

TROUBLED BRIDGES OVER WOKING WATERS

Iain Wakeford 2014

With Woking Hospice's Classic Car Show this Sunday at Mercedes Benz World, and the Tour Series Cycle Race around Woking Town Centre on next Tuesday, I thought that this week and next I would look at the history of Woking's roads, concentrating this week on the various river crossings in the district.

Some of the earliest evidence of roads in the Woking area comes from place-names, and in particular the points where roads cross the numerous streams hereabouts. Fords are featured in places such as Pyrford, the ford by a pear tree, whose bounds were recorded in 956; Durnford, the 'secret' or 'hidden' ford, first recorded in 889; and Croxford, the ford where broken pots were found before 675; whilst also in 675 the bridge by the field of mint (Mimbridge) was recorded.

The ford at Byfleet, now replaced by Plough Bridge, is thought to be equally as ancient and although not recorded by name until much later Shackleford (1547-53) in Old Woking and Kemishford (1605) at Mayford are also presumed to be quite old.

The name Shackleford is interesting. It should not be confused with the village of the same name further up the Wey Valley near Godalming, although its meaning may be similar. The problem is that it seems the experts cannot agree on what that meaning was! Some think it comes from shackle (as in 'to chain') with a chain perhaps being used to guide travellers through the water, but others suggest it comes from a corruption of the Old English word meaning 'shaking' (or to shake), referring to the bed of the ford being uneven or made up of loose pebbles that shook the carts when they crossed.

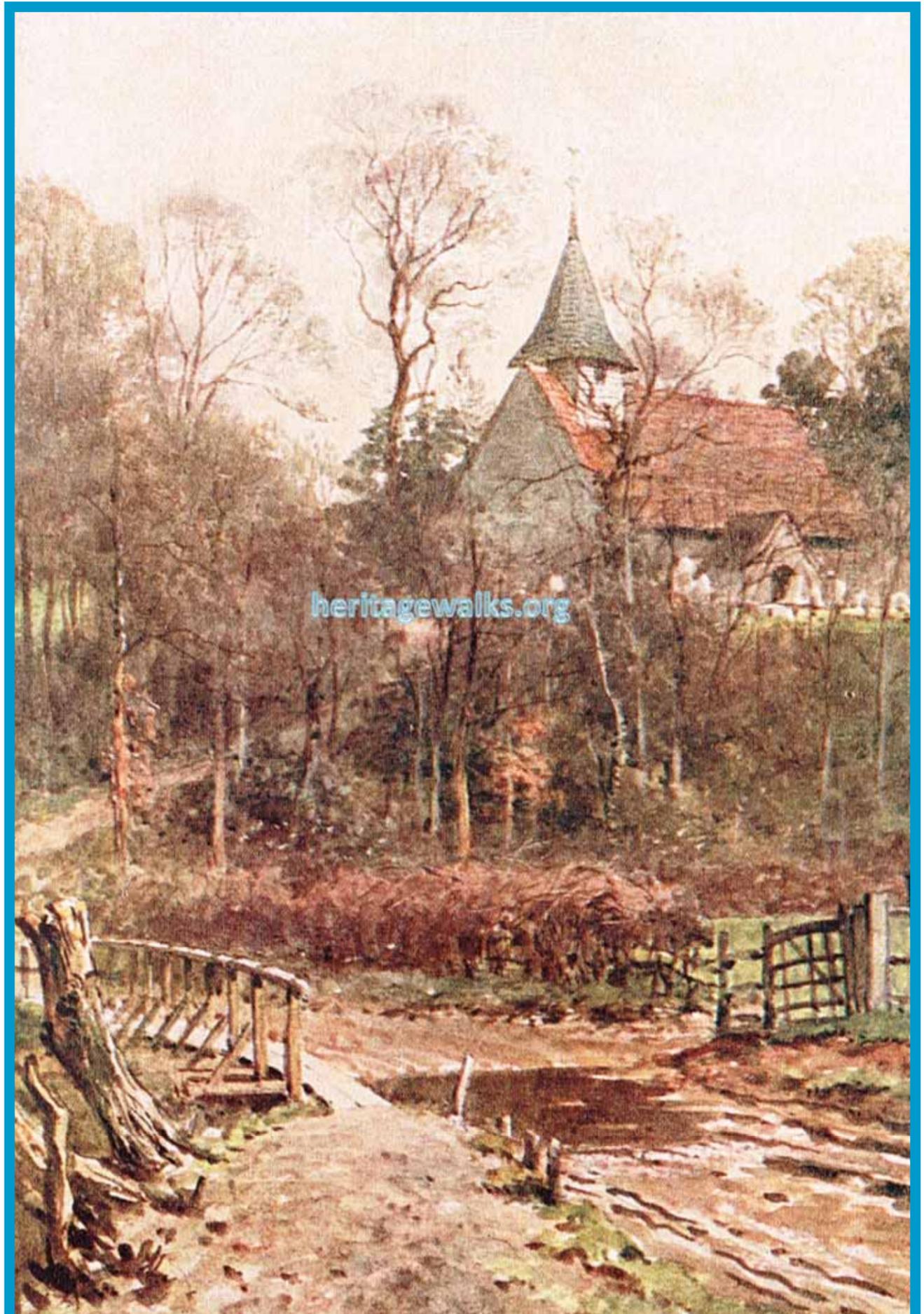
Mayford (possibly the 'Main' ford, the ford where mayweed grew or even Maega's ford) was first recorded in the early 13th century, but soon after it seems that a cart bridge must have been built just downstream of the ford as together with Hoebridge a bridge at Mayford is recorded in several medieval wills, with money being left for its upkeep.

