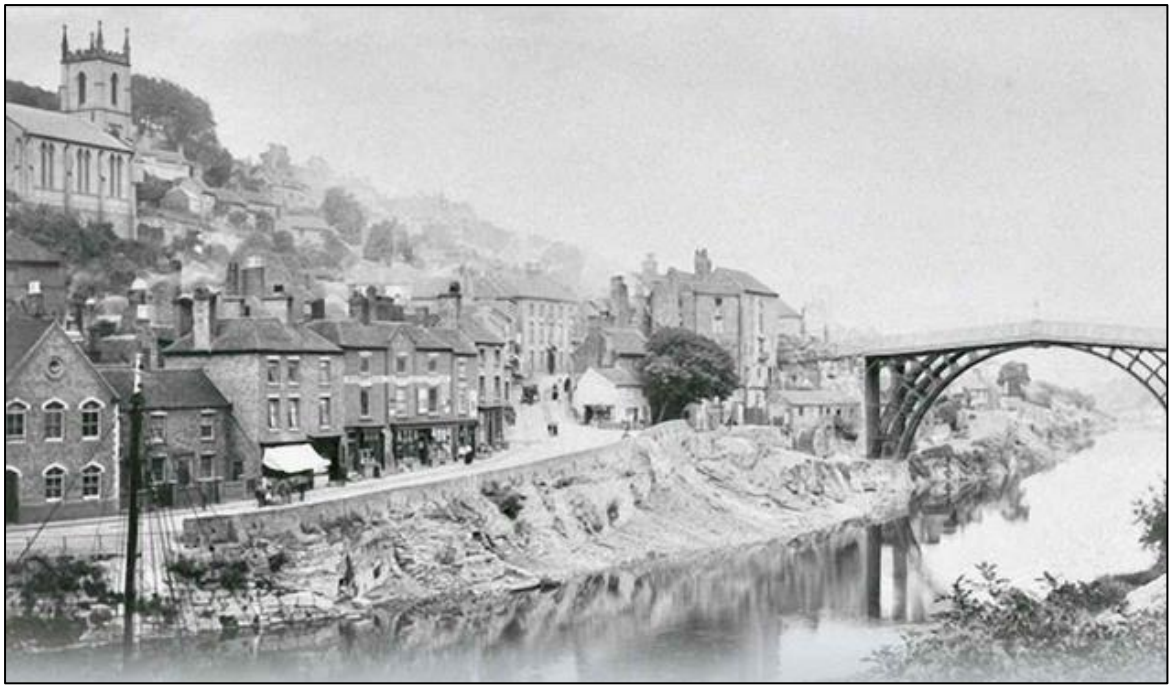
The Iron Bridge in 1935 just after closure to traffic and scheduling as an ancient monument. The buildings to the left of the Bridge were demolished in May 1946 to make way for a planned replacement bridge.

In the twentieth century, Ironbridge became neglected almost to the point of dereliction. The designation of Telford New Town in the 1960s began to restore prosperity to the district as a whole with the implementation of a major conservation programme during which time almost every house in Ironbridge was restored. However, competition from other shopping centres and heavy road traffic have brought about the closure of many of the shops in Ironbridge, although, happily, the Friday open air market still flourishes. At the same time the growing recognition that the monuments of the Industrial Revolution are as much part of our history as stately homes or ruined abbeys has resulted in increasing numbers of visitors to see the Bridge. The Iron Bridge is a monument of international importance and in 1986 the Ironbridge Gorge became one of the first group of seven UK sites to be awarded World Heritage status by UNESCO.

The market place on the north bank, laid out as a direct consequence of the building of the Bridge, is a symbol of the consequence of the bridge builders that they had created something unique - which at the same time provided opportunities for profitable speculation and demanded an appropriate setting. Iron Bridge House is an elegant and essential part of that setting.



Early photograph of the north bank of Ironbridge town pre-1940s.



Early photograph showing the Wharfage, the Tontine hotel and the now demolished buildings immediately north of the Iron Bridge.

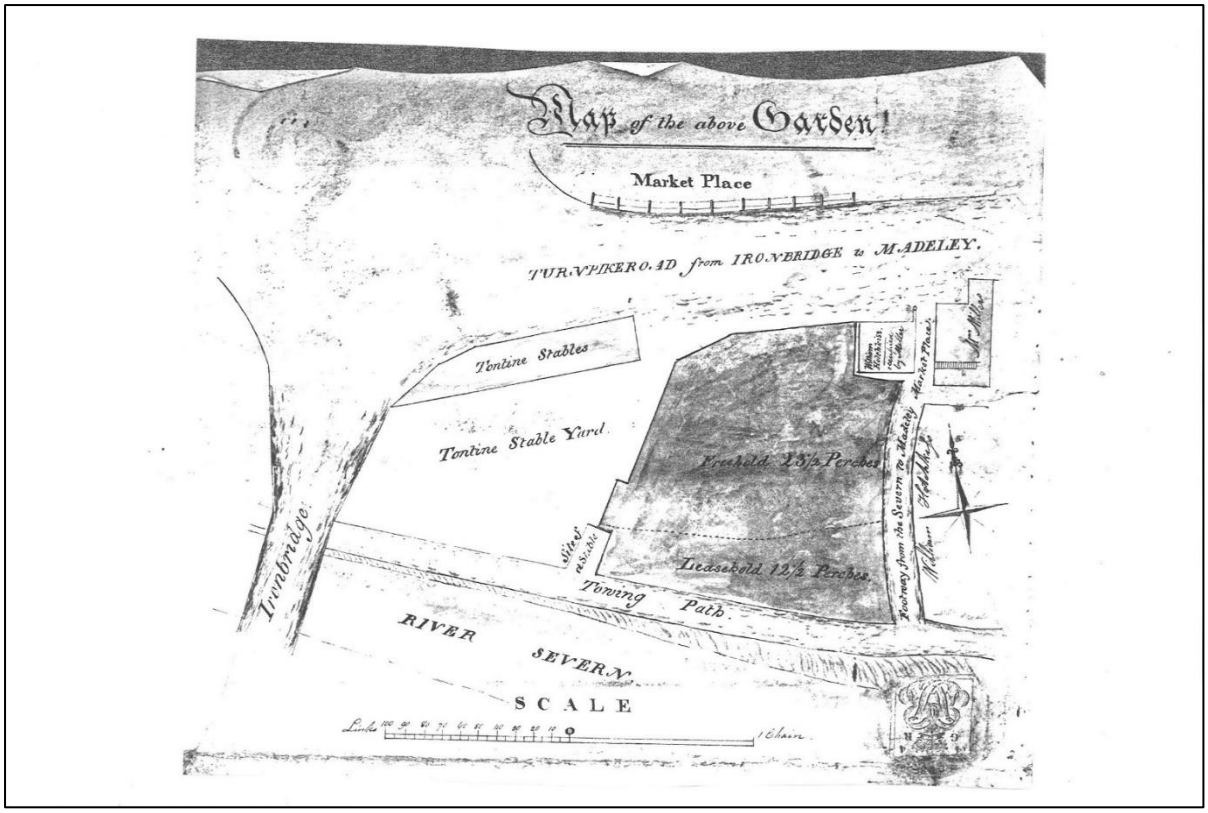
A military parade in Ironbridge to raise money for war weapons during the Second World War. The block of buildings centre left were demolished just after the war to make way for a proposed second bridge crossing which, fortunately, never happened. The war memorial has since moved to the other side of the road.

The Owners of Iron Bridge House

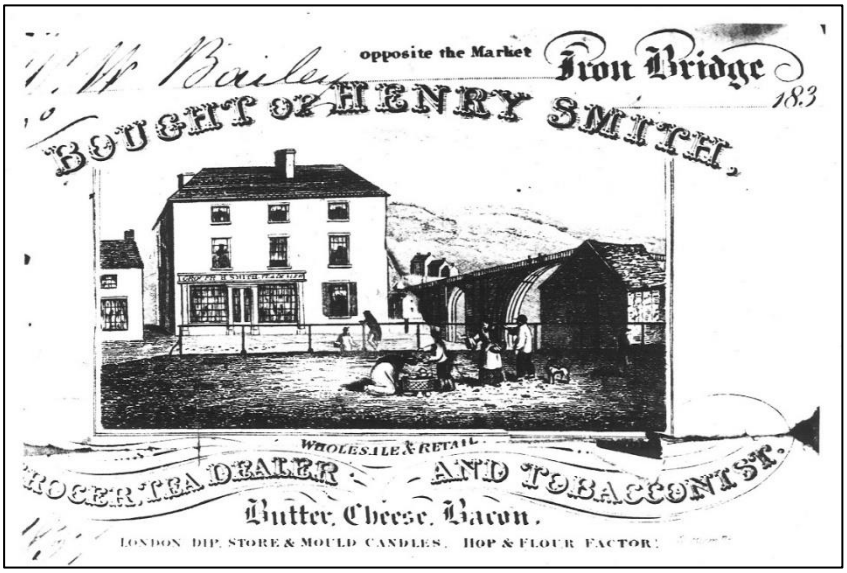
The history of Iron Bridge House (also known as 'Shop in the Square' and formerly known simply as 34, High Street, Ironbridge) is itself of interest. The building does not date from the first phase of development following the opening of the Bridge in the 1780s. In 1835 the land on which Iron Bridge House now stands was sold to Henry Smith, grocer, for the sum of £1,400. The seller was William Smith, who had bought the land in 1827 from the family of Richard Reynolds, partner of Abraham Darby III. On the deed of 1827 the land is shown shaded with no building yet on it.

