

FROM STEP BRIDGE TO SWING BRIDGE (AND BACK AGAIN)!

Iain Wakeford 2017

In the past we have looked at the reconstruction of road bridges in the borough, most notably a couple of years ago when I recalled the controversy over Woking Council's replacement of the old brick-arched bridges over the Basingstoke Canal.

In 1899 Kiln Bridge at St John's had been replaced at the request of the Military Authorities at Inkerman Barracks -although that didn't stop a traction engine destined for the barracks from falling through the old Hermitage Bridge in 1906! That was replaced by a 'temporary' wooden structure (as was Chertsey Road Bridge at that time) although it wasn't until the early 1920's before both were replaced by their present concrete constructions.

Wheatsheaf Bridge and Stumps Bridge were rebuilt just before the First World War; the old Monument Bridge remained in place until the Second World War; but at Goldsworth the brick-arched Arthurs Bridge was simply 'remodelled' by covering it in concrete and removing the crumbling brick parapet and replacing it with iron railings.

With all those alterations to the major road bridges over the canal, only a couple of little-used brick-arches at Langmans and Woodend

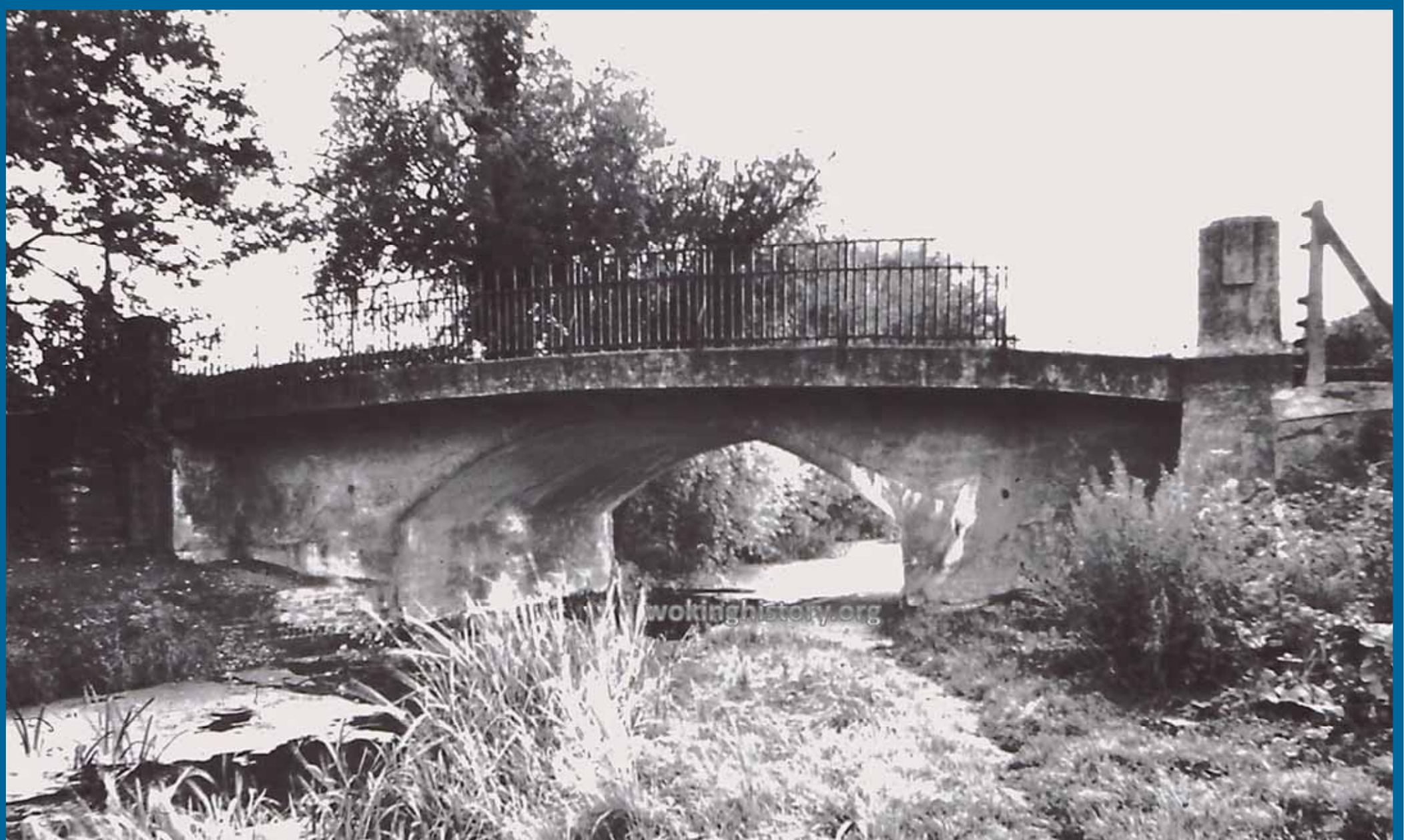


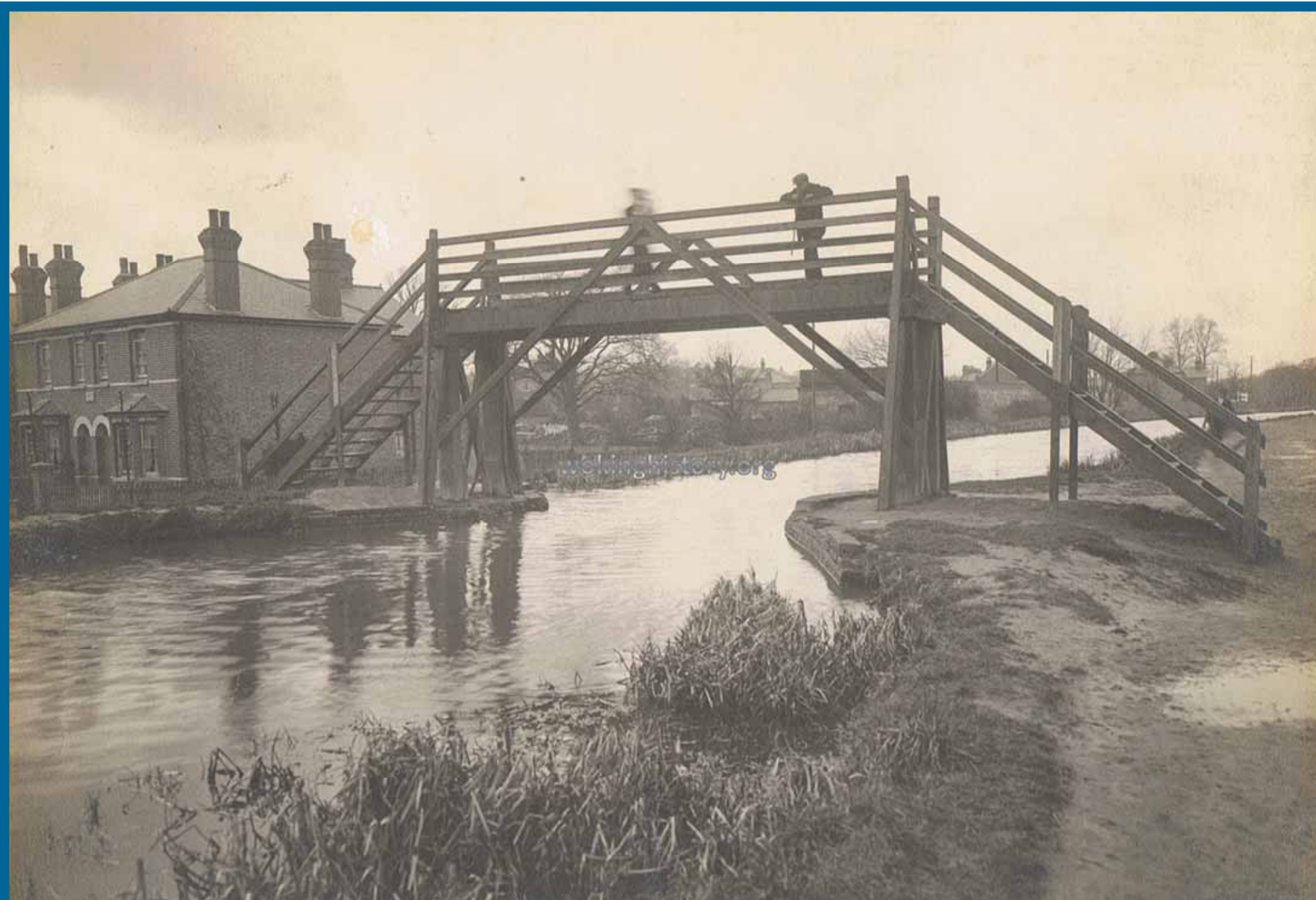
Bridge remained (now Scheduled Ancient Monuments), with the wooden footbridge over the canal at Horsell Moor being the only crossing not to receive the council's attention.

By the early 20th century, with the introduction of bicycles (and prams) the high step bridge was an impediment, and there were calls for it

At Arthurs Bridge the old brick-arch was covered with concrete and the crumbling parapet replaced by railings.

to be replaced by a swing-bridge or some other structure that would allow ramps to be installed on either side. Between the wars some local youths took matters into their own hands and damaged the bridge to such an extent that it



