

THE FIRST TOLL HOUSE

(Bridge House East)



AN ACCIDENTAL HISTORY...

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Produced at
Bridge House East, Sutton Bridge
Third Edition - June, 1996

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Reproduction of Watercolours by Algernon Peckover on Pages 6 and 11 from Walker and Craddock's "History of Wisbech" at present at the Wisbech and Fenland Museum

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Electoral Registers at Spalding Council Offices

Photographs and Information from Relatives and/or former Occupants of Bridge House East and from Local Historians

Information from Sutton Bridge, Holbeach, Spalding, Kings' Lynn and Wisbech Libraries

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(Bridge House East)

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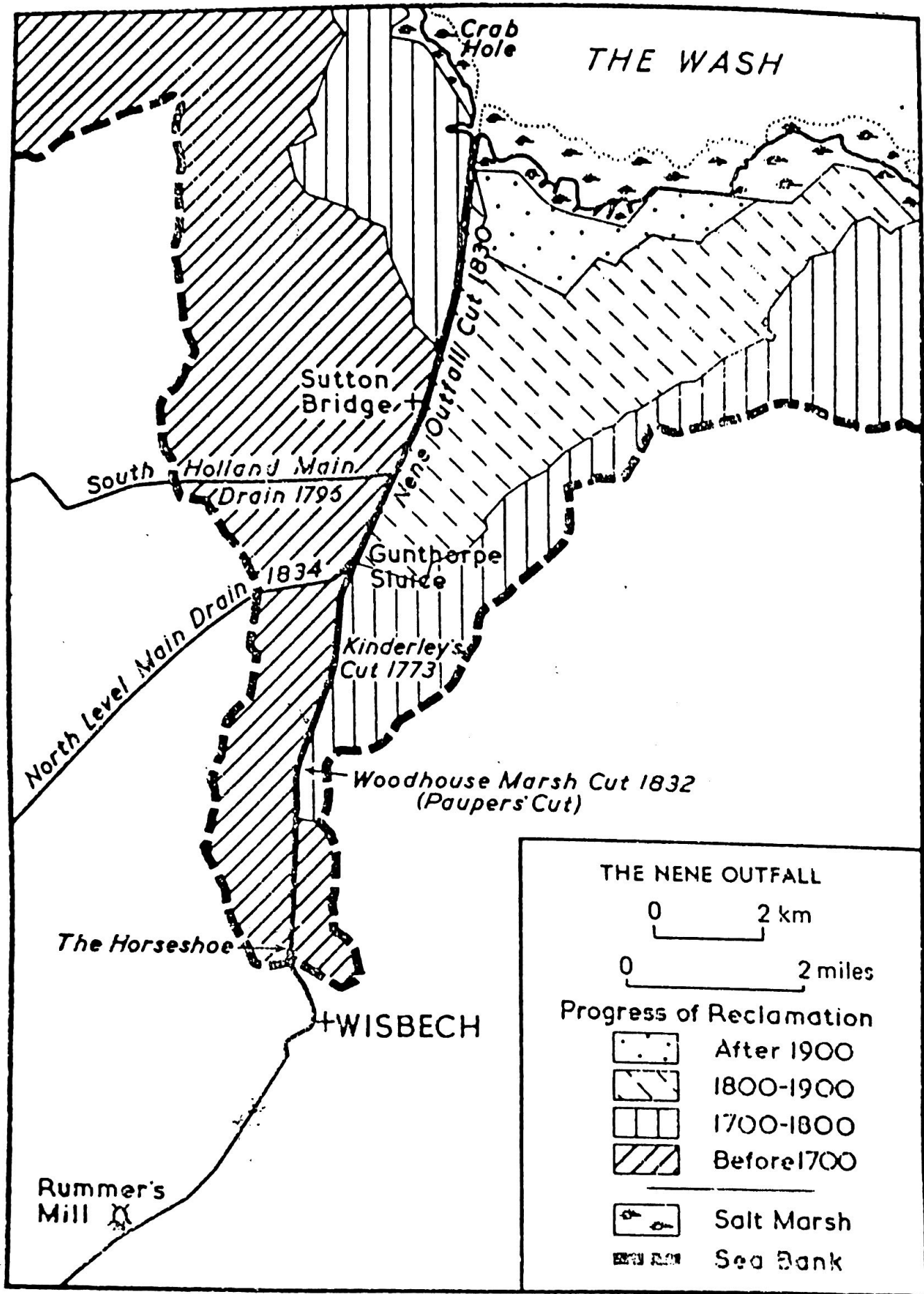
We have lived in our cottage, Bridge House East, on the riverbank, for nearly nineteen years. We realise that the house is very old but had only made tentative enquiries about its history. We finally decided that the atmosphere, the unique position and the age of the cottage demanded in-depth research and in commencing this task we found that one thing led to another and more was discovered about the Bridges and the village than we had originally intended . .

INTRODUCTION

The source of the River Nene is near Daventry and flows through Northampton. After passing the junction with the Grand Union Canal it proceeds north-east to Peterborough. From here a southern branch leads into the Middle Level and the main river continues in a series of man-made cuts to Wisbech and Crab Hole in the Wash, three miles upstream from Bridge House East.

Legislation was passed over the years for making the river navigable and the history can be clearly followed in "The Canals of Eastern England" by John Boyes and Ronald Russell.

The connection with Bridge House East really starts at Wisbech. It was here in 1769 (Mr Yeoman), 1771 (Mr Utting), 1836 (Sir John Rennie) and 1847 (Robert Stephenson) that it was agreed that the low waters and width of the Nene could not be remedied until the "impediments" at Wisbech were removed. From the late sixteenth century the Commissioners of Sewers had been concerned about the Nene Outfall. A Sluice at the Horseshoe, upstream of Wisbech, was begun but the work on this was stopped in 1615 through lack of funds. In 1631, a group headed by the Earl of Bedford, began work on the Outfall and completed Horseshoe Sluice, the top of which formed the new highway between Cambridgeshire and Norfolk (see Page 2 and 4). Another improvement above Wisbech was Woodhouse Marsh Cut, known as Pauper's Cut as it employed labour on the Poor Rate. This also had a chequered history of work and abandonment over the years from 1827 to 1832.



Changes in the Nene outfall.

Nathaniel Kinderley commenced a cut above Wisbech in 1771 but this was opposed by Wisbech Council who destroyed the works although they had originally supported the scheme. All through the history of the new Outfall there arises this animosity from Wisbech. In 1773 Kinderley's Cut was improved but the outfall of the River Nene at Sutton Washes or Cross Keys Washes (now Sutton Bridge) was far from satisfactory, making it very difficult for the port at Wisbech.

There was no village such as we know today, but a few scattered farmhouses and cottages built along the track or Turnpike Road from Long Sutton. The last Toll Gate was one mile inland. In 1774 a new road was envisaged to be known as New Washway Road, later New Hell Lane and later still Bridge Street (now Bridge Road).

On the edge of the Lincolnshire Washway stood a granary and a windmill but Cross Keys Wash consisted of a flat expanse of marshes with the river Nene running through sand and silt, constantly changing its course. The only pointer to a way through the marshes, without making a detour through Wisbech, was the Wash House or Cross Keys Inn (now Bridge Hotel) and this led to a dangerous and treacherous mile and a half wade before travellers could reach the Norfolk edge of the Washway. Guides could be hired at the Wash House to take travellers and drovers with their cattle across the sandbanks, more often than not, up to their waists in water, entering and leaving by slipways. Mist and fog was common over the marshes making the use of guides essential. (See Page 4)