A bill head in the Ironbridge Gorge Museum indicates that before the end of the 1830s Henry Smith had set up on a house on this site as 'grocer, tea dealer and tobacconist, butter, cheese, bacon, London dip, store & mould candles, hop & flour factor'.

In 1861 Henry Smith died, leaving the property so that his son Egerton William Smith might carry on the business, by paying off his brother Henry, a farmer. In 1863 Egerton paid £1,200 to his brother and others. He married in 1869, and carried on the business which in the 1870 Post Office Directory is called 'Egerton William Smith, grocer and provision dealer, High Street and at Coalbrookdale'. He died in 1887, leaving the property to his widow Mary. They seem to have had two children at least: Egerton William Smith, commercial traveller, and Marian Stokes, who married and lived at Coalbrookdale. After Mary Smith's death her children sold the property to Thomas Parker for £1,000. He lived at Severn House, outside Ironbridge on the Shrewsbury Road, and died shortly afterwards, for Iron Bridge House was sold in the sale of his property at the Tontine Hotel on 27 June 1916. It was bought by R. A. Jones for £550. His widow Mrs Jones sold it to J. C. Lloyd and Sons, a grocery and off-licence business, in 1949.



Deed of 1827 with land shown shaded where Iron Bridge House is now located.



A bill heading of the firm of Henry Smith, grocer, dating from the 1830s in the collection of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.

Geoff Hickman, who was the second manager installed by J.C. Lloyd's in the early 1950s, recalls some of its more recent history. He remembers the original dark wood interior, consisting of shelves, labelled drawers and canisters containing everything one would expect to find in a high class grocer's shop - tea, sugar, spices, etc. The shop also had oak beams (since covered up), and a small office at the back with an old-fashioned safe, and antiquated electric lighting. The shop was 'modernised' to suit the 1950s by J.C. Lloyd, and the interior stripped out. In Mr Hickman's day, there was a local delivery service by car and by a delivery boy. Most provisions came in bulk. Sugar came in 2cwt sacks and was weighed out on Monday mornings into bags of 1lb, 2lb or 6lb. Butter, lard, cheese and margarine also came in bulk, and were stored in the cool cellar beneath the shop. Dried fruit (prunes, sultanas, raisins, etc.) came in bulk and 1cwt sacks of meal, pig feed, pigeon feed, etc. were stored in the back warehouse. There were trapdoors in every floor, and the wheel of the hoist used to raise and lower the sacks still survives in the top of the building. During this period the shop was very busy, and supplied several of the large houses locally, as well as the people of Ironbridge: it was open from 8.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m., with half-day closing on Wednesday.

During the 1960s, J. C. Lloyd sold the shop and after other changes of ownership, it was closed down. Federated Properties Ltd. sold it to the Landmark Trust in 1972 who carried out alterations including the fitting out of two flats above the shop. In 1978 the Trust leased the ground floor shop to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.

The grocer's shop in the 19th century at Iron Bridge House, in the collection of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.

IRONBRIDGE

ALL THAT WELL-BUILT

House and Business Premises

with Off-Licence

lately occupied by Messrs. EGERTON SMITH & SONS, situate in the Centre of Ironbridge, with a Frontage of 45 feet to the Main Street.

The House

contains **ENTRANCE HALL, DINING and DRAWING ROOMS, SITTING ROOM, SIX BEDROOMS, Bathroom and Lavatory** (hot and cold), **Two Kitchens,** China Pantry, numerous fixed Cupboards.

Outside—Coal House, soft water Tank, and W.C.

Capital GARDEN, planted with choice **Fruit Trees and Roses, Three Greenhouses, Summer House,** Potting Shed, Fruit Room and Storage.

THE BUSINESS PREMISES

WITH OFF-LICENCE

comprise **DOUBLE-FRONTED SHOP,** fitted with Counters, Shelves and Drawers. **Office, Three Large Store Rooms** (all timber solid Oak), **2-stall Stable** with Loft over, **Bacon Drying House, Coach House, Cart or Motor House,** with Store Room over.

THESE PREMISES have been occupied by the Firm of Messrs. Egerton Smith & Sons for many years. They were specially built, at a great cost, by the late Mr. Smith, and occupying such a Unique Position in Ironbridge, offer splendid facilities for any Firm wanting First Class Premises.

From the sale catalogue of the property of Thomas Parker, June 1916

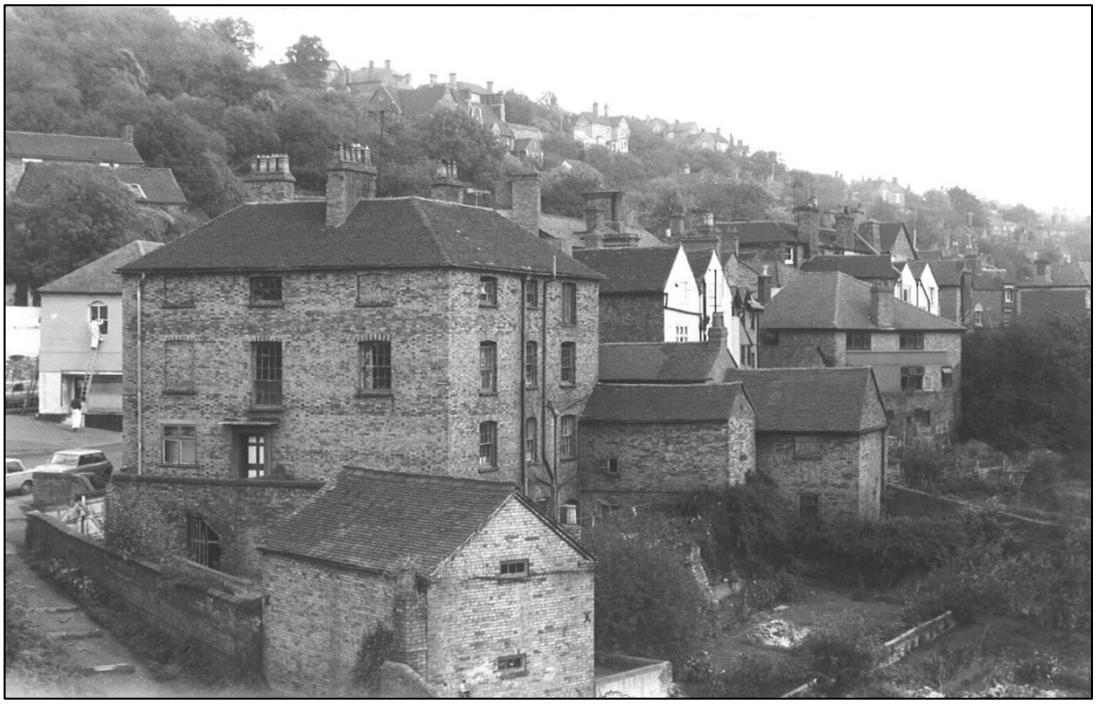
Restoration of Iron Bridge House

This building was bought by the Landmark Trust in 1972. For a while, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust occupied the ground floor under temporary licence and used it as a shop, but in 1975 work on the restoration began. This involved repaving the full width in front of the shop, the old bricks being mostly broken. In the interior, many alterations had to be made for the benefit of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, which still occupies the basement and ground floor.

As well as replastering and redecorating throughout the building, it was necessary to replace some of the first-floor joists and to remake the ceiling, which was fireproofed. New window-frames and doors were also provided and the house was divided in two, providing one flat for the tenants, Mr and Mrs Hickman, who had been living in the building before the Landmark Trust bought it and who agreed to act as caretakers, and a second to be let to Landmarkers. The fireplace that was in the shop was moved to the Landmark sitting-room. New heating was installed. The restoration was finished by 1977 and the improved ground floor and basement premises were leased to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust in 1978.

The architect of the restoration was George Robb, FRIBA, of Chapel-en-le-Frith, and the building work was carried out by Messrs.W. A. Sherratt Ltd. of Church Stretton, Salop and Messrs.Geo.Linnecor & Son (Midlands) Ltd.of Bridgnorth.

The Iron Bridge House in the early 1970s and during restoration.



The building before and during restoration showing the blocked up windows and irregular glazing.

Life in a 19th Century Grocer's Shop

It is difficult for us to appreciate what life was like in Egerton Smith's grocer's shop in 19th century Ironbridge. There would have been a large bustling household, many of whom would have had to perform tasks that have now been forgotten.

Victorian grocers bought goods in bulk and then decanted them into smaller weights. The term originates from medieval times, when anyone who bought goods in bulk, or by the gross, was known as a grocer. Here you could buy just about anything.

The following extract, though it begins by describing work in a Co-operative store, helps give a sense of the difference between such shops then and now. It comes from the autobiography of Winfred Griffiths (b.1895), who was married to Jim Griffiths, M.P. for Llanelly and Secretary of State for Wales, and describes her life in the early years of the First World War. (Reproduced from *Annals of Labour: Autobiographies of British Working-class People 1820-1920,* ed. John Burnett; Bloomington, Indiana and London 1974. In its English edition this book was entitled *Useful Toil*.)

This picture and the others which follow come from *The Grocer, Guide to Window Dressing for Grocers, Provision Dealers, Off-licence holders and Oilmen*, published by The Grocer magazine, (London 1911).

