

# A HISTORY OF THE THAMES BRIDGES BETWEEN HAMPTON COURT AND EAST MOLESEY

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## THE FERRY

**I**N 1514 the manor of Hampton Court was acquired by Wolsey, who immediately began the erection of his magnificent palace. The activity occasioned by these building works, the transport of servants and workpeople, and later the journeyings of Wolsey with his long retinue, the visits of foreign diplomats and all the other various comings and goings, made it imperative that a ferry for the passage of the Thames in the immediate vicinity be made available and kept ready for use at all times. Especially was this so after Henry VIII had cast his envious eyes upon the place, accepted it as a gift, and installed himself as resident.

By 1536 a ferry appears to have been established, and together with another ferry from West Molesey to Hampton village was the property of the Crown as an appendage of the manor of Molesey Prior;<sup>1</sup> but both were at times leased to persons separately from the manor. In 1545 Hampton Court ferry was in the hands of "Thomas Sheparde of Molesey."<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Crane, lady of the manor of Molesey Prior (who became well known in connection with the famous Martin Marprelate affair), was granted by Letters Patent, dated 23 January 1585, a lease of both ferries "with the boat thereto belonging, and all tolls, customs, and profits," for twenty-one years at an annual rental of twenty shillings apiece.<sup>3</sup>

At the expiration of this lease, in 1606, they were granted by Letters Patent dated 27 May, to Lady Dorothy Edmondes, wife of Sir Christopher Edmondes, kt., lord of the manor of Molesey Matham, to hold for forty-one years at the same terms as those granted to Mrs. Crane.<sup>4</sup> This lease, together with the rest of the Edmondes's estate in Molesey, devolved upon Sir John Lytcott, Lady Edmondes's nephew, a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber of King James I, and brother-in-law to the unfortunate Overbury who was poisoned in the Tower. Sir John died on 16 September 1641, and lies buried in East Molesey church. Whereupon his widow and family sold his estate in Molesey, including the lease of the ferries,

<sup>1</sup> *Brayley (B. & W.)*, II, 75.

<sup>2</sup> *V.C.H. Middx.*, II, 322, quoting L. & P. Hen. viii, xix, 55.

<sup>3</sup> *Pat. Roll.*, 27 Eliz., pt. ii, m.6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 Jas. I, pt. xxi.

to Henry Pickering of London.<sup>5</sup> In June 1646, at the expiration of the lease, Pickering petitioned the Committee for His Majesty's Revenues praying "that the premises may be continued to him for such time as your Honours shall be thought meet."<sup>6</sup> This plea seems to have been granted. Later Pickering sold the leases to James Clarke, esq., whose son, afterwards Sir James Clarke, obtained a renewed lease of both ferries on 28 January 1667-8, for a fine of £450 and an annual rent of £2 14s. 2d., for a term of twenty-one years.<sup>7</sup> On 6 January 1675-6, Clarke petitioned the King that the length of this lease be made up to ninety-nine years. After reference to Sir Charles Harboard, Surveyor-General, this was granted on 12 March 1676-7.<sup>8</sup>

On 7 July 1648, the following letter was directed to the keeper of the ferry.

The better to prevent the confluence of people to those who have taken up arms against the Parliament and are now in and about Surrey, we desire you to take care that the horse-ferry boat be fixed on the Middlesex side at sun-setting and kept there till sunrise, and sufficient guards set upon that place so that none be suffered to pass in the daytime except market people and such as have business from the state and passes to warrant their crossing over.<sup>9</sup>

In the reign of Charles II Simon Winsloo the ferryman received ten shillings a quarter for ferrying over the workmen and labourers engaged on the works at Hampton Court palace.<sup>10</sup>

### THE FIRST BRIDGE

By the middle of the eighteenth century this slow and cumbersome method of transit had become so extremely inconvenient, and at times of flood even dangerous,<sup>11</sup> that Mr. James Clarke, grandson of Sir James Clarke mentioned above, the then lessee of the ferry, introduced a Bill into Parliament on 12 January 1750, to enable him to build a bridge here. Stating that "many mischiefs and inconveniences would be prevented and great benefits would arise to the inhabitants of the counties of Middlesex and Surrey and to the Publick in general, if a bridge were built across the river of Thames, from Hampton Court in the County of Middlesex, to the opposite shore at East Moulsey in the County of Surrey," a petition signed by a great number of influential gentlemen was presented to the House of Commons at the same time.<sup>12</sup> The Bill passed both Houses and received Royal assent on 15 April 1750. It enacted that "it would be lawful for the said James Clarke his heirs and assigns to build a bridge," and to make and erect such highways or bridges leading to the same as may be considered necessary. In the building thereof the builders were to have especial

<sup>5</sup> *M. & B.*, II, 783.