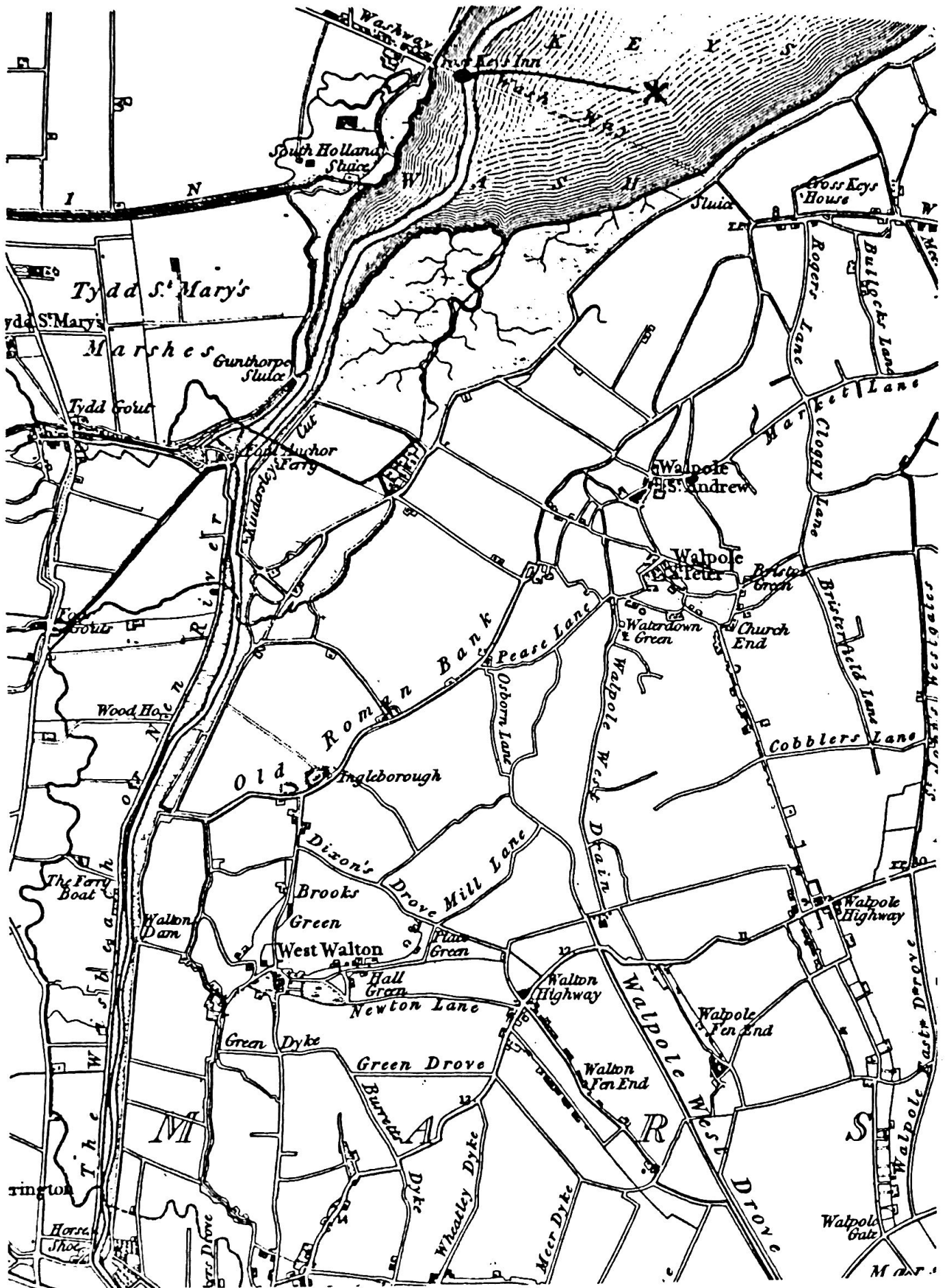
The ships bound for Wisbech could not penetrate the washes and had to be unloaded at Cross Keys Wash and reloaded onto smaller vessels of 40 to 60 tons burden - these vessels also being neaped within a few miles of the town for two to three weeks.

A REPORT IN 1814 by John Rennie, a well known engineer, examined the problems of drainage and laid out the main obstacles:

1) The narrow and confined channel of the Nene through the town of Wisbech. Apparently the buildings in the town were so close to the river that there was no room to widen or deepen the stream unless a considerable number of houses were taken down, and even the Bridge itself removed. Accordingly, he recommended a new cut to be made from the Horseshoe in a straight line to Rummer's Mill (and from then to Peterborough).

2) The high and shifting sands between Gunthorpe Sluice and Crab Hole - here was the fundamental difficulty.

* EVENTUAL POSITION OF HOUSE IN 1830



If the outfall of the Nene was to be fundamentally improved, it needed to be by a new channel from the mouth of Kinderley's Cut to the level of low water in the bay and, by distance and depth of water, Crab Hole was the best choice.

It was expected that the construction of this cut would lower the level of the outfall water by nearly 12 feet.

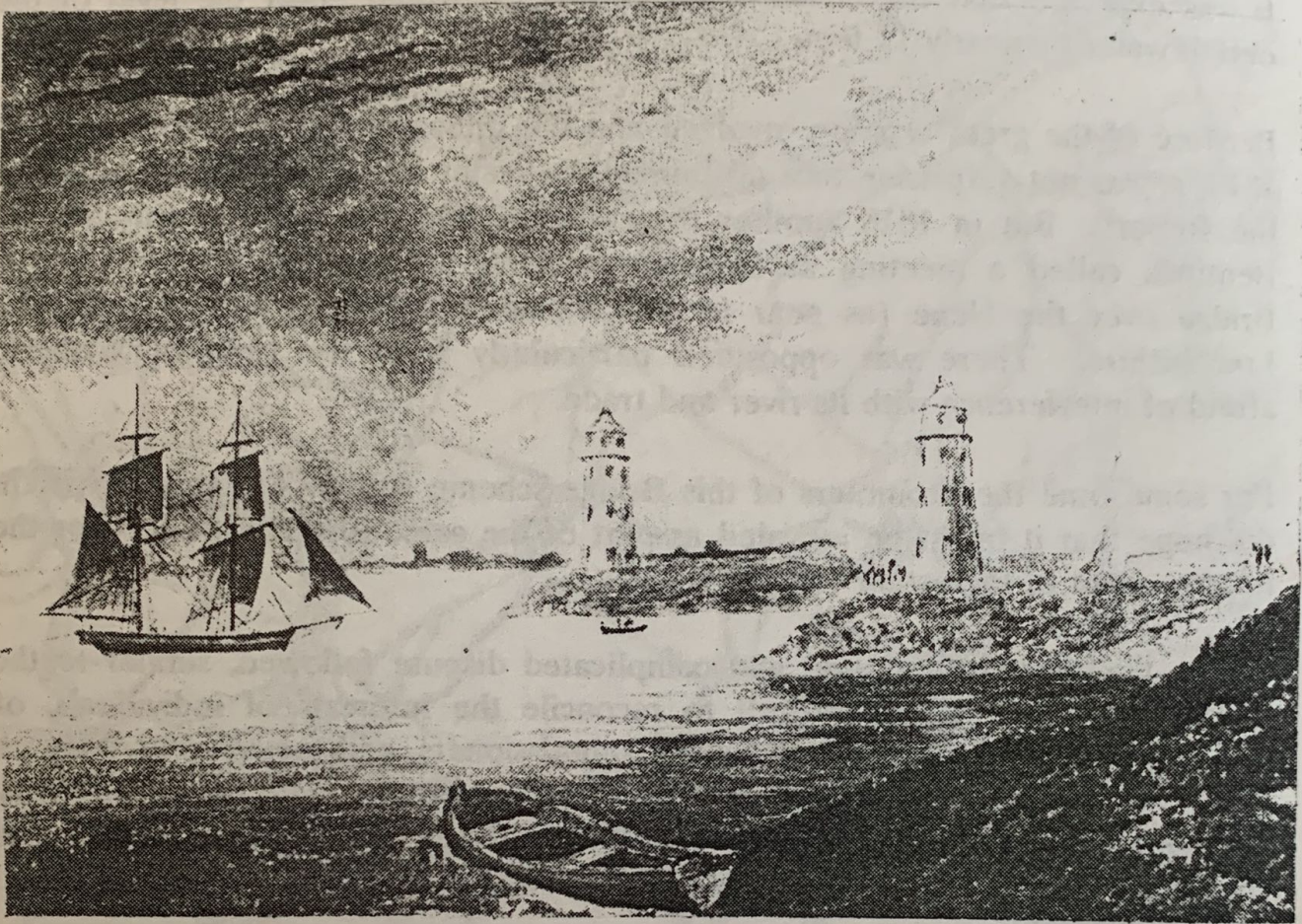
Because of the great expense involved and the upheaval following the peace of 1815, it was not surprising that no immediate result followed the publication of the Report. But in 1818 another project took concrete form. Lord William Bentinck called a meeting at Lynn to consider the possibility of erecting a Bridge over the Nene (as near to the sea as possible) to join Norfolk and Lincolnshire. There was opposition particularly from the town of Wisbech, afraid of interference with its river and trade.