I found on my arrival at the Co-op that I was not expected to serve in the shop right away but was to have some time to get used to the variety of goods and the prices. During this period I worked in what was called 'Dispatch'. This was a room behind the shop in which orders were put up. In charge of this room was a little man with a fair moustache. He was not at all formidable as a 'boss', but was quiet and firm and slightly humorous and organized the work very well. The first job I was put to do was weighing sugar. Sacks of sugar were stored in a loft over Dispatch. This sugar was tipped down a shute to a bench below. It was my job to stand all day by this bench opening bags, filling sugar into them with a scoop and weighing them in one, two, three and four pounds. As a variation I sometimes switched over to lump sugar and when sufficient sugar had been done soda was sent down the shute. Soda was a commodity bought by most housewives before the advent of soap powders. After a few days at this rather monotonous task I was allowed to help with putting up orders. A very large number of these orders were from country customers. These were collected in late afternoon by the carriers who plied between villages and town.

Friday evening was a busy time in the shop, as many members came then to collect groceries and to pay bills. As bad luck would have it I was sent down for the first time to help on the grocery counter on a Friday evening. I was so bewildered that I am afraid I made a fine mess of things. I had to take payment of bills and the method of receipting had not been explained to me. When trying to serve customers I did not know where things were kept, nor yet had I memorized all the prices. I had not acquired the knack of making tidy packets for goods like dried fruit, rice and tapioca, and numerous others which were kept loose in drawers and had to be weighed as needed. To crown all, most customers expected their goods to be done up in a large paper parcel.

It seems now at this time, when all goods are packeted, and self-service is the order of the day, almost incredible the amount of work involved in serving just one cusomer under the old conditions. We sold some goods for which there was no room in the shop, such things as potatoes, corn for chickens, barley meal, bran and other animal feeding-stuffs which had to be measured in pint, quart or gallon measures and packed in paper bags. Another article was common salt, which came to the shop in long thick bars, from which we had to cut a thick slice to be sold for 1½d. Yet another commodity was a long bar of household soap which might be bought whole or in halves or quarters and, for a change from solids, there was draught vinegar, to be drawn off into a measure and transferred to customer's own bottle or jug. All these goods and others too were stored

in rooms behind the shop and had to be fetched and weighed or measured as needed. The shop assistant's job was not a light one in those days, neither was it a clean one. So many things to weigh and so much to fetch and carry played havoc with our hands and with our overalls. We had a little retreat where we could wash our hands, in cold water, but too many trips to 'Scarborough', as it came to be called, were apt to be frowned upon. So we just wiped our hands on our overalls – and that was that! I soon learned to be wary of 'Committee men' who sometimes appeared without warning, and were suspected by the employees of 'snooping'. At the back of the grocery premises was a baker's where not only bread but confectionery was made. One of our shop windows was given over to a display of cakes which could be bought at the provision counter. In course of time I was given the job of dressing this window and I found it a pleasant interlude.

She went and worked in another grocer's shop in Basingstoke. It is clear from what she says that being a shop assistant was skilled work, complicated and exhausting.

Almost all the staff from the manager down had changed, and I came to the conclusion I also would seek a change. There was a grocery and provision business in town called Walkers Stores which was advertising for a girl to learn the work of the provision counter. I applied and got the job. There were two men, the first and second provision hands, on the counter and I was to assist them and learn the job so that I could take the place of the second hand when he would be leaving to join up. I had to keep the shelves filled up with stock of tinned and bottled goods; I had to weigh up lard and margarine in pounds and half pounds, I learned the knack of patting up butter on a stone slab with pats kept in a bucket of cold water, and of cutting up fifty-six-pound cheeses into sections easy to handle; and I had to acquire the skill to cut up sides of bacon into different parts to be sold at differing prices. Soon the second hand left and I officially took his place. By now my immediate boss, the first hand, was the only male left in the stores, except the manager and the warehouseman. Before long I learned

1. Annals of Labour: Autobiographies of British Working-class people 1820-1920 ed. John Burnett (Bloomington, Indiana and London 1974) 115-24. In its English edition this book was called Useful Toil.

FIG. 16. A CHEESE WINDOW.

FIG. 8. A "FULL WEIGHT" WINDOW (3).

Similar personal memories of working in grocer's shops are printed in Veronica C.Hartwich, Ale an' A'thing (Dundee c.1981), a booklet published by Dundee Museums and Art Galleries to accompany an exhibition opened in April 1980 illustrating the trades of grocer and publican in Dundee.

Work in Dundee Shops

Many people alive today worked, and learned their trade, in the traditional grocer's shop. Here are some of the stories they have to tell about their work.

The grocer was a skilled tradesman with an expert knowledge of the goods he sold, as Mr James Aitken, Perth Road, says: *"Health rules forbid so much of the old style bulk selling. The training of old required you to know what the differences in goods were to a fine detail. You had to know how to prepare and care for your goods. I went to classes at the College of Commerce, where I learnt all this, and how to mount proper window displays, and how to tie a proper parcel, using the correct kind of knot."*

The grocer had to prepare much of his stock himself before it could be sold. Good grocers bought and blended their own teas. Even a firm as large as William Low's did so until quite recently, marketing it under the name of "Willow Tea".

Coffee had to be roasted, of course. Mr Braithwaite, of Castle Street, tells us: *"We roast our coffee freshly every day. The firm was originally a tea merchant's, and coffee was started as a sideline, to oblige individual customers. In the old coffee machines, the beans fell through the gas flame, which was blown directly into the roasting box. Its disadvantage was that the volatile oil in the beans was released in too large quantities and so it caught fire. The smell was horrible!"*

Mr Fleming, who was apprenticed to Peebles Brothers, High Class Grocers, of Whitehall Crescent: *"I was put on the coffee roasting for a year or two, using the old gas machine. I got used to the smell, but people didn't like to sit beside you on the bus."*

Mr Stewart K. Sim, a retired grocer who had shops on the Perth Road and High Street, remembers: *"We made a speciality of coffee. We were the one shop in the Perth Road that roasted our own. Mr Aimer was a coffee merchant in Dundee, and he came out to us one evening with a coffee roasting machine. We had a gas burner at the back of the shop, which we fixed onto this machine, and we put in two pounds of coffee beans. You saw the smoke coming out, and he still kept on roasting until he thought it was right. He emptied it out into a wire tray, took it out to the Perth Road door, and shook it to get rid of the husks. We used to do this ourselves, and people used to wonder at the lovely smell of coffee in the Perth Road.*

"In 1964, maybe it was, a chap came in to me and he says, 'Where's your coffee roaster? I remember you used to shake it out that door there. I used to stay in Taits Lane; I've been in America for 40 years. The smell used to come up the Hawkhill, and we used to say, "That's Simmie and his coffee."'"

Sugar was delivered to the shop in two hundredweight (224 lb.) sacks, and had to be weighed out and packaged in 1, 2, 4 and 7 lb. bagfuls. Mr Braithwaite again: *"Weighing out the sugar was a Monday morning job. Every week ten huge sacks had to be humphed from the store and through the shop. And* **then** *you had to start bagging it all up. Once you got a sack of sugar on your shoulder, you had to keep going, you couldn't stop."*

The big casks of treacle and syrup were a delicate task. The carters hated them, because they were so difficult to control. If they slipped off the lorry, or dropped too suddenly when being lowered into a shop's cellar, they could all too easily split, spilling their contents everywhere. A sticky problem! In small shops it was traditional for customers to bring their own jars to be filled. Mr W. S. Landsburgh, a retired grocer, remembers from his apprentice days: *"Syrup and treacle we bought in barrels and steel drums. Some shopkeepers kept it down in the cellars and it was put on a gantress. Well, if you'd nothing else to do, you'd go down and put up a few jars. When it got near the finish of the syrup you had to tilt the barrel up. Oh, and every so often I'd be doing this job and I would put down a two pound jar, you see, and it would be so slow that I would go and do something else, and forget. And when I got back the syrup would be over the jar and onto the floor. I had an awful mess to clean up before the boss got to see it."*

There was always a ready market for cereals of various kinds, but oatmeal was the staff of life in Scotland. Mr Sim recalls: *"Oatmeal we put up in stock too. What we called a 'Lippie' was a pound and three quarters; half a peck, three and a half pounds, and a peck of meal was seven pounds.*

9

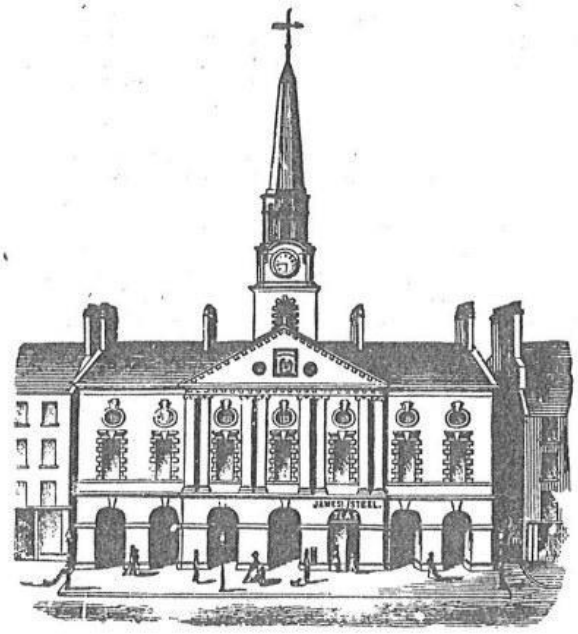
That was the measures used in these days. The funny thing was a Lippie of meal was a pound and three quarters, but a Lippie of potatoes was seven pounds. The sale of oatmeal became less, because the breakfast cereals came in, you see. The Cornflakes, the Rice Krispies, that sort of killed the meal trade. In 1905, when we started in business, the cereals we sold were Quaker Oats and Force. Grape Nuts was another one."

