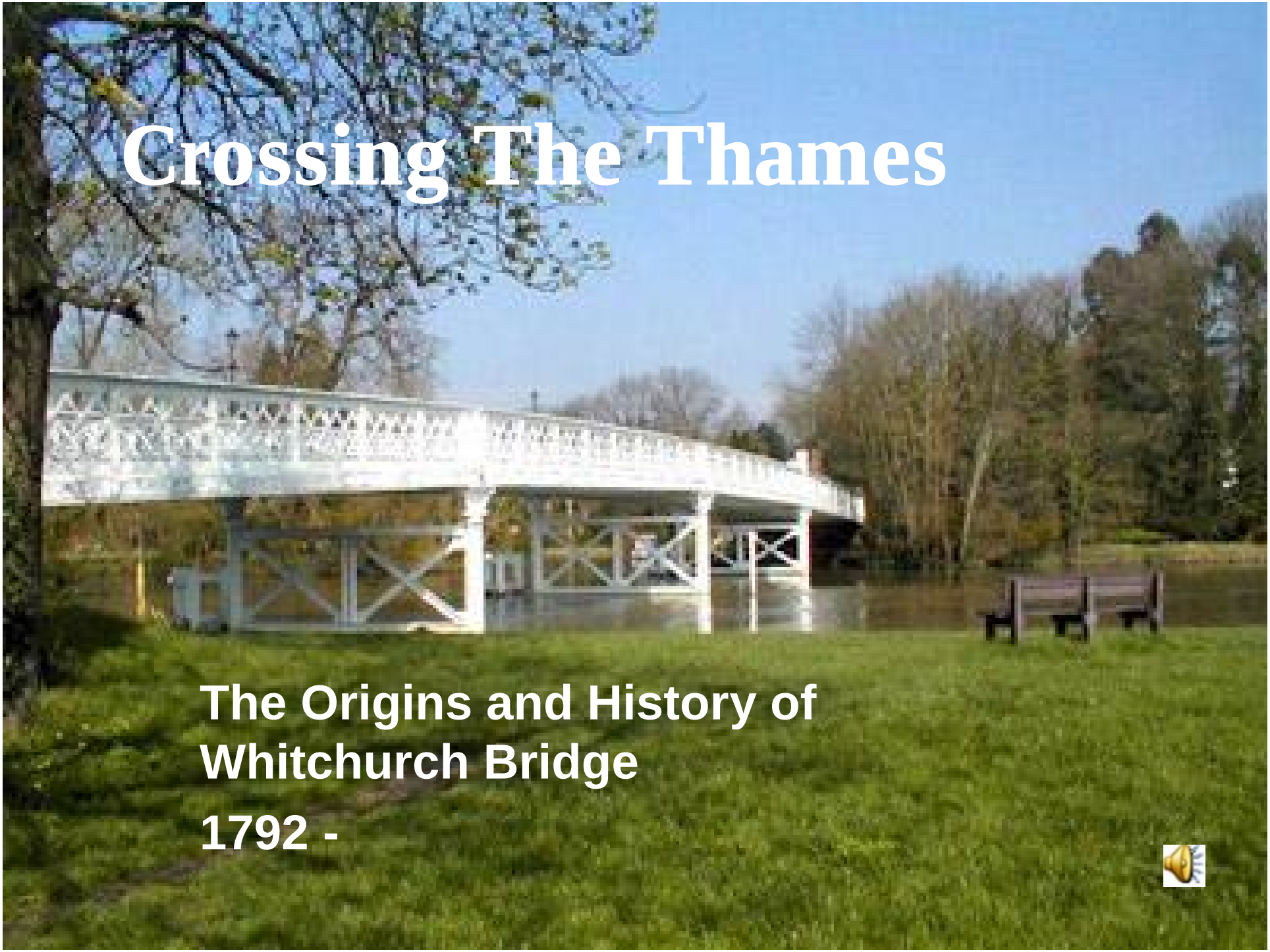
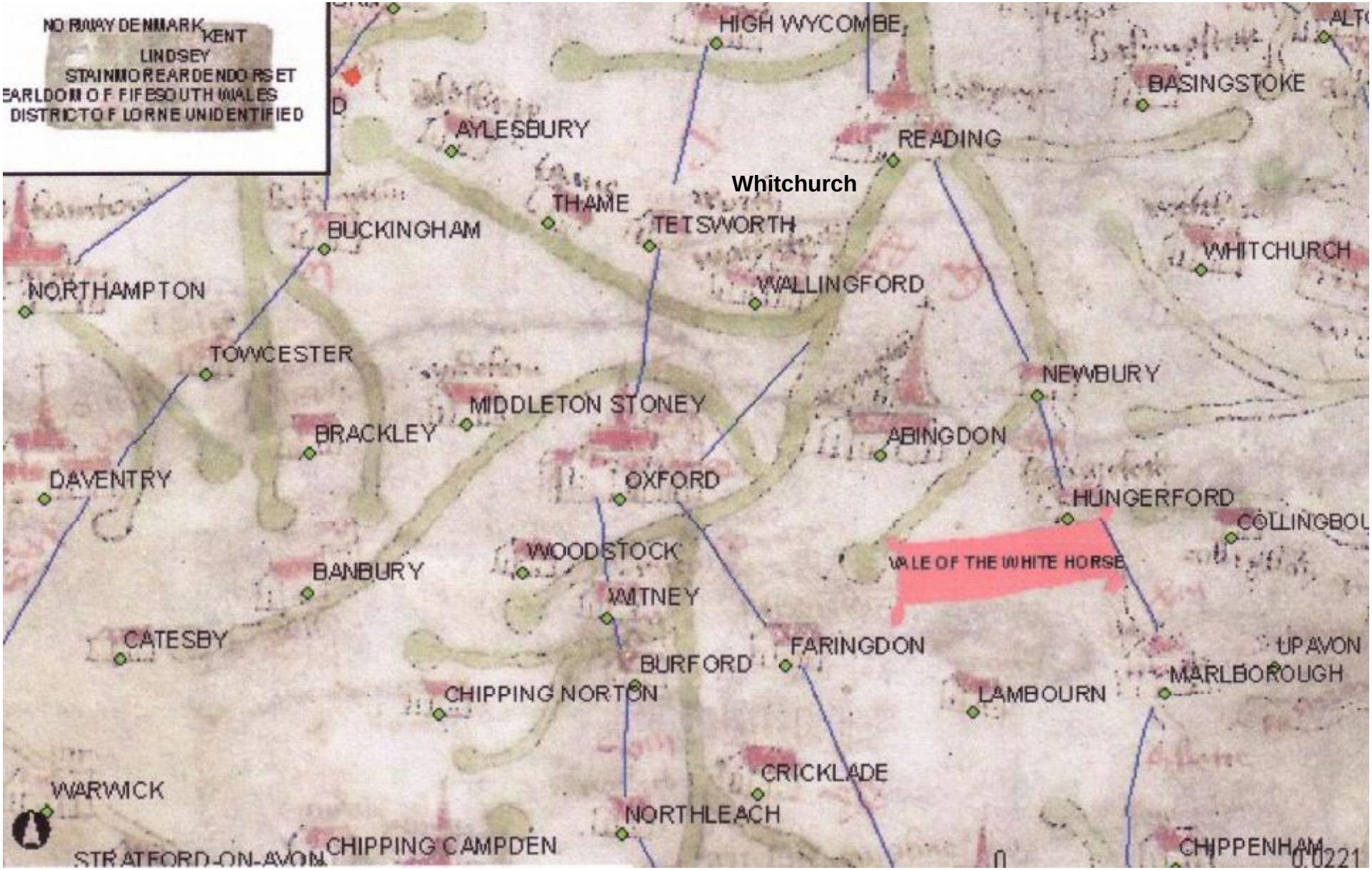

Crossing The Thames
The Origins and History of
Whitchurch Bridge
1792 -

Before 1750

- Few well maintained roads and bridges
  - In this area main highways were
    - London – Maidenhead – Reading – Newbury (Bath Road)
    - London – High Wycombe – Tetsworth – Oxford and thence to Witney, Farringdon and Abingdon
- Minor roads were local responsibility and often little more than muddy tracks
- Although the gentry would have horses and carriages there was little organised or regular transport
- Rivers and later canals were the main means of transport for goods
- Animals were transported over large distances by drove roads

The Gough Map c1360 (East at the top)



Fords and Ferries

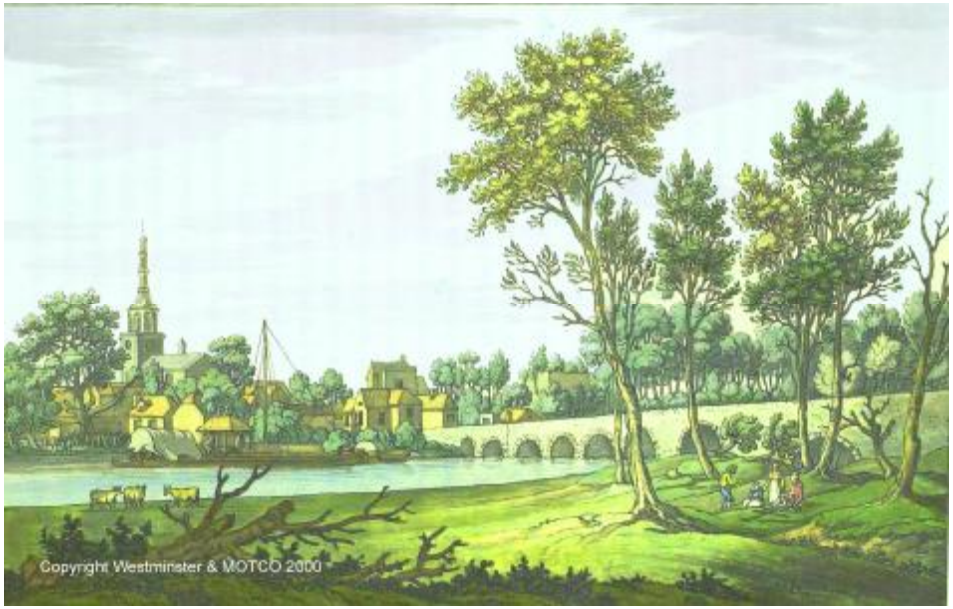
- **Apart from the crossing places of the great roads the passages over the Thames were of two sorts: the original fords, and ferries at key crossings.**
- **Above Goring names ending with the word "ford" are numerous – Duxford, Moulsford, Wallingford, Shillingford, Sandford, Oxford. Wallingford was probably the walled or embattled ford, and Oxford almost certainly the ford of the droves – droves going north from Berkshire.**
- **Bridges were already in existence at Wallingford and Caversham but crossings at Whitchurch, Goring and Shillingford were by ferry**