<sup>6</sup> *Cal. S.P. Dom.*, 1645-7, 450.

<sup>7</sup> *Cal. Treasury Books*, 1669-72, 7; 1676-9, 71; 1693-6, 881.

<sup>8</sup> *Cal. S.P. Dom.*, 1675-6, 532; *Hist. MSS. Com. Rep.*, LXXIV, 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1648-9, 171; *Sy.A.C.*, XIII, 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Harl. MSS.*, 1656, f.232; *V.C.H. Middx.*, II, 322.

<sup>11</sup> *Gents. Mag.*, xx, 588-9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, xx, 41.

regard to the neighbouring lands and tenements, and to provide and take care, from time to time, that there be no overflowing occasioned by the bridge, and "there must be left a free passage, for the water to run and flow through the arches of two hundred and sixty feet at least." In the case of dispute between parties five commissioners for the Land Tax for Middlesex and Surrey were to mediate and settle the damage and recompense.<sup>13</sup>

The bridge was designed and constructed by Samuel Stevens and Benjamin Ludgator, and was opened for the passage of traffic on 13 December 1753.<sup>14</sup> There are at least three different engravings of this bridge in existence. One, entitled "A Prospective view of Hampton Court Bridge cross the River of Thames," was engraved by Grignion after a drawing by A. Heckel, and shews the bridge, looking up the river (pl. *va*). Another, with a view from the other side of the bridge, was published in 1754 by Robert Sayer from a drawing by Canaletti, engraved by Hulet. A line drawing of the bridge appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in December 1753. It was a peculiar and crazy affair of very frail construction, with seven steep wooden arches: but not unpicturesque, and reminiscent in some respects of the "Willow Pattern."

Some of the wood for the construction of this bridge came from Selborne, and Gilbert White records that twenty trees were required "that were fifty feet long without bough, and would measure twelve inches diameter at the little end." These trees were sold at twenty pounds apiece.<sup>15</sup> An approach road two hundred and fifty yards long was constructed on the Surrey side, to connect the bridge with the existing highway.

### THE SECOND BRIDGE

Being of such light construction, however, this first bridge soon fell into decay, and after a life of only twenty-five years was demolished to make way for a bridge of more substantial character. The second bridge, which was erected on the same site and on the same abutments, was also built of wood, and was designed and constructed by a Mr. White, of Weybridge.<sup>16</sup> It was opened in 1778. The bridge was three hundred and fifty feet long and eighteen feet wide, in ten arches raised on piles, and surmounted by a low parapet;<sup>17</sup> it cost £7,000 to build (pl. *vb*). A toll house stood on the Middlesex bank, and on the middle of the lower side was a stairway leading to a landing stage. Samuel Ireland writing in 1791 described it as having a "light and pleasing effect."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "An Act for building a bridge cross the river of Thames from Hampton Court in the County of Middlesex to East Moulsey in the County of Surrey." 23 Geo. II, cap. 37.

<sup>14</sup> *Gents. Mag.*, xxiii, 588.

<sup>15</sup> Gilbert White, *The Nat. History of Selborne* (1788), 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> E. Law, *Hist. of Hampton Court Palace* (1885-91), III, 288.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*; quoting *Brayley (B. & B.)*, II, 307.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Ireland, *Picturesque Views of the River Thames* (1791), II, 81.

This bridge was more solidly constructed than its predecessor, and performed public service for close on a hundred years. However, for a number of years before it was finally demolished complaints against it were voiced; in fact one writer described it as "hog-backed, crazy, inconvenient, and obstructive of the navigation."<sup>19</sup> Several public meetings were held in the "Prince of Wales" hotel in East Molesey to "press for better bridge accommodation between the parishes of Hampton and Moulsey." An editorial article in the *Surrey Comet* had this to say: "The inadequacy of the present bridge is too well known a fact to all the locality to need argument. It is hard to say anything in favour of that rickety old structure. Ugly and hog-backed in appearance it is neither safe nor convenient for the traffic either above or below. It is an object of ridicule for the multitude of foreigners who annually throng to Hampton Court Palace." The owners at this time tried to attribute the dilapidation of the bridge to the construction of the lock and weir; they said that when the bridge was first built the current flowed directly under it, but since the erection of Molesey lock the stream had been deflected. However just this may have been, the City of London, the owners of the lock, disclaimed liability and refused to pay compensation.<sup>20</sup>