For some time the promoters of this Bridge scheme suspended their activity in the hope that it might be included as part of the same ultimate project for the improvement of the estuary.

Nearly ten years of confused and complicated dispute followed, similar to the issues of today. It was difficult to reconcile the interests of individuals, of particular districts, of the North Level Commissioners, and the town of Wisbech itself. There were many public meetings, committees and sub-committees, resolutions and reports. Furthermore, the distressed state of the country and the difficulties of farmers was not a favourable atmosphere for raising large sums of money.

The Corporation of Wisbech was concerned in particular about that part of Rennie's scheme which recommended the cut from the Horseshoe Sluice to Rummer's Mill (see Page 2), and the town consulted Thomas Telford whose suggested improvements in the neighbourhood of Wisbech itself were not so disturbing. Telford, however, only confirmed Rennie's views about the necessity for removing the Nene from its channel, among the shifting sands, into a new outfall towards Crab Hole. It was plain that some improvement was needed, but in 1826 Wisbech Corporation was still worried by the disadvantages to the town of the opening of communications between Lincolnshire and Norfolk. Finally, after much tortuous negotiation, the necessary Acts for both Bridge and Outfall were obtained in 1826 and 1827. The Act appointed Commissioners for the Nene Outfall. William George Adam, the Duke of Bedford's agent, was the first Chairman. Telford and Rennie were appointed Engineers for the Cut and Telford for the Cross Keys Bridge. Jolliffe and Banks were the Contractors and quoted £110,000 for the new channel.

They also erected lighthouses at Crab Hole in 1829 without the sanction of Trinity House. The East Bank Lighthouse, once the home of Peter Scott, is now the home of David Joel (RN Retd.).



A watercolour by Algernon Peckover, 5th March, 1847

It was interesting to note an excerpt of a Report by John Rennie to the Duke of Bedford earlier in 1819.

"REPORT BY JOHN RENNIE, Civil Engineer, to the Duke of Bedford, on the proposed Bridge over the River Nene, dated 10th April, 1819:

It was resolved that a Bridge over the Nene to link Norfolk and Suffolk, with Lincolnshire and the North of England, would be highly beneficial to the agricultural and commercial interests, etc. The River Nene is narrow until it reaches a public house called Foul Anchor, then passes Gunthorpe Sluice half a mile nearer the sea. Then gradually widens until it reaches Cross Keys Wash nearly a mile and three-quarters in width. The bottom of sand and silt is no worse than at Gunthorpe Sluice and Foul Anchor and a Bridge would be no more difficult.

Expenses:

<i>Gunthorpe Sluice new road from Tydd St Mary</i>	<i>£3,740</i>
<i>Bridge across the river</i>	<i>£8,130</i>
<i>Road on the east side along the sea bank and improving the old road to Walpole St Andrews</i>	<i>£4,140</i>
	<i>£16,010</i>
<i>Bridge across the river on Cross Keys Wash</i>	<i>£9,000</i>
<i>Embankment to the west shore</i>	<i>£7,410</i>
<i>Embankment to the east shore</i>	<i>£17,740</i>
<i>Road to the Cross Keys Inn</i>	<i>£920</i>
	<i>£35,070"</i>

The Company was formed to construct the embankment from the Wash House to its opposite bank in Norfolk with a bridge and toll house over the Nene - the toll house being an extension of the Swineshead and Fossdyke Turnpike Trust.

THE FIRST BRIDGE (and Bridge House East)

Work commenced by cutting the new Outfall from the end of Kinderley's Cut to deep water at Crab Hole. The contract was signed by Messrs Jolliffe & Banks on 2nd July 1827.

Between 1,200 and 1,500 men were employed and this resulted in several local farmers being made bankrupt as their sheep, food and wheat were stolen by the workers. The local spectator sport at that time was watching the Sunday fights at the Wash House or Cross Keys Inn (Bridge Hotel). Cholera and smallpox took their toll of the workers and many of them were buried in a mass grave in Long Sutton. Many the story is written about these workers.

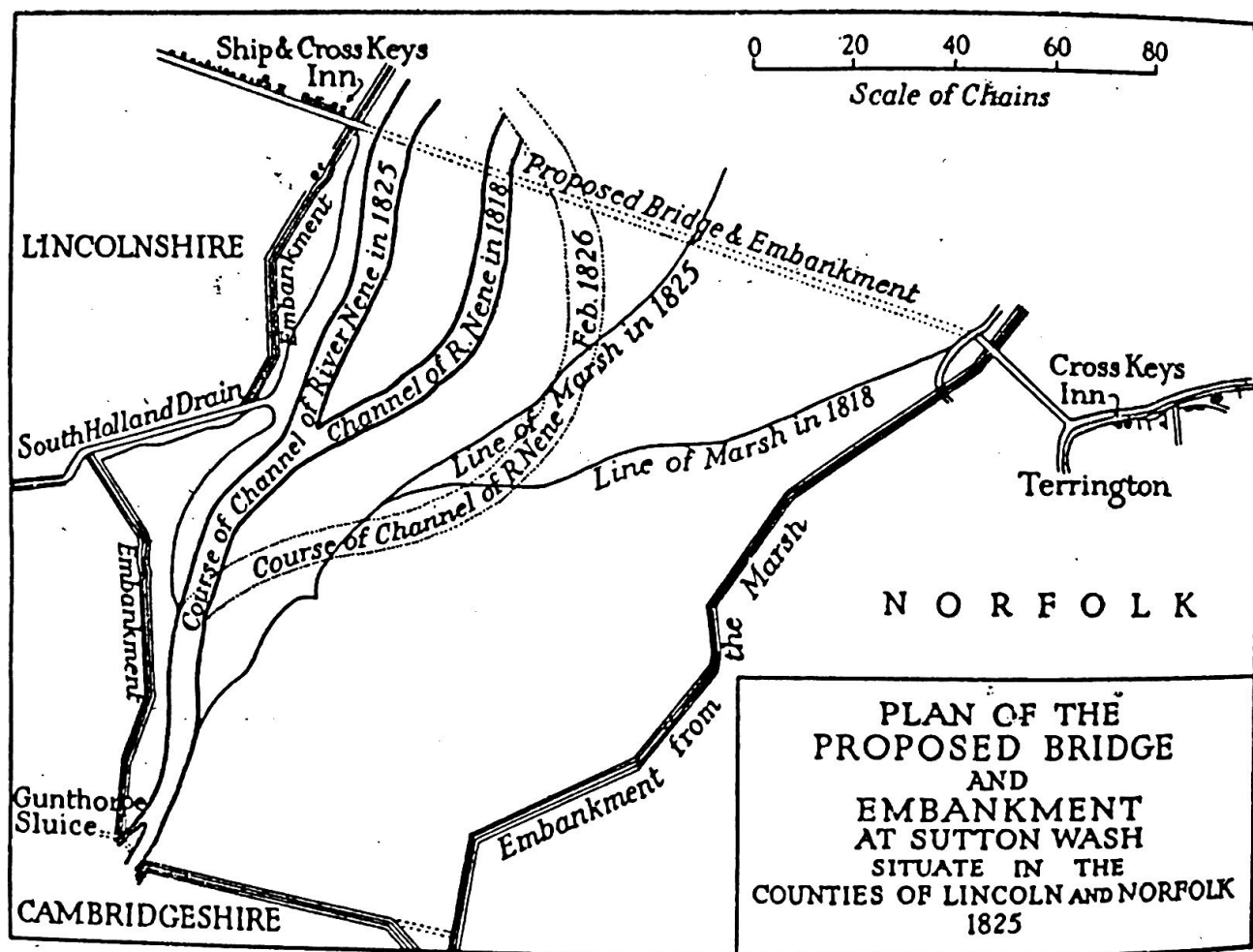
Work on the Outfall proceeded apace as the Report of the Committee for the Nene Outfall, dated 7th July, 1828 showed: *"The Committee have the pleasure of reporting that they have the most ample reason to be satisfied that the present state of the works which were received by them by Sir Edward Banks on the 4th of this month and which have advanced with an expectation and facility beyond their expectation not only in the channel from South Holland Sluice to Skates Corner already in a state of considerable forwardness but the contractors have assured them that without any unforeseen accident the channel will actually be open for drainage and navigation in the month of August, 1829, a year previous to the period stipulated for by the contract."*

"The Committee have been informed by the Contractors that the Cross Keys Bridge and Embankment will also be completed about the same time."