A Typical Ferry

The early Thames Bridges

- **The repair of bridges has at all times been a great source of anxiety. Chapter 23 of Magna Carta stated that "No village or individual shall be compelled to make bridges at river banks except those who from old were legally bound to do so." This presumably also covered the questions of repair and many Inquisitions were taken in medieval times to settle who should do the work. A very common verdict was that "No one is responsible for their repair of this bridge".**
- **As a consequence "grants of pontage" or licences to collect tolls for a limited period were frequently issued by the King to those appointed or permitted to bear the cost of maintenance, but these did not meet the requirements of the new age of transport.**
- **During the eighteenth century many acts of Parliament were passed dealing with the construction of new toll bridges.**

Thames Bridges before the 18th century

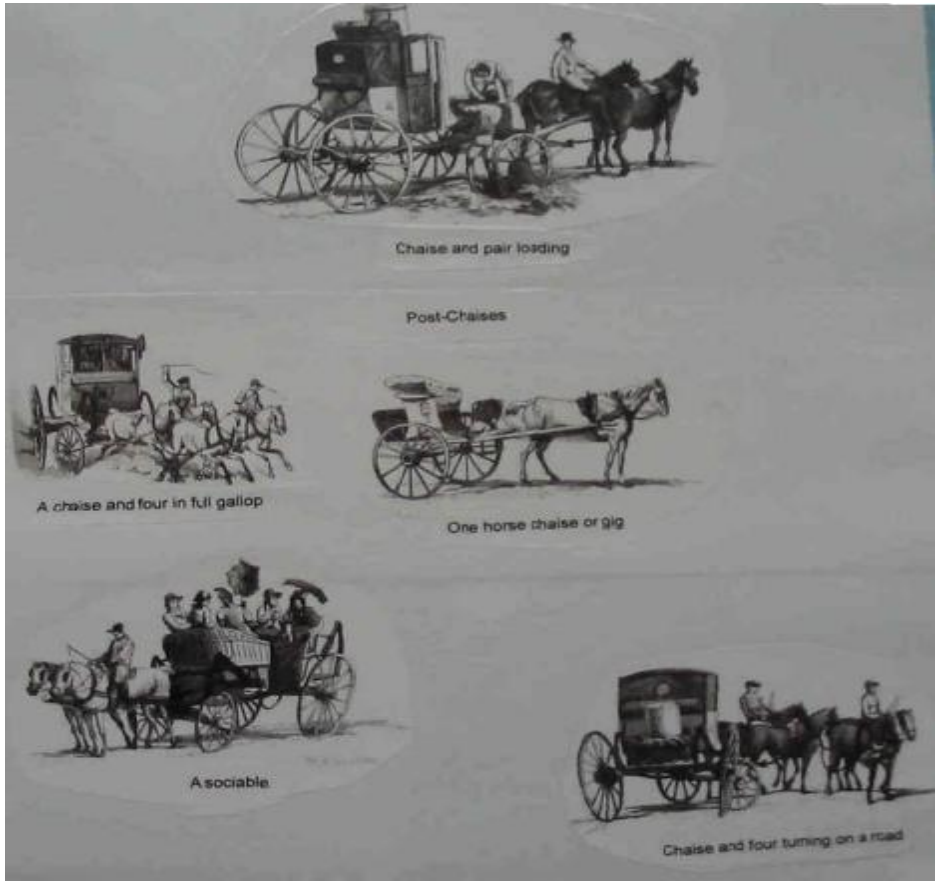


Wallingford Bridge
13th century
Extensively repaired in 1530

Caversham Bridge
In existence in 1231
Wooden and very narrow
with chapel in the middle

The 18th Century Transport Revolution

- Increased travel by carriage drove major changes in transportation and roads
- Previous standards of road and bridge construction were no longer acceptable



The Turnpike System

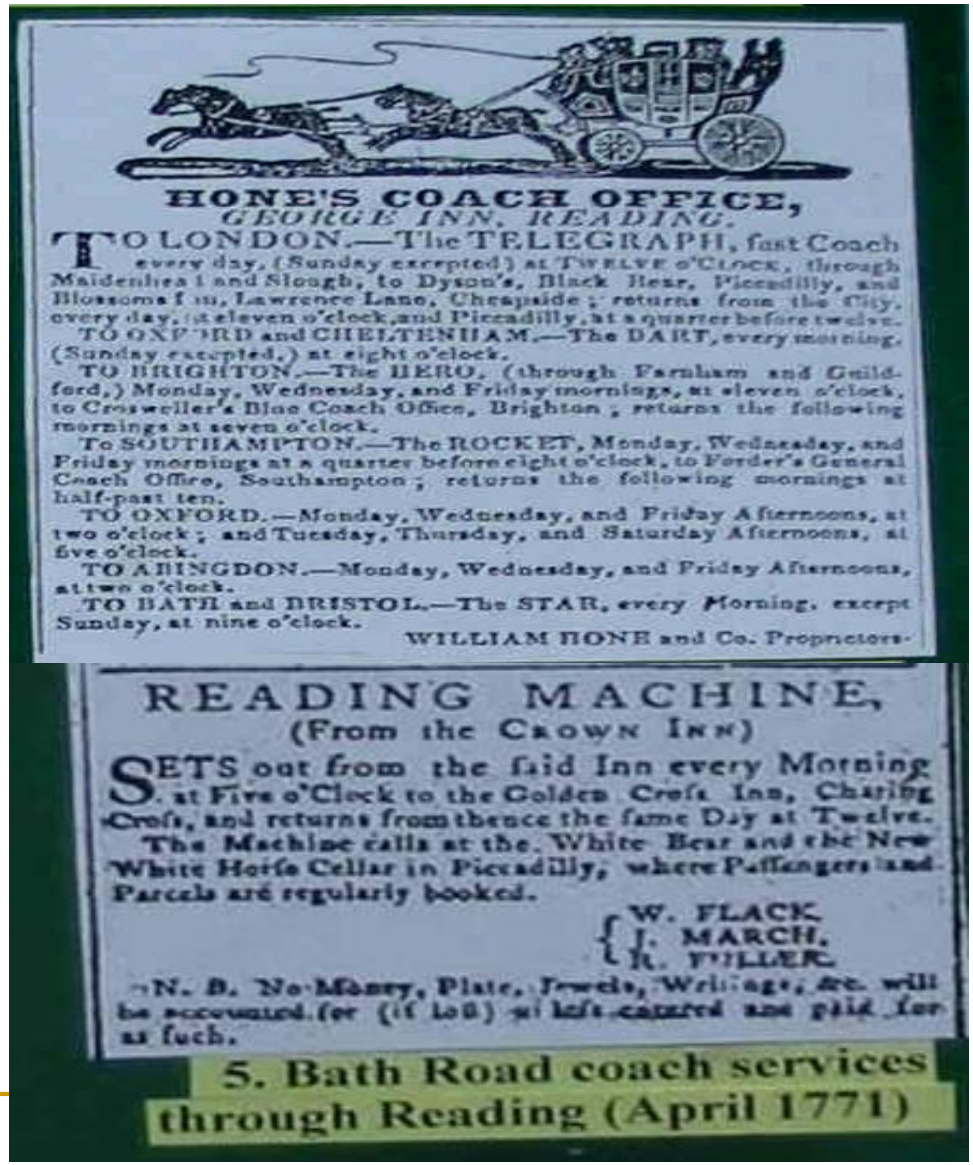
- **Between 1750 and 1840 more than 600 turnpike trusts were established covering 22,000 miles of roads**
- Turnpike trusts were corporate bodies which could be established only by acts of Parliament.
- An act could authorise a trust to borrow money on the security of its expected tolls, and to buy land for widening an existing road or making a new road.
- They were responsible for erecting tollgates, side bars (for pedestrians) and tollhouses. The trustees were mainly local landowning gentry together with professional people.
- The clerk, usually a local solicitor, was responsible for managing the business affairs. A local banker was often appointed as treasurer, and there was at least one surveyor.
- Trusts were usually established initially for 21 years although many were renewed for a further term

Turnpikes through Pangbourne

- 1764 Turnpike Trust created to build a new bridge over the Thames at Shillingford and maintain the road through Pangbourne to Reading “which is in many places very narrow, and in others very deep and ruinous” according to the Act
- 1771 new turnpike road constructed from Pangbourne to Theale, leading south towards Basingstoke and Southampton
- These Trusts survived until the 1870s

Stage and Mail Coaches

- The rapid development of coaching services together with the new roads gave Britain the finest transport system in the world
- New services were fast and punctual
- Between 1750 and 1830 the number of coaches increased tenfold and long distance journey times fell from 4 – 5 days to 12 – 15 hours
- The introduction of mail coaches from the 1780s stimulated further innovations in speed and comfort



HONE'S COACH OFFICE,
GEORGE INN, READING.

TO LONDON.—The TELEGRAPH, fast Coach every day, (Sunday excepted) at TWELVE o'CLOCK, through Maidenhead and Slough, to Dyson's, Black Bear, Piccadilly, and Blossoms Inn, Lawrence Lane, Cheapside; returns from the City, every day, at eleven o'clock, and Piccadilly, at a quarter before twelve.

TO OXFORD and CHELTENHAM.—The DART, every morning, (Sunday excepted,) at eight o'clock.

TO BRIGHTON.—The HERO, (through Farnham and Guildford,) Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings, at eleven o'clock, to Croswellier's Blue Coach Office, Brighton; returns the following mornings at seven o'clock.

To SOUTHAMPTON.—The ROCKET, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings at a quarter before eight o'clock, to Forder's General Coach Office, Southampton; returns the following mornings at half-past ten.

TO OXFORD.—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday Afternoons, at two o'clock; and Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday Afternoons, at five o'clock.

TO ABINGDON.—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday Afternoons, at two o'clock.

TO BATH and BRISTOL.—The STAR, every Morning, except Sunday, at nine o'clock.

WILLIAM HONE and Co. Proprietors.

READING MACHINE,
(From the CROWN INN)

SETS out from the said Inn every Morning at Five o'Clock to the Golden Cross Inn, Charing Cross, and returns from thence the same Day at Twelve.

The Machine calls at the White Bear and the New White Horse Cellar in Piccadilly, where Passengers and Parcels are regularly booked.