Danish butter has always been very popular in Dundee. As far back as 1889, Wm. Hogg, trading on the Hilltown, was selling 600 lb. a week. Most cheeses were also imported; a typical stock for Mr Sim might have been Scotch Cheddar, Gouda, Edam, Gruyère, Parmesan, Port Salut and Danish Blue. There was also some spreading cheese, and Cheshire was a standard sale.

Most of the eggs sold in Dundee came from Ireland or Aberdeenshire. In the old days there was no grading by size. As they used to say: *"Eggs is eggs"*. Mr Landsburgh recalls: *"Farm eggs, they mostly came from Aberdeenshire in 30 dozen cases. Long wooden cases. There was a division down the centre with 15 dozen in each side and they were in sections. These sections had packing, a sheet of cardboard, between each layer. And, you know, we sold a lot of eggs in those days. And I've seen round about Eastertime us getting in maybe a big quantity. The boss would say, 'Wullie, will you fill these two baskets and go round the doors with them?' Which I did. We sold them at anything about 9d. to 11d. a dozen. When I went round with these eggs the customers got the pick and when I'd got down to the last six dozen or so, all the big eggs had gone, and there was nothing but small ones left. And I got a row from the boss for bringing back all the small eggs; we had to sell them off cheaper, at maybe 8d. a dozen."*

The traditional breakfast puts ham alongside the eggs. Grocers often made a speciality of hams, together with bacon and cooked meats. Some firms went even further, like Sim's: *"And I was starting to cook our own hams. We built a small kitchen at the back of the Perth Road shop. We took half the back green there to build this shed cookhouse, to make our own gammons, Irish gammons; we cooked these, and roast pork, meat rolls and pies with mince and peas in. Well, during the Second World War, all meat became rationed and we didn't have enough to carry on, so we closed the place down. We had a chef at that time, but we closed it down. At the time we started to use it again after the War, our equipment was all rusty and all out of order, and we just never continued it again."*

The convenience of a bacon slicer was unknown until about 1920, but even when it was available, older grocers preferred



Advertisement of James Steel, tea merchant, founder of the business which is now Braithwaites of Castle Street. The original shop was sited in the old Dundee Town House, "The Pillars". 19th century

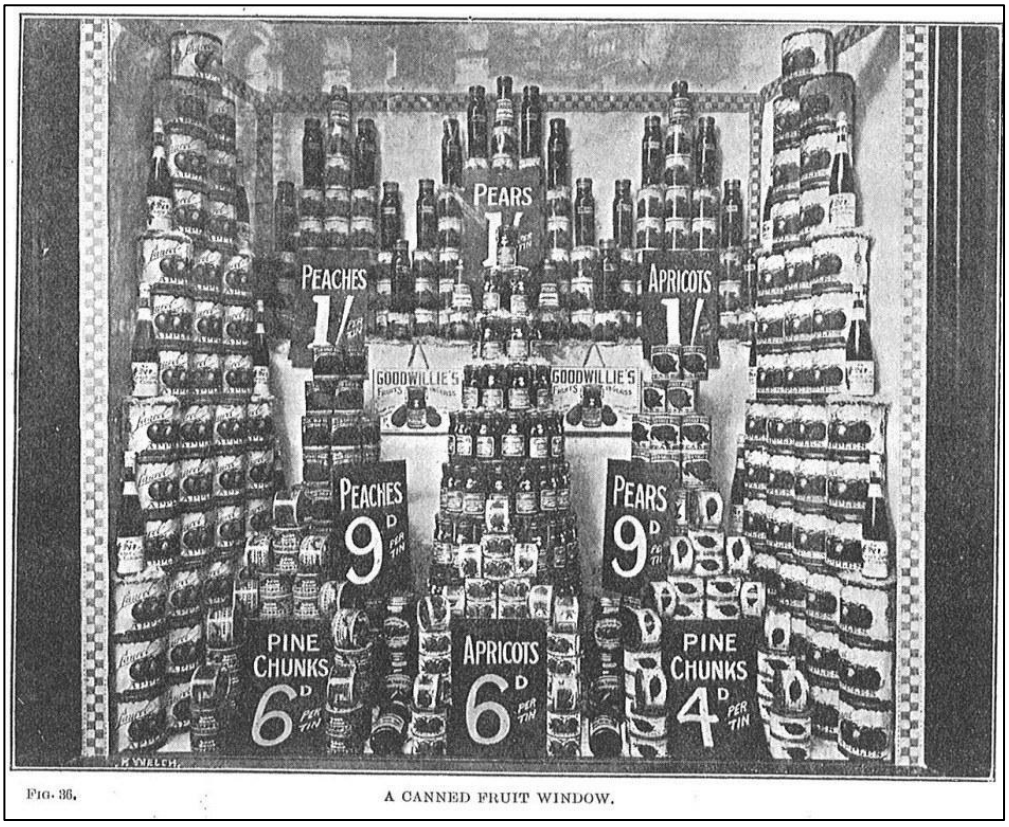


FIG. 36. A CANNED FRUIT WINDOW.

to use a ham knife. A now retired Dundee grocer, who was an apprentice in those days, remembers trying to persude his boss to buy one, putting the argument that every slice would be cut uniformly, only to be told, *"Wullie, if ye cannae cut bacon as well as one o' these machines, ye shouldna be here!"* Nevertheless, as soon as he got a shop of his own, he bought himself a ham machine.

Preserved fish was also sold at the grocer's. As Mr Landsburgh says: *"When I first went into the trade, we bought dried haddocks. You never see them nowadays. They must have been about two feet long. They used to be hung up in the shop; very unhygenic, you know. A customer would come along and say: 'I'll take that one.' And we would get it down and cut it up into pieces for them. Later on, instead of hanging them up, we got them in and put them into approximately pound bundles, and sold them that way. I used to like the haddock. Again, salted herring, we sold it in small kegs of about six or seven pounds."*

Even on the licenced side of the business, the drink was supplied in bulk, and had to be bottled by the grocer himself. This was hard work. Mr Aitken: *"As a child I can remember the rather primitive methods used for bottling the beers and spirits. With Guinness and other ales, the work was the same week after week. Monday morning, you started with collecting the bottles, and you had to light a fire and heat the water to wash them in wooden tubs. Whisky was tapped from the casks and run off into a trough and they had a simple syphoning system. If necessary, someone would have to suck it to start it off; the old manager sometimes got a little 'happy'. It was primative, but it worked, and it paid. After that we stuck on the bottle labels; this was not necessarily perfectly done all the time, but what mattered was the quality of the contents.*

"On Mondays, too, you had to sort out the whisky bottles belonging to all the individual firms. They were returnable. You packed them up for transport and phoned the railway to let them know to fit you into their collection schedule. The more there was sitting waiting on the pavement, the better it looked to your rivals. It was extra work, but it meant they were all re-used."

Mr Sim's father bottled beer and whisky, too: *"These days on a Monday, our time was occupied in washing bottles for the bottling of beer, stout and vinegar. You washed your bottles on a Monday in a big tub of hot water and a big tub of cold water. And on the Tuesday, you started the bottling and in the afternoon, you did the labelling. Every firm would send you a packet of labels for your stout or for the Bass . . . the Bass was an important sale. We used to buy Bass in what you called a barrel, that held 36 dozen*, and a 'kil' of stout, which was 18 dozen*. And after they were bottled and labelled, they were put into order on shelves in the cellars down below. And we had them all dated when bottled, for Bass, it wasn't sold for six weeks afterwards. Bottled Bass had to be settled, and matured.*

"In 1906, a year after he started in business, my father bought London stout, and bottled it. It was not a great success afterwards, because people came in to you and said, 'Well I want Combe's Stout, I want Barclay Perkins Stout, I dinna want Sim's Stout.' In these days, we bought two brands of stout, Combe's Stout and Barclay Perkins, these were the brands we sold. And the beers we sold were McEwan's and Younger's. McEwan's was a bitter beer, and Younger's was, I think at that time, a sweeter beer. Sold at 2d. a bottle, well known as 'tuppenny'. Some people sold it at three bottles for fivepence-ha'penny.

"Then we bottled our own whisky, and we had our own labels printed. Burns and Harris used to print our labels: J. K. Sim's Special Scotch. Ours was a very popular brand, and people would phone in, specially to ask for it. In the First World War, whisky was very scarce, very scarce; we didn't have whisky to bottle. After the War, I think we used up the labels, and that was the finish."

*One gallon filled a dozen bottles of approximately the same volume as a modern beer can. A barrel held 36 gallon; a "kil" or kilderkin, 18 gallon.

JOHN MOIR & SON,

LIMITED.

Factories: LONDON. ABERDEEN. SEVILLE.

Purveyors by Appointment to HIS MAJESTY THE KING.

This Marmalade is prepared by special process and consists of a clear firm Jelly, with fine shreds of Peel, made entirely from SELECTED SEVILLE ORANGES and REFINED SUGAR. It will be found delicious, digestive and appetising!

Head Office . . .

9 & 10, GREAT TOWER STREET, LONDON, E.C.

In Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution (London 1970), David Alexander argues that the period saw an enormous increase in trade from stationary shops. The technological revolution, in which Ironbridge played so important a part, was paralleled by a revolution in food distribution, of which No.34 High St. is representative. Here is Alexander's account of the activities of the grocer.

