

A mediaeval bridge discovered in excavations at Bristol

Dear readership, might I draw your attention to an instrument bridge found in the Finzel's Reach excavations in Bristol? I became aware of this via a review article in *Current Archaeology* and managed to track down the source paper which I am permitted to quote. The wood is yew with the grain going across the bridge and I suspect it was held in place by string compression. To me, the closeness of the two(?) inner strings suggests drone strings accessible for bowing from either side but there must be other solutions.

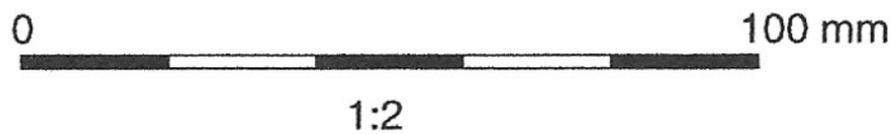
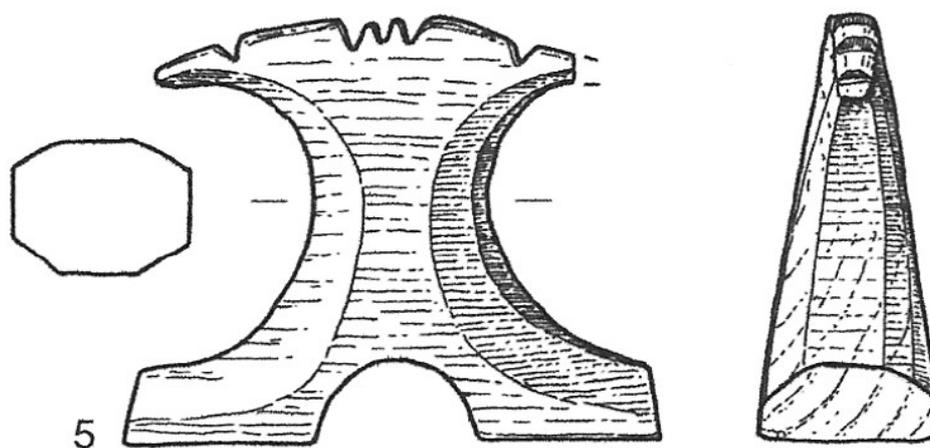
Source: *From Bridgehead to Brewery*; Section 2.13 Woodworking Technology, by Steven J Allen, Oxford Archaeology Monograph 27; ISBN 978-0-904220-86-5

P12/13: Late 12th-Early 13th Century

Fig. 1, no. 5; Plate 3. Bridge from stringed musical instrument. Flat wider base edge with semicircular cut out at mid-point. Drilled and carved cut out at each end. Narrow edge scored for 4, possibly 5 strings, but incomplete. Some surface damage. Cut from tangentially faced *Taxus baccata* L. 36 l, 18 w, 12 th. 4217, SF3142, A1.17, Per 2, TSW3.

P19: The most unusual, and unexpected find from the assemblage is the bridge from a stringed musical instrument such as a lute or similar (Fig. 1, no. 5, Plate 3). The bridge is used to support the ends of the strings, lifting them clear of the body of the instrument, allowing them to be plucked or bowed during play. The Finzel's Reach bridge is grooved to take four strings, a smaller fifth groove seemingly only present to mark the mid-point of the object. It is carefully shaped and carved for decorative, as well as musical purposes. However, there are no traces of nails or pegs to hold it in place, suggesting the object was unused or had been glued in place with an adhesive which has left no trace. There appear to be no similar finds published from this period in the British Isles. A very crude example of Anglo-Scandinavian date is known from York (Morris 2000, 2356), but there are better worked early 11th-century examples from Lake Paladru, Isère (Homo-Lechner 1993, 261, nos 2 and 3), carved from another dense close-grained wood, in this case maple, and scored for three and two cords.

Section 2.13, Figure 1, Wooden small finds, nos. 1-7 – Find no. 5



Section 2.13, Plate 3: Instrument Bridge