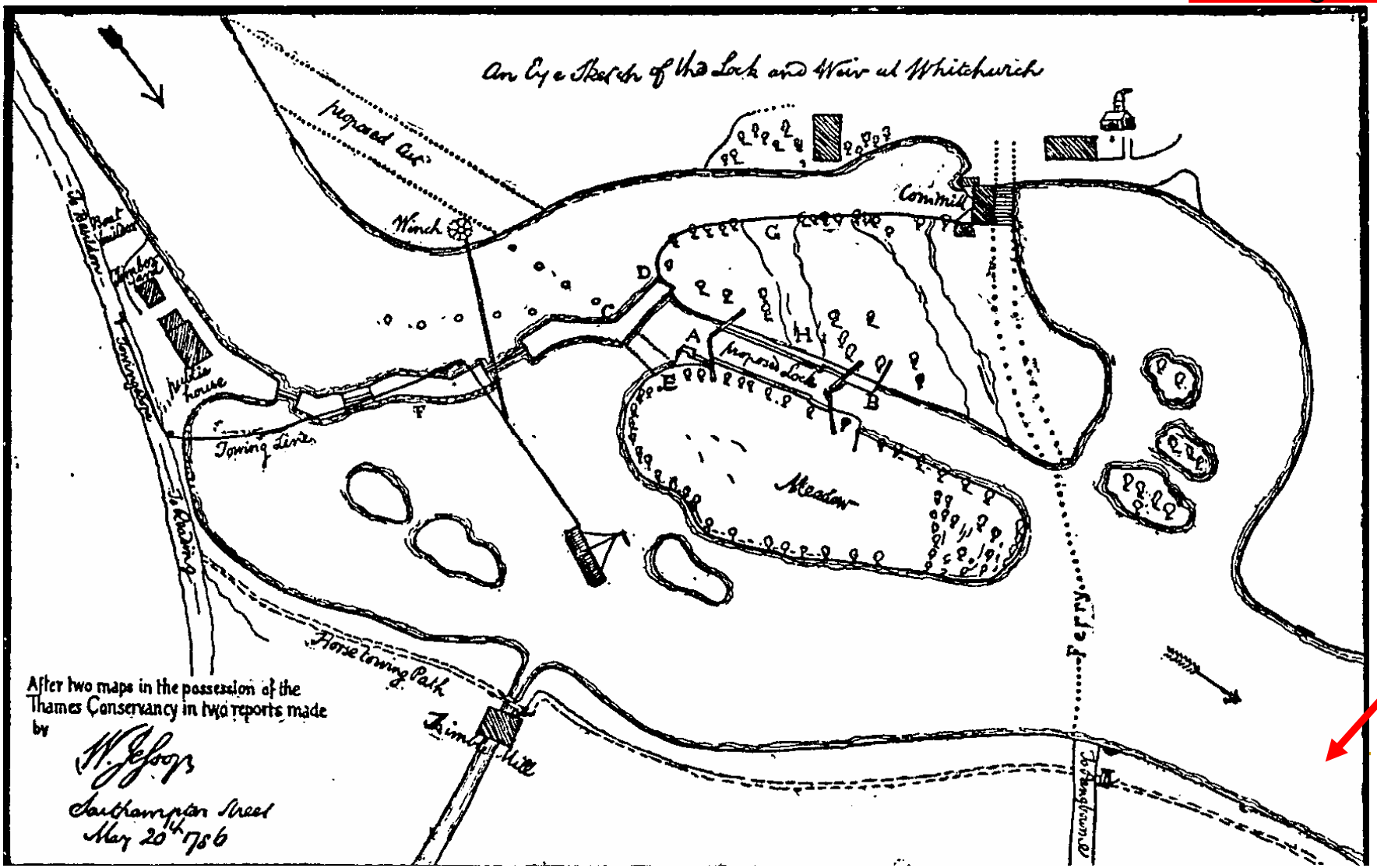
W. FLACK.
J. MARCH.
R. FULLER.

N. B. No Money, Plate, Jewels, Writings, &c. will be accounted for (if lost) if left entered and paid for as such.

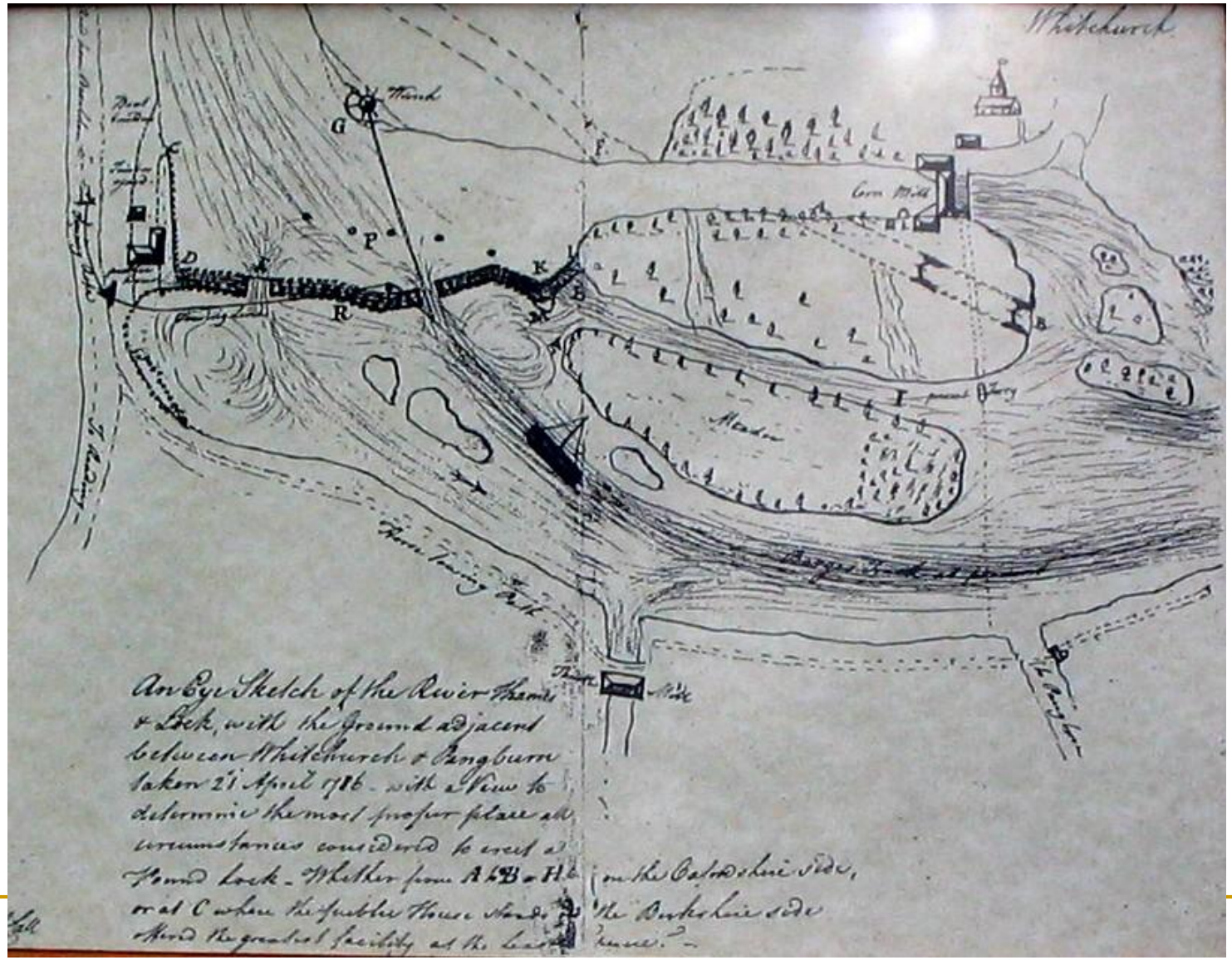
5. Bath Road coach services through Reading (April 1771)

Whitchurch Lock The 1786 drawing showing where the ferry used to run

Site of proposed bridge



Whitchurch Lock as originally proposed



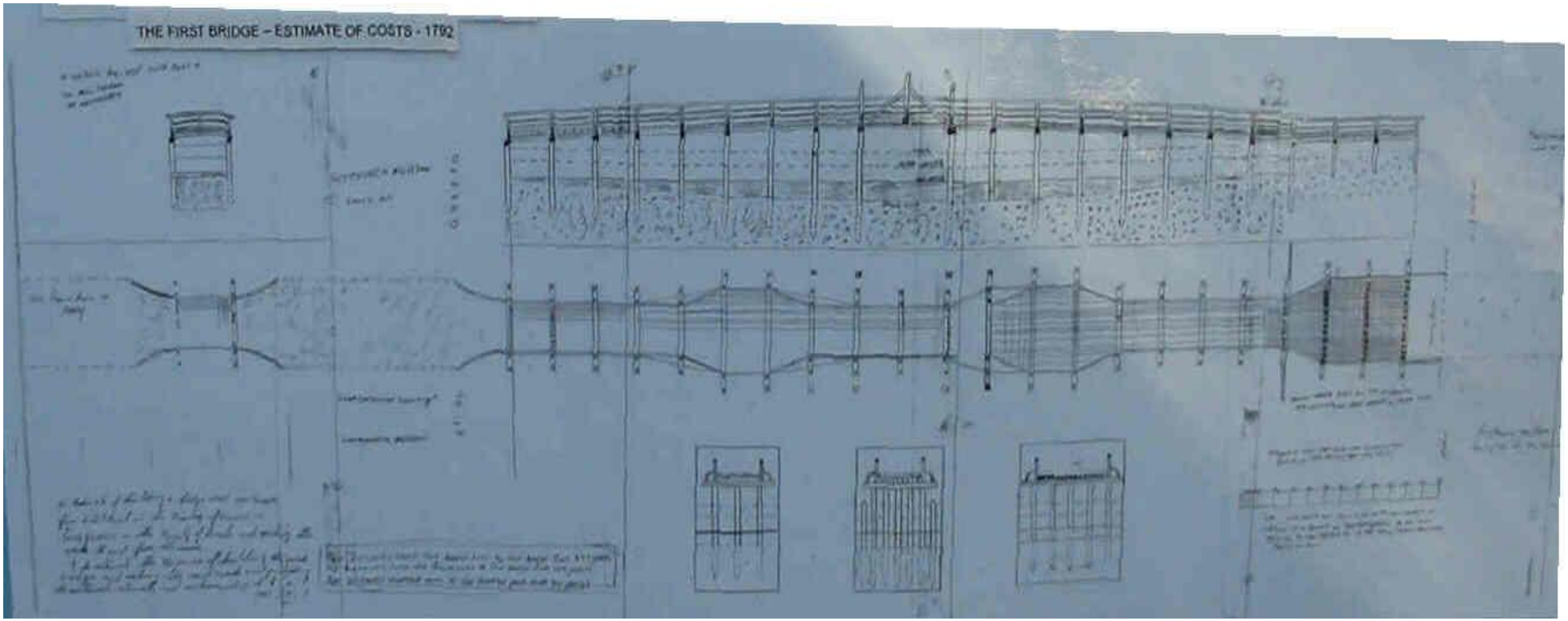
The Origins of the Whitchurch Bridge

- *"WHEREAS the building of a Bridge, at or near the Ferry over the River Thames, from Whitchurch, in the County of Oxford, to the opposite shore in the Parish of Pangbourn, in the County of Berks, will be of great utility and advantage to the public" (Preamble to the 1792 Act)*
- Original Proprietors *James Peter Auriol, Esquire, the Reverend John Symonds Breedon, Samuel Gardiner, Esquire, the Reverend Coventry Lichfield, Doctor of Divinity, the Reverend John Lichfield, Robert Micklem, Esquire, Richard Southby, Esquire, Jonathan Tanner, William Vanderstegen, Esquire, and William Vanderstegen, Esquire, Junior*
- A Company not a Trust (Shareholders not Trustees)
- Responsible for maintaining bridge "in perpetuity" not for a fixed time
- In 1792 the bill was put before Parliament and this was passed in time to start work on the new bridge in June.
- By November the bridge and approach roads had been constructed and the bridge was open to traffic.