One such will is that of Adam Ryley (or Rydley) of Wokyng who left forty pennies in 1486 to be used equally 'to the fabric of the bridge of Mayford and the bridge of Howe', with a further 13s4d for 'the bridge of Wockyng' – presumably because it didn't need quite as much money for its repair as the other two.

Having said that just a year earlier, John Gaddiston, whose house was 'next to the bridge of Wokyng' left twenty pennies towards its repair, so perhaps Ryley thought that the majority of his money was better spent on its more rural counterparts.

Byfleet Bridge, likewise finds mention in medieval times with £64.7s.4d being paid out of the exchequer of John Penycok for repairs 'done in Byflet Park and to a certain bridge within the said park' in 1447, together with repairs to a 'certain lodge there to keep rabbits within the said park'.

Some historians believe this to be the footbridge linking Byfleet Manor House with Foxwarren (possibly due to the mention of the warren's lodge), but I wonder whether the



bridge is actually what is now known as Plough Bridge.

The owners of the Manor of Byfleet were certainly responsible for its upkeep, so in 1616 when the Surrey Assizes found that 'Byfleet Bridge is in great decay' it fell to the Crown to pay for its repair. Interestingly the same court found that Croxford Bridge (also the responsibility of James I) had 'fallen down', which must have been quite an inconvenience locally, although one that appears to have been