1. *The Grocer and Shopkeeper*

In the grocery trade, initial processing was done by the wholesaler. A visitor to a Bristol wholesale grocery warehouse noted:

> Here they are breaking up tierces of sugar, and mixing the different kinds. There, they are weighing flour. In this corner, you find a man before a solid heap of currants, which stubbornly retains the form of the cask, belabouring it with an instrument. ... Here, they are with an order-book, making up the items of an order. There, they are weighing and packing. In a central position, an inspector is placed in a counting house glazed on all sides, from which he can look out on the whole stream of business. ... In another place, you find a monster coffee-roaster in full play. Again, you are in a room where some half dozen kinds of tea are ready to be tasted by one of the principals.[2]

But in this period the wholesaler's principal function was to break bulk, and the retailer was responsible for the ultimate blending, sorting, cleaning and packaging for retail sale. This meant that the quality of goods sold could vary widely between two grocers buying from the same wholesaler. To fulfill these processing functions, the grocer was obliged to equip his shop with a wide range of weights and scales, shovels, scrapes, scoops, sieves, breakers, mills and wrapping materials.[3] The processed goods would be held in bulk in drawers, bowls, jars and canisters, and normally all packaging was done at the time of sale.

A survey of the major items of stock will provide a clearer understanding of the specific trade skills demanded of grocers. Tea was certainly one of the major commodities in which they dealt. While classification was subject to frequent redefinition, in our period green teas were normally classified into Imperial, or Bloom, Hyson and Singlo and black teas into Souchong, Cambo, Congou, Pekoe and Bohea. Within each category there were further classifications with respect to quality. For example, a Colchester grocer in the 1840s issued a sale catalogue which

[2] W. Arthur, *The Successful Merchant: Sketches of the Life of Mr Samuel Budgett* (2nd ed., 1852) pp. 11–12.

[3] See the inventory of equipment held in the Coventry shop of Joseph Ward in the 1830s, at Public Record Office, B.3. 5366. (Hereafter all references to the P.R.O. bankruptcy files will be shortened to read, B.3. 123...).

CHOICEST
CEYLON **TEA**

2S.

Would YOU like to try the finest growth ——— from the ——— "GARDEN ISLAND?" You will find it in BROWN BROS.' PURE CEYLON— the Tea of distinction.

3 pounds for 5/9, 6 pounds for 11/3.

ONLY OF

BROWN BROS., Market St.

Besides the obvious statements in large lettering to catch the eye, there are the additions in smaller type. There is a reason for this. The passer-by, with a curiosity which is inborn in woman—and in man—will pause to come nearer and see what it is

offered Congou, good Congou, fine Congou and finest Congou, with similar gradings for other black and green varieties.[4] The range of teas stocked by a grocer would vary, of course, with the incomes and tastes of his customers. Although teas were sorted into their respective classifications long before they reached the retailer's shop, at the very least the grocer needed some understanding of the various grades in order to buy wisely from the wholesaler. But in the better class of grocery shop customers expected knowledgeable advice and many grocers developed their own blends.[5]

Coffee was also subject to complex classification. Mocha, or Turkey coffee, imported from the Red Sea area, enjoyed the highest reputation; East Indian the next best, and West Indian and Brazilian were regarded as very inferior. The Colchester grocer's stock was further divided into fine, finest and very old Mocha, Plantation fine and finest, Ceylon fine and fine raw.[6] Retailers could buy already roasted beans from wholesalers and coffee roasters, but the high class tradesmen usually assumed roasting responsibilities himself. It was a highly skilled function, for if the bean was overheated it lost much of its potential flavour. By the 1840s grocers were offering their customers a type of 'instant' coffee sold in bottles as 'essence of coffee' and advertised as 'a convenient preparation for making Coffee instantly, by the addition of boiling water'.[7]

Much of the retail market for sugar was for sweetening tea and coffee. Sugar was sometimes sold by grocers as a 'leading item' to attract custom for complementary products, and they might refuse to sell sugar without a purchase of one of the beverages, especially if they suspected the customer was buying his teas from itinerant dealers.[8] As with the beverages, grocers faced processing and packaging responsibilities with sugar. In the West Indies sugar was boiled down into a moist brown substance which was retailed in Britain as raw or muscovado sugar. Raw sugar was further refined in Britain into loaves and lumps, the quality of each being determined by the number of

[4] Essex Record Office, T/P 160/2–4.
[5] Blending, of course, was too often synonymous with adulteration.
[6] Catalogue of stock, Essex Record Office, T/P 160/2–4.
[7] Loc. cit.
[8] Mayhew, *London Labour*, i, 455–6.

times which the raw sugar underwent refining. For example, a grocer's sugar stocks might be classified into good and finest loaf, and good, fine and finest lump. The refuse from the refining process was collected and formed into large loaves of cheap sugars known as 'bastards'. The syrup scraped from the refiner's moulds was sold as golden syrup and treacle, and these presented the retailer with many handling problems. For example, an entry in the diary of a Kent grocer for September 1809 read,

I was removing my Treacle Puncheon with my Iron Crew and in my hurry I set it most too Proud. It fell down and broke a ½ Bushel Crock of Treacle and a fine Mess I had. But I got it up with a very little lost, say 3 or 4 lbs. The best way to draw Treacle off is to Tap it in the Bunghole, and draw as much out as you can, and then you can take out the Head without injury.

The moist raw sugar was wrapped in paper packets on sale, while loaf sugar had to be cut and pounded into granuals and finally packaged in sugar paper.

Cocoa imports in 1822 amounted to only 523 000 lbs., but consumption grew steadily throughout the century, mainly in the form of the cocoa beverage.[9] Brand names dominated the retailer's shelves before 1850: the Colchester grocer advertised stocks of 'Sir Hans Sloane's chocolate—the original and only genuine Article, manufactured by Messrs. Chambers and Lumby' and many products from Fry's, including soluble cake chocolate, soluble cocoa, dietetic cocoa, soluble chocolates in ¼lb. canisters, cocoa paste in ½lb. jars and Fry's & White's Patent cocoas.

The high class grocer stocked many spices, such as mace, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, ginger, several grades of pepper, allspice, mustard, chilies, curry powder and arrow-root. They were purchased from the wholesaler in an unprocessed form and, where appropriate, they were ground, mixed and wrapped by the retailer. At this time, however, grocers were also stocking these spices in essence form, pre-packed in bottles for immediate sale.

The grocer's stocks of dried, foreign fruits and nuts might include several types of plums, figs, dates, raisins, currants, oranges, lemons, pears and apples, almonds, chestnuts and Brazil nuts. By 1850 fruit merchants undertook some pre-packaging, especially in gift package form. But typically the retailer was responsible for final cleaning, sorting and packaging: as the Kent grocer wrote in his diary on 29 August 1809, 'I picked 2 Baskets Raisins of 112 lbs in 2 Hours and a half.'

[9] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, p. 98.

Grocers dealing in 'Italian goods' stocked vermicelli, macaroni, tapioca, sago, gelatines and most carried groats, barley, flour and boiling and split peas. By the 1840s Italian warehousemen and grocers sold many pre-packaged sauces, some of which were nationally distributed and a few which are still available today, such as Lea & Perrin's Worcester sauce.

The household stores market was shared among grocers, tallow chandlers, oil and colourmen, chemists, ironmongers and hardwaremen. Soap was retailed in three basic varieties: white soap, which was sometimes perfumed and was prepared from olive oil and soda; yellow soap, a common household variety made from soda, tallow and resin; and soft soap, manufactured from fish oil and potash. Starch could be had from manufacturers in stove-dried packets, which might then be broken down for retail sale. The white and yellow soaps were sold in moulded bars or in cuttings from the bar, but the soft soap involved the retailer in many handling problems. Soft soap had an unpleasant lard-like consistency and was stored in bins to be scooped into a customer's container. Shrinkage in the volume of soft soap after sale was a common source of friction between tradesmen and their customers, for in the shop the soap would be kept in the darkest part of the cellar to reduce weight loss.

Grocers would normally stock oil for lamps, cleaning and polishing oils, linseed oil, currier's oil and many others. Candles of the moulded and dipped varieties were sold in many varieties. There were a few manufacturer-branded candles by mid-century, such as Clarke's & Field's and Price's Patent Belmont, but most were undistinguished as to origin.

Among the many sundry articles which the grocer might stock were alum, blacklead, blacking (with a few brand names, such as Day & Martin) brimstone, emery cloth, lamp black,

lamp cottons, lucifers, sulphur, colour and paints, corks, carriage grease. There would also usually be a large stock of brushes for in-door and out-door use, brooms, cloths and mops.

