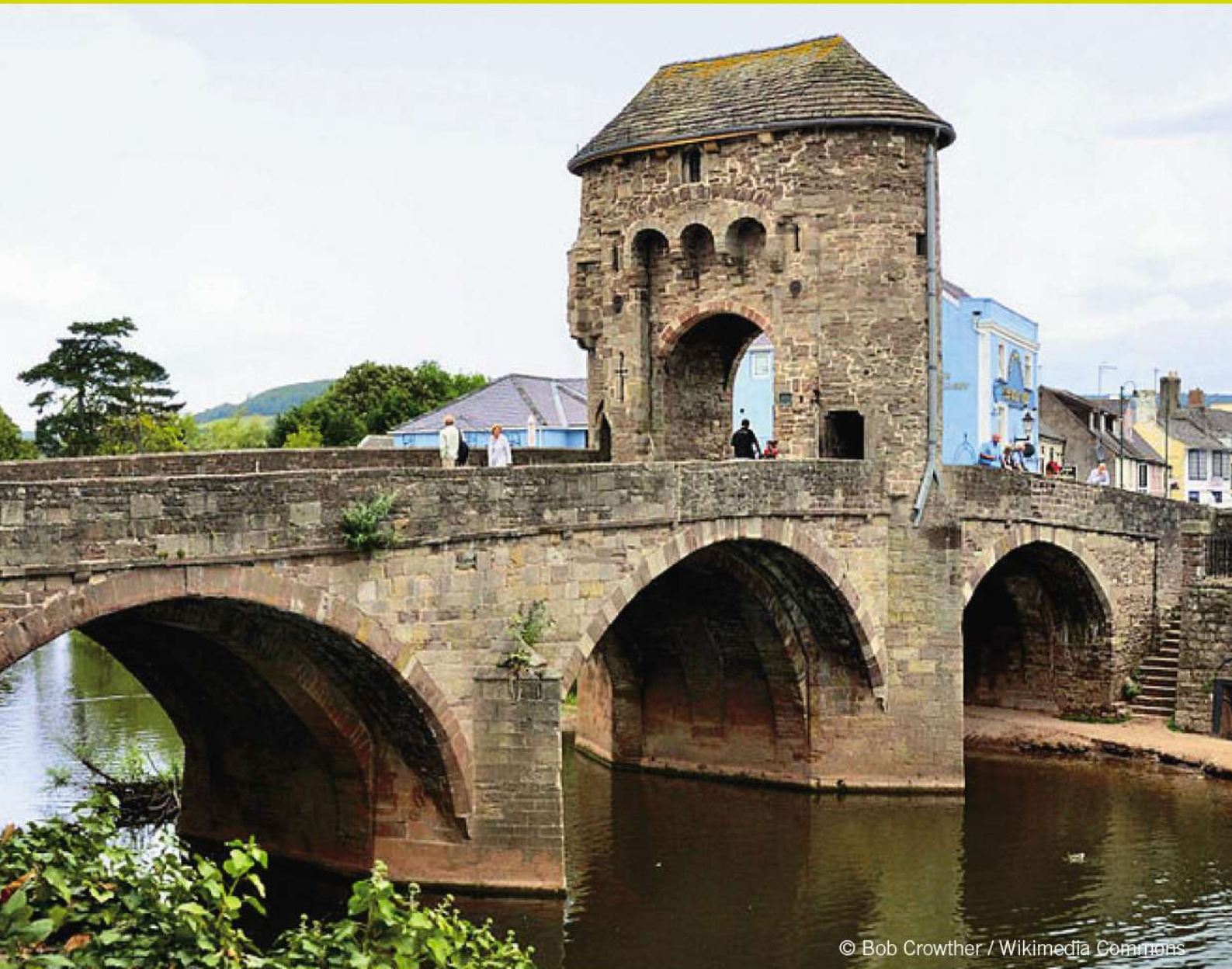


Monnow Bridge and Gate

Final Interpretation Plan

May 2013



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monmouthshire
sir fynwy



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu
Gwledig; Ewrop yn Buddsoddi
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development: Europe Investing in
Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to this plan

Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) is undertaking a project to improve the interpretation and visitor experience at the historic Monnow Bridge and Gate in Monmouth, which is a scheduled ancient monument. This is one element of the 'Origins of Monmouthshire – Gateway Monmouth' project, which has received funding through the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007 – 2013 (funded by the Welsh Government and the European Union).

Imagemakers Design and Consulting have been appointed to develop, implement and install an interpretation plan for Monnow Bridge and Gate. This report sets out our proposals.

The other elements of the 'Origins of Monmouthshire – Gateway Monmouth' project (which are related, but not included in this commission) involve works to repair, renovate and improve physical access to the gate, and a design study to progress improvement options for the environmental area around the bridge.

In this interpretation plan we set out our findings, which include proposals for the interpretive aims and objectives, as well as themes and topics. We also include a series of proposed projects supported by cost estimates.