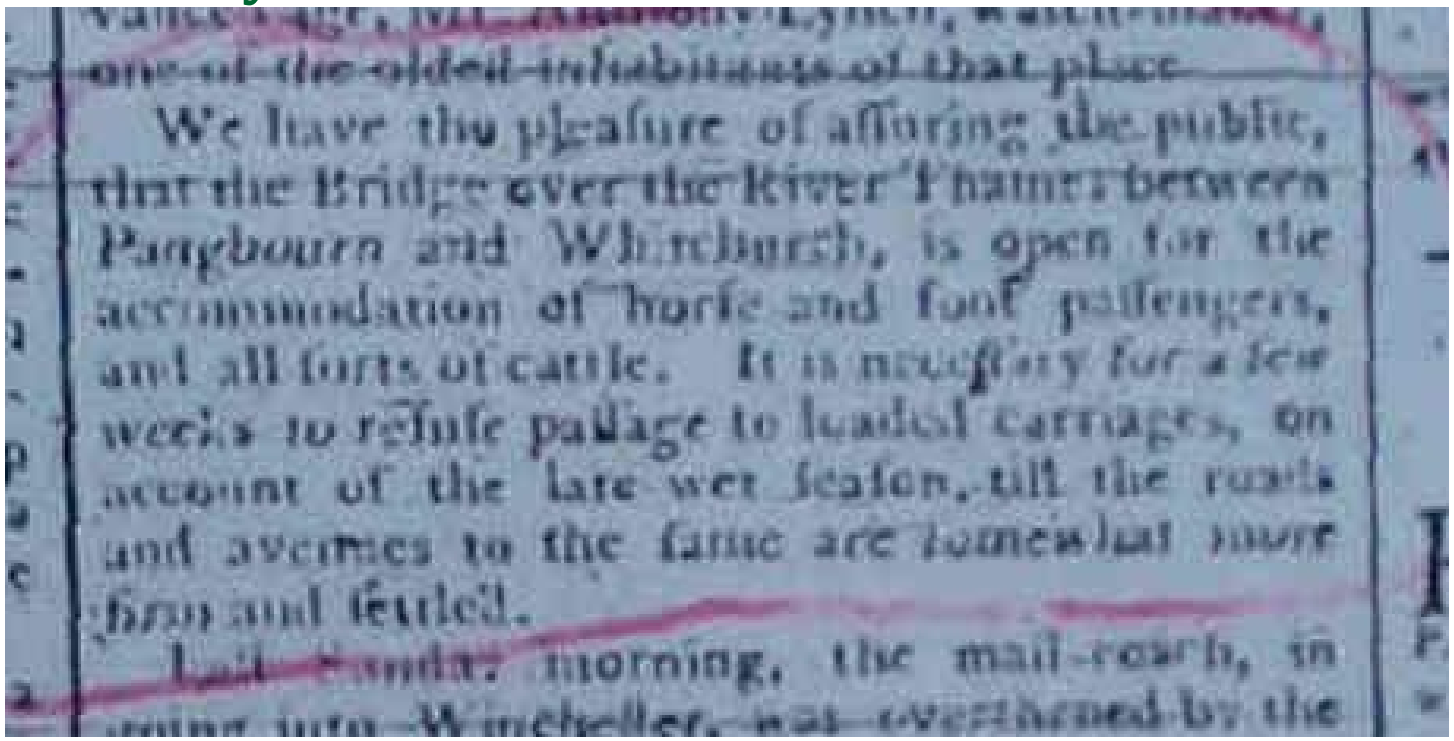
Drawing relating to the first bridge

(copied by Clive George of Woodcote)

Built 1792
Constructed of wood to a design by Mr Treacher with 20 piers
Wide enough to take a carriage – 12 ft
Cost £2,400 (equivalent to £240,000 today)



Reading Mercury –published Monday 12th November 1792



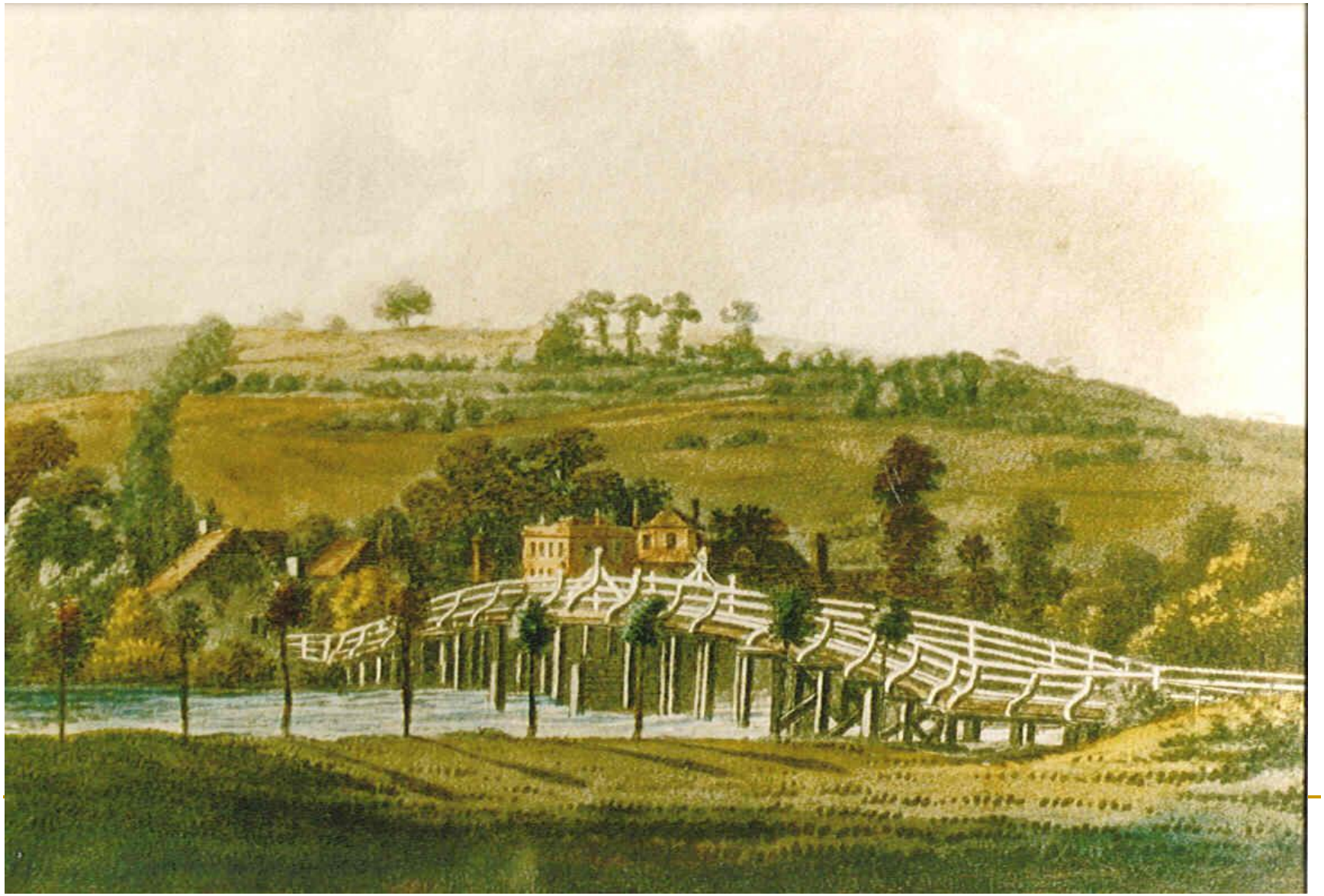
We have the pleasure of assuring the public that the bridge over the River Thames between Pangbourn and Whitchurch is open for the accommodation of horse and foot passengers and all sorts of cattle. It is necessary for a few weeks to refuse passage to loaded carriages, on account of the late wet season, till the roads and avenues to the same are somewhat more firm and settled

The First Tolls

- The first toll was collected on November 20th 1792.
- Tolls of 2d per wheel for carriages would be the equivalent of £1 today
- The toll keeper was Mrs Waters, who had with her late husband operated the ferry at Whitchurch. She was an employee of the company and earned £16.00 per annum and lived in the toll house. She worked until her death in 1820/21.
- The tolls were ‘sold’ to toll ‘farmers’ after this period until 1902, when the new toll collector was an employee.

