



The Bridges of Medieval England: Transport and Society 400-1800 (Oxford Historical Monographs)

David Harrison

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Medieval bridges are startling achievements of design and engineering comparable with the great cathedrals of the period, and are also proof of the great importance of road transport in the middle ages and of the size and sophistication of the medieval economy. David Harrison rewrites their history from early Anglo-Saxon England right up to the Industrial Revolution, providing new insights into many aspects of the subject. Looking at the role of bridges in the creation of a new road system, which was significantly different from its Roman predecessor and which largely survived until the twentieth century, he examines their design. Often built in the most difficult circumstances: broad flood plains, deep tidal waters, and steep upland valleys, they withstood all but the most catastrophic floods. He also investigates the immense efforts put into their construction and upkeep, ranging from the mobilization of large work forces by the old English state to the role of resident hermits and the charitable donations which produced bridge trusts with huge incomes.

The evidence presented in *The Bridges of Medieval England* shows that the network of bridges, which had been in place since the thirteenth century, was capable of serving the needs of the economy on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. This has profound implications for our understanding of pre-industrial society, challenging accepted accounts of the development of medieval trade and communications, and bringing to the fore the continuities from the late Anglo-Saxon period to the eighteenth century. This book is essential reading for those interested in architecture, engineering, transport, and economics, and any historian sceptical about the achievements of medieval England.

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