1.2 How this plan was produced

This interpretation plan has been produced according to the following methodology:

- Consultation with Colin Phillips (MCC Special Projects Manager), and reference to the MCC brief
- An initial review of the storyline material, references and resources including images
- A site visit, including the interior of the gate
- Interpretive planning and creative workshops held by Imagemakers, and attended by various key stakeholders including Colin Phillips (MCC); Nicola Smith (MCC); Bethan Covington (MCC); Stuart Wilson (Monmouth Archaeological Society); Glyn Edmunds (MCC); Martyn Evans (MCC); Sue Mills (Monmouth Museum); Shirley Hughes (Adventa); Mike Powell (Monmouth Comprehensive School); Mike Booth (Shire Hall, Monmouth); and Grahame Thomas (Monmouth Civic Society).
- Attendance at the design study workshop held by Macgregor Smith Landscape Architects

- Research at Monmouth Museum
- A brief investigation into Monmouth's tourism market
- Subsequent consultation with other key stakeholders who were unable to attend the Iagemakers workshops, including Councillor Susan White (MCC); Steve Clarke (Monmouth Archaeological Society); Amanda Edwards (the Attik); Toni Ballard (trainee youth worker linked to the Attik); Dr Michael Rowlands; and George Badman (pupil at Monmouth Comprehensive School)
- Further desk-based research
- Review of architectural drawings
- Iagemakers internal discussions

2. Audiences

Based on insights from our consultation process and our research into Monmouth's tourism market, the following specific target audience groups have been identified:

- Local residents
- Families with children
- Children and young people attending local primary and secondary schools (formal learning)
- Children and young people in their free time (informal learning)
- FE and HE students
- University of the Third Age students
- Couples over the age of 45 (the largest existing audience for heritage interpretation in Monmouth)
- Active retired people, many of whom have a strong interest in heritage
- People with disabilities
- Day trippers and coach trippers
- Heritage enthusiasts, including specialist groups such as Monmouth Archaeological Society, or those following the stories of relevant Cadw themes around Wales
- People using local heritage trails and visitor resources, e.g. the Blue Plaque Trail, the Monmouth Town Trail, Monmouthpedia etc.
- Visitors to Monmouth and the Wye Valley AONB, including walkers, cyclists and canoeists
- Local businesses, some of which use Monnow Bridge and Gate as their logo
- Media organisations and events organisers that help to publicise Monmouth, e.g. Monnow Voice
- People attending Monmouth Festival

There is no single way of segmenting potential audiences for the interpretation of Monnow Bridge and Gate: different visitors will have different needs at different times.

A core strategy is therefore to provide a range of interpretation experiences that will have a wide appeal, provide choice, and meet the different preferred learning styles of a mixed audience. Within this broad approach, however, a range of specific audience-related issues can be identified:

- Local residents are a key audience for the interpretation. They often have a general awareness of Monnow Bridge and Gate, but are unfamiliar with the stories that make its history so rich. Many local people may be so used to seeing the gate regularly (as they go to the shops, or take their lunch break by the river) that they need help to see it with fresh eyes.
- Local young people are the future ambassadors for Monnow Bridge and Gate, so it is vital to engage with them. At the older end of the age spectrum this is traditionally one of the more challenging (but also one of the most rewarding) audiences to engage with.
- The provision of a stimulating heritage experience is essential for the tourism-related audiences. Here there are particular benefits in connecting the interpretation of Monnow Bridge and Gate with other heritage features and attractions in the area, including the Shire Hall, the Kymin, Monmouth Museum, the Blue Plaque Trail and Monmouthpedia.
- Monnow Gate is a historic structure, and the interior is somewhat cramped. As such, it presents particular challenges for people with limited physical mobility. The interpretation should be designed with disabled audiences in mind, both in terms of an accessible 'universal design' approach and in the provision of specific media options.

3. Interpretive aims

Key aims for the interpretation have been identified as follows. The interpretation should:

- Be engaging, enjoyable and educational
- Be a 'must-see' experience, both for local people and visitors
- Generate a much stronger sense of arrival and welcome at Monnow Bridge and Gate
- Capture the essence of what makes Monnow Bridge and Gate special, and help visitors to understand the significance and special qualities of the gate
- Tell the stories of how people's lives have been affected by Monnow Bridge and Gate over the centuries
- Use the most appropriate mixture of new technologies and traditional media
- Convey a sense of what life was like around the gate during the key historical periods
- Integrate live events and activities into the themes and stories
- Be aware of, and dovetail with, the outcomes of the forthcoming design study, including accommodating any future physical changes to the surrounding area
- Contribute to Monnow Bridge's role as one of Monmouth's two 'bookends' (the other one being the Shire Hall)
- Integrate with and complement existing and planned interpretation of Monmouth town and the Shire Hall (e.g. the Blue Plaque Trail, the Monmouth Town Trail, Monmouthpedia, Monmouth Museum etc.), so that the gate interpretation adds value to the existing visitor experience and increases dwell time and spend in the town
- Be based on extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders in the town (including the Monmouth Civic Society, the Town Council, the Chamber of Commerce etc.) and statutory bodies including Cadw
- Fit with Cadw's approach to interpretation (specifically Cadw's twelve storytelling themes that are used to integrate built heritage sites across Wales into a coherent narrative, developed as part of its Heritage Tourism Project)
- Fit with the new Monmouthshire destination brand and marketing strategy
- Meet the requirements of the funders for acknowledgement on interpretive materials / media developed, and the outputs and evidence they require
- Be informed by the latest scholarship
- Complement accompanied visitor access inside the gate in the future
- Make the stories of the gate come alive for local people and visitors
- Enhance local people's pride in their town, and foster a sense of shared ownership and stewardship of Monnow Bridge and Gate
- Raise Monmouth's profile as a visitor destination
- Be bilingual

- Be unpretentious, clear and concise
- Meet the needs and exceed the expectations of a wide range of audiences
- Be accessible
- Complement the interpretation of the Wye Valley AONB
- Use images to enable visitors to visualise the gate as it was in the past
- Be as futureproof as possible
- Be aesthetically appealing, interactive and exciting
- Be layered, compelling and varied
- Be durable, safe and environmentally sustainable
- Set Monnow Bridge in its local and regional context
- Complement Monmouthshire's branding as the food capital of Wales
- Encourage repeat visiting, especially amongst local people

4. Interpretive themes and topics

Themes in interpretation express the underlying ideas that are being communicated, and represent the connecting thoughts that should be left in the minds of the audience. Within the themes, topics are more specific stories and details.