Rennie and Telford visited the cutting of the new outfall and Rennie gives an interesting account in his autobiography.

EXCERPT FROM AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF SIR JOHN RENNIE

"My father had been employed by the Duke of Bedford, and other great landowners in the North Level of the Fens, to consider the best plan of improving the Nene, so as to render it a good outfall for the drainage of the



extensive low fen lands bordering it, which, on account of their bad drainage, were frequently subject to floods, and comparatively valueless. My father wrote a very able report on the subject, and recommended that the Nene should be deepened, enlarged, and lowered throughout its course from Peterborough to the sea; that a new channel should be made from a place near Rummery Mill above, to the Horseshoe Bend below Wisbech (for the course followed by the

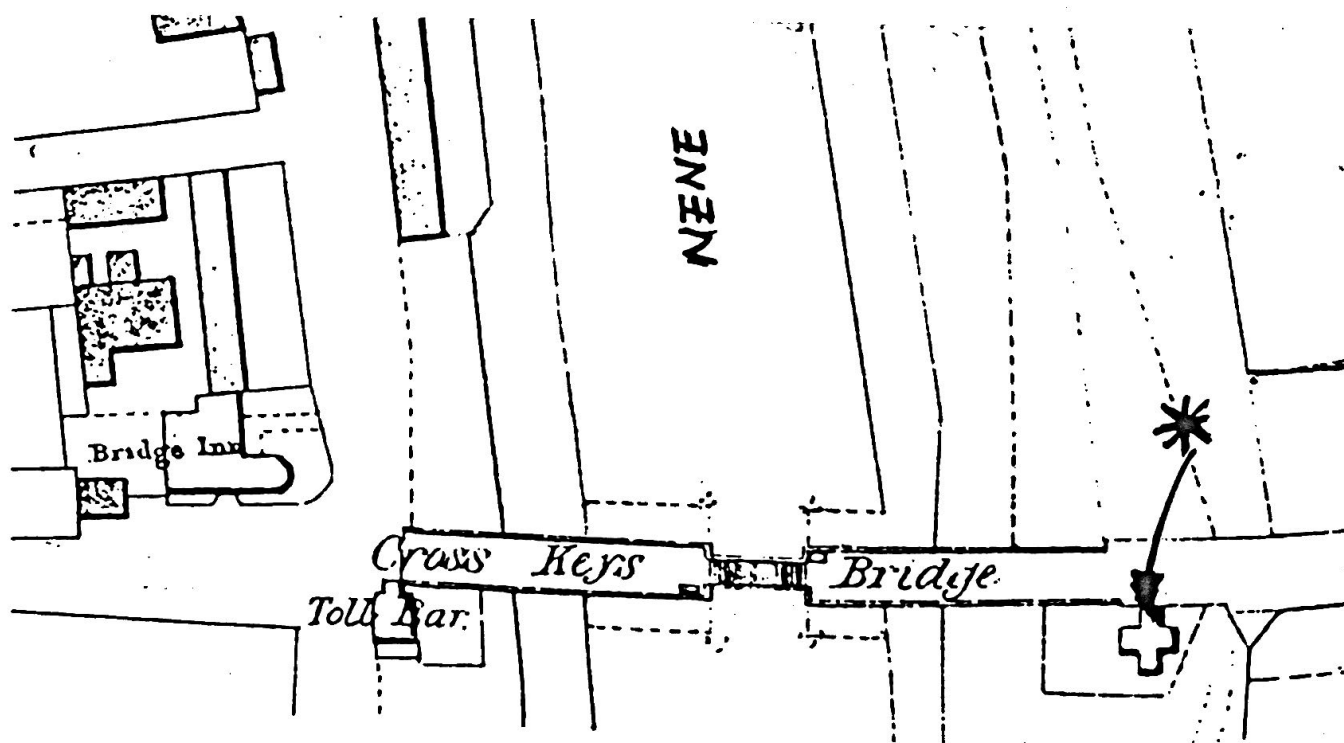
river through the town was so crooked and confined that it could not be sufficiently improved without incurring great unnecessary expense) and that the navigation to and from the town itself should still be preserved by connecting the old with the new channel; and also to make a new outfall for the river from Kinderley's Cut to a place called Crab Hole, in the Great Wash, where there was ample depth of water. He said that the new outfall might be partly within the estuary and partly in the marshes without, to Skates Corner, but that then it would neither be so direct nor so effectual as if made entirely within the banks of the Nene estuary. Mr Rennie's report was approved of, but the necessary means for carrying it into effect were wanting, so the matter for the time lay dormant. Subsequently Mr Telford and myself were appointed the engineers and reconsidered the whole matter. Finding the people of Wisbech were violently opposed to the main channel passing by their town, we were obliged to give up this part, as well as the upper portion of the channel to Peterborough, and confine ourselves to the improvement of the outfall below Wisbech, and to commence the new outfall near the lower end of Kinderley's Cut. I strongly advocated my father's plan of making the new outfall direct to Crab Hole, within the old banks, but as the first expense would have been a little more, although far less in the end, as has been proved, it was resolved to make the new outfall to Skates Corner, partly within, partly without the old banks.

An Act of Parliament was accordingly obtained, and Messrs Jolliffe & Banks became the contractors. The works commenced, and the outfall was opened in 1831. Whilst it was in progress Mr Telford and myself frequently visited the works together, and in June we went down the old estuary of the Nene in a boat at low water, for the purpose of examining more minutely the state of the channels near Crab Hole and Skates, where we proposed that the Nene Outfall should enter the estuary. It was a very stormy day, accompanied by lightning, thunder, rain and a strong south-east wind. We got as far as Crab Hole at low water, when the weather beat us completely and we were obliged to walk over the muddy shore half way up to our knees, and drenched to the skin. We had sent for some refreshments to an old house, called King John's House, near the bank, said to have been erected during his reign, and to have afforded his Majesty shelter after his retreat from Lynn. The rain now came down heavier than ever, so that we had no alternative but to retrace our steps back to the dirty old "public" at the ferry, called "Cross Keys" about three and a half miles distant.....

When everything was ready we went down and met the contractors Messrs Jolliffe & Banks and immediately gave them orders to commence filling up the old channel; they had about 1,300 men, and horses, carts and materials, and appliances of all kinds

The Corporation of Wisbech, who had always opposed the measure, although they were compelled by the Act to contribute £30,000 towards it, which was perhaps the cause, offered every obstruction in their power, and said that the new outfall was not excavated deep enough according to the Act, and came down in their barge with their law officers, giving us official written notices to stop all proceedings. At this critical moment the contractors were rather taken aback; Mr Telford and I, however, ... ordered the men to proceed stopping the channel, and to take no notice of the Corporation ... they turned tail and returned to Wisbech. ... The third day afterwards the old channel was completely closed. ... The current at first appeared to have very little effect; and the Duke of Bedford's Manager, the old excellent and talented Tycho Wing, a schoolfellow of mine ... became much alarmed. The fact was, the fall in the bottom was so little that the current had to remove the obstacles to its progress, which it could only by degrees, when it had accumulated sufficient fall or head; having done this, its progress was most rapid."

The old channel of the Nene was closed as there was not enough water to scour the new channel to its full depth. Three hundred workmen with one hundred carts worked day and night to close up the old channel and this was assisted by four or five barges sunk across the river course to start a bank. It took six days with Jolliffe and Banks personally superintending (Sir Edward Banks and the Revd Mr Jolliffe). Once the water was confined to the new channel it scoured out the bottom leaving deep water to Wisbech. Ten thousand tons of stone were used to protect the new banks of the channel at a cost of £32,000, with the engineer, Mr John Young, accepting the responsibility for the work.



