

# THE BROADMEAD BRIDGE ACCIDENT OF 1873

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This week I want to return to a story that I touched upon last year – the tragic accident in 1873 that happened at Broadmead Bridge in Old Woking when a traction engine pulling a threshing machine crashed through the bridge killing three men.



Taken from the Broadmead's, this picture shows the immediate aftermath of the accident.

The incident was recorded by the Earl of Onslow (who as Lord of the Manor was responsible for the bridge), as well as Edward Ryde in his diary (who appears to have read of the news in *The Times* whilst he was in London), but the most detailed description of the events comes from the *Surrey Advertiser* who recorded not just the accident, but also the subsequent inquest into the men's deaths.

The accident occurred at about 4.15 on the afternoon of Wednesday, 15th January. The machines, which were apparently owned by Thomas Miskin, had previously been at work on the Woking side of the river and were being transported towards Mr Dawes farm at Papercourt in Send when the piles supporting the first and second piers of the bridge on the Woking side gave way. The rear wheels of the traction engine and the front wheels of the threshing machine ended up on the bed of the river, with the two machines forming what the Earl of Onslow described as a 'V' in the bridge.

There were twelve men in the threshing gang, but after the engine took on water at Mr Shears', some of the men who lived in Woking went home, leaving just seven men with the vehicles. One of those was John Saunders of Woking who as the 'red flag man' was walking ahead of the engine to warn people of its approach, whilst another, William Robinson (described as a 'straw pitcher') had been riding on the step of the engine and had jumped off just as the machine reached the bridge.

This left William Bird, the stoker of the engine and George Reene the driver, with Edward

Butler steering the engine and two brothers from Send, John and William Darling. John was sitting next to Edward Butler on the engine (the two being thrown clear when the bridge collapsed), but William was riding on the drawbar between the engine and the threshing machine, so that when the machines fell through the bridge he was immediately trapped between the two under the water and drowned, despite attempts to rescue him. Reene and Butler, were thrown into the water and were rescued by a Mr Alfred John Chapman, a visitor from New Zealand who was staying with Mr Ross at The Old Manor House in Old Woking, but the two were so badly scalded from the engine that they died of their injuries a few hours later.

It wasn't long before a crowd had gathered (including a couple of local surgeons - Mr Eager and Fletcher - who tried in vain to save the two scalded men), and three local policemen were dispatched to take charge of the scene. These were Constables Ellis and Butt and Sergeant Baker, with later Deputy Chief Constable Barker arriving to make certain that a watch was kept overnight (presumably to prevent another accident from taking place).

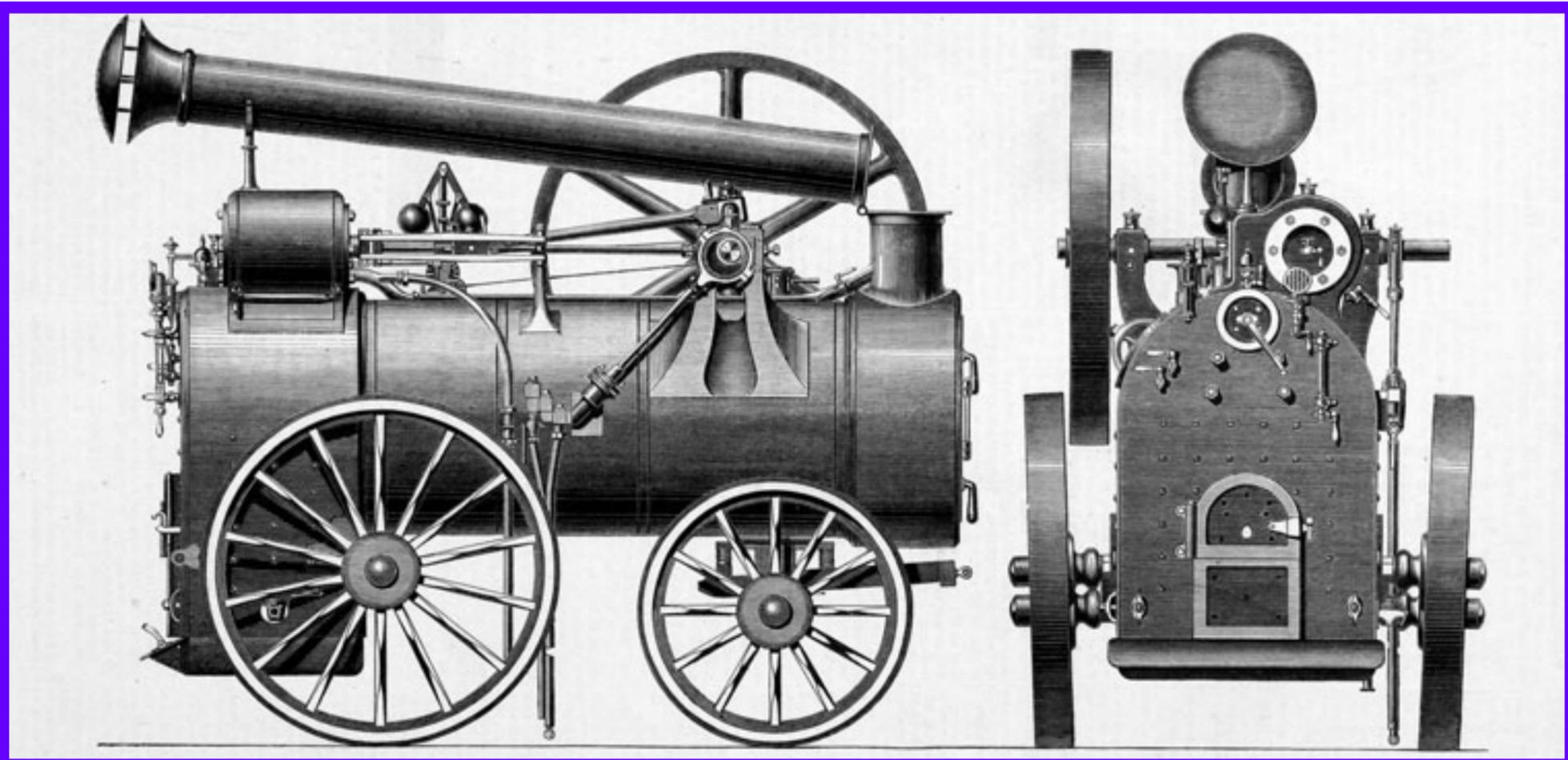
Pedestrian access across the bridge was apparently still possible, but with the two machines firmly stuck, vehicles had a long detour via ever Newark Lane (between Pyrford and Ripley) or all the way to Stoke-next-Guildford!