In 1862 a company known as the "Thames Bridges Company" was floated, with the object of promoting legislation in Parliament to erect several bridges over the Thames. At Hampton Court they intended to erect a new bridge, slightly upstream from the existing one, and to build road approaches thereto.<sup>21</sup> This proposition evidently fell through, for on Wednesday, 11 March 1863, at a public meeting held at the "Prince of Wales" hotel, with the Rev. Charles Scott, vicar of St. Paul's church East Molesey in the chair, Mr. Allen, the owner of the bridge, offered to construct a new bridge within two years to the satisfaction of the Conservancy and to modify the tolls.<sup>22</sup>

### THE THIRD BRIDGE

By May 1864, work had already commenced on the new bridge,<sup>23</sup> and later, as it was being built on the same site, the old bridge was pulled down, and traffic had again to be ferried over. The bridge was completed and opened in 1865 (pl. viA). It was constructed of wrought-iron lattice girders, in five spans resting on four pairs of octagonal cast-iron columns sunk sixteen feet into the river bed, and on brick abutments.<sup>24</sup> The lower members of the lattice girder were curved to form the arch, and on this mouldings were laid by way of decoration. Over each pier was a cast-iron representation of the

<sup>19</sup> James Thorne, *Rambles by Rivers; The Thames* (1849), II, 79-80; Russell Sedgfield, *The Thames* (1866-7).

<sup>20</sup> F. S. Thacker, *The Thames Highway; Locks and Weirs* (1920), 449.

<sup>21</sup> *Surrey Comet*, 1862.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 March 1863.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 May 1864.

<sup>24</sup> James Dredge, *Thames Bridges from the Tower to the source* (1897), I, 101.

arms and crest of the owner, Mr. Thomas Newland Allen: one of these is preserved on a brick wall leading to the present bridge on the Surrey side. The roadway, which was twenty feet wide with a five-foot wide footpath on the upstream side, was constructed of wooden planks laid diagonally on transverse beams. The outer spans were each sixty-six feet across, the intermediate ones seventy-one feet, and the centre seventy-six feet. The total weight of cast iron used was one hundred and forty tons, and of wrought iron two hundred and eighty-six tons.<sup>25</sup> The approach was between battlemented brick walls, one of which still stands on the Surrey shore, and a brick toll-house stood on the Middlesex side. The bridge was designed by Mr. E. T. Murray, engineer, of Westminster Chambers, and with appurtenances cost a total of £11,176.<sup>26</sup>

### THE FOURTH BRIDGE

With the continued use of the internal combustion engine this (third) bridge became totally inadequate for the extended volume of traffic it was called upon to deal with, especially on the occasions of Hurst Park races and Hampton Court fairs. In 1923 the Ministry of Transport made an order restricting the weight and speed of vehicles using the bridge.<sup>27</sup> In 1928 the Middlesex and Surrey County Councils obtained an Act of Parliament authorizing them to close and demolish the old bridge and construct a new one with the necessary linking roads and other dependent works.<sup>28</sup>

In September 1930 work commenced, slightly downstream, on the building of the fourth and present bridge. This necessitated the demolition of the old "Castle Hotel," a noted Thames-side inn which had stood here since about 1620; the diverting of the River Mole into the Ember, adjacent to Molesey Mill; the pulling down of two old wooden bridges which served as an entry into Hampton Court station; the filling in of the old channel; and the widening and straightening of the River Ember to receive the combined waters of the two rivers. A new approach road, connecting the bridge with the Portsmouth Road and the Kingston-by-pass, was constructed by the Surrey County Council.

The bridge (pl. vi**b**) is a handsome structure of ferro-concrete, the only Thames bridge so built, faced with red brick and Portland stone, in the style of the "Wren" portions of Hampton Court palace. It was designed by Mr. W. P. Robinson, M.I.C.E., County Engineer for Surrey, with the collaboration of Sir Edwin Lutyens, R.A., and has three arches, the outers being each ninety feet across and the inner one, one hundred and five; the carriageway is forty feet wide and the footpaths each fifteen feet. The bridge was built by Messrs. Holloway Bros. (London) Ltd. It was informally opened to

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Law, *op. cit.* III, 286-90; Ripley, *Hist. & Topog. of Hampton on Thames*, 82.

<sup>27</sup> *Surrey Comet*, 16 Oct. 1923.

