

The Building of a Bridge over the Avon River at York 1850-1861

Although the need for a bridge over the Avon had probably been recognized before 1850, the agitation for a bridge did not really begin until the early 1850s. By tracing the correspondence between the Resident Magistrate York and the Colonial Secretary's Office a picture can be built of the frustrations suffered by the settlers in their attempts to obtain a bridge and why it took ten years to finally get one.

On April 15, 1850, R.G.Meares wrote to the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO207/13)

"Sir

At an adjourned meeting held at York on the 10th Inst. It was agreed that for the present we should collect subscriptions and if possible, carry a bridge across the river opposite the Barracks at York from the bank on the side of the river next to Mount Brown to the distance of 230' in the direction of the Barracks as per rough sketch. That the bridge should be erected above high-water mark and sloped down at the end to receive the traffic. This would secure the Public from danger in crossing the river and the bridge could be lengthened at any time to the Barracks when the necessary funds could be raised. In the meantime, we are able to state that subscribers have put down their names to about half the amount of Cook's tender for completing the first part viz. 230' in length and we beg on behalf of the inhabitants of the district to lay before His Excellency to grant for the tender and particulars given by Cook, for his approval and to solicit His Excellency to grant " for the purpose of erecting the proposed bridge £80 being half the amount of the tender".

The idea of a subscription bridge (where the settlers pay for half and the government pay for the other half) is already being mooted here. Also appearing for the first time is the name of Solomon Cook, an American engineer who settled in Western Australia, whose name was to be connected to the York Bridge many times in the following ten Years. On April 15, 1850, Cook wrote to the Colonial Secretary with his proposal to build a bridge (CS0207/14)

"I do hereby offer to build a good and substantial bridge across the river Avon at the site near the Barracks as proposed by the members of the meeting held in York on the 10th of this month. To be built of white or Parker's gum - the planks to be split timber. To be built nearly after the plan of the Perth bridges with a few alterations - the bottom of the river being stoney it will be impossible to drive piles therefore they will have to be cross braced and strutted in order to make the bridge stand firm. The timber must be light as it will have to be carted from 3 to 8 miles. The gum is 2 times as strong as Mahogany. Therefore, it will do much smaller.

I will furnish all timber and every material requisite for building the above bridge and finish all in a substantial manner for the sum of £160 sterling, £80 to be paid in produce at a fair marketable price.

I should require £20 in advance if it was convenient. Such of the parties as have subscribed to pay in produce would pay as I might require supplication for the job. The entire length of the bridge to be

230'. I will make every exertion in my power to get the bridge passable before the high floods of the ensuing winter. The bridge is to be built above the highest water marks known by the inhabitants of York.

Appended to the back of this letter is a note in pencil by Charles Fitzgerald, then Governor of WA.

"The parties interested in this undertaking are to be told that I decline to give any monies towards a bridge unless all the piles are driven as in the Canning as I consider Mr. Cook's idea of securing them by cross struts and stones insecure. And further that under any circumstances the Govt. cannot give a larger sum than £50."

Following this letter by Cook are sketches of the bridge (two by Cook and one by Thomas Brown) and a sketch map of York showing three proposed sites for the bridge (CSO207/16-20). The first site had been rejected in consequence of rock on the bottom of the pool (the Barracks site). The second site was where Solomon Cook proposed to throw a bridge of one span across the whole distance and the third site (on Mr. J. H. Mongers property) had perhaps taken into account the Governors wishes for a more secure structure and was one where piles could be driven.

On 30 April 1850 Meares wrote again to the Governor (CSO207/21)

"At an adjourned meeting of the inhabitants of the York district held at York on April 30th, 1850, the reply of his Excellency the governor to the proposal made at the last meeting on the subject of erecting a bridge over the Avon, His Excellency's letter having been read to the meeting and Mr. Cook having stated to the meeting that he has ascertained on Mr. Monger's land a place where piles can be driven near the lower end of the pool. It is suggested that the situation now in view be proposed for His Excellency's consideration.

The one named already where piles can be driven and another site about 150 yards higher up the stream where Mr. Cook proposes throwing over one arch where the water is at present about 45 yards across. If the pile bridge should be adopted Mr. Monger agrees to give up the land required upon receiving an adequate proportion in exchange. It is the opinion of the meeting that both these plans be forwarded for His Excellence the Governor's opinion and decision."