It was clear that a temporary 'pontoon' was required for traffic whilst the engine was

removed and the bridge repaired, so the Royal Engineers were called in from Aldershot to help. Apparently Lieutenant Jelf, a sergeant, two corporals and fourteen men turned up with the necessary equipment and after 'some difficulties getting their equipment to the river' within 1½ hours had built a new bridge capable of taking a load of 5 tons.

The pontoon was evidently on the upstream side of the old bridge as access was gained 'through the meadow belonging to Mr Charrington, the well-known brewer' – although it was soon reported that the field was very badly cut up by horse-drawn vehicles going through it.

The 'Mr Charrington' mentioned in the report of the aftermath of the accident on Broadmead Bridge is obviously Henry Charrington who had just bought the brewery at Old Woking from Richard Isaac Strong. Unfortunately I can find out very little information about this particular gentleman, who appears to have been one of the great brewing dynasty, but was probably not one of the major shareholders in the Charrington & Head Brewery Company that in 1873 was building the massive new 'Abbey Brewery' in Burton-upon-Trent. Indeed, our Henry only made a brief appearance in the history of Woking as in 1876 he sold the brewery to Joseph Oldfield. If anyone can add more to the story of Henry Charrington, I would be most grateful.



The Engine was a Clayton & Shuttleworth Traction Engine, made in Lincolnshire, similar to the one shown here.

On Saturday 18th January at the White Horse Hotel in Old Woking the Coroner, Mr G. H. Hull, esq, opened the inquest on Reene and Bird. Apparently Mr Rastrick (presumably George Rastrick of Woking Lodge in what is now Oriental Road) appeared for Mr Miskin, whilst Mr F.F. Smallpiece of Guildford watched on behalf of the Earl of Onslow.

After hearing evidence from the member of the threshing gang and other witnesses, the Coroner then heard from a Mr William Smallpiece (a civil engineer of 7 Grays Inn Place, London) who had examined the bridge in detail.

The jury's verdict was that Reene and Bird lost their lives due to the collapse of the bridge, but the inquest had to be adjourned for a few days

whilst the body of William Darling could be recovered from underneath the engines. That required heavy lifting gear which was eventually supplied on the following Tuesday by the London & South Western Railway, who transported it from their locomotive works at Nine Elms to Woking from where Mr Hilder of Woking provided carriage to Old Woking.

William Smallpiece apparently directed the operation that finally managed to move the threshing machine on the Wednesday morning (a week after the accident), for William Darling's body to be recovered (followed later by the traction engine).

According to the Surrey Advertiser despite bag weather, thousands of people had come to view the scene on the Sunday, the majority coming by train to Woking Station (and presumably walking to Old Woking), with others driving by carriage from Guildford, Chertsey & Weybridge.