Grocers' stock assortments varied with the market situation. A High Street grocer in a market town would stock in depth in the grocery and household lines; but where the market was small or the shopkeeper's trade was oriented towards the working class, his stocks would be horizontally rather than vertically distributed. Compound trading took two general forms. In the first, the grocer added a second major line to his grocery trade, most commonly drapery or drugs, which might be stocked in a depth comparable to the grocery lines. In the second case, he stocked groceries and very lightly over the fast moving items of several other trades. The Epping shop cited earlier is an example of compound trading in this sense, although the incorporated trades were mainly in the food line. But a Daventry grocer in the 1840s dealt in medicines, cutlery and crockery;[10] and a grocer at Eastchurch in the 1830s added ironmongery, crockery, medicines, stationery and clothing.[11]

Retail grocers drew their stocks from three sources: (1) specialist wholesale grocers, tea dealers and merchants, (2) manufacturer's and manufacturing tradesmen, and (3) wholesale/retail grocers.[12]

The largest wholesale grocery firms were located in London, Bristol and Liverpool, the major entry ports for groceries and provisions. These firms assembled stocks from importing merchants, sugar refiners, commission brokers and from other wholesale grocers. If they supplied general country shops the wholesale grocer would also hold stocks of medicine, household stores and even drapery and clothing. Bristol wholesalers tended to dominate the trade in the West Country, West Midlands and South Wales; Liverpool firms the North Midlands, North Wales and the North; but the biggest London firms supplied shops in most parts of the country. To give only one example, Denis, Lambert & Co., a City firm capitalized

[10] Northamptonshire Record Office, D. 2992.
[11] Records of Richard Sinden, Kent County Record Office, Q Cr 147/1–3.
[12] It is possible to trace the channels of distribution by examining claim sheets filed in bankruptcy cases.

at over £30 000 trading between 1815 and 1829, sold to shopkeepers in Bath, Exeter, Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, Sheffield, York, Newcastle, and many other towns in the same regions.[13] Normally, the country retail grocer would minimize his transport costs by buying in the nearest wholesale centre, but services offered by wholesalers in more distant import centres might prove sufficiently attractive to overcome the transport factor.[14] For example, Thomas Dunlap, a grocer in Pontefract, bought mainly from wholesale grocers in Liverpool but he also maintained accounts with London wholesale firms.[15]

The import merchant and specialist in fruit, cheese, tea, wines and provisions, organized supplies for the city wholesale grocers. They did not usually maintain staffs of commercial travellers, but the smaller import specialists would fill orders from retailers which were sent to them by post, although the bigger firms would only handle bulk orders. Retailers would usually have several accounts with import specialists in addition to their connexions with general wholesale grocers. For example, Edmund Bumpstead of Halesworth had accounts with several London oil, wine and orange merchants and an Ipswich cheese factor.[16]

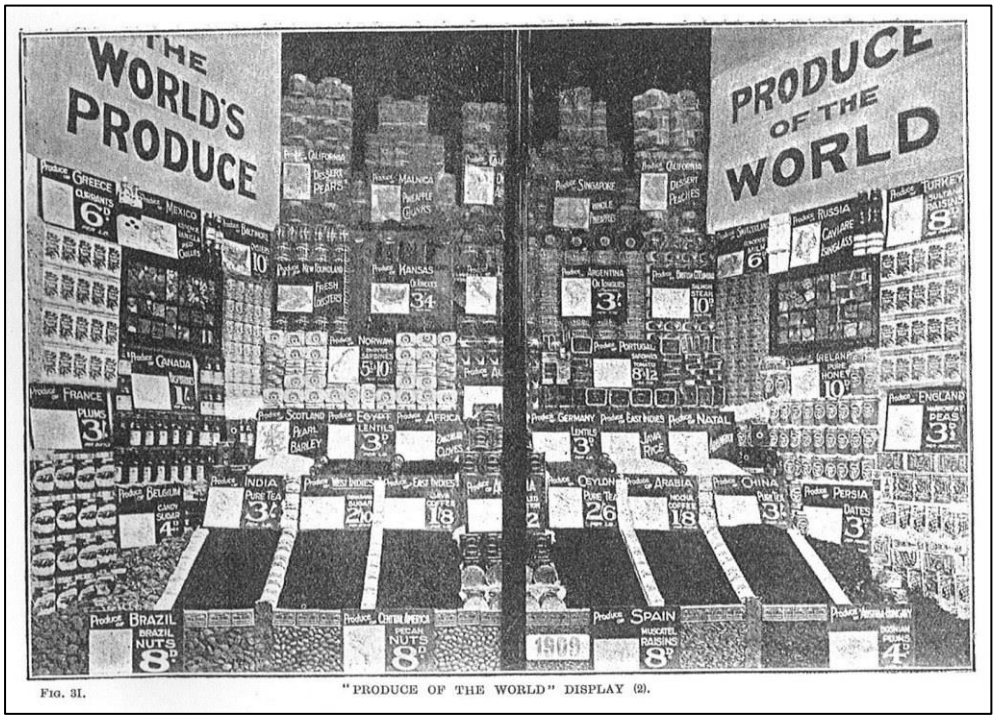


FIG. 31. "PRODUCE OF THE WORLD" DISPLAY (2).

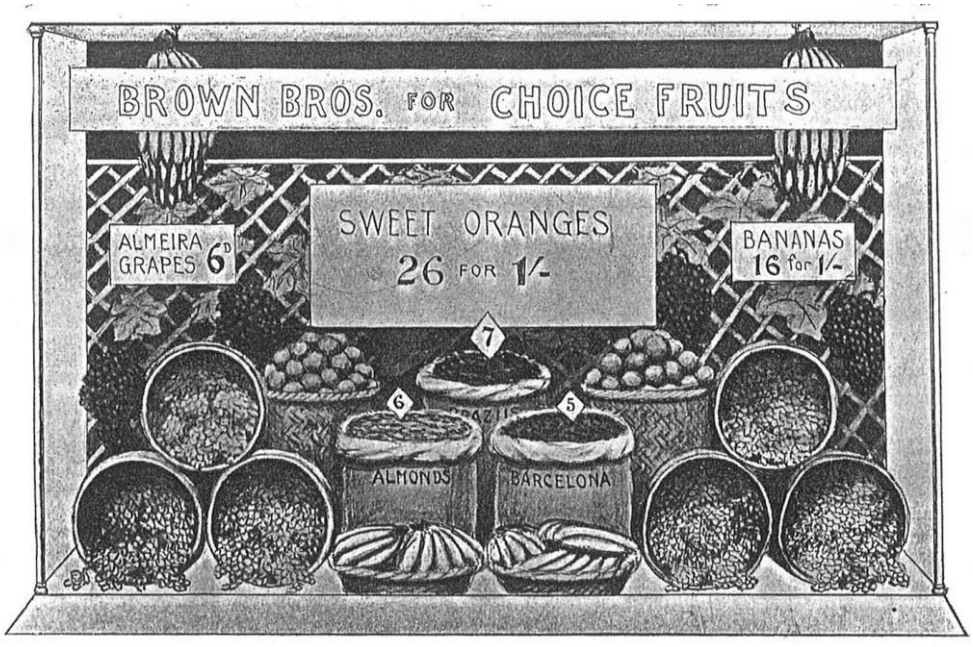


FIG. 59. GREEN (FRUIT DISPLAYS (1).

A great deal of this country wholesaling, but not all of it, was *passive*, in the sense that the wholesaler was approached by the shopkeeper rather than the reverse, while sporadic *active* wholesaling might result from over-buying in job-lots. Job-lot buying, however, could lead to the development of a permanent wholesale trade of an active kind. For example, a draper at Bristol in the 1820s on one occasion bought an enormous job-lot of merinoes at a low price. There was no hope that he could sell even a substantial portion of them by retail and hence was forced into active wholesaling. He sold some to drapers he knew at Chatham and Merthyr, and then hired a horse and cart and instructed his shopman to call on small country drapers to encourage 'a fresh connexion for all kinds of general drapery goods that we sold' but 'to especially push this lot of merinoes'.[27] In the grocery trade, over-buying in tea, sugar, butter and cheese also developed into permanent, active wholesaling. For example, Samuel Budgett, who founded a wholesale grocery firm at Bristol with annual turnovers approaching £1M, was introduced to wholesaling when he over-bought sugar for his retail shop at Kingwood. He followed up his success in disposing of the sugar by making,

> a modest sort of commercial journey; and among tradesmen to whom he would not venture to offer the higher articles of grocery, raised a considerable trade in such description of goods as he might supply without seeming to push into too important a sphere.

[25] B.3. 63. [26] B.3. 741.
[27] *Reminiscences of An Old Draper*, pp. 150–4.

Budgett found his best customers to be 'the smaller dealers, who were overlooked by the wholesale houses and obtained supplies from their neighbours, who, though retail dealers, were so on an extensive scale'. By establishing a reputation among the small tradesmen, Budgett's business grew and by 1850 the firm's travellers sold throughout the West Country and as far north as Birmingham.[28] The more typical figures in country wholesaling, however, were men like the Bristol draper: they remained principally retail traders with a local wholesale connexion. By mid-century, however, the wholesale/retail dealer usually advertised himself as such, and the decline of job-lot buying meant that sporadic wholesaling by retailers declined—an indicator of a developing specialization of function.

FIG. 1. A MODERN SHOP FRONT. WINDOWS FITTED WITH SLIDING SASHES.

Although many wholesale grocers stocked a wide range of sundry items, retailers placed many direct orders with local or regional craftsmen and manufacturers rather than pay middleman and transport costs from London, Liverpool or Bristol. For example, William Alcock of Fazeley in Staffordshire bought his tobacco in Derby and his soap in Shrewsbury; Richard Rose of Sutton Valence in Kent bought his drugs from two Maidstone chemists; and William Towers of Nottingham purchased his soap in West Bromwich and his candles from a local chandler.[17] Other household stores were commonly bought from local colourmen, drysalters, ironmongers, and brush manufacturers. Grocers also went directly to the farms for stocks of eggs, butter, cheese, vegetables and fruit.

[13] B.3. 1454.
[14] 'Services' is used here to include frequent calls by travellers, price, discounts and credit terms, quality and choice.
[15] B.3. 1437. [16] B.3. 791. [17] B.3. 63, B.3. 4403, B.3. 3055.