A print of the Thames at Whitchurch in 1793

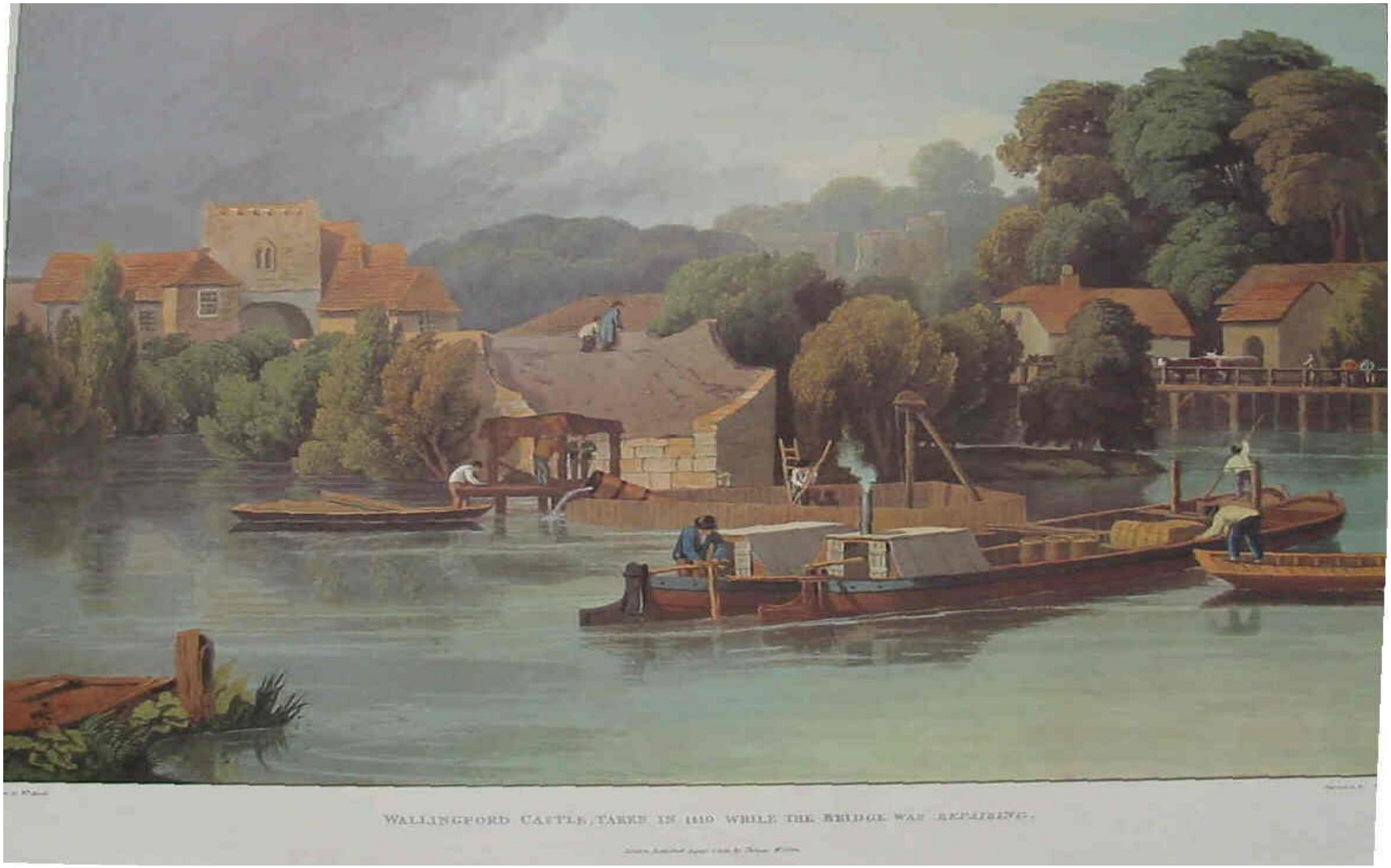
The First Bridge in 1805



Other Thames Bridges -Swinford Bridge

- **Swinford Bridge near Eynsham was built under Act of Parliament for the 4th Earl of Abingdon and opened in 1769. It cost £4,850 to build. It was expecting to yield £500 per annum after ten years but did not reach that figure for many years. It has 9 stone arches. It replaced the ferry by which even John Wesley had crossed. Until the A40 was built in the mid 1930s it was the main route for vehicles travelling between London and Gloucester / South Wales.**
- **The Act gave the Earl power to lower the tolls but not to raise them. In 1853 the fifth Earl made the bridge free to pedestrians, while in 1900 the charge for a bicycle was reduced from 2 to 1/2d. Fifty years later it was found that the wording of the Act permitted the spare wheel of a car to be charged for, so the toll went up to 5d which became 2p with decimalisation.**
- **It remains the only other Thames toll bridge still operating today**

Wallingford Bridge rebuilding 1810



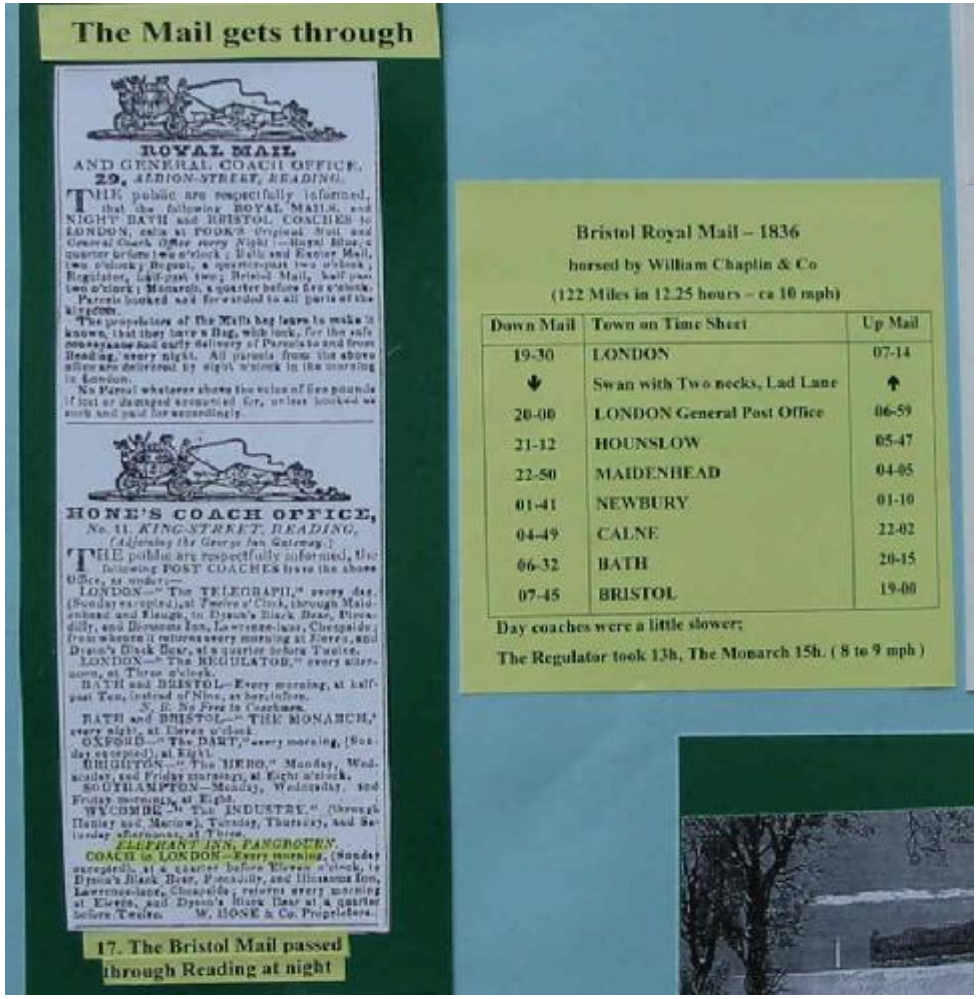
The aquatint by Robert Havell shows the work of reconstruction. It depicts a pair of typical canal craft of the type evolved for work on canals. The completion of the Thames & Severn and Oxford Canals in 1789-90 brought these narrow boats on to the Thames.

Goring & Streatley Bridge

- **May be the oldest of all the Thames crossings where the Ridge Way and the Icknield Way come down to the river**
- **Garrisoned by the Romans who built a raised causeway. This remained useable until the completion of Goring Lock in 1797 but for much of the time it was supplemented by a ferry, which Henry I granted to the Augustinian priory founded at Goring. Henry VIII dissolved their order and gave it to his Sergeant at Arms, John Stonor in 1538.**
- **By raising the water level Goring Lock made the causeway unusable and the ferry more dangerous. In 1810 after a number of people had been drowned in the overturning of a ferry boat, the Thames Commissioners invited subscriptions towards the cost of building a carriage bridge. Because of the poor response they proposed a narrower horse bridge. This too failed to arouse interest and the scheme was abandoned. Twenty five years later 79 local gentlemen banded together to seek powers for the building of a toll bridge. The Act of 1837 stresses the "Great Utility and Advantage" of a bridge. The original commissioners were empowered to raise £9,000 on mortgage to build the bridge, purchase lands for the approach roads and buy out the ferryman, Moses Saunders. Tolls were 1 1/2d for every foot passenger, 3d for a dog drawing a cart, 1s for a carriage with four wheels and 2s per wheel for any vehicle moved or propelled by steam or machinery "other than animal power".**
- **The single storey toll cottage and gates were set up on the central island. In 1890 the toll for pedestrians was reduced to 1/2d and a few years later, after the Toll cottage burnt down, the local Council took over the bridge and tolls were no longer collected**

Coaching and Mail Services in the 1830s

- Mail services took precedence over everything else
- They ran to a timetable and could travel from London to Bristol in 12 hours on the improved roads
- This was the peak of the coaching and turnpike era before the coming of the railways



