

The Humber Bridge Mockumentary

Channel 4 Subtitles

Programme Title

Narrator: The Humber Bridge. For centuries it has stood as a bastion of industry, culture and man's crushing victory over nature. As a testament to man's achievements, it stands tall above all others. However, the taxpayer may be paying the price more than he knows. Channel 4 investigates.

Narrator: As can be seen in the bridge's angular nature, the structure was originally a Roman crossing. Before 120 AD, Roman legions would cross the Humber (known as Abus Fluvius) on foot when the river was frozen. The Emperor Hadrian suffered an embarrassment when two hundred centurions drowned on-march to garrison the settlement Eboracum. Given the choice between creating a bridge or re-equipping his entire army with cork armour, he wisely chose the cheaper option. When the Romans left Britain, the local populace of Hull destroyed the Bridge – an icon of Roman England – in an orgy of fire and axe-chopping, as was the style of the time. Realising afterwards that the bridge was the primary link between their settlement and the farms of contemporary North Lincolnshire, the populace starved in an unnecessary famine.

Narrator: The Bridge, as seen today, was designed and built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel as a precursor to the Great Western Railway. During the construction, over eight thousand slave labourers were employed at the behest of William Wilberforce. Brunel and Wilberforce could often be seen in Irish-style brawls outside the Green Dragon in Hull.

Narrator: The massive debt incurred by the government in building led to the bridge becoming policed by a toll booth. A two-penneth charge was set for a horse and cart to cross – a shilling for a wagon and half a turnip for a walker. Dick Turpin famously robbed the toll booth of an evening rather than hold up the carts before the bridge, giving him more time for playing bowls with town officials.

Narrator: Nowadays, the Bridge makes up a large stake in the UK's annual gross income. Bridge tolls make up 30% annually, with illegal arms deals and speeding fines making up 20% each. Speaking to a leading government official denied the existence of the bridge altogether, referring to the North

East of England as the “great frontier, still full of Vikings and Indians.” A press release from the Home Office later that week confirmed that “everything is okay” and the artificially high price of the bridge tolls is justified “as a tax akin to the congestion charge in central London”.

Narrator: The Bridge sign, emblazoned with the phrase “build it, and they will come” remains as a starch kick in the face of those patrons forced to make use of this grand structure.