<sup>28</sup> The Middlesex and Surrey (Thames Bridges) Act, 1928.

traffic on Sunday, 9 April 1933, when a procession of local people with torchlights and decorated cars passed over. The formal opening ceremony was performed by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, on Monday, 3 July 1933; the Thames bridges at Twickenham and Chiswick were opened at the same time.

The original design provided for four kiosks, two at each end of the bridge, which were to have cost £8,000; but these, after much controversy, were abandoned on both economic and æsthetic grounds.

### TOLLS

The original Act of Parliament which enabled James Clarke to construct the first bridge laid down that it was to be built entirely at his cost and would be vested in him, his heirs and assigns; and he was permitted to levy certain tolls:—

For every Coach, Chariot, Landau, Berlin, Chaise, Chair, Calash, or other vehicle drawn by six or more Horses, the sum of two shillings and six pence. For every Coach, etc. with four Horses, one shilling and six pence. For every Coach, etc. with less than four Horses, one shilling. For every Wagon, Wain, Dray, Car, Cart, or other carriage, drawn by four or more Horses or Oxen, the sum of one shilling and six pence; and by less than four Horses or Oxen, the sum of one shilling. For every Horse, Mule, or Ass, laden or unladen, and not drawing, the sum of two pence. For every foot passenger on Sundays, one penny; and on every other day, one halfpenny. For every Drove of Oxen or neat Cattle, the sum of Twelve pence per score; and after that rate for any greater or less number. For every Drove of Calves, Hogs, Sheep, or Lambs, the sum of sixpence per score; and after that rate for any greater or less number.<sup>29</sup>

It was provided, however, that if the Crown on the expiration of Mr. Clarke's lease in 1766 should elect to defray the expenses of building and maintaining the bridge, both his right and the payment of the tolls would cease, and the bridge would vest with the King.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately this very wise proviso was never adopted; and as early as 1794 complaint was made of the very high toll taken of all passengers and carriages.<sup>31</sup>

Mr. James Clarke died in 1758; his heirs appear to have sold the bridge before 1800, for in that year it was in the ownership of Lord Brownlow,<sup>32</sup> and later of Thomas Newland Allen, of Newlands in Buckinghamshire.

As was usual with proprietary bridges, the owner farmed out the tolls, which were auctioned and leased to the highest bidder. It was computed in 1854 that the average revenue was about £1,500 per annum, paying between twenty and thirty per cent upon the cost. As much as £300 would be taken in one day when the races were on.<sup>33</sup> In 1862, they were leased for £2,029,<sup>34</sup> but seven years later the

<sup>29</sup> 23 Geo. II, cap. 37.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Thacker, *op. cit.* 448; G. A. Cooke, *Topog. Description of Surrey* (1817), 95.

<sup>32</sup> S. Lysons, *Environs of London*, v.

<sup>33</sup> Report of the Parliamentary Committee to enquire into the state of bridges over the Thames.

<sup>34</sup> *Surrey Comet*, 8 Nov. 1862.

value had risen so much that although £2,300 was offered they were withdrawn from auction as the bidding did not reach the reserve price.<sup>35</sup> In 1870, when this lucrative trade was fleecing the long suffering populace to the estimated tune of £3,000 a year, it was urged at an East Molesey vestry meeting that the parishioners should agitate "as the only way to induce the powers that be to free Hampton Court Bridge from toll, and thus enable them to rejoice, like their Kingston neighbours. How many more vehicles would pass through Molesey if they were not charged 6d. for going over the bridge?"<sup>36</sup>

In 1872 the East Molesey Local Board joined the agitation with a request to the City of London to free the bridge.<sup>37</sup> At last, however, in 1876, the Metropolitan Board of Works purchased the bridge for the sum of £4,800, the money coming from part of the duty on coal and wine entering the metropolis, which they were permitted to spend on freeing bridges in and around London; and on 8 July of that year the tolls were extinguished and the bridge was declared "free for ever."<sup>38</sup> The news of this event caused much jubilation in the neighbourhood; a firework display was given on Hampton Court Green which was estimated to have cost twenty-five pounds.<sup>39</sup> The posts of the old toll-gate were dismantled and re-erected at the entrance to Hampton parish church, where they still stand.<sup>40</sup> The toll-house is now the public bar of the "Mitre" hotel.

In spite of the long list of vehicles specified in the original Act to be subject to toll, there appeared before the bridge was freed a new one which the drafters of the Act could never have foreseen—the bicycle. It is reported that on the occasion of the annual monster meeting of cyclists, which took place on the Green at Hampton Court each May, the frantic keeper of the toll-gate was frenzied with indignation at being confronted with crowds of cyclists each carrying his machine on his shoulder and demanding in vain to cross over as a foot passenger.<sup>41</sup> How the toll-keeper extracted himself from this dilemma, and what toll he did charge is not, however, disclosed.