It is possible that grocers' purchases from the city wholesalers were subject to seasonal fluctuations. Tea and grocery stocks in the country as a whole were lowest in the late summer before the arrival of the clipper ships, and heavy stock ordering might, therefore, have followed in the autumn. But the London dealers appear to have been at the centre of tea stock-holding at least, not the retail grocer: by the late eighteenth century the London dealers, who controlled most of the trade to the provinces, kept in their shops only enough tea to meet current demand, and the remainder of stocks purchased at the sales were left in the East India Company warehouses.[18] Evidence from remaining stock order invoices suggest that retail grocers did not order in large volumes at infrequent intervals but every fortnight or as their stock levels demanded. For example in 1813 Thomas Chapman's orders for his Lewis shop, placed with Toms & Hicks of Southwark, assumed the following pattern:[19]

Aug.	4	£138.	17. 4.
	18	19.	10. 2.
Sept.	15	64.	1. 2.
	20	162.	1. 2.
Oct.	16	31.	12. 0.
Nov.	17	84.	19. 9.
Dec.	20	175.	9. 6.

John Smith of Faversham who also dealt with Toms & Hicks placed orders more frequently than fortnightly, sometimes for very small amounts:[20]

Apr.	5	£18.	15. 10.
	21	78.	6. 0.
	28	17.	15. 0.
May	18	7.	18. 8.
	25	9.	11. 4.
June	10	99.	14. 1.
	24	5.	18. 7.
	29	86.	14. 3.

[18] H. C. and L. H. Mui, 'The Commutation Act and the Tea Trade in Britain', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xvi, no. 2 (1963) p. 245.
[19] B.3. 898. [20] B.3. 4541.

Fig. 1. A MODERN SHOP FRONT. WINDOWS FITTED WITH SLIDING SASHES.

July 14	64.	14.	3.
28	42.	5.	0.
Aug. 18	51.	4.	0.

The frequency with which stock orders were placed no doubt varied with the distance of the shop from a major wholesale centre, but improvements in transportation and the development of commercial travelling was tending to equalize the situation for shopkeepers throughout England by mid-century.[21]

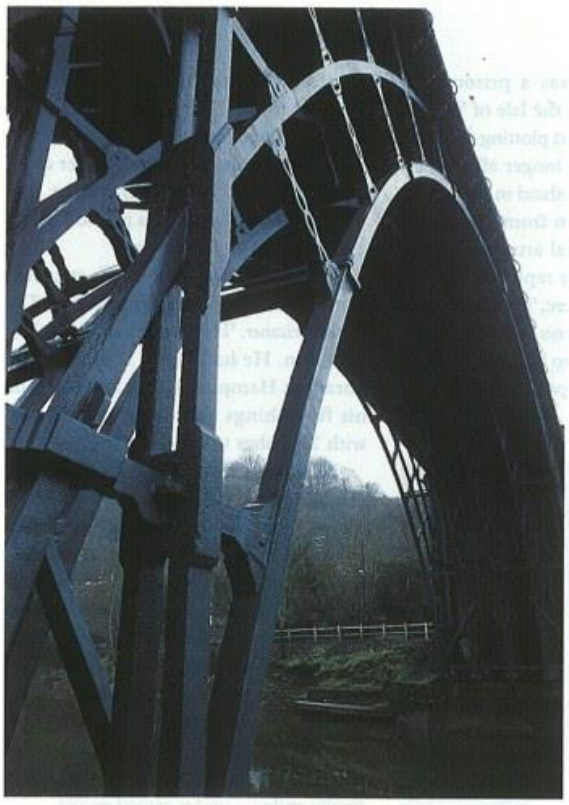
Stock orders might be placed by letter or through the wholesaler's commercial traveller. The growth of railways in the 1830s and 1840s allowed wholesalers' travellers to effect a more intensive and extensive penetration of the market; but throughout this period they strove to concentrate sales and economize on travelling time by largely ignoring the small shopkeepers. The latter depended upon the wholesale/retail grocer to fill small orders at frequent intervals. The account books of Jonathan Pedlar, a St Austell grocer, show that he had several accounts with small shopkeepers in the area in the early 1840s. One of these, a Mr Wakeauer, usually placed a weekly stock order with Pedlar ranging in value from £2 to £6; slightly bigger orders, ranging over lard, flour, bran, meal, tobacco and other goods, were placed at similar intervals by a Mr Elliot.[22] Similarly, Hannah and Thomas Biven of Mortlake bought groceries and household stores from tradesmen at Twickenham, Richmond and Brentford, and little or none from London wholesalers.[23] James Bowles, a shopkeeper at Balsham in Cambridgeshire in the late 1820s, drew all his grocery stocks from three Saffron Walden grocers.[24] While the major High Street grocers dealt mainly with the city wholesalers, they too might buy from regional wholesalers and, when confronted by time gaps between stock orders and deliveries from the city, place emergency orders with local tradesmen. Jonathan Pedlar's Inventory Account for the summer of 1840 indicates that he made purchases of this kind for £8 or less at a time. William

[21] The available information on rates of stock turn will be discussed in the next chapter.

[22] P.R.O., Chancery Master's Exhibits, C. 103, no. 82, 'Geach v. Pedlar', Account Book 'A'.

[23] B.3. 372. [24] B.3. 649.

Alcock of Fazeley in Stafford spread his grocery orders among London firms and a Birmingham wholesaler, but he also maintained a small account with Hannah Boyes, another Fazeley grocer.[25] Thomas Bumpus was a substantial Northampton grocer in the 1840s: he drew the bulk of his stocks from London wholesale firms; but he also maintained small buying accounts with three other Northampton grocers.[26] The net effect of these widespread country wholesale/retail activities was to spread stock holding costs and to facilitate rapid movement of goods, locally and regionally, in response to unpredictable demand situations and delays in stock order deliveries from the cities.



Picture perfect

A painting from Stockholm and a little computer wizardry have helped to solve the mystery of how the world's first iron bridge was built. Mark Palmer investigates

EVERY PICTURE tells a story, but this one seems to have gone way beyond the call of duty. For more than 200 years, engineers, architects and industrial historians have scratched their heads and marvelled at how the original Iron Bridge, which spans the Severn Gorge in Shropshire, was constructed with such extraordinary precision.

Their collective bafflement has been compounded by a distinct lack of hard evidence. For, while there are several paintings and drawings of the bridge made following its official opening on New Year's Day 1781, nothing has been unearthed by way of handwritten reports, sketches or personal observations detailing the bridge's construction. Until now. Or rather, until the spring of 1997 when a previously unknown painting by a Swedish professor of art, Elias Martin, came to light in a Stockholm museum; it depicts the bridge under construction.

There are a great many passionate admirers of the Iron Bridge, numbering among them is the present Chairman of English Heritage, Sir Neil Cossons – who was the first director of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. Since the find, these experts have been studying every detail of the small painting, while at the same time checking the artist's credentials as a recorder of building processes. They have not been disappointed.

'At the beginning I was very excited, but didn't quite understand what I was looking at,' says David de Haan, Deputy Director of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, which works closely with English Heritage in looking after the World Heritage Site near Telford. 'Then it became clear that we had stumbled

PHOTOS PAUL MCDONALD

across something that would change our minds about what really happened all those years ago.'

Martin's painting has not been the only breakthrough. Bill Blake of the English Heritage Metric Survey Team has devised a virtual reality model of Abraham Darby III's bridge, following painstaking research for English Heritage by the Ironbridge Institute's Archaeology Unit into every beam, rib, bolt, wedge and abutment. It is now possible to examine the bridge from any angle, without the use of scaffolding. With the help of colour coding, this has thrown up several new discoveries, not least the existence of a 4.6-metre (15-foot) casting that ties the arch together and locks the crown joint. It was always assumed that only two beams supported the bridge deck, but it is now clear that there are three. Soon, it is hoped, this computerised information will be made available to visitors in the Tollhouse.