Before the waters were turned into the new channel the Bridge itself was built and completed on 16th April 1830, together with its toll house and toll bar. In 1834 the Outfall was finally completed from Wisbech to Crab Hole.

London
28th February 1834

Thos Telford
John Rennie

Telford and Rennie certify the completion of the Nene's New Outfall Cut
in 1834

The Bridge was situated three miles from the mouth of the river, cutting through the Guy's Hospital Estates. It was a timber and cast-iron structure built by Rennie and Telford, the deposited plans being dated 1825. It had a length of 650 feet between abutments with the bridges thereto formed by embankments running out from each bank. Altogether there were fifteen spans, the centre cast-iron being 52 feet long, the two halves opening upwards like drawbridges, or more properly, bascules. The effective width was 26 feet between parapets and each pier was constructed of eight rough hewn piles 22 inches in diameter 18 feet into the silt and sand. Those piers supporting the bascules were made as trestles with cross bracing only to the horizontal spans adjacent to the bascules, the other piers being braced in both directions. These measurements are disputed by some local historians.



A Watercolour by Algernon Peckover, 16th June, 1848

A toll bar was built on the west bank and a toll keeper's cottage (Bridge House East), a very substantial red-brick and slated building, on the east bank, being the only building on that side on what used to be marsh and sandbanks (see Page 4).

The Proceedings of Committee for the Nene Outfall, 6th and 11th October, 1830 stated: "*Ordered that the Clerk do get the question respecting the new toll house (Bridge House East) which has been erected by the Cross Keys Bridge Company on the bank of the cut, settled by reference to Counsel if the Company will consent thereto. . .*"

The Kelly's Directory of 1836 mentions two toll keepers at the toll bar - George Newberry and Henry Woods. It is presumed that the house, being on the Norfolk side, came into the Walpole St Andrew's parish which included the hamlet of Cross Keys. Most of this parish was owned by the Revd C H Townsend. (The entries also included Abel Kirby as landlord of the Cross Keys Tavern.)

The major fault of the Bridge was that it was built at the same time as the cut and the piles were driven into the bed before the old channel was closed up and the ensuing water scoured the new channel. This made it slightly unstable. Stones were thrown around the piles to strengthen them but these caused eddies on each tide which affected the handling of the ships that passed.



Fosdyke Bridge. 1909.

THE FIRST BRIDGE AT SUTTON BRIDGE was a duplicate of that built at Fosdyke. (above)
No photograph of the first bridge has been found - photography being in its infancy.

LIST OF TOLLS

Proposals of tolls to be taken were made at the Bull Inn, Long Sutton, on the 25th November 1825. They were as follows:

EXTRACT

Coaches, Laundau, charriot, chaise, calash and pleasure carriages and for hearse, litter or vehicle having four wheels and drawn by four horses, or other beasts of Draught, the sum of FOUR SHILLINGS and for every additional horse, other beast of Draught, the sum of ONE SHILLING.

Vehicles drawn by 3 horses etc.
THREE SHILLINGS

Vehicles drawn by 2 horses etc.
TWO SHILLINGS

Vehicles drawn by 1 horse etc.
ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE

Foot persons every one will be charged
THREE PENCE.

Every person riding on coaches, Laudau etc. the sum of THREE PENCE to be collected by driver.

Every drove of Oxen, cows, cattle,
TWENTY PENCE PER SCORE.

Every drove of CALVES, SWINE, SHEEP OR
LAMBS - TEN PENCE PER SCORE.

Every drove of GEESE OR TURKEYS -
FIVE PENCE PER SCORE.

W C BENTINCK
Chairman

The embankment from the Bridge to Cross Keys in Norfolk was completed a year after the Bridge and a toll was taken from those crossing it:

CROSS KEYS BRIDGE AND EMBANKMENT

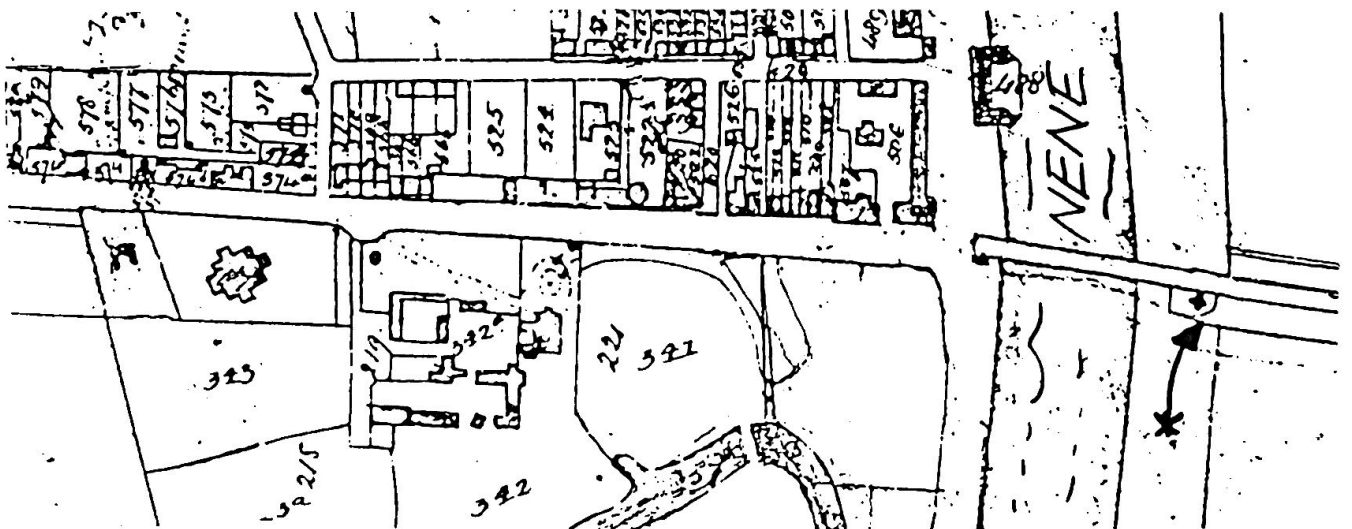
Report of the Committee unanimously drafted at the General Meeting and ordered to be published as the Prospectus.

(Extracts) *"It may be proper to remark that the roads on each side of the Cross Keys Wash be gravel, of equal, in goodness, to any in the kingdom. . ."*

"A General Meeting has already directed that the tolls on the Cross Keys Wash Bridge shall be double those of the Fosdyke with some few exceptions, in which they have been reduced one third: but the Committee has every reason to believe that by the completion of this great line of road, embracing as it will do the whole of the intercourse between the two counties, so considerable a traffic will be created as to raise a revenue that shall be double the amount of the Fosdyke tolls. If this calculation be correct the total receipts will amount to £2,720 per annum. . ."

After crossing the Bridge the travellers had to drop down to the sandbanks and follow a route marked by poles with flags. It was a bone of contention that the traveller had to pay to cross the Bridge and then risk his life wading up to his waist or neck across the tidal sands.

The construction of the bank, or Lynn Boards, as it is sometimes known, was erected from the sea in 26 weeks, commencing on the 6th March, employing 900 men and 250 horses to build the almost two mile stretch. This was organised by Mr. Roffey and was proof of what could be done with good management and, to quote, ". . . when the utmost subordination is enforced among a class of men with the most uncultivated minds and the rudest of habits."



On 4th July, 1831, the first vehicle, the Union Coach from Norwich to Newark used the road on the bank, leaving the Cross Keys Tavern in Norfolk and crossing to the Wash House Inn, with celebrations at each point. (As a point of interest, the White's Directory of 1842 shows Thomas Cooke as landlord of the Wash House or Bridge Hotel.) This saved 36 miles on the journey from Norwich to Newark and then on to York.



A typical Coach of the early 19th Century

Part of the early history of the Bridge is reflected in the "Second General Abstract of the Accounts of the Cross Keys Bridge Company, October, 1833 to October, 1841" - reproduced on the following page.