By this time, the Governor had changed his mind as to the style of bridge required, as his reply to Meares' letter dated May 9, shows 1850 (CSF28/no413).

"Sir,

Having submitted your later dated 30 April containing propositions by Mr. Solomon Cook for constructing a bridge over the Avon at York to His Excellency, I am instructed to reply to say that he has well considered the advantages offered by both places and is decidedly in favour of that proposed by Cook of the single span without piles, if the Committee on the spot find no obstacles, to its it's being carried into effect, in that case it is His Excellency's wish that the bridge be thrown over the pool at the street or roadway where the water is represented as being 45 yards wide; and

as no detailed plans have been submitted to His Excellency for the opinion of the Superintendent of Public Works as to the practicality or durability of the bridge, His Excellency will require the contractor to enter into the bond(which i herewith enclose) together with another party, as a necessary precaution where public money is expended, on finally concluding arrangements you will have the goodness therefore as Chairman of the Committee to see this bond duly executed, and return it to this office.”

On May 14, 1850, at a meeting held at York for the purpose of fixing upon a site for the erection of a bridge across the Avon River several proposals were carried (CSO204/294).

1. That the bridge was to be erected across the pool at the street or roadway near Ellis's Cottage where the water at the present mark was 45 yards.
2. The bridge was to be of one span and according to the proposal of Mr. Solomon Cook the engineer.
3. That Mr. Cooks name be taken as sufficient to the bond without a second surety.
4. That a committee be formed of the following gentlemen, Captain Meares, Samuel Burges, Thomas Brown, S. S. Parker Jnr., and J. H. Monger.

Between May 14 and May 16, 1850, the Resident Magistrate received the Governors letter of May 9, for another meeting was hurriedly convened and a basic disagreement over the bond to be signed by Solomon Cook arose. R.G.Meares' report of that meeting is as follows (CSO204/293).

“Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge yours of the 9th Inst. together with a bond relating to the proposed bridge over or across the Avon – upon receipt of which I immediately called another meeting for hitherto it had been considered advisable not to form a committee but to let all the settlers by their signatures to the subscription or by their presence to act in concert as to ascertain a general feeling and wish for the thing if such existed.

The subscription list being handed to Mr. Cook, he accepted the amount at present enumerated viz. £82.10.0 which he accepted in part payment of the £160. I then read the bond to him and the meeting – to which he at once objected for being, as he said, an entire stranger and of another country, it could not be expected that he should be enabled to procure any person to join with him in such a security.”

The opinion of the meeting being then taken it was considered that as the time had been already so protracted by correspondence and Mr. Cook having decidedly stated that unless some final arrangement could be then made that he must withdraw his proposal altogether. It was proposed and carried that Mr. Cook's signature to the bond without a second surety should be deemed sufficient in as much as “the Government were not to pay the £50 until the completion of the bridge. His Excellency will no doubt consider this is a strain on the power given in your letter of the 9th Inst. viz. “if the committee find no obstacle to its being carried into effect” - now there did occur this huge obstacle and only

the one possible made that could be discovered(?) in getting over it which was accordingly adopted.

Mr. Cook begged very hard for £20 in advance as soon as the work shall have been fairly begun and expressed a wish as will be seen in his proposal (enclosed) that if His Excellency will vouchsafe to grant him the favour he might be permitted to receive it through the Government Resident as his whole time will be taken up with the bridge, so much delay having already taken place and the winter so fast approaching.”

Solomon Cook’s proposal to the meeting was -

“I will build a bridge good and substantial on the site proposed by the meeting of one span from bank to bank – the bridge to be 12’ in width within the railing. The flooring of said bridge to be hewn or sawn timber and to be built wholly after my own plan and to be supported by one or more false piers until the timber is sufficiently seasoned. I agree to take the names in the subscription list as far as they go as payment. I also accept the £50 offered by the Govt. in part payment on condition that £20 be advanced through Government Resident as soon as the work is fairly begun and the remainder at the completion of the work – subscription in produce to be paid as required. The whole of the work to be done in a workmanlike and substantial manner for the sum of £160.”

That the question of the bond was a contentious one can be seen in a further letter from Meares to the Governor dated 1 June 1850 (CS0204/295).