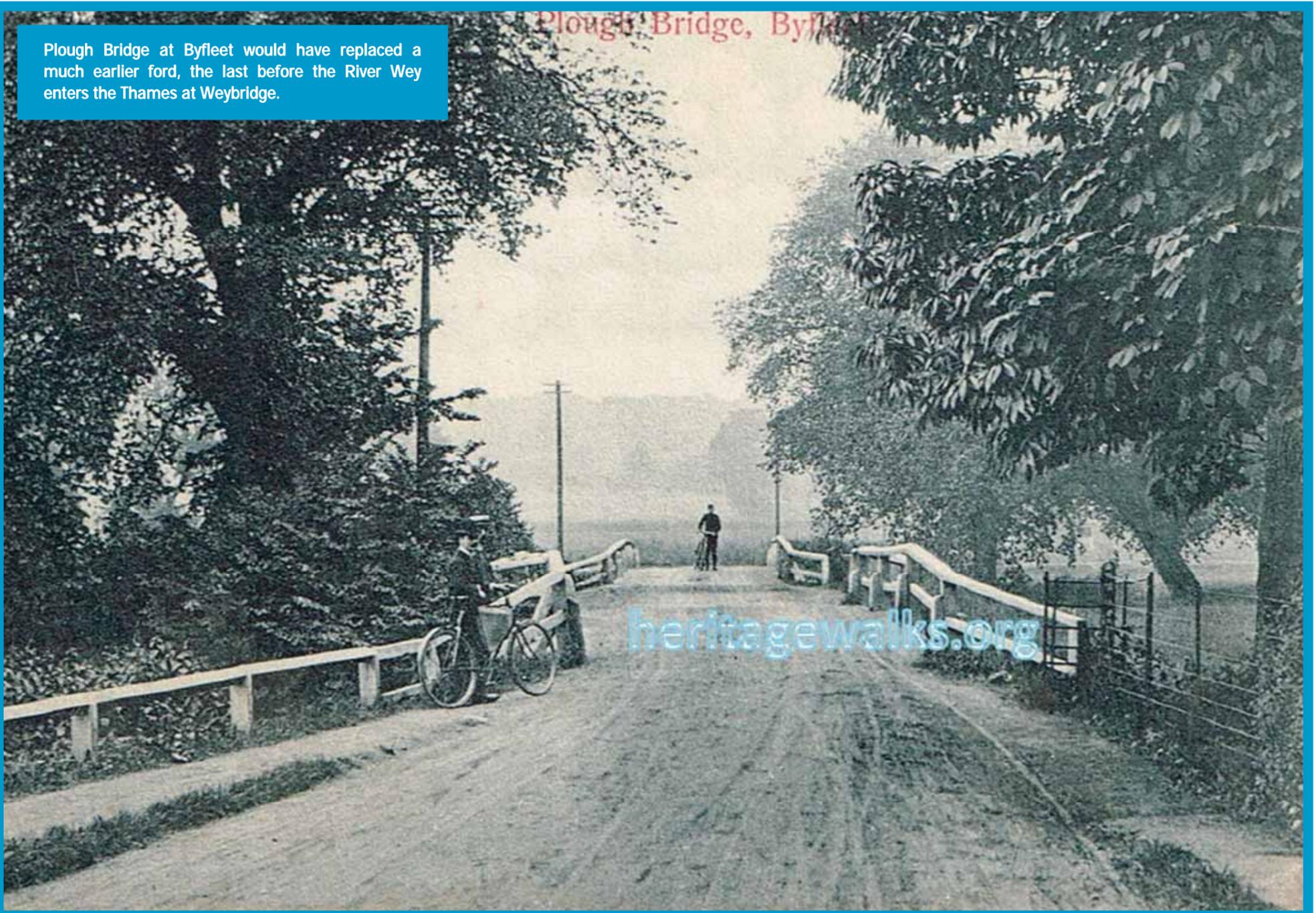
The pear tree that gave the village its name, must have been beside this ford across the Bourne below St Nicholas' Church.

In later years the ford was replaced by a bridge, with a causeway across the meadows towards Newark Priory and Ripley.

regularly suffered as in 1664 and again in 1666 the Quarter Sessions found the bridge again 'out of repair' and 'Henrietta Maria, Dowager Queen of England' as lord of the manor 'ought to have it repaired whenever necessary'.

Plough Bridge, Byfleet

Plough Bridge at Byfleet would have replaced a much earlier ford, the last before the River Wey enters the Thames at Weybridge.