We propose **one overarching theme** for the interpretation:

Monnow Bridge and Gate embodies much of Monmouth's heritage and character in microcosm. It is unique in Britain, and it has played various roles over the centuries, but it has always been central to the lives of local people.

A comprehensive set of themes and topics for the interpretation of Monnow Bridge and Gate is suggested below, all of which offer scope to be explored in more detail at specific sites and through individual pieces of interpretation. The themes may never be overtly spelt out in the interpretation, but they should guide the choice of topics to be communicated, as well as practical issues such as design style and illustrations.

4.1 Primary theme 1

Monnow Bridge and Gate was built to defend Monmouth from attack.

- Monmouth's medieval history can only be understood in the context of a frontier town. Monmouth was one of a chain of planned Norman towns that developed along the Welsh Marches after 1066, on the front line of an ongoing power struggle between Norman Marcher Lords and Welsh princes, and indeed between rival Marcher lords. (This topic fits with Cadw's 'The Lords of the Southern March', 'Princes of Deheubarth' and 'Princes of Gwynedd' themes).

- Monmouth was strategically important to the Normans because of its position as the gateway to south Wales. It also stood at the confluence of the River Monnow and the River Wye, which were important trade routes. This trade was based on the richness of the surrounding area's natural resources, including limestone, timber and iron ore. (This topic fits with Cadw's 'The Lords of the Southern March' theme).
- Monnow Bridge was built in around 1270 to replace an earlier timber bridge, and Monmouth's earth-and-timber palisade was partly replaced with stone town walls and gates in around 1300. The town's defences were intended to withstand or slow down small Welsh raiding parties, who used the surrounding landscape of hills and valleys as the perfect terrain from which to launch hit-and-run attacks. These raids caused significant damage to Norman towns all along the Welsh Marches, particularly in the late 1200s when the majority of the Marcher lords' forces had been sent north to fight the Scots, leaving the Welsh Marches comparatively vulnerable. (This topic fits with Cadw's 'The Lords of the Southern March' and 'Castles of Edward I' themes).
- The disputed borderlands between England and Wales had been unstable and dangerous for centuries, but this was particularly true in c. 1300 as a result of Edward I's Welsh wars. As a 'wild west' frontier town, Monmouth was inevitably drawn into the conflict. Crossbow bolts and iron arrowheads for English soldiers were produced in Monmouth. (This topic fits with Cadw's 'The Lords of the Southern March' and 'Castles of Edward I' themes).
- Monnow Gate was built in around 1300 as part of the overhaul of the town's defences. At that time Monnow Bridge was outside the real heart of Monmouth. However, the River Monnow made a convenient, defensible barrier on the vulnerable approaches to Monmouth from the south and west. The gate acted as a forward line of defence, forming a military axis with the castle at the other end of town. Closer to the heart of the town, West Gate (in what is now Monnow Street) provided a second line of defence. (This topic fits with Cadw's 'The Lords of the Southern March' and 'Castles of Edward I' themes).
- Monnow Bridge and Gate was a symbol of the English town's power, facing towards Wales and intended to act as a powerful deterrent to Welsh raiders. (This topic fits with Cadw's 'The Lords of the Southern March' and 'Castles of Edward I' themes).
- However, Welsh raiders were not the only threat to Monmouth. The instability engendered by endemic rivalries between the Norman barons, and their maintenance of private armies, were arguably a greater threat to local security

than the Welsh. Monnow Bridge and Gate should also be seen in the context of defending Monmouth against the forces of rival Marcher lords. (This topic fits with Cadw's 'The Lords of the Southern March' theme).