“Sir,

I am not certain that it is necessary to address you on the present occasion – but the Bridge Committee having assembled on Mr. Burges’s presenting instructions from His Excellency the Governor accompanied by a new bond for signature. After some discussion it was signed yet there is still an anomaly. Cook positively refused to sign a second bond but undoubtedly the first is still in existence, at least it was considered so by the Committee who all attached their names to the second.”

Presumably this was satisfactory to all concerned for the question of the bond does not arise again.

By 8 August 1850 still no work had begun on the bridge as seen by a letter from the Resident Magistrate stating that My Cook felt it necessary to appoint someone to inspect the timber. A three-man committee was proposed (CSO204/305). In due course of time the government assented to the men proposed.

By 10 October 1850, the government’s patience was beginning to wear thin. In a letter to the Resident Magistrate (CSF30/ no 1083) the Colonial Secretary asked

“Sir,

I am directed to request that you will make the necessary enquiries and ascertain for His Excellency’s information the progress which Mr. Cook, the contractor, for the erection of a bridge

over the Avon at York has made in that work, as it is His Excellency's intention in the event of the progress made not equaling the amount granted in aid by the government, to call upon the sureties for the sum advanced by £20."

Meares' reply dated 14 October 1850 expresses confidence in Mr. Cook to complete the work (CSO204/313).

In reverting to your letter of the 10th Inst. As to the York Bridge I beg to state for his Excellency's information that I immediately called a meeting of the Trustees who however, owing to the extreme pressure of shearing, working and the coming harvest could not attend. I therefore went around and took the opinion of the parties separately who entertained the fullest confidence in Mr. Cook as to the performance of the work. Who states that owing to want of hay or forage until the present moment he could not get any person to undertake the drawing in of the quantity of timber cut for the bridge and that Mr. Embleton is engaged with a team of 6 bullocks to which his own 2 are to be added to commence as soon as forage of any kind is to be obtained.

Mr. Cook says that there is no fixed time specified in the bond further than the bridge is to stand one wet season or winter's rain or words to that effect but the bond is at Perth."

Apparently Meares' confidence in Mr. Cook was unfounded for on 31 January 1851 (CSF30/no190) the Governor again asked that a report of work on the bridge be given, going so far as to state in the second letter

"I am moreover instructed to say that, if the amount of the subscription is not forthwith paid, Cook will be required to remit the £20 advanced by the Government who will then release him from all engagements with them and abandon all interest in the bridge."

Solomon Cook gave his excuse for the non-building of the bridge in a letter to the editor of the Independent Journal of 31 January 1851.

To the Editor of the "Independent Journal"

SIR,—I see by the *Independent Journal* of the 24th instant, that its York correspondent regrets the bridge not being built. I have but to say, that my agreement with the Bridge Committee was to build it according as the subscriptions were paid up, and that (not being able to afford it) I should not be required to be at any pecuniary outlay otherwise. My outlay in the incidental expenses preparatory to the building of the bridge, now

much exceeds the amount of subscriptions paid up. The building of the bridge chiefly depends on the subscribers themselves, as on their coming forward with the amount of their subscriptions, they will have no reason to complain of my tardiness with regard to its erection.

The subscription list is yet short of the amount promised, and I would draw your York Correspondent's attention to the fact, that there are in Perth and elsewhere holders of land in this neighbourhood, who have not as yet, subscribed in any way, although equally benefitted as the inhabitants of York.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

SOLOMON COOK.

York, Jan. 27.

A letter from R.G.Meares to the Governor on 3 March 1851 (CSO224/7) shows that the settlers seemed to have cooled to the idea of a subscription bridge and thought that it should become a government project entirely.

"Sir,

Under His Excellency's instructions reverted to in your letter of the 20th February. I have called a meeting of the committee appointed for the York Bridge when the general opinion was that as there are now convicts in the colony Mr. Solomon Cook's offer of the £20 advanced by the Government some time since should be received- the idea seems to be that it will become a Government work- I have therefore the honour to enclose a check on the bank for the amount and I am requested by the committee to claim the bond that it may be cancelled."

However, the Government had not given the idea of a subscription bridge as is shown in a letter of Thomas Newte Yule to Solomon Cook dated 28 August 1851 (CSF31/no406).