That Sunday was also the day of burial in the churchyard of Reene and Butler, with a collection box apparently being set up for the widow of George Reene (the others presumably leaving no dependents).

William Darling's body was buried on Friday 24th January, after the inquest had been resumed and a verdict of death by drowning following the accident had been reached.

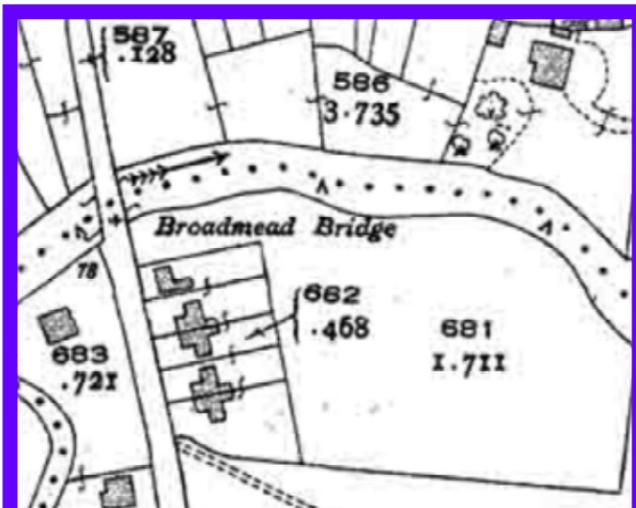
From the evidence given at the inquest it is clear that the traction engine should never have gone over the bridge in the first place. Mr Smallpiece in his evidence estimated that the bridge was about fifty years old and had originally been suitable for a load of five tons, whilst Mr Miskin in his evidence had revealed that the traction engine alone (made by Clayton and Shuttleworth of Lincoln) weighed ten tons!

Having said that, Mr Hilder had stated that only seven weeks before the accident he had taken his traction engine over the bridge, 'which the manufacturers told him weighed 11½ to 12 tons in working order', so he was fortunate that an accident hadn't happened sooner.

Perhaps the most remarkable part about the whole story, however, is that after the traction engine and threshing machine were removed the bridge was simply 'patched up' (with presumably a large sign denoting the weight restriction) and it was not until just before the First World War that anyone got around to building a proper one!



Royal Engineers constructed a temporary pontoon, until the bridge could be repaired.



Broadmead Bridge after being rebuilt in 1914.

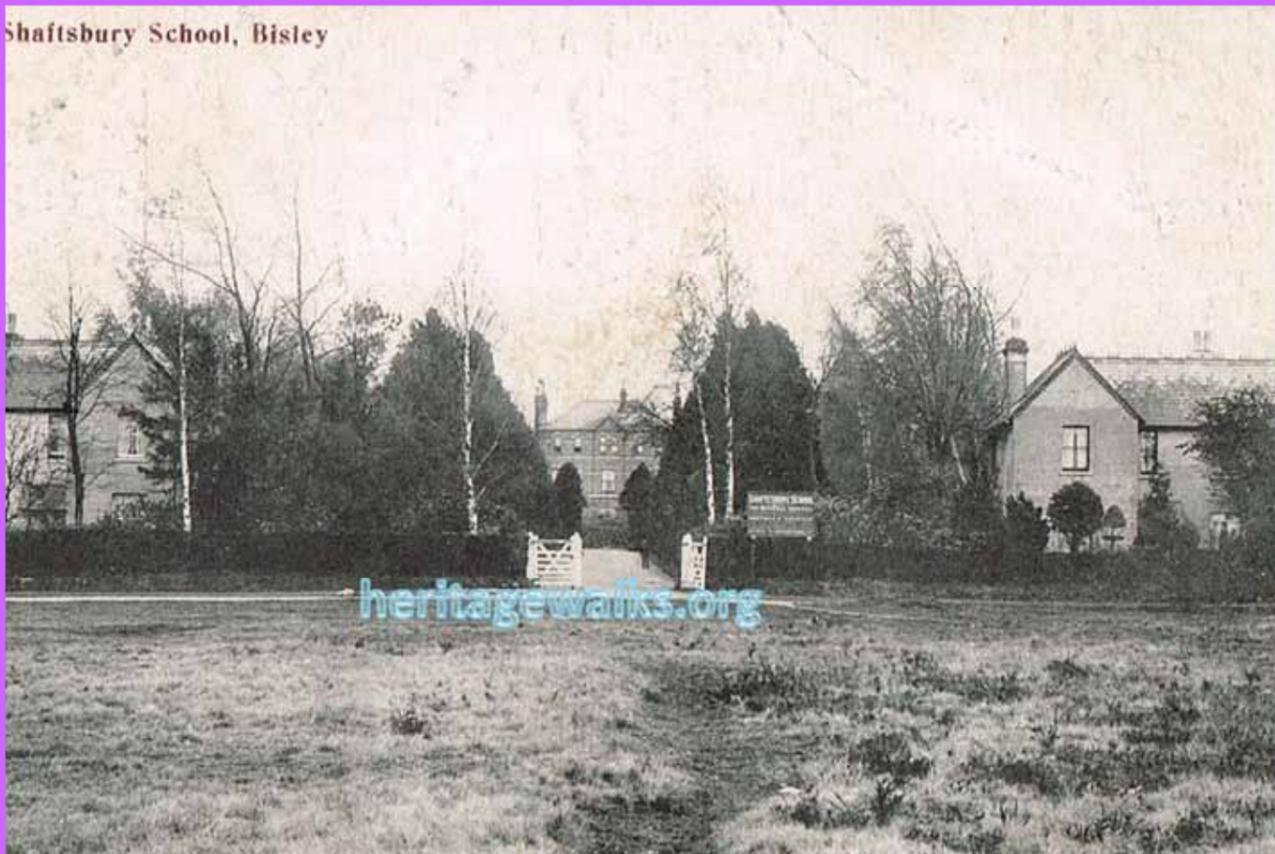
## THE BUILDING OF THE SHAFTESBURY BOYS SCHOOL & THE REBUILDING OF BISLEY CHURCH