THE SECOND BRIDGE AND VILLAGE

The first Bridge was built with Bridge House East, the toll cottage and the sole property on the east, abutting it on its south side on the east embankment. About 1845 the ten miles of the river between its mouth and Wisbech were embanked thus reducing the available width of the river Nene to about 300 feet. This required the removal of Rennie's Bridge and a second, designed by Robert Stephenson, was built in 1850 on the south side of Bridge House East. This Bridge consisted of four spans - two fixed at the west end measuring 52 feet and 69 feet 6 inches, one fixed at the east end measuring 52 feet and a swinging

THE SECOND GENERAL ABSTRACT OF THE ACCOUNTS OF THE
CROSS KEYS BRIDGE COMPANY

	<i>Company Dr.</i>	<i>Company Cr.</i>
	£	£
<u>October, 1833 to October, 1841</u>		<u>1833 October</u>
To Cash for Tolls	9,674 17 5	By Balance of Account in the Treasurer's hands, according to the First Abstract
Ditto Arrears of Calls	800 0 0	
Ditto for Damage to Bridge by the sloop "Alice"	500 0 0	<u>1841 October</u>
Ditto by the "Commerce"	15 0 0	Sundry Bills for ordinary repairs to the Bridge and Embankment subsequently to the First Abstract
Ditto for Rent of Land	20 0 0	Bills occasioned by the damage to the Bridge by the Sloop "Alice"
This is inclusive of the Annual Allowance made by Mr. Bircham for the use of land in his occupation under an agreement to accept a reduced salary of £70 per annum instead of £168, which in effect produces an annual rental of £98.		Salaries to the Superintendent* &c Clerk's Bills
To Cash borrowed from Bankers	2,000 0 0	<u>Expense of Repairing Toll House</u>
Ditto for materials sold	55 7 0	Expense for New Buildings
		Cash laid out in purchase of Land
		Ditto Shares
		Ditto paid for Interest
		Ditto Principal Money borrowed and repaid
		Ditto for Miscellaneous Bills
		Balance in the Hands of the Treasurer
	<u>£12,345 4 5</u>	
		<u>11,708 3 9</u>
		637 0 8
		<u>£12,345 4 5</u>

*The spelling at that time

span of 192 feet 9 inches. The width was 16 feet 6 inches. The cost was about £20,000, and the toll was one shilling (five new pence) each way. A toll house was provided on the west bank (Bridge House West) which still stands.

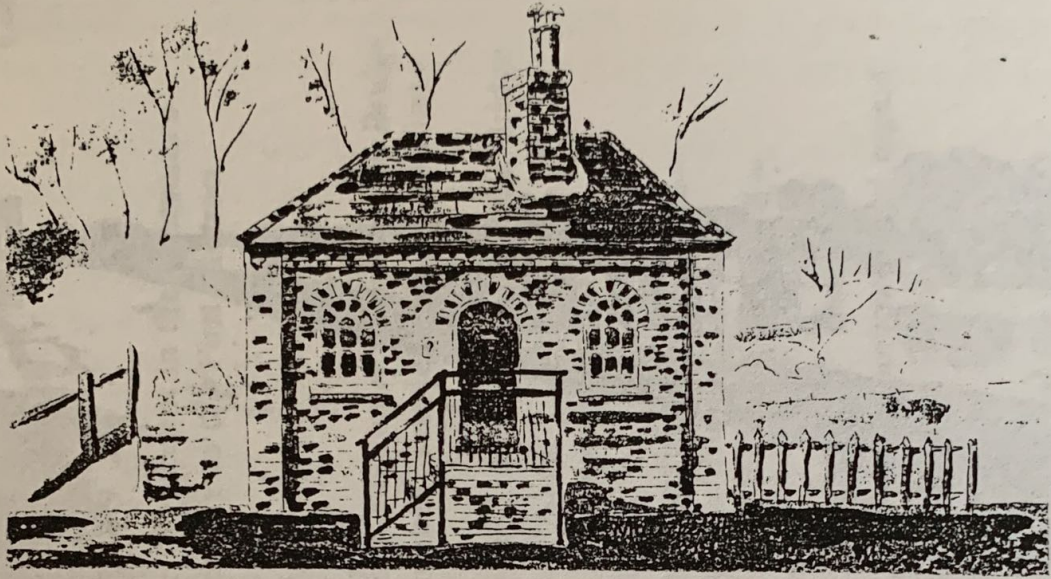


Conjecture and any possible construction can be put on the Census Records of 1851 for Long Sutton and Sutton Bridge, which cannot be cross-referenced at this time. The landlord of the Bridge Hotel Tap was Joshua Sutcliffe; the landlord of the Bridge Hotel was Thomas Moore, with a chambermaid, waiter, cook, ostler and boots, also being entered. The record also showed a Thomas Durrant as the toll collector at the Bridge toll house (probably "West").

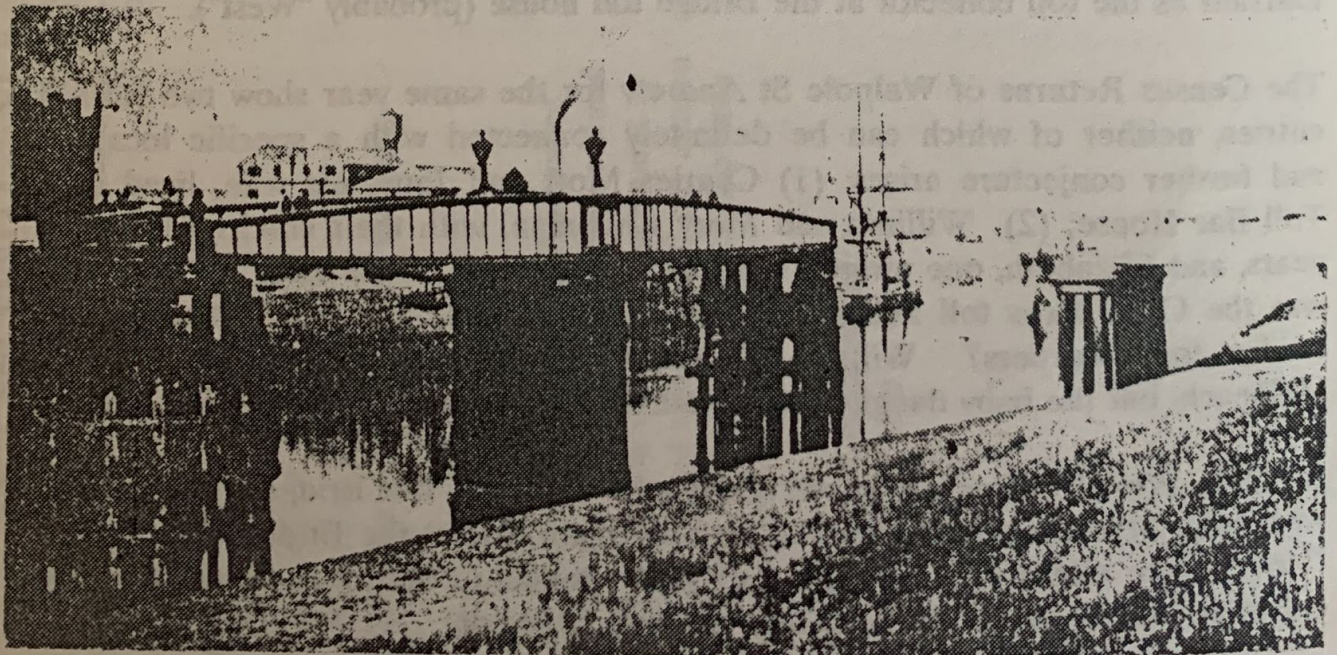
The Census Returns of Walpole St Andrew for the same year show two further entries, neither of which can be definitely connected with a specific location, and further conjecture arises: (1) Charles Mott and Jane, his wife, lived at 1 Toll Bar House; (2) William and Mary Chapman, with their children David, 4 years, and Elizabeth, one month, lived at 10 Toll Gate, Cross Keys, and William was the Cross Keys toll keeper. Were either of these the first or the second Bridge toll keepers? William Chapman, his wife and son, were born in Holbeach, but the baby daughter was born in, as written, "Norfolk, Walpole".

In 1856, White's Directory shows Benjamin Smith as the Bridge toll collector with John Moore at the Hotel Tap and William Earl at the Bridge Hotel. The "Lincolnshire Gleanings" of 1856 also show Benjamin Smith as the Bridge toll collector, but also lists William Gray as a toll collector.