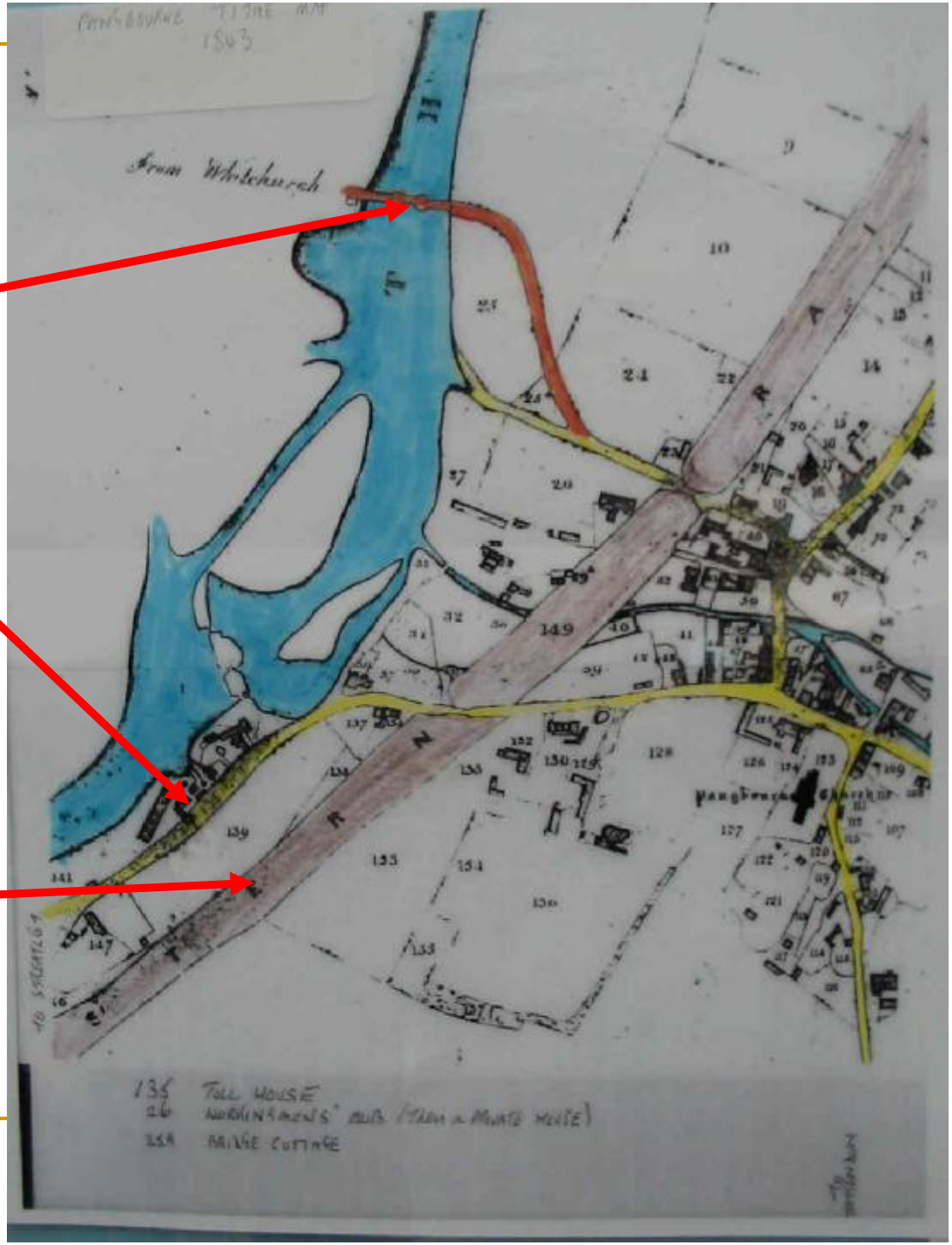
Rectorial Map of Whitchurch 1820

Tythe Map 1843

The bridge is shown at the top of the map

The turnpike toll house was situated on the west side of the Swan Inn

The railway embankment can be seen across the middle of the map



The Second Bridge at Whitchurch

The second wooden bridge was built around 1852 and has only half the number of piers that the earlier one had.

A painting of the second bridge by Claude Rowbotham

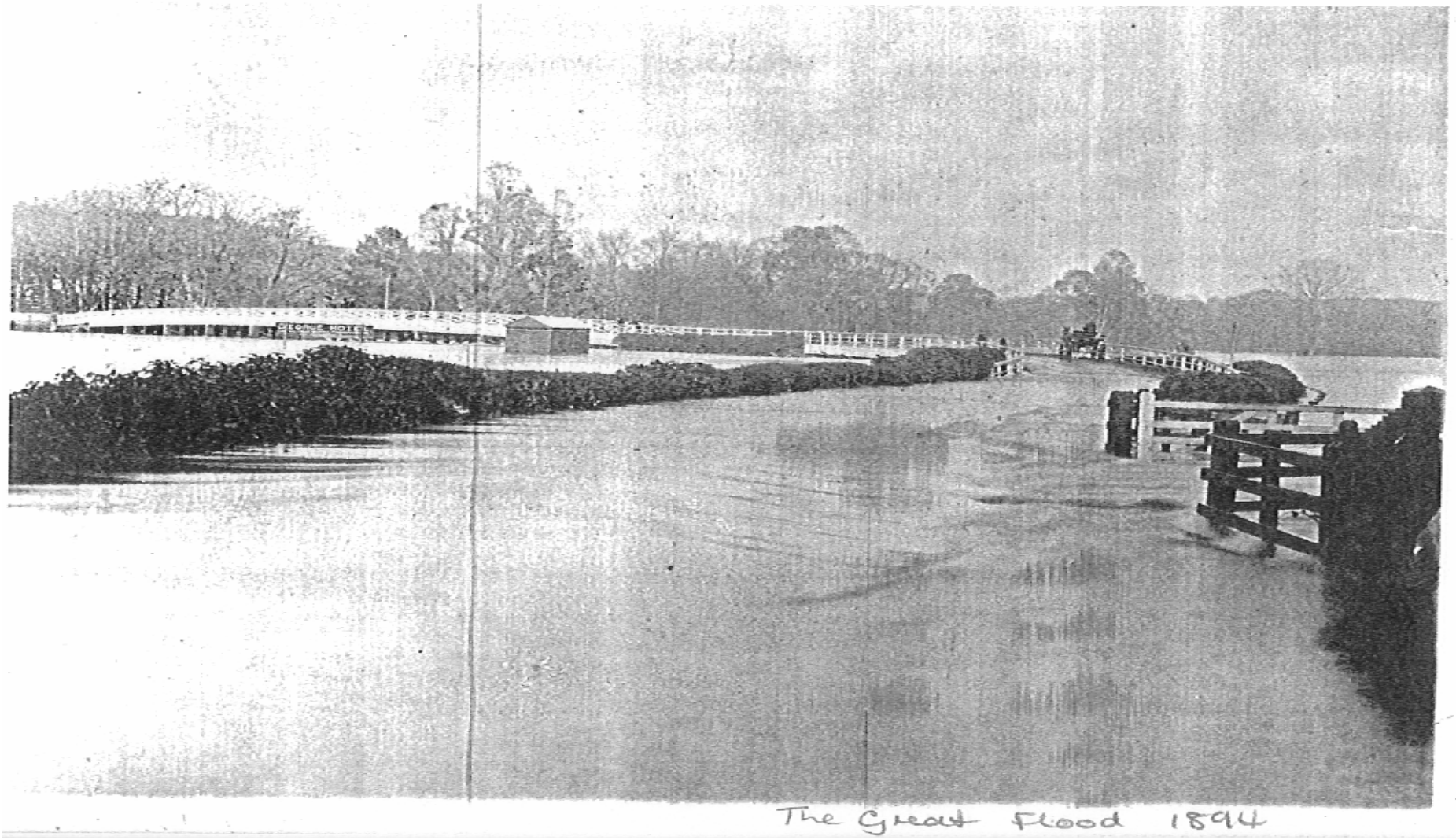
Another painting of the second bridge

Photo of the second bridge taken c 1871

Second bridge in 1893

Second bridge

The Great Flood of November 1894



The decline of the turnpikes

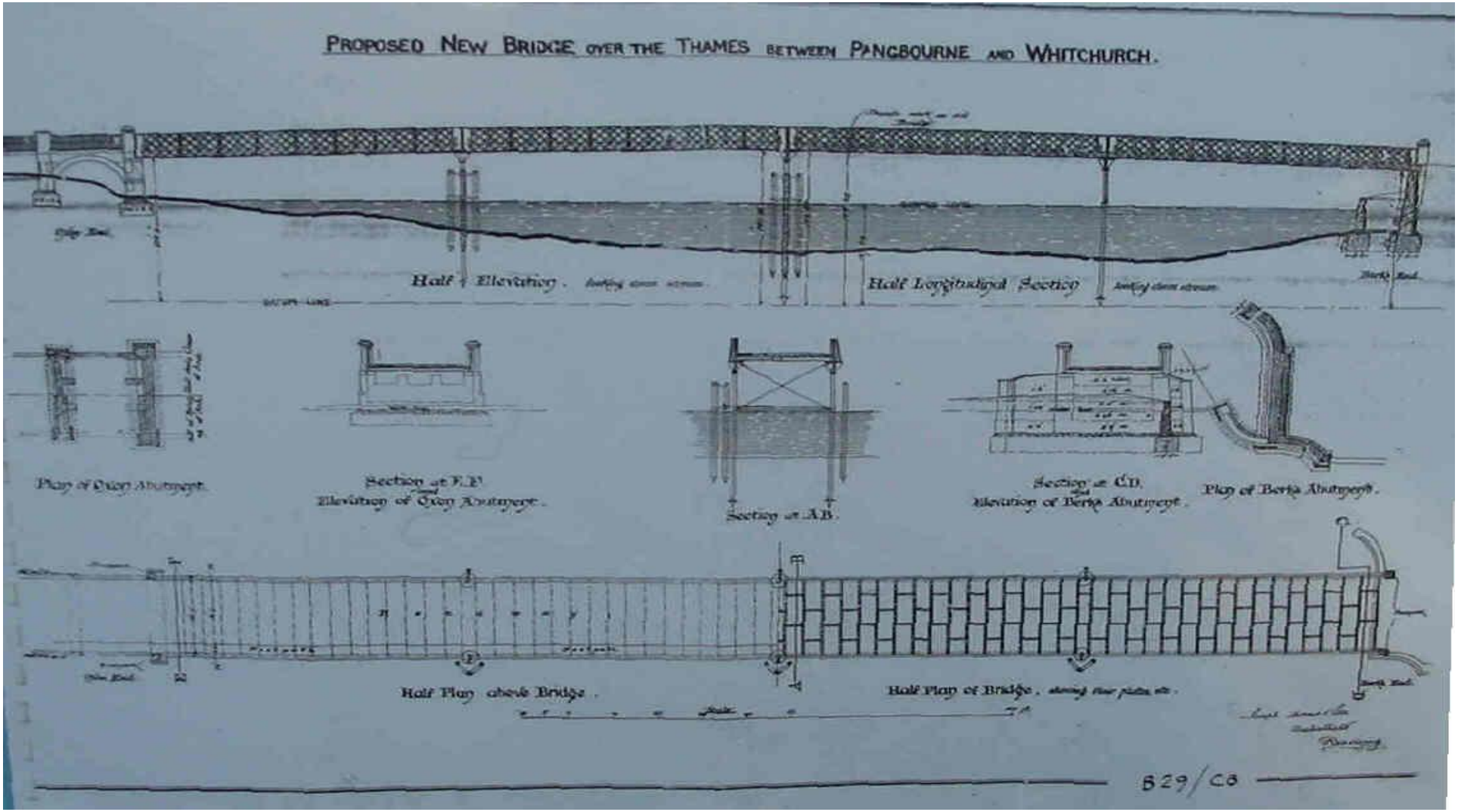
- **Turnpikes were severely affected by the coming of the railways and traffic declined rapidly from the 1840s**
- **The Pangbourne turnpike was wound up in 1874 – the roads were handed over to the local authorities and the tollhouses were sold.**
  - **All major roads were “disturnpiked” by 1895**
- **Why did Whitchurch Bridge survive as a toll?**
  - Bridges were relatively more expensive to maintain
  - Not on a major road
  - No local authority willing to take it over