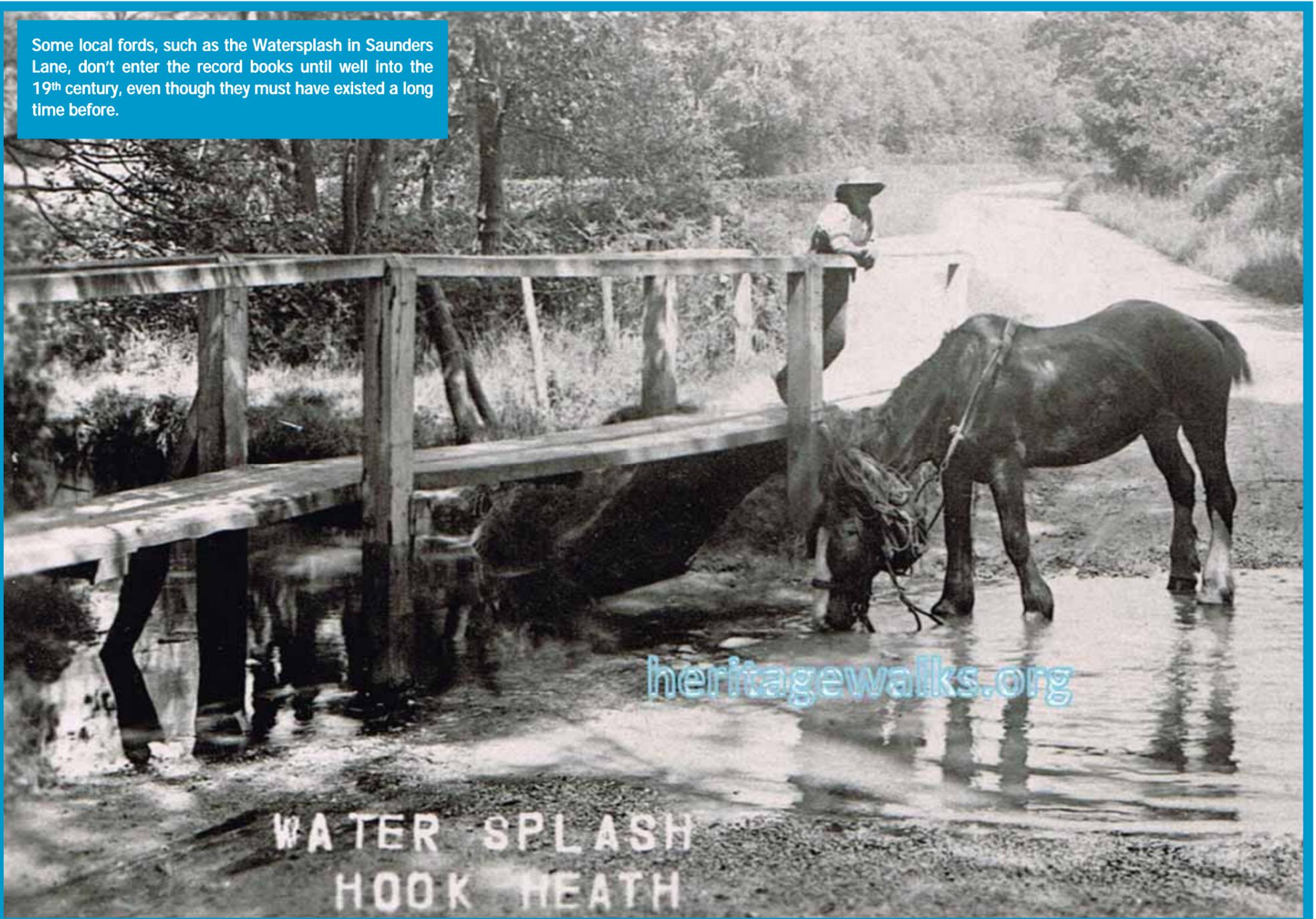
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Watery Lane at Chobham is very aptly named as in effect its entire length is one long ford. From Clappers Lane to Ford Road the lane runs along the bed of the Bourne, with raised causeways and footbridges to the side to allow pedestrians to keep their feet dry.



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Some local fords, such as the Watersplash in Saunders Lane, don't enter the record books until well into the 19th century, even though they must have existed a long time before.