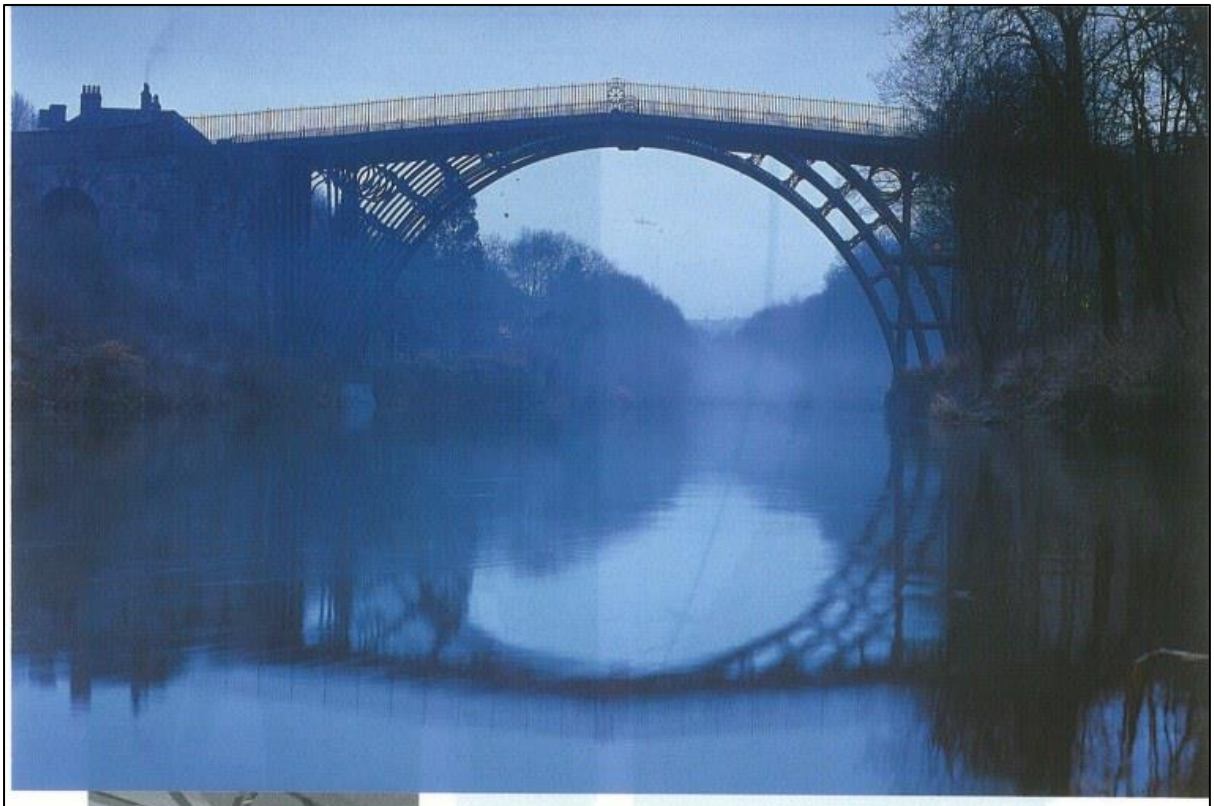
The opportunity to test these new findings arose when the producers of BBC2's *Timewatch* learned of English Heritage's work. They commissioned members of the Royal Engineers, 51 Field Squadron (Air Assist) to construct a half-scale replica of the bridge, using the process depicted in the painting and adopting eighteenth-century building methods. It stands within the grounds of Blists Hill Victorian Town, a living history museum run by the Ironbridge Gorge Museums, and will become a permanent feature for the hundreds of thousands of visitors who make the pilgrimage to the 'valley of invention' each year.

'The Iron Bridge was in fact the last great monument of the age of craftsmanship,' says Sir Neil, 'but being made of metal it stands absolutely on the cusp of the modern age, prefiguring such engineering feats of the future as the Eiffel Tower, the Forth Bridge and the London Eye. I am delighted that our experts have succeeded in shedding new light on this extraordinary structure, which marked a turning point for mankind.'

'It is not just the bridge itself that is so special but the whole setting,' says Tony Fleming, an English Heritage Inspector of Ancient Monuments. 'I never tire of learning more about it. One of the roles of English Heritage when it comes to a World Heritage Site is to use employ our expertise to advance our knowledge of the site and its construction.'

One of the principal conclusions to emerge from the new research and scale version is that the iron was lifted into

Opposite page, left to right: detail from the original Iron Bridge; the half-scale replica of the bridge, built to test the theories of the English Heritage Metric Survey Team. What they discovered contradicted how experts had presumed the original bridge was constructed in the eighteenth century
Above, left to right: one of the derricks used to construct the replica; the underside of the Iron Bridge itself



'The Iron Bridge was in fact the last great monument of the age of craftsmanship'

position using two 21-metre (70-foot) wooden derricks (cranes) and possibly another one mounted on a boat in the middle of the river. Previously, it had been thought that towers were constructed on either side of the river with a wooden structure running between them. This was consistent with a brief description from 1789, which talked about there being a 'large scaffold' erected before the ribs were lowered into place. No further details were revealed, however.

What is now clear from the painting (which came to light following a visit to the bridge by a group of Finns) is that the ironwork was originally freestanding, with the abutments on each side being added later – a huge departure from usual bridge-building techniques. While it had been supposed that the separate parts were pre-cast and assembled like a Meccano kit, it is now evident that each of the large castings was hand-moulded individually as it was required, and not cast in advance from a timber pattern.

For Abraham Darby III, therefore, the bridge was an ongoing work in progress, a bespoke sculpture of amazing proportions. He may have been a brilliant ironmaster but he was also an inspired artist who, in building the bridge, produced what Viscount Torrington described in 1784 as 'one of the wonders of the world'.

This becomes obvious when you stand underneath the newly painted structure on the northern side. Look up and you will notice that the middle frame (there are five in total) is different to the others, as if Darby were feeling his way as he proceeded, working from the centre outwards. Almost all the joints, which are packed with cast-iron wedges and filled with lead, are of different sizes. The apertures – crucial to the overall appearance of grace and elegance – also vary quite dramatically.

David de Haan believes that the bridge was cast at the Bedlam Furnace near the river and not in one of Darby's landlocked furnaces. Lettering on one of the outer arches reads, 'This bridge was cast at Coalbrook Dale and erected in the year MDCCLXXIX [1779]' but this was simply the name by which the whole valley was known in the eighteenth century.

Darby was not the original designer of the Iron Bridge. That role was given to Thomas Farnolls Pritchard, who first suggested the idea of bridging the river here at a time when Shropshire was profiting from the production of iron by

Above: Iron Bridge, and inset: a CAD model produced by English Heritage that reveals the geometry of the bridge

using coke as fuel rather than charcoal. Such was the dynamism of the area that the Severn was the second busiest river in Europe at this time.

Pritchard died before he could see his modified design become a reality. Darby was present at the opening but, by that time, the bridge had practically bankrupted his business; he died deep in debt ten years later. The project cost twice the original estimate and Darby was responsible for the shortfall. Details of his personal account book are on view in the Tollhouse on the southern bank, along with other archive material.

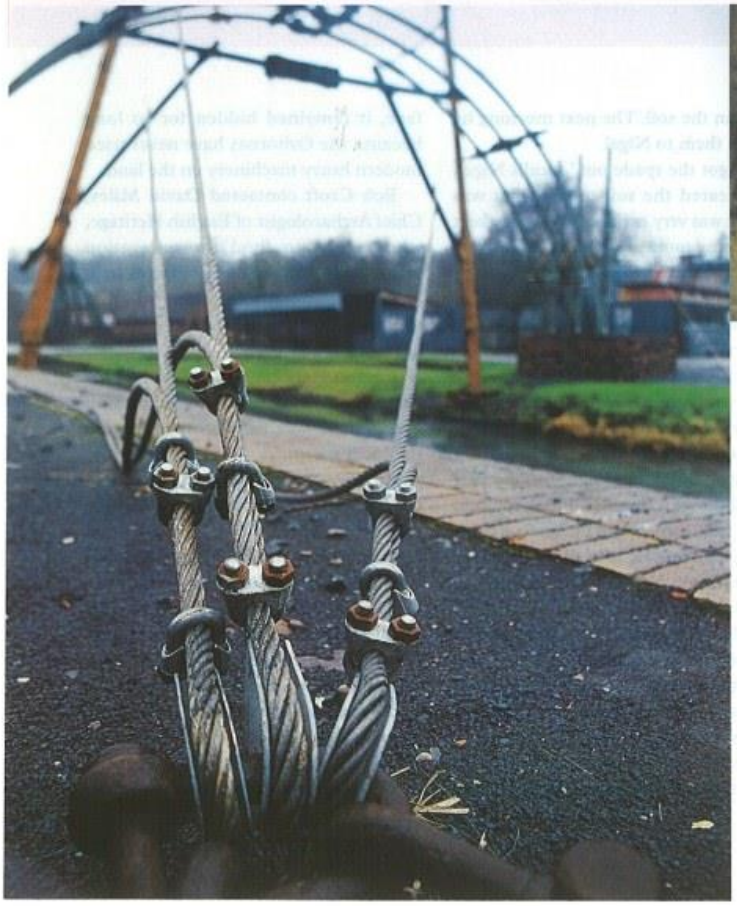
The bridge is now closed to traffic but pedestrians can still use it – free of charge since tolls were abolished in 1950. The structure is safe – for the moment. In 1973, Shropshire County Council, in association with English Heritage's predecessors as custodians, the Department of the Environment, embarked on a major initiative to halt the ground movement on either side of the bridge. This involved building an inverted concrete arch between the abutments on the river bed.

When Darby set out on his great work, there was no town of Ironbridge. But within a few years, the Tontine Hotel had been erected and other buildings and houses soon followed. Today, the shops and houses – and the prominent church of St Luke's – huddle together on the northern hill, all owing their existence to the bridge on the river bank below.

Mysteries still remain about the Iron Bridge but the evidence uncovered during the past few years has ensured that its reputation as one of the country's greatest assets remains firmly intact.

'What we have discovered makes it even more dramatic and important,' says David de Haan. 'The leap in engineering techniques that it represents is far greater than we had envisaged. By recreating a part of it ourselves, we now have actual, tangible evidence of how the Iron Bridge was built. This represents a substantial breakthrough.' ■

Below right: the painting of the bridge under construction by the Swedish professor of art, Elias Martin, formed the basis for the half-scale model
Below: the scale model under construction by the Royal Engineers 51 Field Squadron as part of BBC2's *Timewatch*



fact file

Iron Bridge, Shropshire
Tel 01952 432166 for information on the award-winning Iron Bridge Gorge museums: Blists Hill Victorian Town; Coalport China Museum; Tar Tunnel; Jackfield Tile Museum; the Museum of the Gorge; Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron; Darby Houses and Broseley Pipeworks

The Iron Bridge Experiment
The half-scale model of the Iron Bridge is still at Blists Hill Victorian Town for the public to see. For more information about the experiment please visit www.theolt.com