

Richard Forman's poem on the building of Abingdon and Culham Bridges and the causeway between them.

This poem is written on vellum and preserved in Christ's Hospital. It seems to be the work of Richard Forman, ironmonger, and is thought to have been declaimed at a feast of the Holy Cross guild in May 1458, over forty years after the events to which it refers.

After an introduction in Latin, the main part of the poem is in the alliterative poetic style in Middle English. It is in two sequences of quatrains each ended by a couplet, and it terminates with a rebus that gives the author's name.

The poem has been reprinted several times. This transcription is from the version published in 1873 by C D Cobham as an appendix to his edition of Francis Little's historical manuscript of 1627, *A Monument of Christian Munificence*. Cobham added to its difficulty by printing it in black letter type, although there is no reason to believe it was ever printed while such type was in common use. The division into verses follows Ralph Hanna, "The Bridges at Abingdon: An Unnoticed Alliterative Poem." *Yee? Baw For Bokes: Essays on Medieval Manuscripts and Poetics In Honor of Hoyt N. Duggan*. Ed. Michael Calabrese and Stephen H. A. Shepherd. (Los Angeles: 2013), pp 31-44.

Henrici quinti regis quarto revoluto
Anno, rex idem pontem fundavit utrumque,
Supra locum binum Borford dictumque Culhamford.
Inter eos namque via regia tenditur alta.

5 Annis adjunctis dat iter gradientibus amplum;
Principium cujus Abendinae situatur.
Annis tunc demum M. quater C. numeratis,
Et sexto deno cum fecit opus pietatis.
10 Vos qui transitis hujus memores bene sitis,
Et vestris precibus fundator sit revelatus.

Off alle Werkys in this Worlde that ever were wrought
Holy chirche is chefe, there children been chersid.
For be Baptim these Barnes to blisse been i brought,
15 Thorough the grace of God, and fayre refreshed.

Another blissed besines is brigges to make,
There that the pepul may not passe after greet showres.
Dole it is to drawe a deed body oute of a lake,
20 Thar was fullid in a fount stoon, and a Fellow of oures.

Kyng Herry the fyft in his fourthe Yere,
He hathe i founde for his folke a brige in Berkeschire.
For cartis with cariage may goo and come clere,
25 That many Wyntres afore were mared in the Myre.

And som oute of her sadels flette to the grounde
Wente forthe in the Water wist no man whare.
Fyve Wekys after or they were i founde,
30 Her kyn and her knowlech caught hem uppe with care.

- Then the Commons of Abendon cryed on the kynge,
 Upon Dukes and lords that were in this londe.
 The Kynge bad hem begynne apon Godes blissing.
- 35 And make it also stronge as they couthe with stone, lyme or sonde,
- Apon the day of seynt Albon they began this game,
 And John Huchyns layde the first stoon in the kynges name.
- 40 Sir Peris Besillis knight curteys and heend,
 For his fadir soule and his frendes he dyd as he scholde.
 He gaf hem stonys i nowhe into the werkys ende,
 Also mony as they nedid fech hem if they wolde.
- 45 Than crafti men for the quarry made crowes of yre,
 Weges, and ways, and mony harde howys,
 Jeffray Barbour bad pay hem her hyre,
 Then must they have moolds to make on the bowys.
- 50 They cockid for cartes, and cast for her chisyng.
 They founde oute the fundament and layde in large stones
 They reysid up the archeys be geometre in rysyng,
 With xi. laborers lavyng at onys.
- 55 There was water I nowhe, stone, lyme and gravel.
 Werkemen als wise as they coude fynde any.
 And ever bad the barbour pay for her travel,
 Til a M. Marke he spende eche a peny.
- 60 Then the strenghe of the streme astoned hem stronge,
 In labor and lavyng moche money was lore.
 There loved hem a ladde was a water man longe,
 He helpe stop the streme til the werke were a fore.
- 65 It was a solace to see in a somer seson,
 CCC. I wysse working at onys.
 iiii. and iiii. reulyd be reson,
 To wete who wrought best were set for the nonce.
- 70 The peple preved her power with the pecoyse.
 The Mattok was man handeled right wele a whyle.
 With spades and schovelis they made such a noyse,
 That men might here hem thens a myle.
- 75 Wyves went oute to wite how they wrought:
 V. score in a flok it was a fayre sight.
 In bord clothes bright white brede they brought,
 Chees and chekens clerelych A dyght.
- 80 These weren the dyches i diged in ful harde grounde,
 And i cast up to arere with the wey,
 Sethen they were I set with a quyk mownde

To hold in the bunkes for ever and ay.

- 85 The gode lorde of Abendon left of his londe,
For the breed of the brigge xxiiii fote large.
It was a greet socour of erthe and of sonde,
And yt he abated the rent of the barge.
- 90 An C. pownde, and xv li. was truly payed.
Be the hondes of John Huchyns and Banbery also,
For the waye and the barge thus it must be sayed.
Therto witnesse al Abendon, and many oon moo.
- 95 For now is culhan hithe i com to an ende,
And al the contre better and no man the worse.
Few folke there were coude that wey wende,
But the waged a wed or payed of her purse.
- 100 And if it were a begger gad breed in his bagge,
He schulde be ryght soone i bid for to goo aboute,
And of the pore penyles the hiereward wold habbe
A hood or a girdle, and let hem goo withoute.
- 105 Many moo myscheves there weren I say.
Culham hithe hath causid many a curse.
I blyssed be our helpers we have a better waye,
Withoute any peny for cart and for horse.
- 110 Thus accorded the kyng and the covent,
And the commones of Abendon as the Abbot wolde.
Thus they were cesed and set al in oon assent,
That al the brekynges of the brige the towne bere schulde.
- 115 This was preved acte also in Perlement,
In perpetual pees to have and to holde.
This tale is i tolde in noon other entent
But for myrthe and in memory to yonge and to olde.
- 120 Now every good body that gothe on this brige,
Bid for the Barbour gentil Jeffray,
That clothed many a pore man to bed and to rige,
And hathe holpe to rentis to holde up this waye.
- 125 The wiche rentes right trewe men have i take on honde,
And graciously governed hem now a good while.
Who so have hem hereafter with trewthe but he stoned,
It schal be knowen openly he doth hymselfe begyle.
- 130 I counsel every creature to kepe hym from the curse.
For of this tretys will I no more telle.
And be not to covetous to youre own purse,
For peril of the peynes in the pit of helle.

135 Now God geve us grace to folowe treuthe even,
That we may have a place in the blysse of Heven. Amen.

r. A.B.I.N.D.O.N.R.F.I.

Take the first letter of youre foure fader with A, the worker of wax, and I and N, the coloure of an asse; set them togeder, and tel me yf you can what it is than. Richard Fannande Iremonger hathe made this tabul, and set it here in the yere of King Herry the sexte xxxvi^{te}.

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