Thoms records an amusing story concerning the bridge. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the renter was a man named James Feltham, who first came to the district as a cobbler, and succeeded in this so well that he was able to acquire a long lease of the bridge. He spent a considerable amount on renovations, and "as he was anxious to thrive from his tolls he kept the gate locked when nothing was passing. One morning the Royal hunt came across Hounslow Heath to the bridge, where the stag had taken water and swam across. The hounds passed the gate without ceremony, followed by a large party, crying, 'the King'. Feltham

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1869.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Jan. 1873.

<sup>39</sup> Ripley, *op. cit.* 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

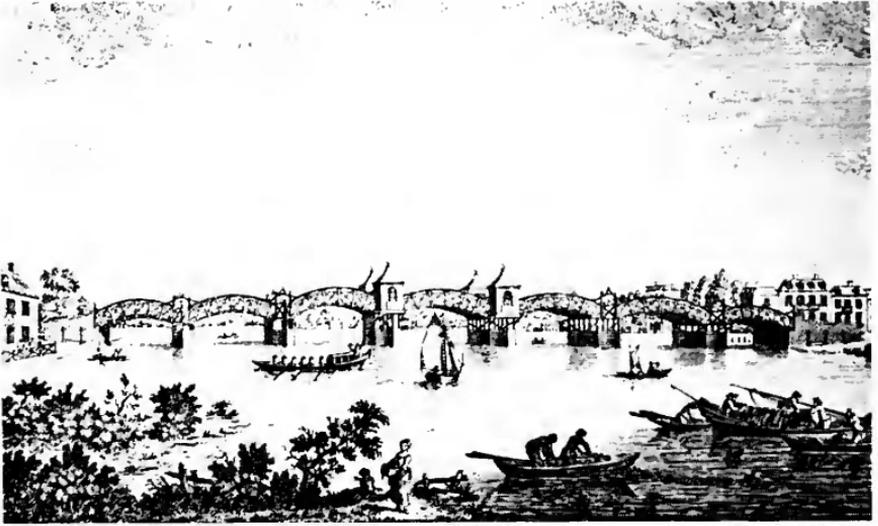
<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 March 1870.

<sup>38</sup> Law, *op. cit.* III, 290.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

opened the gate, which he closed again after they had rushed through without paying. Soon a more numerous and showy party came up, vociferating more loudly, 'the King.' He stood with his gate in his hand, though menaced with horse-whips. 'I'll tell you what,' said he, 'hang me if I open my gate again until I see your money. I pay £400 a year for this bridge, and I laid out £1,000 upon it. I've let King George through, God bless him; I know of no other king in England. If you have brought the king of France, hang me if I let him through without the blunt.' Suddenly the King himself appeared among his attendants. Feltham made his reverence, opened his gate again, and the whole company went over to Moulsey Hurst, where the hounds were at fault. The King, chagrined for the moment, sent back Lord Sandwich to know the reason for the interruption. The man explained his mistake, and added that when Royal hunts passed over the bridge a guinea had always been paid, which franked all, and that this was his 'first good turn.' Lord Sandwich returned to the King, but His Majesty hastily desired him to pay for all his attendants, who amounted to no less than forty of the whole party. The matter was eventually explained to the King, and when crossing the bridge some time afterwards on a visit to the Stadtholder, then resident at Hampton Court, he pulled down the carriage window, and laughing heartily said to old Feltham 'no fear of the king of France coming today.'"<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> W. J. Thoms, *Book of the Court* (2nd ed., 1844), 43.



*a.* THE FIRST BRIDGE, LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (p. 81) GRIGNON'S ENGRAVING, ENTITLED "A PROSPECTIVE VIEW OF HAMPTON COURT BRIDGE CROSS THE RIVER OF THAMES."



*b.* SECOND HAMPTON COURT BRIDGE, *c.* 1850 (p. 81) VIEW FROM THE MIDDLESEX BANK SHOWING TOLL-HOUSE AND GATE.



*a.* THIRD HAMPTON COURT BRIDGE (1865): VIEW FROM THE RIVER MOLE ON THE SURREY SIDE (p. 82).



*b.* FOURTH HAMPTON COURT BRIDGE, 1959. FROM THE SURREY BANK, UPSTREAM (p. 83).