"Sir,

Referring to my conversation with you on the subject of a bridge to be thrown across the Avon at York, I am directed by His Excellency the Governor to inform you that he is most willing from the

funds of the colony to aid in this work if you will undertake it on the following terms, viz. That a good and substantial bridge 12 feet wide, be erected warranted (sic) by you, with sureties, to stand 5 years; that it shall be valued at £150 at least, towards which His Excellency will give £75 leaving you to make up such subscription list among the settlers for the remainder either in cash, materials, or carting as may be satisfactory to yourself, on your reporting your arrangements complete, and your readiness to commence the work His Excellency will be prepared from time to time as it progresses to advance portions of the above sum taking surety for the completion of the bridge within a reasonable time or, as in former instances, the refunding of such advances.”

Cook obviously was in no hurry to build the bridge, for as seen in a letter to the Colonial Secretary's Office dated 20 December 1852 (over a year later) work still had not begun (CSO229/350)

“Sir,

In accordance with His Excellency’s wishes I have endeavored to raise subscriptions for a bridge across the Avon at York. I am sorry to say I have not succeeded to the extent of my expectations, those parties from whom most was expected have contributed least but knowing the urgent necessity for a bridge, I have ventured to send tenders in for its erection, and will trust for more liberal contributions after it is commenced as I acknowledge the benefit it will be to myself individually. I am determined with the Govt. Assistance tendered for it to carry it through. It is requisite the tender should be accepted as early as possible as no time is to be lost in getting in the timber.”

Added to this letter is a note

“If it is finally determined to erect this bridge on colonial account and if the amount required be placed on the estimates the work must be publicly advertised. Mr. Cook’s tender can be sealed and taken if he wished it at the period of opening the tender.”

We can see that the government had finally decided on to pay for a bridge to be erected, and not raise the money for it by subscription. To this effect tenders would be called for and Cook, who all along looked as if he was going to build the bridge, no longer could regard himself as the only contender. This is seen in a letter by W.A. Sandford to Cook dated 27 December 1853 (CSF13/no1172)

“In reply to your letter of the 20th Inst. I am instructed by His Excellency to observe that if it is finally determined upon to build the bridge you mention on Colonial Account and if the amount required be placed on the estimates, the work must be publicly tendered for. Your tenders, however, can at once be sealed and await a final decision when time for opening general tenders shall arrive.”

On 7 February 1853, the Resident Magistrate York wrote to the Governor with regard to a site for the proposed bridge (CSO/279/229), “the best site for the bridge is in front of the present barracks where South Street dips into the Avon River.”

Acting on this information the Colonial Secretary wrote to Cook on 26 March 1853 (CSF31/no1283).

"I am directed by His Excellency to request you will furnish a plan and specification of the bridge for tender to build across the Avon at York, shewing the arrangement of the timbers, etc., and also to enquire whether the site you propose is the one selected by the settlers at their late meeting. You will be good enough in addition to state the nature of the timber you intend using in the construction of the bridge and the probable period of completion. On receipt of these details the Governor will be in a position to decide on your tender."

Another letter quickly followed on 29 March 1853 (CSF31/no1285).

"On reconsidering the subject of the bridge across the Avon at York His Excellency considers that it would probably be expediting the construction were you to say at what cost you will contract to execute the work according to the enclosed plan and specification of Lieut. Du Cane R.E. Have the goodness to furnish me with a reply by return post if possible, returning also the plan and specifications."

Not surprisingly Cook had had enough. In a letter dated 4 April 1853 (CSO253/198) he set out his reasons for withdrawing his tender.

"Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of plans, etc. for a bridge across the Avon at York, and beg to state that they could not be carried out without an unnecessary and heavy expenditure in its erection, such piles as are there specified would cost at least £3 each, delivered in York. I have not had time to prepare plan of such bridges as I had purposed erecting, this week, and on duly considering the subject I must beg to withdraw my tender for its erection at the present time, as the season is now so far advanced, that by the time the materials are prepared we shall be in the midst of winter, and if the waters are high it would be impossible to proceed with it."

However, the Government had not finished with Cook and continued to badger him with requests for tenders. 16 August 1853 (CSF33/no43)

"I have the honour to acquaint you that the Govt. Are prepared to receive a tender from you for constructing a bridge across the Avon River at the spot marked by Assistant Surveyor Austin. The tender to contain a guarantee that the bridge last 2 years."