Around 1900

Whitchurch toll-gate

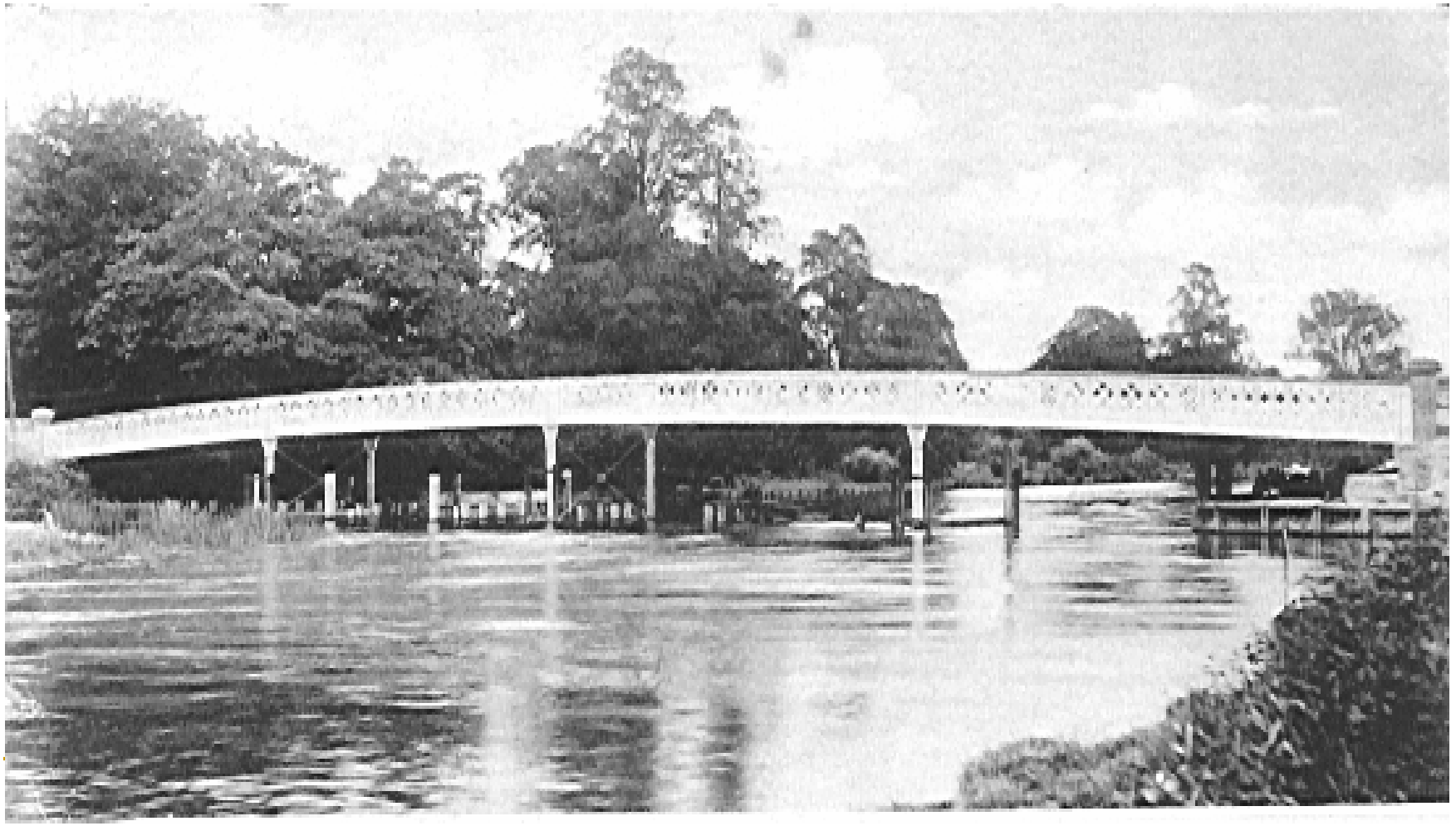
The Third Bridge

Built in 1901/2 by the Cleveland Bridge & Engineering Company ltd.
Constructed in cast iron with three piers



The Third Bridge from a postcard dated 1903

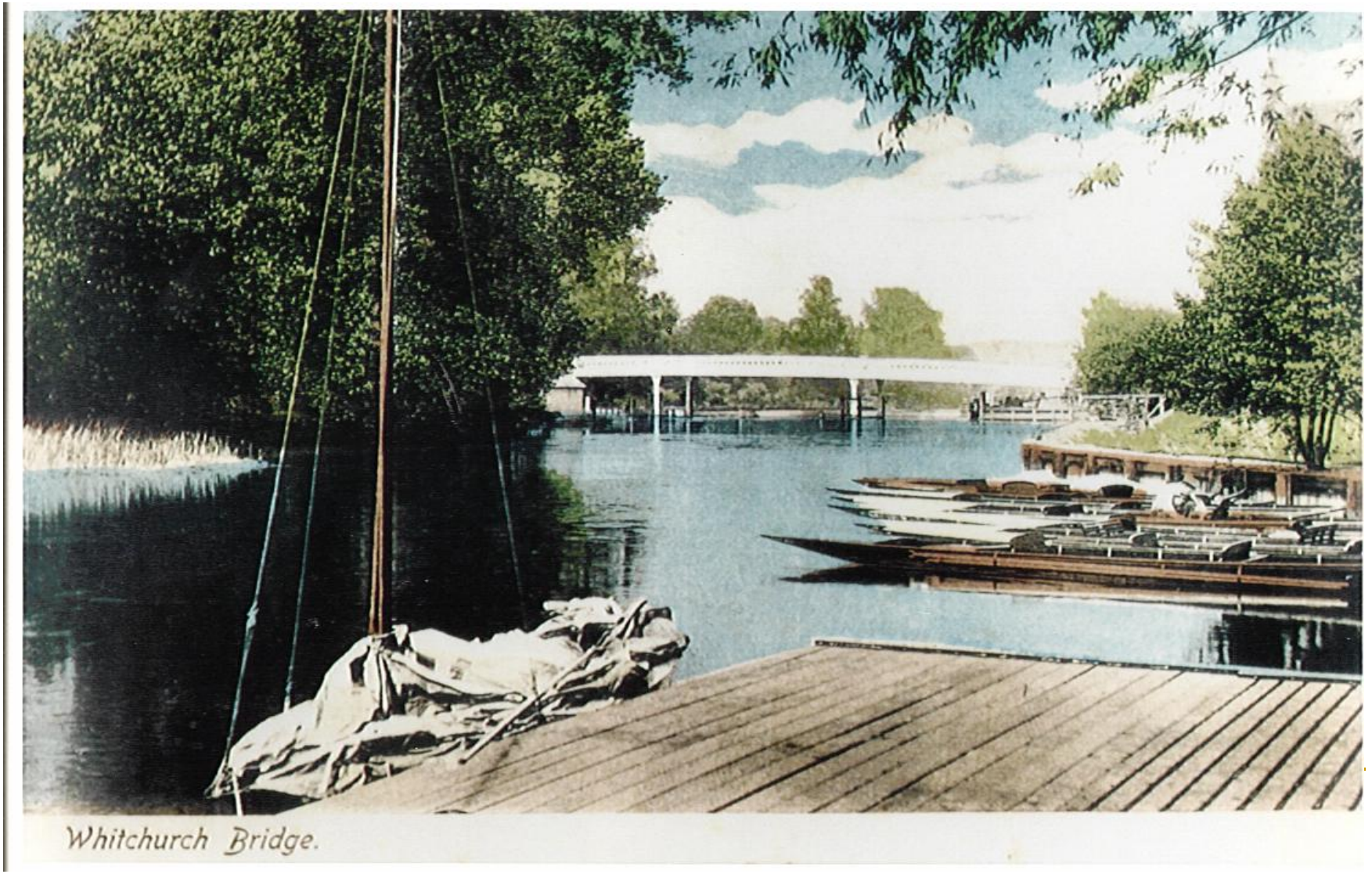
showing the cut down piles of the second bridge