- In the early 1300s the bridge and gate looked considerably different. The bridge was significantly narrower (only slightly wider than the central archway), and the gate was probably whitewashed to protect the stonework from the elements. The defences were concentrated on the vulnerable western face of the gate. There were no pedestrian passageways at the sides of the gate, so the only way to cross the bridge was through the gate, which was defended by a portcullis (the grooves for which are still visible) and strong wooden doors. A low-pitched roof was hidden behind a battlement, where soldiers could patrol a narrow walkway and keep a lookout for trouble. Soldiers could also fire through west-facing arrow slits.
- The original interior of the gate was very different too. The walls were whitewashed (making the interior lighter than it is today), and the ceiling was much lower (the level of this original ceiling can still be seen in the post-holes, ledge and corbels above the stairwell). The chamber was subdivided, and it was furnished with a fire, as well as a garderobe in a separate chamber. The presence of a garderobe suggests that in these early days the gate was regularly occupied for long periods of time. The chamber also housed the portcullis winching mechanism.
- The exact date when the three machicolis were added to the west face of the gate is unknown, but they had been added by c. 1400. These chutes allowed the gate's defenders to throw stones, pour boiling water, or fire arrows down onto the heads of any attackers who had managed to get close to the doors. If attackers tried to set fire to the doors, the defenders could also douse the fire by pouring water down through the chutes.
- Monmouth's town defences were strengthened during Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion, and it is likely that Monnow Bridge and Gate was reinforced at this time. Monmouth was not captured by Glyndŵr's forces and sympathisers, but it seems that the surrounding countryside was ravaged right up to the town walls. (This topic fits with Cadw's 'Owain Glyndŵr and his Uprising' theme).
- Monmouth was strategically important during the Civil War as the gateway to South Wales, and it changed hands several times in the struggle between Royalists and Parliamentarians. In February 1645 Monnow Bridge was the scene of a battle between 300 Royalist soldiers from Raglan Castle and Parliamentarian forces led by Colonel Kyrle, the Deputy Governor of Monmouth.

- There are two small holes (formerly three) in the western face of Monnow Gate, beneath the machicolation. They were probably loopholes for muskets, which were knocked through to help defend Monmouth against an anticipated attack by Chartist rioters from Newport. Contemporary references from December 1839 mention such loopholes being made.
- Skirmishes between rival groups of young men from 'Up-Town' (the main town of Monmouth) and 'Cappers' Town' (Overmonnow) traditionally took place on Monnow Bridge on May 1st and May 29th, when both sides were armed with stone-reinforced besoms. The clashes were banned in 1858.

4.2 Primary theme 2

Monnow Bridge and Gate formed a clear threshold to the town. This meant that tolls could be collected on goods being brought to market in Monmouth.

- Monnow Gate was a tollhouse as well as a fortification, and its construction was funded through tolls. The money required to build the gate and the rest of Monmouth's stone town walls was raised through the collection of 'murage' in 1297 – 1302 and 1315 – 1318. Murage was a toll that was levied on goods that were being brought to market. It was intended specifically for the purpose of building town walls and defences, and the word 'murage' is derived from the Latin word for a wall.
- The protection afforded by Monnow Bridge and Gate and the stone town walls made it easier to hold regular, secure markets in Monmouth, and to levy tolls on produce and livestock being brought to market. In this way the gate contributed to the development and growing prosperity of the town. It was a linchpin of a commercial axis running from Monnow Bridge to the market in Monnow Street.
- The original 1297 grant of murage survives, and a transcription can be read in Appendix A of *Monnow Bridge and Gate*, by M. L. J. Rowlands (Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994). It gives an insight into the wide range of goods available in Monmouth at that time, including the skins of foxes, cats and squirrels; pieces of cloth of silk with gold of samite; firewood; steel; Aberdeen [fish]; hemp; wine etc. Monmouth in c.1300 was clearly a bustling centre of trade.
- As the local market town, Monmouth developed as the hub of a vibrant local farming community. For hundreds of years, countless drovers brought their livestock across Monnow Bridge, passing through the gate.

- The story of Monnow Bridge and Gate has been closely linked to fresh local food and markets for seven-hundred years, and Monmouthshire is now branded as the food capital of Wales.

4.3 Primary theme 3

Since 1705 Monnow Bridge and Gate has been repeatedly adapted to meet the changing needs of local people.

- Before 1705 it seems likely that Monnow Gate was used as a lock-up, where drunks were kept until they had sobered up, and trouble-makers were held until they had calmed down. Strongly-built fortifications like the gate, which had outlived their original purpose, lent themselves to the secure detention of miscreants. However, documentary evidence for the use of the gate before 1700 is very scarce indeed (Dr Michael Rowlands, pers. comm.), and this must remain a matter of conjecture. (This topic would fit with the Monmouthpedia 'Crime and Punishment' trail).
- In October 1705 Monmouth Common Council ordered "Monnow Gate and the Gates thereof to be repaired & fitted up". Shortly afterwards, in November 1705, Monnow Gate was leased out through a contract made between the Corporation of Monmouth and Roger Rosser, Mathew Bibee and Henry Bibee. The annual rent was set at one shilling at Michaelmas, and a pair of fat capons for the Mayor at Christmas. Rosser (a carpenter) was required to "Convert the said Gate into a good and sufficient dwelling house" within a year, and the lessees were required to maintain the gate in good order.
- After 1705 there is reliable documentary evidence for Monnow Gate being used as a lock-up, with the inhabitant of the gate dwelling acting as a porter. However, exactly how the buildings were divided up between the dwelling and the lock-up is not known. The gate was also the starting point for 'whipping at the cart's tail', when offenders were publicly whipped from Monnow Bridge to Dixon Gate or Wye Bridge. (These topics would fit with the Monmouthpedia 'Crime and Punishment' trail).
- Converting Monnow Gate into a habitable dwelling required considerable structural alterations. The old battlements and low-pitch roof were replaced with a higher-pitched, tiled roof at a higher level, creating a new attic above the level of the original roof. A two-floor, timber-framed building was also built abutting the eastern face of the gate on the downstream side, projecting over the river. Further repairs to the bridge and gate were carried out between 1771 and 1775.