The original granary had been demolished when the channel was cut and was replaced by a three storey granary just north of Wharf Street. This is now private apartments (Garner's Wharf).

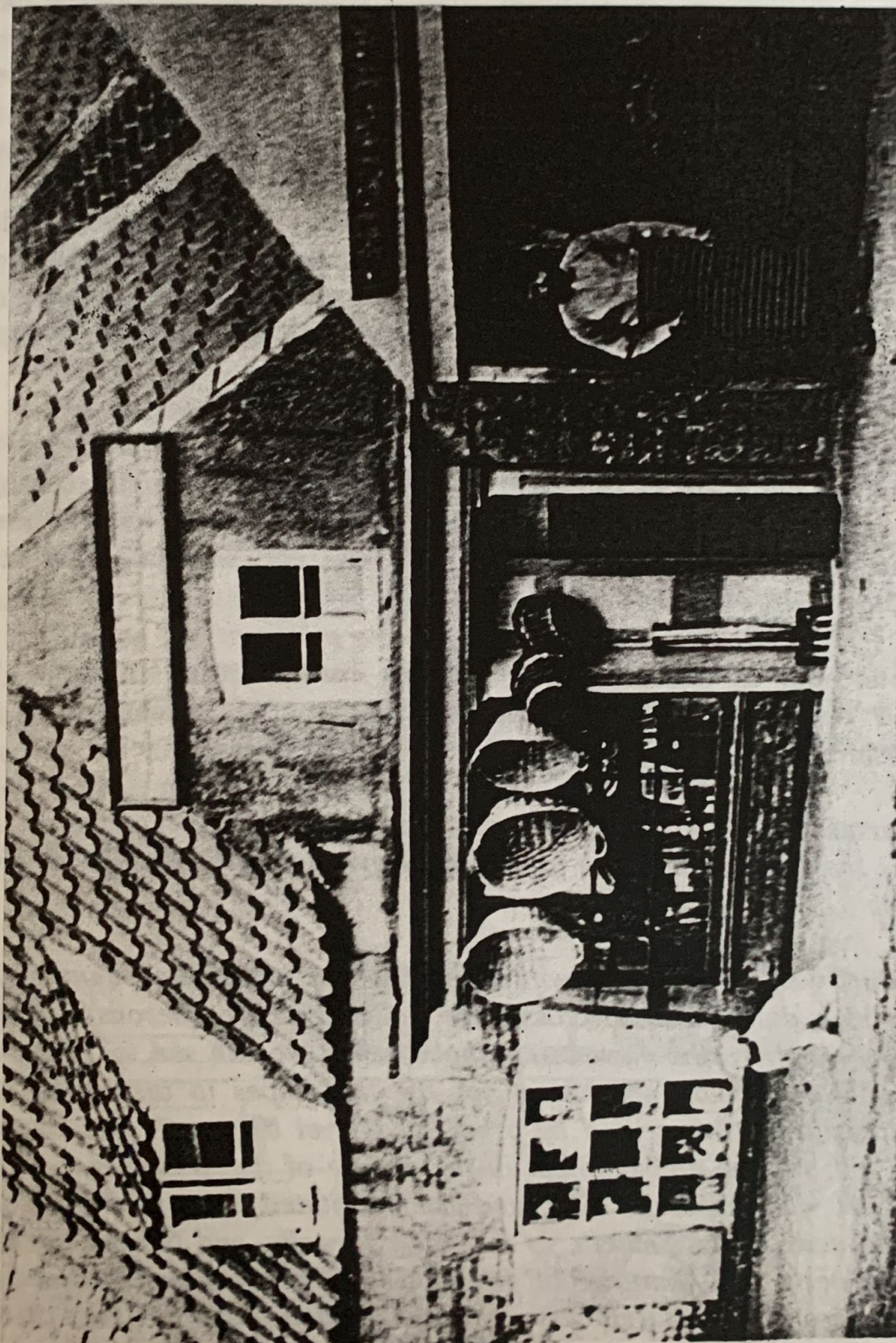


A pilot office (now, unfortunately, with an added extension), the small building standing on the left of West Bank Road, was built at the same time as Bridge House East together with a 30 foot look-out, an enclosed hut at the top of a skeleton tower, against the north wall of the granary. On the river bank, itself, almost opposite Bridge House East, a two-storey warehouse was built by the Skeltons (agent for Guy's Hospital) between 1836 and 1852. An archway, at the centre, led on to a wooden quay. This warehouse, eventually owned by Sidney Garner, from 1940, has now been modernised, retaining the original fabric, the archway bricked up and sold as flats (the Quay Flats).



AN EARLY SUTTON BRIDGE SHOP

Approximately where Portass & Carter and the Empty Site now stand



When the work in Cross Keys Wash had finished a small hamlet grew into Sutton Bridge, with Bridge House East now in Central Wingland (named after Tycho Wing, agent to the Duke of Bedford) later being Number 65 Sutton Bridge. Central Wingland was extra parochial and a separate civil parish until 1953 when it was added to Sutton Bridge. (Before reclamation of the Cross Keys Wash the border between Lincolnshire and Norfolk ran down the centre.) The Cross Keys Inn or Wash House Inn was refurbished and re-named the Bridge Hotel. The Census Returns for Long Sutton and Sutton Bridge show, in 1861, a John Barnes as landlord of the Bridge Hotel together with his wife and one servant. In 1881 a No. 1 River Bank occupied by Howlett, Kine, Horton and Coy, is also listed. The Walpole St Andrew Census Returns of the same year shows Thomas Betney, an agricultural labourer, living at 55 Old Toll Gate - more conjecture. In 1892 the White's Directory shows a toll collector, James Stewart, living in Bridge Street, as Bridge Road was then known - most probably connected with the Second Bridge.

New Streets, such as Wharf Street and Lime Street together with High Street, were built to the north of Bridge Road and became the "shopping centre" of the village. St Matthew's Church was built in 1843 with Guy's Hospital bearing the cost and Sutton Bridge then became a separate ecclesiastical parish, originally having been part of Long Sutton.

It is interesting at this point to note some excerpts from Volume I, "Eastern England" by Walter White, and published in 1865, remembering that the Lincolnshire/Norfolk border was on the centre of the River Nene.

"We pursue our walk along the level road and come to Terrington, a village that has the comfortable look produced by many good harvests, with a windmill to match . . .

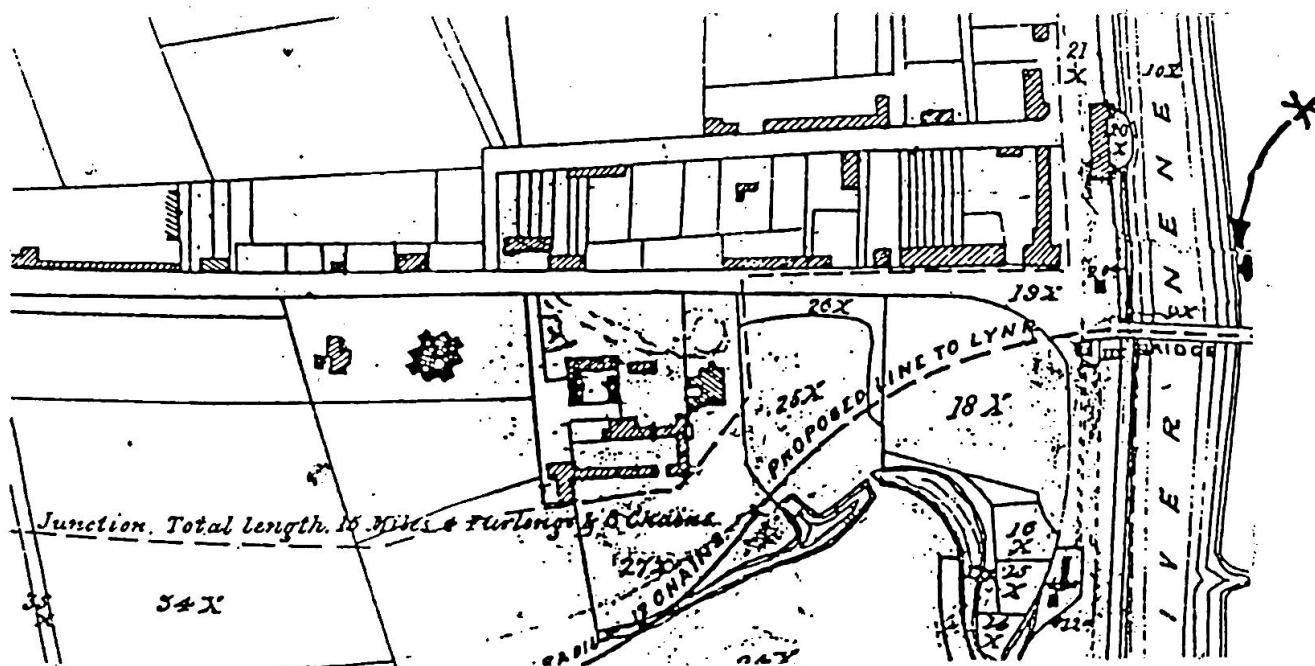
Two hours walking brings us within sight of the mighty embankment by which, straight as a dart, the road crosses the hollow and treacherous tract of Sutton Washway . . . here the view being unobstructed we can see for miles around a prospect which would prepare us for the landscapes in the Fens: leagues of spongy pasturage intersected by drains and level banks . . . we can survey as from a hill; for the embankment in the middle of the Washway is forty feet in height. It was begun in 1825, and has facilitated the reclamation of fifteen thousand acres. The Smeeth, as it is called locally, and the fen of this district were formerly the common of the seven towns of Marshland, whose poor inhabitants grumbled sorely when the reclamation deprived them of reeds and wildfowl . . .