Cook's answer of 22 August 1853 (CSO254/116) reads as follows:

"I beg to acknowledge receipt of yours of 16th ult. And in answer would state that if tenders were advertised for with an intention of having the bridge built immediately, i should know how to proceed, there are many arrangements to be made in undertaking such a work and having tendered for the same one before and been subject to many delays, i do not feel inclined to tender again, unless the Government is prepared to accept as well as receive tenders for the work to be proceeded with at once, in that case i would endeavour to undertake it, and would furnish a tender, awaiting your further instructions."

The government's reply came on 25 August 1853 (CSF33/no64).

"Adverting to your letter of 22nd instant, I have the honour to acquaint you that his Excellency is fully prepared to accept tenders for constructing a bridge across the Avon at York, provided that such tenders are of a satisfactory nature. By reference to the Government Gazette of Tuesday next you will receive a notice calling for tenders for this work."

The tender for the bridge was first advertised in the Government Gazette of 30 August 1853 p.2.

"Tender for supplying the whole of labour and materials for the entire erection and completion of a good and substantial bridge to be built across the Avon at York, to cross the Avon in a line from the barracks to the Parsonage, or as may be otherwise pointed out prior to its being erected."

There follows a three year gap in correspondence concerning the bridge. From the next letter dated 8 September 1856 (CSO368/236) it seems clear that no one was given the Government tender and that no bridge was built. This letter is from the Resident Magistrate York (Mr. R.G.Meares).

"I have the honour to state that several of the settlers have requested of me to ascertain whether the government will give anything- and how much towards the construction of a bridge across the Avon. Liberal subscriptions are being collected and the cold water so liberally bestowed lately seems to have created a new fire of enthusiasm and a bridge it would appear is really to be."

The next letter from Meares dated 26 March 1857 makes it clear that a bridge had finally been built. But what also stands out from the letter is that he did not think much of the bridge and regarded it as only a temporary measure (CSO388).

"I have the honour to receive your letter of the 12th Inst. With enclosures relating to the so-called bridge over the Avon at York – the thing was done by subscription and carried out by Mr. Monger- but, last winter – and it was such a high flood- there was I am informed 4 feet of water over it. I have thought it my duty to state this for his Excellency's information as most assuredly any outlay for approaches to reconstruction – as a bridge- would be money thrown away – perhaps I do not read the document rightly and it is for a bridge to be at that locality. If I might give an opinion, I should say it was the best site of all for the work could go on summer and winter. The approach on this side would be very short but on the other 200 or 300 yards. Yet the water smartly shallows."

At a meeting in the York Court House (reported in the Inquirer 5 May 1858, p.2.) some 30 or 40 settlers met to consider the question (amongst other things) of a bridge. It is clear from this meeting that the settlers themselves did not consider that the previous bridge was worthy of its name. A proposal was carried

"That a bridge over the Avon in the townsite of York, sufficient for a loaded dray to pass at the time of high water, is of the greatest importance, and ought to be the first work undertaken."

Mr Wittenoom then addressed the meeting

“It is well known that a bridge was one of our first and greatest requirements. We have now been 23 or 24 years without one, during which period a number of valuable lives had been lost, or rather sacrificed, in attempts at crossing the river in wintertime. Farm produce is transmitted at great risk, and often communication is cut off for weeks; the mail is stopped, and last winter the mail carrier was nearly lost, and at all times he is exposed to the greatest danger, as well as the chances of losing the mail altogether. From time-to-time various schemes for the erection of a bridge have been set on foot, but none perfected. Subscription lists have been opened, and he believed even piles cut, but as yet nothing was done. We were often promised a bridge, but it is still to be built. All must agree in the necessity that existed for one, now more than ever, and that it was the first and most important work to be done.”

Mr. Burges thought the site of the bridge should be the centre of York and Mr. Robert Austin pointed out that the best site was opposite the main road to Guildford. At this point the meeting went on to other business.

Over a year after this meeting still nothing had been done as a letter from some of the inhabitants of the York district dated 28 July 1859 shows (CSO439/191).

“We the undersigned inhabitants of the York district beg that you will have the goodness to bring under the notice of His Excellency the Governor the great inconvenience which is experienced during the winter months for want of a bridge over the Avon River at York. With the increased population and traffic, the absence of the means of communication between opposite banks of the river becomes more felt and the necessity of a bridge over which stock and produce may be safely consigned more apparent. We beg to state that a bridge something similar to the one over the Mackie River would meet our present requirements and we believe it might be constructed at comparatively small expense as the timber might be cut within a short distance of York. We respectfully beg that His Excellency will be pleased to take the matter into favourable consideration and assure him that his compliance with this application will confer a great benefit on the settlers of this district.”