- By 1804 the gate and the adjoining lean-to building had ceased to be used as a dwelling. They were only used intermittently as a militia guardhouse and storeroom, and in 1815 the lean-to was demolished. (There may be potential to link this topic to the Monmouth Castle and Regimental Museum in the future).
- By 1819 the press of people, carts and livestock passing through the gate was regularly causing serious congestion at the bridge. In order to relieve some of the pressure on the archway, the first pedestrian passageway was pierced through the gate at a cost of three pounds and ten shillings. The passageway was reached along a timber walkway bowing out from the side of the bridge, as can be seen on contemporary paintings.
- At the same time the original, flat-topped doorway to the gate's chamber was sealed up (although its outline is still visible if you know where to look, opposite the current doorway), and the stone staircase that it led onto was demolished. A new door and doorway were created in faux-medieval Gothic style, which survive to this day. A new oak stairway up into the gate's chamber was also created at this time.
- In 1826 - 1827 the bridge was widened on the upstream side and a pavement was built, so that the pedestrian passageway ran straight through the gate for the first time (without bowing out over the side of the river as it had previously done). This is why the medieval garderobe (which had previously discharged directly into the river) now appears to discharge onto the parapet of the bridge.
- In 1830 the bridge was widened on the downstream side, with a pedestrian walkway running around (not through) the gate. The gate's roof was rebuilt in 1832.
- A pedestrian passageway was pierced through the downstream tower of the gate in 1845 "at an expense not exceeding Five Pounds". No significant structural alterations have been made to Monnow Bridge and Gate since 1845. The gate's windows are not original, and were created at various times in the C19th.
- In 1835 the ownership of Monnow Gate passed from the Corporation to the Duke of Beaufort as part of a property exchange. The Duke appears to have let Monnow Gate, and the lessee used it as a storeroom. Throughout the C19th the structure deteriorated, until there was a real danger of collapse, and emergency repairs began in 1889. In 1900 the Duke of Beaufort presented the gate to Monmouthshire County Council, who have owned it ever since.

- Due to its prominent location, the exterior of Monnow Gate was a very popular place to attach advertising and electioneering material in the C19th and early C20th. Wooden stubs that supported billboards at this time can still be spotted projecting from the stonework.
- The gate's chamber was opened to the public in 1902, and by 1910 it was furnished with various pieces that had been donated. There was an oak table and chair, two watercolours by Mrs Bagnall-Oakley, a transcription of the 1297 murage grant, and a visitors' book (now in the collections of Monmouth Museum – Dr Michael Rowlands, pers. comm.). In 1923 Monnow Bridge was formally recognised as a scheduled ancient monument.
- Until 2004 Monnow Bridge was the only road across the River Monnow near Monmouth, meaning that it had to be open to vehicular traffic. In fact, by 2004 Monnow Bridge was the oldest road bridge still in use in Europe. The gate was damaged by collisions several times in the C20th, the most famous occasion being in 1982, when a double-decker bus smashed into the west face of the gate (the driver had forgotten that he was not driving a single-decker). A new road bridge was finally opened slightly further downstream in 2004, and Monnow Bridge has been pedestrianised since then.

4.4 Primary theme 4

Monnow Bridge and Gate has become an icon of Monmouth.

- The bridge and gate are a lasting testament to the skill and ingenuity of the unknown medieval masons who built them. They were built from about seven different varieties of local stone, all of which were probably quarried within ten miles of the bridge (for details please refer to *Monnow Bridge and Gate* by M.L.J. Rowlands, ps. 92 – 93).
- In the late C18th the development of the Romantic Movement sparked a greater interest in visiting picturesque historic sites, and Monnow Bridge and Gate became popular with people who were taking the Wye Tour. Since then Monnow Bridge and Gate has appeared in numerous paintings and (more recently) photographs, including a sketch by J.M.W. Turner in 1795. Monnow Bridge and Gate continues to be a very popular subject for artists today, and an exhibition of historic and contemporary views of the bridge and gate could be held in the future (This topic fits with Cadw's 'Artistic Responses to the Landscape' theme).
- Paintings and photographs record the changing appearance of Monnow Bridge and Gate over the centuries, and also often give a sense of the gate's role in

the daily lives of local people. Much of the gate's sense of place and atmosphere comes from imagining the countless people who have crossed the bridge over the centuries, in many different contexts. Monnow Bridge and Gate is as much a social landmark as a physical one.

- Despite the deterioration of the structure throughout the C19th, the exterior of the gate continued to be decorated on special civic occasions such as Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838, and the coming of age of John Maclean Rolls in 1891.
- Fortified bridges were a fairly common sight in medieval Britain, but they were often demolished once they had outlived their original purpose and begun to inconvenience vehicular traffic. Others were swept away by floods. Only two fortified medieval bridges now survive in Britain, at Monmouth and Warkworth. However, at Warkworth the gate stands at the end of the bridge, rather than on the bridge itself. Monnow Bridge is the only surviving fortified medieval bridge in Britain where the gate stands on the bridge itself, and one of only a handful of such bridges in Europe, including the Pont Valentré near Cahors (France) and the bridge at Besalú (Spain). Determining the precise similarities and differences between Monnow Bridge and its sister bridges in Europe would require further in-depth research, but there is an opportunity to develop links between the interpretation of Monnow Bridge and that of its sister bridges in the future.
- Over time Monnow Bridge and Gate has become an icon of Monmouth, and local people are very proud of it. The gate has been reproduced as souvenirs, and incorporated into the signs and logos of many local businesses. In the lead-up to the London 2012 Olympic Games the Olympic torch was carried through the gate. In the words of local trainee youth worker Toni Ballard, "It wouldn't be Monmouth without the bridge."