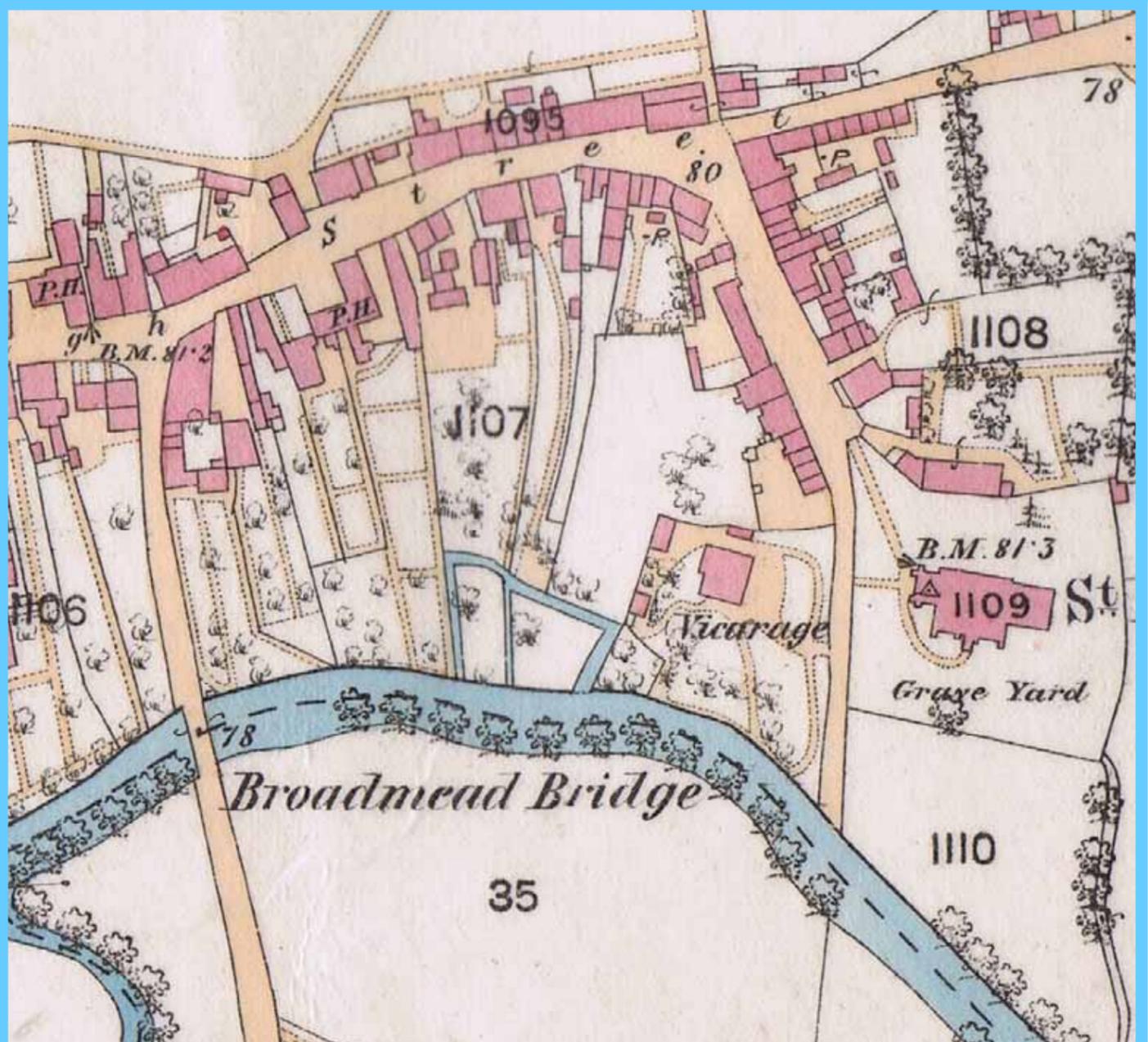


LOCAL MP GOES THE WRONG WAY TO THE WEY

In the Surrey History Centre there is preserved a scrapbook, compiled by the ladies of the Kingfield & Westfield WI in 1949. One section contains the interesting recollections of Mrs Bracey-Cox, whose family moved to Westfield in 1890 and whose vivid memories are as interesting now as they were when she first set pen to paper. One item concerns Church Street in Old Woking, which up until the early part of the 20th century ran all the way down to the river beyond the church.

