

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07195-6 - A Description of Westminster Bridge: To Which are Added, an Account of the Methods Made Use of in Laying the Foundations of its Piers and an Answer to the Chief Objections, that Have Been Made Hitherto.

Charles Labelye

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A Description of Westminster Bridge

The construction of the first Westminster Bridge, upon which Wordsworth composed his famous sonnet, presented many challenges in terms of the materials and methods with which a sturdy bridge could be built in tidal water and on a gravelly riverbed. A number of candidates presented their surveys to the commissioners of the bridge, but it was the Swiss-born Charles Labelye (1705–62) who was appointed to oversee construction in 1738. The bridge opened to traffic in 1750. This 1751 publication expands upon the shorter work that Labelye had prepared in 1739 to address the laying of the foundations. Significantly, he used caissons – vast wooden structures sunk into the riverbed – within which the stone piers were built. Although the promised illustrations did not appear in this work, the book provides a valuable insight into the technical problems of a major engineering project, and the solutions available at that time.

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that have been made thereto.

WITH

An APPENDIX,
CONTAINING

Several Particulars, relating to the said BRIDGE,
or to the History of the Building thereof.

AS ALSO

Its Geometrical Plans, and the Elevation of
one of the Fronts, as it is finished,

Correctly engraven on two large COPPER-PLATES.

— *Quod optanti divum promittere nemo
Auderet, volvenda Dies en attulit ultro.* VIRG.

By CHARLES LABELYE.

LONDON:

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To the RIGHT HONOURABLE, &c.
THE
COMMISSIONERS

Appointed by

Act of PARLIAMENT,

FOR

Building and Maintaining *Westminster Bridge*;

This short DESCRIPTION and ACCOUNTS

Drawn up in Obedience to their Com-
mands, and published at their De-
fire; together with the annexed
Plans and Elevation of one of the
Fronts of *Westminster Bridge*, are
with the utmost Respect, and Gra-
titude, most humbly dedicated

By their

most devoted,

most obliged,

and most humble Servant,

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P R E F A C E.



SOON after the Right Honourable, &c. the Commissioners, appointed by the Authority of Parliament, for building and maintaining *Westminster Bridge*, had fixed upon a Design, and appointed such Officers and Artificers as they thought proper, for the Direction and Execution of the Works ; several of the Commissioners (and among them some well known to be good Judges in Civil and Military Architecture in general, and Bridge building in particular) desired I would draw up an Account of the Method I intended to follow in laying the Foundations of the Piers of *Westminster Bridge*, and give the Reasons why that Method (which I had the Honour of explaining

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plaining twice, upon Models before the Board) was preferable to other Methods proposed and made use of in the Building of Bridges.

On the 11th of *May*, 1738, I received an express Order of that Honourable Board for that Purpose. In Obedience to their Commands, I began soon after to write a short Account of this Method, but the Works requiring my constant Attendance, I was not able to compleat and publish it till *May*, 1739. Besides, finding that several People made Objections (even to the Possibility of putting in Practice those very Methods) I thought it best to postpone that Account, till after the first Pier should be compleated, by the Execution of which, most of those Objections would be destroyed; being almost sure that the most plausible Arguments, which could be offered before that time, would hardly prevail over some favourite Notions.

The short Account which I then published, was so well received by the Publick, that the whole Edition was soon disposed of, and ever since I have had frequent Requests to republish it, or a fuller Account; which for several Reasons (and among others for want of Leisure) I thought proper to defer till the Bridge was intirely finished, and opened to the Publick. Since which, the Board of Commissioners was pleased on *February*. the 26th last past, to give me a new Order for the drawing up, Printing, and Publishing the following Description and
Ac-

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Accounts. Besides a short Description of *Westminster Bridge* (of which I have annex'd a correct Plan and Elevaion) the Reader will find in the following Sheets, proper mention made at first of the several Facts which induced me to make use of the Methods which I have followed, with all the Success imaginable, in the Building the Piers of *Westminster Bridge*, of which Method I have annexed as plain an Account as the Nature of such things will allow without Schemes or Figures, reserving a fuller Account to a larger Work, the Contents whereof I have given at the End. I have also inserted several Particulars relating to the Bridge, and some Accounts to give the Reader an Idea of the Quantity of Materials employed therein. Some of those Accounts have indeed been printed before, but having been most wretchedly mangled, and made absolute nonsense, by the Compilers of the Magazines, and other Phamphlets, I thought it was proper to repeat them here, correctly expres'd.

I am very sensible that I should make some Apology for speaking of myself so much as I am obliged to do in this Relation, if I did not do it in Obedience to the Orders of the Commissioners, which direct me to give an Account of such Things as I have either done myself, or directed to be done.

As I will not be drawn into a Paper War upon this or any other Account whatsoever ; I shall never lose any Time in replying to any thing

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thing that may appear hereafter by way of Remarks upon, or of Answer to the Whole, or any Part of this Description, and Accounts.

Lastly, I hope the Readers will make me large Allowance as to my Stile and Diction, when they know I was neither born nor bred in *England*, but in *Switzerland*; and never heard a Word of *English* spoken, till I was near twenty Years of Age.

E R R A T A.

Page	Line	instead of	Read
9	19	not exceed	not much exceed
16	19	the Piles which were	where the Piles were
28	30	Frame	Frames
55	32	Same	Some
58	7	where what	where
58	17	three	two
67	7	Commiffioner	Commissioners
71	1	proer	proper
75	15	all the Piers	all the 14 Piers
82	21	<i>Straum</i>	<i>Stratum</i>
96	23	not above	not much above
97	21	of Materials	of the several Materials