5. Interpretive objectives

In addition to the broad aims outlined above, specific interpretive objectives are proposed as follows:

5.1 Emotional objectives

As a result of the interpretation, visitors will feel:

- Welcome
- Excited and enthusiastic
- Curious
- Inspired with a sense of place and of Monnow Bridge and Gate's history
- Confident that the Monnow Bridge area is a safe and well-managed environment, especially for families with younger children
- As if they are travelling back in time
- Empathetic towards other people for whom Monnow Bridge and Gate has played a part in their lives
- Fortunate and proud to have such a rare, beautiful and interesting building in Monmouth
- Better informed
- A sense of stewardship for Monnow Bridge and Gate (this will be particularly true for visitors who return regularly)
- Appreciative of the gate's uniqueness
- Impressed by the interpretation
- They have had a fulfilling experience
- They are themselves a very important part of the gate's story, closely linked to its long-term wellbeing (this will be particularly true for visitors who return regularly)
- Personally involved in Monmouth's heritage and its civic life today (this will be particularly true for visitors who return regularly)
- Motivated to spend more time exploring Monmouth and the surrounding region

5.2 Behavioural objectives

As a result of the interpretation, visitors will:

- Explore Monnow Bridge and Gate and the surrounding area (with consequent benefits to physical health and emotional wellbeing), and interact positively with the riverside area

- Explore opportunities for personal involvement in the work of caring for the gate (for example by supporting it and volunteering, including perhaps joining a 'Friends of the Gate' group)
- Avoid activities that spoil the environment of Monnow Bridge and Gate (e.g. damaging the fabric of the bridge or gate; lighting fires; disturbing wildlife habitats; dropping litter; vandalism; dog fouling)
- Not take the gate for granted
- Care for the gate
- Spend more time and money in Monmouth
- Make repeat visits to Monmouth and the gate
- Explore other local heritage sites such as the Shire Hall and the Kymin
- Act as enthusiastic and informed ambassadors for Monmouth, encouraging friends and family to visit

5.3 Learning objectives

As a result of the interpretation, visitors will learn:

- Monnow Bridge is an important and highly valued example of a medieval fortified river bridge
- About various stories of life through the ages at Monnow Bridge and Gate in a manner that is accessible, engaging and memorable
- About the evolving roles, relationships and dependencies between Monnow Bridge and Gate and the town
- About the importance and special qualities of the natural environment at this site, both nowadays and through the ages
- Monnow Bridge and Gate was built to defend Monmouth from attack
- Monnow Bridge and Gate was used to collect tolls on goods being brought to market in Monmouth
- Since 1705 Monnow Bridge and Gate has been repeatedly adapted to meet the changing needs of local people
- Monnow Bridge and Gate has become an icon of Monmouth
- In addition, visitors will learn about one or more of the topics depending on their interests

6. Proposals

6.1 Design rationale

Central to our design rationale for the Monnow Bridge and Gate interpretation is a desire to offer provocative and symbolic interventions that spark curiosity, relate to specific stories/usage of the bridge and gate, and inspire further independent discovery. Physical installations should be unobtrusive, allowing Monnow Bridge and Gate to be the 'hero'. However, this must be balanced against the need to provide a suitable, visible welcome to visitors, identify the bridge, and provide an insight into its history and significance.

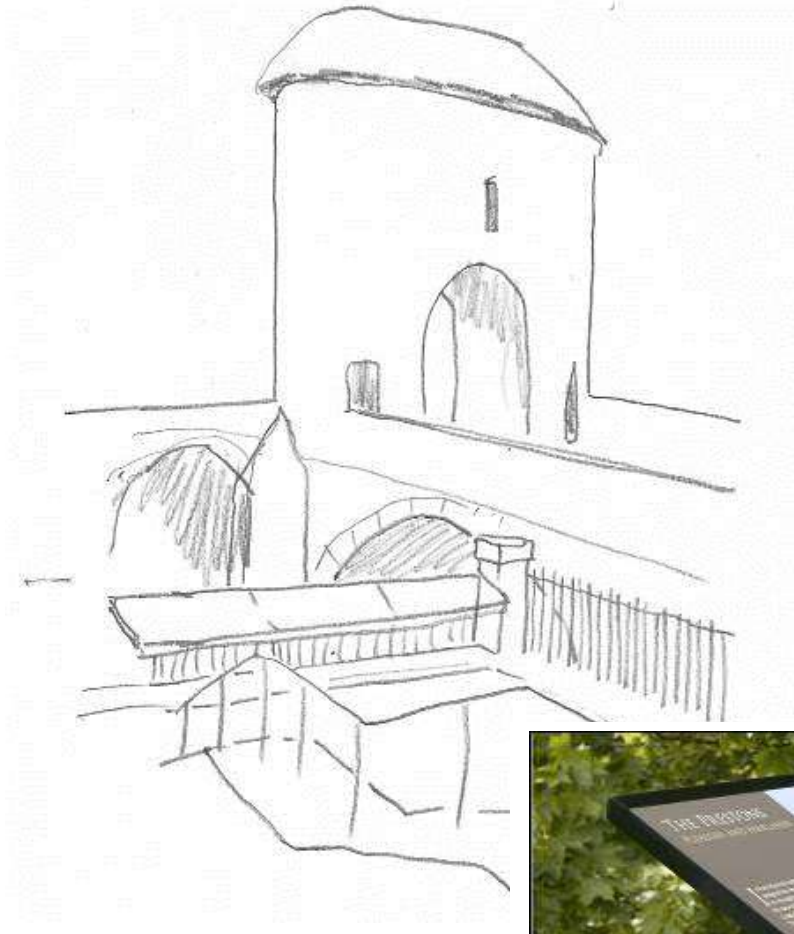
Here we present a range of creative proposals that provide practical solutions to identification and orientation, as well as a range of media to provide visitors with engaging, layered interpretive content. We have grouped the projects into phase 1 projects and future phase projects.