'It was in about February 1899 the coachman of Leigh Bennett M.P. took this turning in mistake for the Send turning and drove right into the river as at that time there was no protection. Leigh Bennett escaped and the reins were cut to free the horse. The coachman was drowned and when his body was recovered he was still clutching the reins which had been cut. My father helped pull him out'.

Some believe that there was once a ford at this spot, but if that were the case then surely the coachman would have just driven straight out the other side. I believe it is more likely that there was a wharf on the old River Wey at the end of Church Street, serving the village before the Wey Navigation was constructed in the 17th century, but either scenario is difficult to prove without any documentary evidence to support either.



WHEN BROADMEAD BRIDGE WAS CONSIDERED 'A WORK OF ART'



Broadmead Road looking towards Old Woking,, obviously after the 1872 accident and probably after the bridge was reconstructed in the early 20th century.

In January 1872, following a horrific accident when a traction engine pulling a threshing machine fell through Broadmead Bridge at Old Woking, an inquest heard of the poor state of bridge between Old Woking and Send.

Mr William Smallpiece, a surveyor of 7 Greys Inn Place, London, who inspected the bridge at the time, stated that it 'may have been constructed to the rules of art, but not to the rules of science' and it was so unsafe that it was 'not fit for a load of corn to cross' - let alone the traction engine and threshing machine that had caused the bridge to collapse.

The bridge was a simple wooden cart bridge of six spans, each span varying in length from 7ft 8in up to 9ft and being made up of three ten inch square wooden piles driven into the river bed and then connected by numerous supports carrying planks of wooden decking much like a trestle table.

Apparently it had been constructed 'about fifty years before by a Mr Carman and his sons', and was 'thoroughly repaired' in 1851 with little more done since.

Obviously when it was built it was only used for the occasional horse drawn cart or carriage, but fifty years later was evidently carrying much heavier loads despite the fact that the wooden piles had 'wasted around water level' over the intervening years.

Mr Smallpiece estimated that originally the bridge could have carried about 5 tons, but a couple of years before the accident short spurs

had been added in places, which 'were too short and had been bolted to the wasted piles at their weakest points'.

It is not clear whether this work was carried out by James Whitburn, but Mr Appleby (an agent for Lord Onslow, the owner of the bridge) stated at the inquest that he had at one stage instructed the builder to repair the bridge if he saw anything wrong with it, the result of which was that a hole in the decking had been replaced, but no other inspection below deck was carried out.

Whoever was responsible for the repairs (or lack thereof), it is clear that nobody was that concerned as one local farmer told the Coroner that just seven weeks before the accident (which killed three men), he had taken his 11½ - 12 ton traction engine across the bridge (and presumably back again), without any thought that it might collapse.

Even after the tragic accident little appears to have been done. A temporary bridge was in place for a short time before Lord Onslow invested £120 in patching up the wooden bridge and placing notices 'in accordance with the Locomotive Act' to all his manorial bridges. And so it remained in use for nearly forty years, being replaced by the present concrete bridge just before the First World War.

With money being left in wills in 15th century wills for the upkeep of Woking Bridge, and Assize Records from at least the 1620's noting that 'Woking Bridge is greatly decayed and ought to be repaired by the Crown', it is clear that Broadmead Bridge was constantly being patched up and repaired, when what was probably required was a properly constructed brick or stone bridge. In the end it wasn't until 1914 that the present reinforced concrete bridge was constructed.

