

### MONK'S BRIDGE, NEAR RIMINGTON, CLITHEROE.



The graceful span of Monk's Bridge is clearly reflected in the waters of the Swanside Beck. March 2010.

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Our regular research pointed the way to a fine example of a packhorse bridge located in a beautiful, secluded glen between the historic, picturesque villages of Downham and Rimington in the Ribble Valley near Clitheroe. Both villages are dominated by the whaleback mass of Pendle Hill, infamous for witch lore, whilst Rimington straddles the ancient border between Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire.

One fine March day, we decided to seek out this appealing bridge. Alan and I found ourselves tramping through a marshy meadow heading towards the massive, stone-built, twelve-arched Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway viaduct that carries the Blackburn to Hellifield railway line. With wind-bent Hawthorns on our right close to a huge pile of broken stone we reached the viaduct. To our front was a post and wire fence and a broken, rickety, old wooden five-bar gate. To our

left, after snaking this way and that way around many hilly contours, a stream, Ings Beck flowed under one of the tall viaduct arches. Alan, clearly fascinated with the towering viaduct's construction, was busy taking digital pictures. Suddenly, he excitedly shouted, "**By golly, I have discovered an L&YR tombstone,**" pointing down to a round-topped, time-blackened, upright stone, incised with the letters L&YR. He explained to me that his find was a boundary stone that marked the edges of the land once owned by the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Company which had gone out of existence in 1923. After poking around underneath the arches we discovered two more of these old railway curiosities. Leaving the viaduct to head downhill we were suddenly arrested by the fascinating sight of a red breasted robin, its beak spearing tasty creepy-crawlies with military precision out of a rotten lower limb of a gigantic Oak.

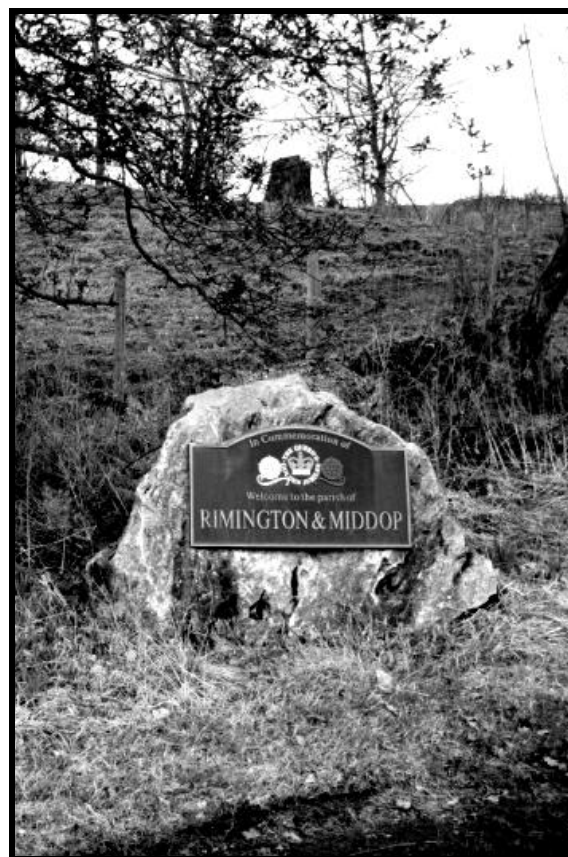
## JAGGERMEN'S BRIDGES ON PACKHORSE TRAILS

Just beyond the monster Oak we could clearly see the spot where the Ings Beck meets a larger stream, the Swanside Beck, which hurried down a beautiful glen bordered on both sides with peaty banks on which flourished many large Oaks, Ash, Alders and clumps of thorny Hawthorn. Looking down stream, I could see we had now reached our goal, for partially hidden by the trees was a stone bridge on its high humped arch gracefully leaping across the beck. Pointing ahead, I shouted over to Alan, “**There’s Monk’s Bridge.**” Yes, this little venerable packhorse bridge is known by not one, but by two names. Hereabouts it is known as Swanside Bridge, for it crosses the Swanside Beck; its alternative ecclesiastical name, Monk’s Bridge, because it was evidently used by the Monks of nearby Whalley and Sawley Abbeys. My personal favourite name for the bridge is Monk’s Bridge.

After hurrying along the extensive pebbly beaches and crawling beneath a barbed wire fence, we reached the east foot of the bridge where we were greeted by the fantastic display of a large clump of beautiful yellow daffodils

sprouting at the side of the abutments. We both agreed the bridge was a truly amazing example of a picturesque packhorse bridge. The high humped arch comprised of roughly hewn slabs of local stone spans the beck in a leap of around twenty-two feet. The voussoir stones were cut from crudely worked sandstone blocks. The underside of the arch was covered in attractive, brownish lichens; green ferns emerged from cracks and crannies, and a large specimen plant of maiden hair spleenwort sprouted luxuriantly from a mini crevasse behind the downstream keystone. Hanging down also were a number of ghostly-looking stalactites. There were no parapets, and the six foot wide trackway over the top of the bridge was formed from pebbles set in mortar. From the bottom of the bridge on either side of the beck, we could easily make out the grass covered trackways, once trodden by the Jaggermen and their strings of laden packhorses.

We both heartily agreed, that Monk’s Bridge was indeed a gem of an ancient packhorse bridge located in the truly, breathtakingly beautiful Ribble Valley.



The left image is the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Boundary Stone. On the right shows the Rimington & Middop signpost, our starting point. March 2010.

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