6.2 Phase 1 projects

6.2.1 Project 1 - welcome and orientation point

For anyone using or visiting Monnow Bridge and Gate there is an important feature missing. Apart from the blue plaque there is no sense of welcome, celebration, identification or indication of its historical significance. We feel it is appropriate that the interpretive provision includes a thoughtful and sympathetically designed welcome point. This would be a contemporary installation providing both orientation and a 'way in' to understanding the history of the bridge and its unique status. It would offer a welcome to visitors and provide a gathering point for tours and those following trails.

We suggest a wall-mounted landscape interpretation panel in a wide landscape format. This panel would provide a general welcome and introduction as well as a layered 'timeline' style graphic focusing on archive images of Monnow Bridge and Gate from different periods of time. The panel design is simple, contemporary and augmented with a QR code to allow visitors to 'delve deeper' by accessing Monmouthpedia and an associated audio file (approx. 40 seconds long). We would arrange equipment and a training session to allow local volunteers to record and edit this scripted audio file. The panel would also include references to the Cadw 'Follow the Story' interpretation and promote related heritage sites in the vicinity.



Please note that the sketch and photograph above have now been partially superseded. The appearance of the panel interpretation remains similar. However, the new proposed location for this panel is mounted on the wall on the paved area adjacent to Blestium Street, overlooking Monnow Bridge and Gate. Scheduled Monument Consent would not be required for an intervention at this location, and the panel would be accessible to people with limited physical mobility there. Please note that the panel frame would be designed so that it could be fitted to two legs in the

future, once landscaping works resulting from the design study are completed. Please refer to the location image in the attached appendices for further information.

6.2.2 Project 2 - road graphics

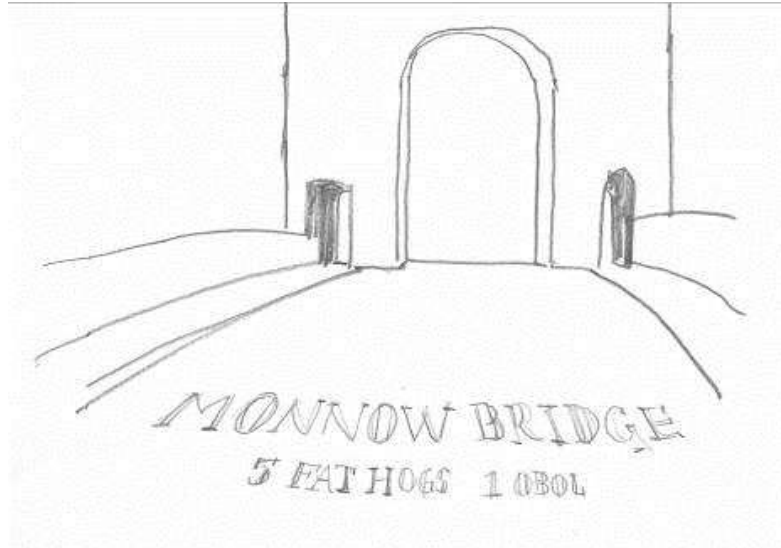
We propose a strip of typography set into the road surface at each end of the bridge, naming the bridge in Welsh and English, and including the price of the toll or 'murage' for bringing goods across. By using Welsh on one side of the bridge and English on the other we could play on the idea of there being a Welsh side (on the Overmonnow side) and an English side (on the town side), historically speaking.

Given the tarmac road surface of Monnow Bridge, we propose a strip of Monmouth red sandstone pavers are carefully set into the road surface at each end of the bridge. The pavers would feature sandblasted lettering with a colour infill in order to contrast with the stone.

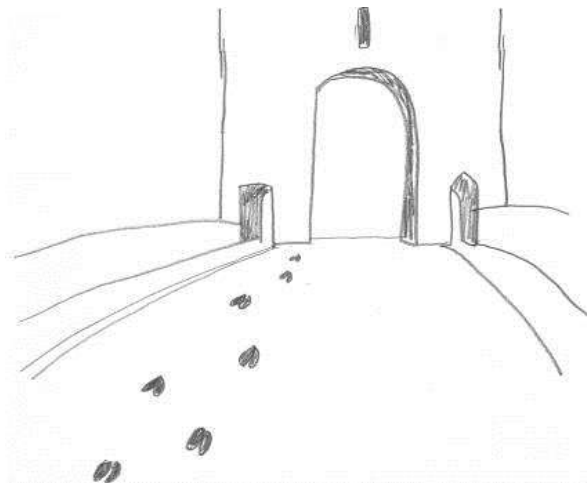
In addition to the typography a 'trail' of different prints would be inset into the road surface across the bridge. Visitors would see the hoof prints of cattle (referencing the use of the bridge to herd cattle to market) as well as the boot prints of soldiers defending the bridge. Each hoof or boot print would be sandblasted into slabs of Monmouth red sandstone, along with an inscribed name or short description infilled with colour to contrast with the stone.