Several resolutions were then passed at a meeting of subscribers to a proposed bridge over the Avon at York held at the Castle Hotel on 13 August 1859 (CSO439/213). Mr. S.E. Burges, who took the chair, opened the meeting by stating the necessity of having a bridge across the Avon between the end of South Street and Glebe Street. The following resolutions were then carried:

1. “That the residents of York and settlers in the York district whose names are attached to the Bridge Subscription list are prepared to guarantee to the local Government the erection of a bridge over the River Avon between the ends of South Street and Glebe Street, provided the local Government contribute to the building fund the sum of £300 the said bridge to be commenced without delay and to be

subject like other buildings erected with aid from public funds to the inspection and approval of the Government.

2. That Mr. R.G.Meares Jnr. Be requested to act as secretary and be good enough to forward by the next post to the Colonial Secretary a copy of this and the subscription list.”

A copy of the list of subscribers and donations paid is at (CSO439/215).

A further letter to the Governor dated 15 August 1859 clarified the position as to the site of the bridge (CSO439/214)

“I have the honour to forward a copy of resolutions passed at a meeting held at the Castle Hotel on Saturday the 13th Inst. Together with a copy of subscription list for the erection of a bridge across the Avon between the end of South street and Glebe Street, This site has been selected as being the most suitable place for a bridge being near the centre of the town and nearly facing the main roads to Guildford, Northam and Beverley and close to the church, the parties whose names are attached to the list are willing to build the bridge providing the Government will assist them with the sum of £300 and the bridge when completed to be subject to the approval of the Govt. As this is a work of great importance and much wanted as the farmers cannot get their produce to market during winter months and the only means the public have of getting across the river to church is by a raft made of casks lashed together and some planks thrown across which ai allowed one of my men to make for the convenience of the public. Therefore, under these circumstances, we trust that His Excellency will entertain this proposal favourably and allow the work to go on without any delay.”

Added to this letter is a note from Henry Wakeford (Private Secretary to the Governor) dated 19 August 1859 which shows that the Government was looking favourably on the proposal.

“In reference to the wishes of the memorialists the Council will grant £300 towards the completion of a bridge as proposed on a plan being submitted and approved by the Govt. That the bridge and approaches must be superior to all floods and that the water shall not be dammed up or obstructed are indispensable conditions to the Govt. making any part.”

Further resolutions were passed at a meeting of subscribers dated 27 August 1859 (CSO439/208-10). Briefly the proposals were

1. “That a building committee be formed comprising L. Bayly, Mr. Cowan, Messrs. Burges, J. H. Monger Jnr., R.G.Meares, John Taylor, John Heay, Samuel Craig, and Archdeacon Brown.
2. That all business connected with the acceptance of tenders etc. shall be transcribed by the committee, by whom all accounts shall be passed before settlement.

3. That R.G.Meares be appointed Treasurer to the York Bridge Building Fund.
4. That an account be immediately opened with the WA Bank under the title of the York Bridge Building Fund to the credit of which the Treasurer shall pay all subscriptions.
5. That to inspire public confidence in the bona fide character of this undertaking the subscribers shall, where agreeable, sign a declaration of their readiness to pay their subscriptions in the following manner – viz – sums from £25 down in 2 instalments, from £50 in 3, from £100 in four. The first instalment now, the remainder at such time or times, as the committee may during the actual and visible progress of the work determine.
6. That an advert be inserted in the local paper calling for tenders for the building of a bridge.
7. That the secretary be requested to forward a copy of the resolutions carried at this meeting to His Excellency the Governor.”

The letter goes on to add

“This is a work of great importance to the district and if it requires some energy and some liberality to carry out the undertaking the settlers are too well aware of its advantage to be backward in prosecuting it. The call for the first instalment was met without a single objection or complaint by the payment in cash of £90, this was from subscribers then present. A vote of thanks being passed to the Chairman, the meeting separated.”

At the next meeting of the committee dated 3 October 1859 two points of interest arise (CSO439/205-6). The first is that Mr. Solomon Cook is again tendering for the bridge (and the committee recommend accepting his tender) and the second is the fact that the bridge will be £140 dearer than the committee thought (the committee’s attempts to extricate themselves from their predicament make interesting and amusing reading).

