

Great Archaeological Sites in Newport



7. NEWPORT TRANSPORTER BRIDGE



People need to cross rivers from one side to the other, and ships need to sail up them. The two things do not always sit easily together. The two most obvious ways around the problem are either to build a bridge that rises high enough under the river for ships to pass underneath, or to moor the ships downstream of the bridge and transfer their cargoes to low barges to continue their journey upstream. But what if you really need to get from one side of the river downstream of the port and the ships are so tall that it is too difficult or too expensive to build a bridge they could pass under at high tide?

As ships became larger and larger at the end of the 19th century, a number of different options were tried out that incorporated mechanisms to allow the bridge to move so that ships and land vehicle could take turns. The commonest is probably the swing bridge, where a bridge and the roadway it carries is mounted on a pivot and can swing to the side to allow the ships to pass. Or there is the bascule bridge, of which the best known is London's Tower Bridge, where one end of the roadway tips up. But another solution was even more radical – the transporter bridge.

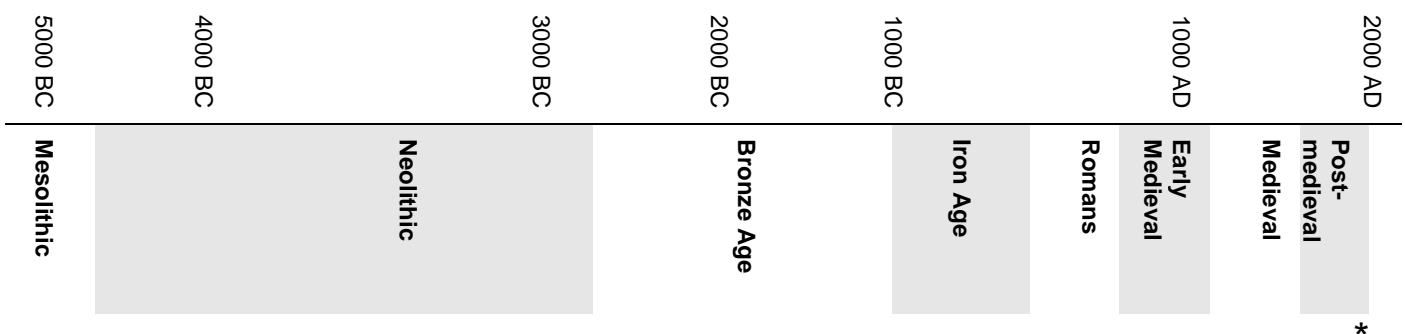
Essentially this consists of a tower on each bank supporting a high-level gantry from which is suspended a moveable section of decking, the gondola. This is docked against one side of the river to allow vehicles to drive on. When it is full, or no-one else wants to cross at that time, the gates are secured on both gondola and landing stage on the side from which the vehicles have come, and cables in the gantry winch the gondola across the river. When it arrives at the opposite bank, the gates on the new landward side are opened, the vehicles drive off to be replaced by those wishing to travel in the opposite direction, and the process is repeated. However, the drawback is that it is slow and can only carry a limited number of vehicles at a time.

Only twenty transporter bridges were built in the whole world, and only two of those in Britain now remain in working order. One of these is the Newport transporter (ST 3170 8625), rising 73.7m above the river and measuring 196.6m in length. It was constructed in 1906 to shorten the journey time for people living west of river, where most of the houses were, to the new works on the east bank. It took four years to complete, and the total cost was £98,000.

It has superseded for most practical purposes by the George Street bridge and the City Bridge but has continued in use as a tourist attraction, and as part of the National Cycleway network.

The transporter bridge crosses the River Usk between Stephenson Street on the east bank and Brunel Street on the west bank where there is visitor centre (NP20 2JY); see the Transporter Bridge section of the Newport Museums and Heritage Service website for opening times and entrance charges. The nearest railway station is Newport on the main line between London and Cardiff. There is a toll for vehicles using the transporter to cross the river. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 152.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. The transporter bridge has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 02495g, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page.