A modification to the existing Scheduled Monument Consent in operation at Monnow Bridge would be required for these interventions. Please refer to the location image in the attached appendices for further information.

The prints could also define positions for handheld/smartphone-based interpretation in the future (see project 5).



Please note that the sketch above has now been partially superseded by the proposal for a strip of lettering sandblasted into Monmouth red sandstone pavers.



Please note that the sketch above has now been partially superseded by the proposal for hoof and boot prints sandblasted into slabs of Monmouth red sandstone, along with an inscribed name or short description infilled with colour to contrast with the stone.

6.2.3 Project 3 - audio soundscape

Guided groups will be provided access inside the gate. The interpretation here would be primarily provided 'live' by the guide, but we feel this is a great opportunity to install a simple yet effective soundscape that would immediately transport visitors back in time. Three sounds would be chosen, e.g. starting with a stonemason at work, then changing to Edward I-period soldiers marching across the bridge, and ending with cattle being driven over the bridge to market. These three sounds would be accompanied by three short (approx. 20-30 seconds each) clips of evocative, scripted interpretation. The combined effect would be to transport visitors back in time as they imagined the scene on the bridge below them. We would arrange equipment and a training session to allow local volunteers to record and edit these scripted audio files. As part of a future project, ghostly visuals of selected characters could also be projected onto an interior wall of the gate to complement the soundscape.

The sound clips would be played by a CD player positioned somewhere unobtrusively within the chamber, and remotely operated by the guide. This would be an economical way to proceed with the soundscape. Provided the CD player was discreetly hidden, without any fixings or associated items directly impacting on the scheduled ancient monument, a modification to the existing Scheduled Monument Consent in operation at the gate would not be required for this intervention.

6.3 Future phases

6.3.1 Project 4 - life-size cut-out characters

We suggest creating a galvanised steel life-size cut-out welcome character representing a key period of time in the history of the bridge; for example a C13th stonemason, an Edward I-period soldier, a cattle drover, or a Georgian tourist. This would be an iconic and thought-provoking installation. The surface would feature simple hand-painted line work to define a face and some lines of clothing. Mounted onto the surface would be an interpretation panel incorporating text and archive images that demonstrate how the structure has changed over time according to different needs.

This installation could feature a QR code and have an NFC (Near Field Communication) chip embedded for visitors to use their own NFC-enabled smartphones to download the character's story. The story would be entertaining and revealing in its own right, but taken together with the graphic content of the panel the audio would provide a thorough history of Monnow Bridge and Gate. The voice of the character would not be provided by actors but by a suitably skilled and enthusiastic local resident.

Visitors would be encouraged to explore the bridge and the other important heritage landmarks in the vicinity. The panel would also include references to the Cadw 'Follow the Story' interpretation and promote related heritage sites in the town.



6.3.2 Project 5 - heritage trail/explorer app

Whilst a simple iOS platform app enhancing and supporting exploration of Monnow Bridge and Gate is a possibility, it would be at the cost of other forms of interpretation, which (taken together) satisfy more of the immediate requirements. We recommend that a joined-up approach be taken to develop a more wide-ranging smartphone/tablet product for Monmouth. This would see the development of an app that provided a link between other important heritage sites across the town. With financial input from other partners and stakeholders this app could integrate location-aware functionality and augmented reality that enabled visitors to access content at specific points along the trail.

For example, if a visitor stood in the footprints of an Edward I-period soldier on the bridge they could launch a film reconstruction of soldiers marching over the bridge. Standing at a point overlooking the bridge visitors could access a gallery of artistic impressions of the bridge produced by artists over centuries. Subject to the budget and scope of the app, a more sophisticated use of augmented reality within the smartphone app could help visitors 'see' how the bridge has changed over time. Photographic or illustrative overlays could be geo-tagged around the landscape to allow the visitor to 'see' architectural details or structures that no longer exist.



6.3.3 Project 6 – lighting

The existing architectural lighting should be improved to showcase the distinctive architecture and clearly signal the bridge as a unique, cherished and iconic symbol of Monmouth. There is also great scope for ‘one-off’ style lighting/projection installations that could take place during existing events and festivals. These installations can tell stories and provide dramatic backdrops to theatrical events – or be performances in their own right.



6.3.4 Project 7 - augmented reality viewer

Located on the viewing area adjacent to the bridge, an augmented reality viewer would show visitors what the bridge looked like during different periods in history and demonstrate the changes that took place as its role changed. The sequence of computer-generated images could show masons at work on the bridge during its construction, soldiers marching over it and cattle being driven over it to the livestock market on the other side. It would be possible for this feature to raise revenue if it were coin operated.

Below are some examples of the CGI visuals that we have developed for a similar installation in Chester.



6.3.5 Project 8 - events

- Re-enactments – marches, battles, markets etc.
- School art projects – competition to record Monnow Bridge and Gate etc.
- School creative writing projects – giving a ‘voice’ to people who have used the bridge in the past
- Science projects – designing bridges - Monmouth to host a national schools science competition