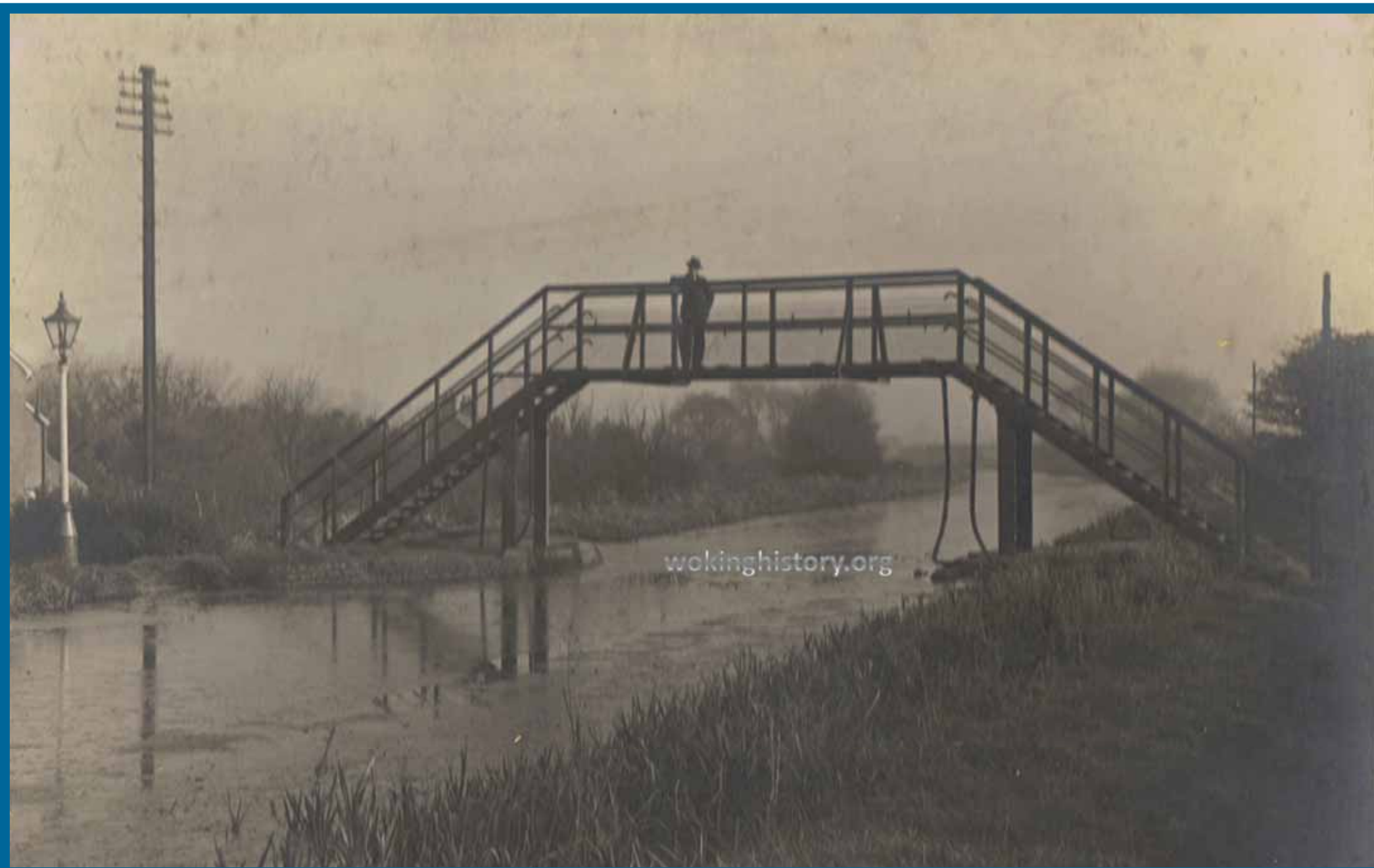


needed to be temporarily rebuilt. Contracts were drawn up in 1938 for a new swing bridge, but with the intervention of the war it was not until early in 1960 that work began on demolition and reconstruction. Actually the

'demolition' took less than a day to achieve, with a temporary 'pontoon' bridge allowing wheeled vehicles to cross the canal whilst work was carried out. In reality this pontoon was just an old barge moored across the canal, with

The old wooden bridge and it's temporary replacement

decking connecting it to each bank and handrails installed to prevent the public from toppling into the water.





Construction of the new swing bridge took only a few months to complete.



Construction of the new bridge took just a few months with the ramps on either side constructed first. By March they were ready to receive the new six-ton steel bridge that was capable of being swung on the Horsell side of the waterway - should any barge venture up this part of the canal. It was finally opened on the 17th May 1960 by Horsell Councillor, Archie Benstead (accompanied by a number of other councillors and officials).

I can well remember the swing bridge from my childhood (it being the route we would take from Goldsworth School to the playing field at Horsell Moor), but I cannot ever remember seeing the bridge being swung open.

With the construction of Lockfield Drive in the late 1980's the less than thirty-year-old swing bridge had to be replaced with an even higher bridge than the original – not because of anticipated traffic returning to the waterway, but because of lorries and buses on the new Goldsworth Park link-road. In their wisdom the engineers decided (perhaps because it was still known as 'Step Bridge Path') that shallow steps could justifiably be installed on the ramps on either side of the bridge (which hindered, but not excluded the use by push-chairs etc.), but when it came to access to the canal towpath it was deemed access by just steps was perfectly acceptable.

Once again progress in Woking had managed to go two steps - or should I say two ramps - forward and numerous steps back!