In 1873 Lord Shaftesbury added to the Bisley Refuge Farm School a second home – to be called the Shaftesbury Boys School. It stood where Coldingley Prison is today, a tall, imposing (very Victorian) building, that could accommodate about another one-hundred and twenty boys.

With well over two-hundred boys, plus the staff required to look after them, the Shaftesbury Homes were to have a massive impact on the village – not least the church which had remained almost unaltered (or repaired) since medieval times!

The previous year a new vicar had come to Bisley, the Rev. Walter Eaton, M.A., who almost immediately set up a fund to 'plainly, but decently restore the church'. The Bishop had apparently 'urged on one the necessity for immediate restoration', and the Rev Eaton found the church 'in a most deplorable condition as regards both the exterior and interior'. The crumbling 15<sup>th</sup> century Chancel had been bricked up from the Nave and the Diocesan Architect apparently reported that 'the wall on the north side is actually unsafe, and that the roof is in a most decayed condition'.

The Fund had a target of £700 – not a small sum as the good Reverend noted in his begging letters that 'Bisley is a small country Parish, poor, without any resident gentry or large farmers!' In the end, according to Rosemary Cooper in her guide to St John the Baptist Church (1981), 'due to his untiring efforts, £800



was raised and this, together with a loan on the security of Broachmead, was sufficient to start the work.'

She goes on to state that 'unfortunately the old timbered chancel was cleared away and a new one built – the only record of the old one being a sketch by the Rev. Cater. There was also an old "singing gallery" at the west end of the nave which was removed at the same time.'

Apparently it was common practice to extend churches on the north side (the Devil's side as Miss Cooper called it), 'as this was the burial place for people "of no account" such as vagrants, paupers or suicides'.

Whether any pauper graves were disturbed in the process I do not know, but the churchyard of the 'decently restored church' of Bisley is as popular as ever.

## THE PRINCESS MARY VILLAGE HOMES, ADDLESTONE, BUILT IN 1872

Last week we looked at the Mosaic Workers of Woking Prison. I don't know whether any of them came into contact after their release with the 'Mission in Aid of Discharged Female Prisoners', but it was founded in Clapham by Mrs Meredith who also ran the (appropriately named) 'Marble Laundry'!

In 1872, together with a friend from Lyne called Caroline Cavendish she proposed to establish what was initially to be called 'Mrs Meredith's prison school' in nearby Addlestone.

Before then the two ladies had organised foster homes for girls in Longcross and New Haw, but an amendment to the Prevention of Crimes Act stated that the children of any women convicted for a second time of certain offences should be sent to an 'Industrial School' and with the foster homes becoming inadequate it soon became evident that something more permanent had to be done.

The idea was to build special houses that would be run by a matron, where the girls could be brought up more as a 'family' than in an 'industrial school', and with the encouragement of HRH Princess Mary Adelaide, Duchess of Teck (who was a campaigner for children's welfare), the



Princess Mary Village Homes were established off Crouch Oak Lane.

The first pair of houses were opened on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1872, with two more cottages following on the 10<sup>th</sup> May allowing thirty-seven

girls to take up residence at the site. Eventually it was envisaged that there would be six cottages (as well as a school house and teacher's accommodation), with six benefactors already having contributed £300 each for their construction.