“At a meeting of the York Bridge Building Committee decided that the tender of Mr. Solomon Cook for the erection of a bridge to cross the river by a single span was accepted subject to the approval of the Govt. Rough drawings only were placed before the committee but as the plans have yet to be laid before the Govt. The minds of the committee were relieved from any anxiety. In the course of a few days Cook has promised to place the plans in a more complete state in your hands. When this scheme was first brought under the notice of the Govt. The subscribers solicited aid to the extent of £300 undertaking to furnish the remainder.

The tender now conditionally accepted has (in accordance with His Excellency’s prediction) exceeded the subscriptions of the subscribers, the excess being no less than £140. It had been expected that the tender would not be beyond £600, it is £740. The subscriptions amount to £300 and it is anticipated that this sum will be added to by more than £40, still as matters stand now the committee remain responsible for £140.

Under the circumstances two courses suggest themselves, viz. One of commencing the work and when difficulties arose asking for the public aid under the conviction that the government would not allow so important a work to remain unfinished. The other course, if it seems a little humiliating, is the committee believe not the least honourable of the two, it is this, to state at the outset the circumstances in which they are placed acknowledging that the Government had met them liberally with the full amount asked for and then without bringing upon the Govt. Any of the pressure that persons suppose to arise from the spectacle of a half-finished public work to solicit from an unfettered county a further grant of £70, pledging themselves to find the remaining £70. This course the committee have adopted not without sanguine hopes that in trusting to the simple generosity of the Govt. they have acted wisely.”

On 11 October 1859 Solomon Cook (who had been eager to commence work on the bridge since 1850 and still had not done anything) wrote to the Colonial Secretary (CSO439/207).

“I beg to submit the accompanying plan of the proposed York Bridge across the Avon for the approval of his Excellency the Governor. A reply at an early date will be esteemed a favour as I am anxious to commence operations as quick as possible.”

However, as usual, the Government showed itself in no hurry to act and it was not until the 16 October 1860 that tenders were called for in the Government Gazette.

“Tender for York Bridges from persons willing to construct 2 bridges over the Avon at York, one at Redmile’s Lane, one at Ford Street.”

It is interesting to note that when the Govt. finally decided to build and pay for a bridge at York they decided upon two bridges (perhaps as a sop for the people of York having had to wait for so long). The acceptance of the tender came in the Government Gazette of 20 November 1860...

“J. H. Monger & Co. To construct 2 bridges of mahogany timber over the Avon at York for £1725.”

Note that this cost is over double of that proposed by the inhabitants of York and Solomon Cook the previous year- and the York people were willing to pay for half of that.

That these bridges were built is an undeniable fact as letters from the Resident Magistrate York on 1 January 1861 (CSO489/35) about passing spaces on the bridge and 14 January 1861 (CSO489/7) requesting plans for J. H. Mongers superintendent Mr. Hancock show.

The final proof can be seen in a letter dated 1 July 1861 in which the resident Magistrate reports damage done to the new bridge by an abnormally high flood.

S. Howell 27/8/1979

Inquirer and Commercial News (Perth, WA : 1855 - 1901), Wednesday 24 July 1861, page 2

The floods overturned the west portion of one of the bridges which was in course of erection. No doubt a great part of the bridge will have to be re-built when the river ceases to run for the present year. The public at the south end of the town are greatly inconvenienced in consequence, but I have not heard who are to blame in this affair. One of the bed-logs of the bridge completed has sunk to the depth of about 19 inches. Since the flood there is to be seen, still good, the little bridge built many years ago on the same principle as the large one, only with this difference—that the small well-trying bridge had its bed-logs upon solid material. If the Government tendered for the bridges to be built upon bed-logs of one uniform depth, the contractor is not to be blamed, even if one-half the bridge stands on a sand-bank and the other half upon doubtful and uncertain material, which is the case, and hence the sinking of the one bed-log before mentioned. If these bridges have to be rebuilt, who is to be called over the coals for such a blunder? If the 'specifications' had shown that the bed-logs were to rest upon clay or other solid material, and the contractor to sink till he came to it, Mr. Monger would have erected the bridges upon a solid foundation, and the structures then might have stood the test for many generations, for no bridges in the world ever contained better, if such good and solid timber, as the York bridges. Are we to be taxed to pay for blunders emanating from the Engineers Office? or from the Colonial Secretary's Office?