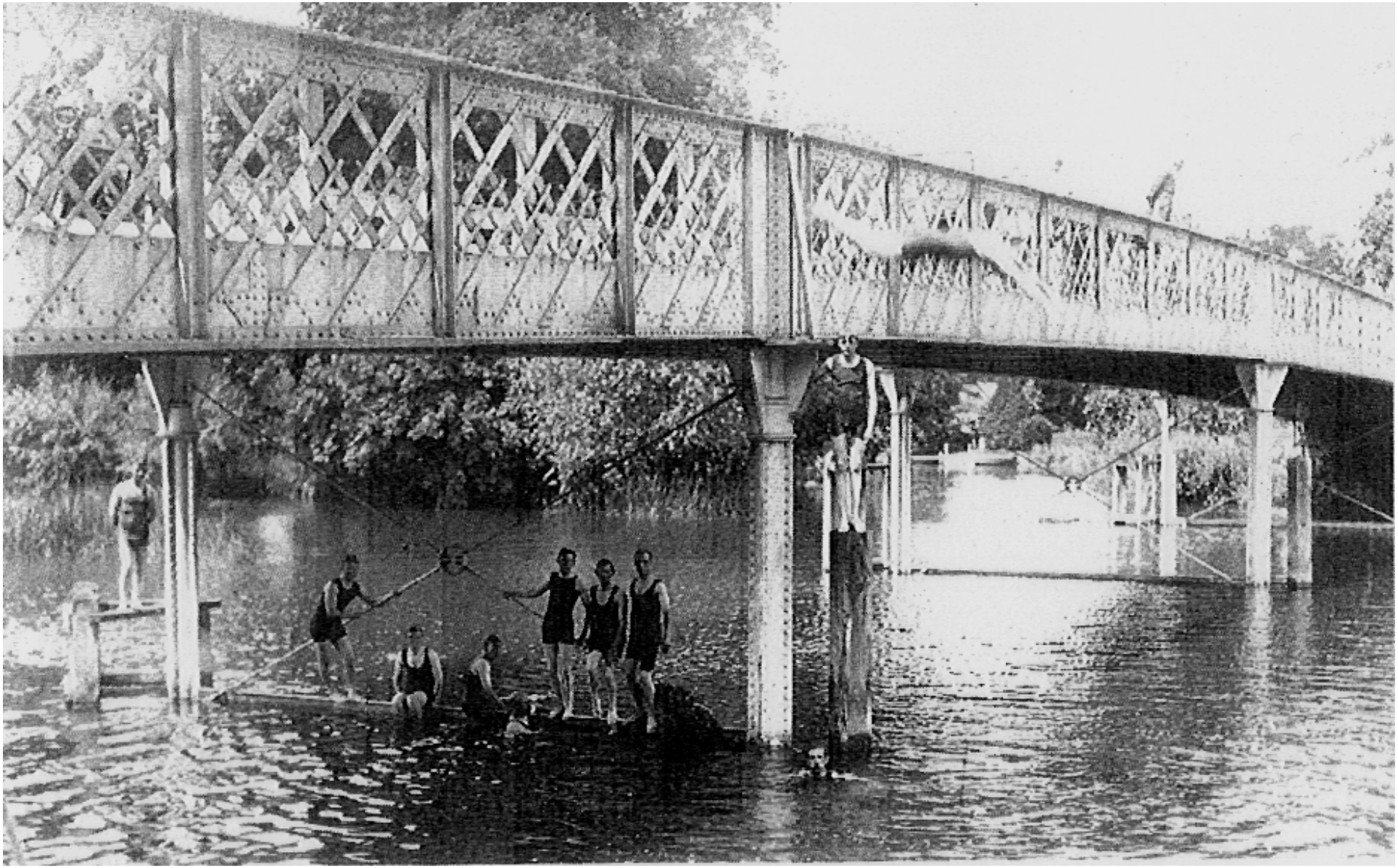
Third Bridge in 1910

An early motor car crossing the new bridge

Third Bridge about 1920
boat building still at the Wharf?

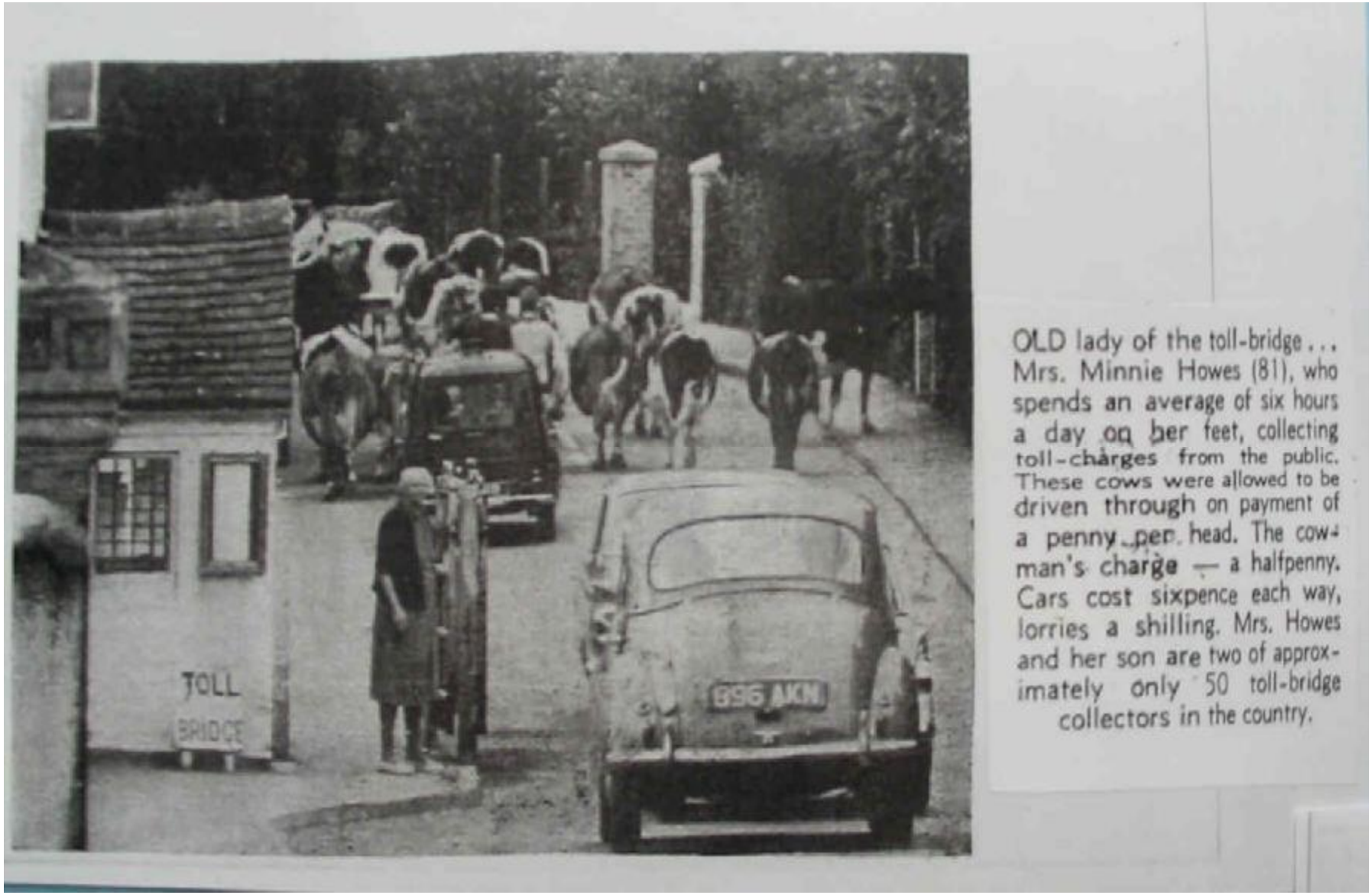


Bathing at Whitchurch in the 1920's



Toll Gate Before 1938

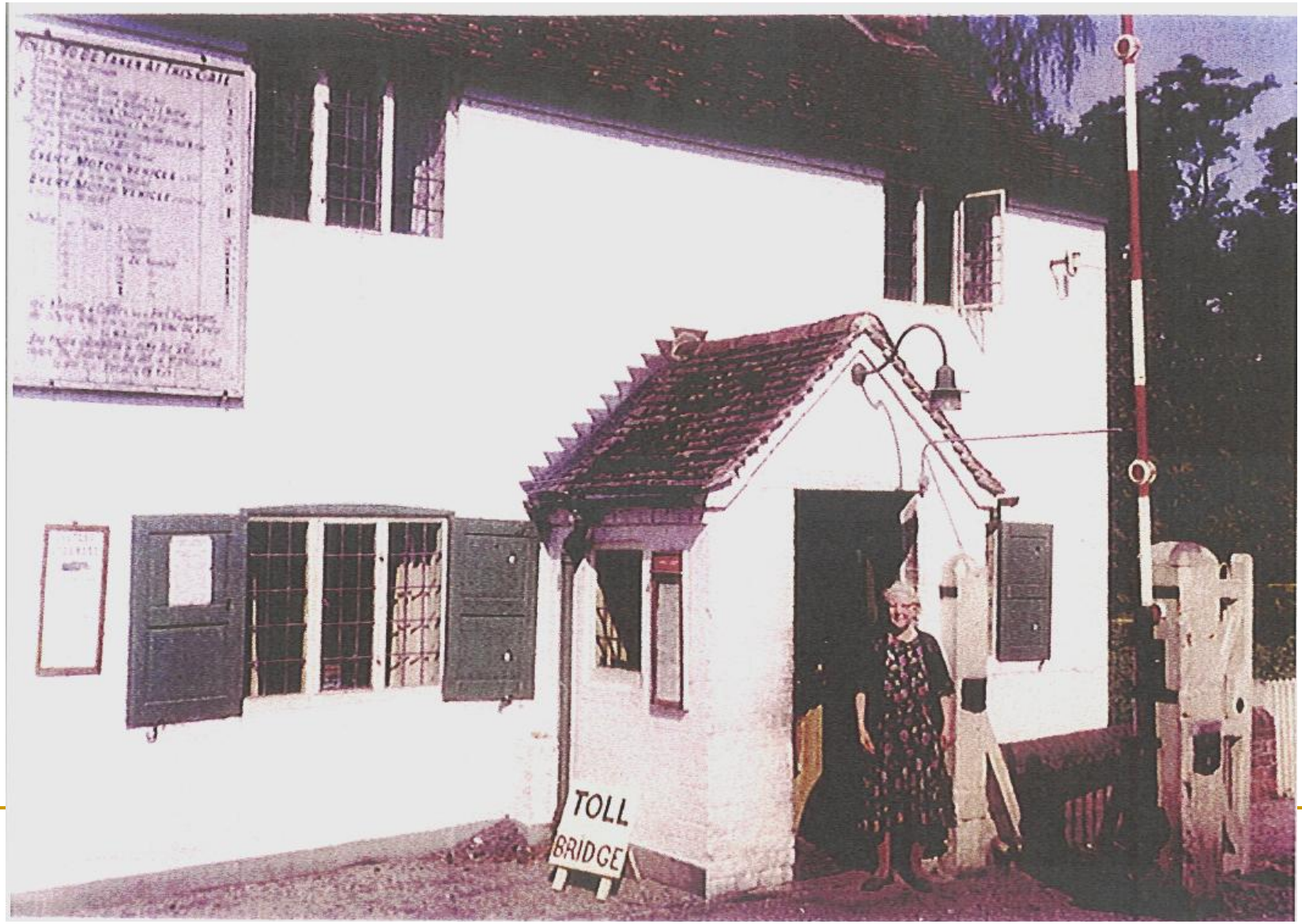
Toll collecting in the 1950s



OLD lady of the toll-bridge . . . Mrs. Minnie Howes (81), who spends an average of six hours a day on her feet, collecting toll-charges from the public. These cows were allowed to be driven through on payment of a penny per head. The cowman's charge — a halfpenny. Cars cost sixpence each way, lorries a shilling. Mrs. Howes and her son are two of approximately only 50 toll-bridge collectors in the country.

The Toll House - built at the time of the first bridge in 1792.

Collecting would have taken place from the porch door which faced the road



Grace collecting in the road in 1991

New toll booth -Autumn 1992

The gate across the roadway was there until 1992, when a toll booth was built in the road alongside the garden

A photograph by David Lang

taken in 1986 after being painted

The Bridge in the 21st Century

- Current bridge is now a listed structure and the key features will be retained during the next reconstruction due in 2013
- New technology will assist in continuing maintenance of the operation despite the vast increase in traffic over the last 100 years
- Now the wheel comes full circle – future transport policy is likely to encourage more private tolled roads and bridges and automated charging systems……so we are planning for the next 100 years of Whitchurch Bridge