Before this road was made the passage of the washes was at times, especially after a "fresh," very dangerous without a guide; and tables were published to make known at what hours the tide would serve for the crossing. Even then accidents would happen. Horses would sink in the soft ground and stick fast and if they could not be released by the usual practice of tramping round and round them at a few feet distance to force them up by a counter-pressure, they were left to drown . . .

Near the middle we look down on a large pool that has a saltish smell as of a recent tide, and on a farmstead, where stacks rival the house in bigness, and the cattle-yard is inclosed by a semi-circular shed built of the coarse flags and sedge cut from the drains, which give the place a strange and ragged appearance. It seems that last season's harvest of that ragged stuff was bountiful, for one of the big stacks contains nothing else.

Sutton Bridge, so long seen at the end of the straight line, is reached at last: it is a settlement which shows signs of growing into a small town. And here we cross the Nene and enter Lincolnshire . . .

The bridge opens for the passage of vessels bound to Wisbeach, and is about to be spanned by the railway that will some day connect Lynn with Spalding. Below the bridge the river has all the appearance of a canal, flowing straight between high banks to the Wash: one of the great drainage works by which the navigation and the bordering lands have been alike improved. The low level traversed by the stream is Cross Keys Wash: a walk of three miles along the bank will bring us to the sea wall which keeps out the tides.



This fenny corner of Lincolnshire produces a roughish class of natives. Some of the incidents described to me whilst travelling savoured more of what one expects to find in uncivilised countries than of an English county. One thing is certain, opium-eating for medicinal purposes prevails largely in the Fens . . .

In a country where thousands of acres are below the level of the sea, and the maintenance of land depends on a ceaseless contest with water, one would hardly look for the ordinary breed. The banks which cross all the landscapes with dark lines, straight or curved, are the only roads, now for the most part hard roads; but twenty and even ten years ago these were sludgy tracks. Some remember the time when the ruts were 'just the same as ditches, deeper than wagon wheels and the wheels didn't turn round, they only slid along on the hub,' that is the nave. A small proprietor could not afford to spend money in road-making, and so got out of the difficulty by harnessing eight or ten horses to a laid wagon which two could draw when they came to the hard road. And in wet weather, or during a thaw, no-one could ride or walk along the banks without a thick bespattering from head to foot. Hence the byeways were shunned as much as possible, and hence the tardy civilisation of dwellers in out-lying places . . .

I inquired about King John's House, curious to know whether any trace remained of the monarch's resting-place, or of his traditionary escape from drowning. Oh, yes, they all knew it; and some had been 'at it' not long before: an old-fashioned abode, occupied by one farmer Mumby, built about a hundred years ago, on the site of the house in which the king was said to have tarried after losing all his baggage while crossing the treacherous sands of the Wash from Norfolk to Lincolnshire. He was surprised by the tide and had to ride for his life . . ."

THE COTTAGE AND THE RAILWAY

By 1842 the actual loading and unloading of ships at Sutton Bridge river side had become easier because of the improved river. Thomas Clarke, the Wharfinger, set up as a Corn and Coal Merchant along with Moses Ligo, one of the ships' owners and George Prest and Spencer Skelton.

These names are in the records but, to date, it has not proved possible to identify the first inhabitants of the cottage. Bridge House East stayed as the Toll-Keeper's cottage until the second bridge was built. When the Lynn and Sutton Bridge Railway Company (Midland Railway) extended its line eastwards from Sutton Bridge it apparently housed a railway family.

Local research suggests that, from 1868, Frederick Rix, who was employed by the Railway, lived in the cottage and here his two eldest children were born: Harriet, on the 21st April, 1869, and Herbert, on the 18th December, 1870. The Birth Certificates for the two children show, first, in 1869, that Frederick Rix was employed as "Bridge Keeper on the Railway", and his address was given as "Central Wingland, Lincoln." Second, in 1870, that he was "Railway Bridge Man" and his address was given as "Bridge House, Sutton Bridge, Long Sutton". Another interesting fact is that, on the Certificates for both years the births were registered in the Registration District of Holbeach in the Sub District of Long Sutton District in the Counties of Lincoln and Norfolk (?).

His third child was born in Wisbech: William Dewson Rix, on 22nd March, 1873. It can therefore be assumed that, by this time, Frederick Rix had vacated the cottage. Mrs. Day of New Road is the grand-daughter of Herbert.

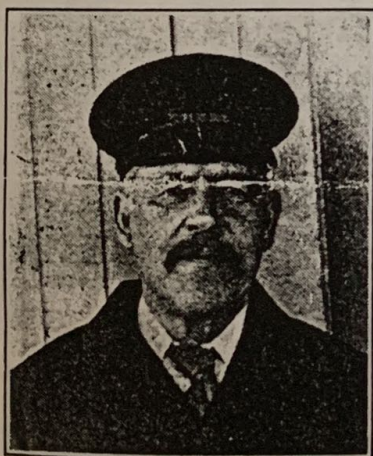
The next known tenant for the cottage was George King (Big Bill), the Foreman in the Delivery Yard at Sutton Bridge Station who lived there with his wife, Mary (née Johnson). He was the grand-father of Joan Jinks of Chestnut Terrace. The dates suggested were c1908 to 1928 (an early postcard to the Kings, at the cottage, was dated 1908). The earliest Electoral Registers at Spalding, Lincolnshire, those of 1918, prove his occupancy with the address, unromantically, as East Bank. The Registers showed a John King in 1922 and a John Richard King in 1927 also as part of the family. This was the father of Joan Jinks who went to war, from the cottage, in 1914 and between the dates of 1922 and 1927 worked in Australia. His sisters (Joan's aunts) were Edith Newson (née King), Florence Skelton (née King) and Annie King. All lived at the cottage. Big Bill stayed in the cottage until 1929 when the property was taken over by George William Almey.

M. & G.N. Joint Line

Sutton Bridge

STATION Foreman George King retired on December 28 last after 50 years' service, 48 of which were spent at Sutton Bridge. He entered the service of the Bourne and Lynn Railway as porter at Fleet station in 1880, and two years later was transferred to Sutton Bridge. In 1885 he was appointed drayman and in 1890, foreman, a position he held for 40 years. He was always an asset to the Company by his genial disposition and his willingness at all times to serve the public, with whom he was a warm friend.

On Saturday, January 4, a social evening and smoking concert was held at Sutton Bridge, when a number of the station staff and representatives of the trading community met to bid farewell officially to Mr. King. The chair was taken by Councillor Mr. Richard Longlands who, with others, paid tribute to the ready assistance rendered at all times to the public by Mr. King. During the evening the station master, Mr. J. E. Summers, handed to Mr. King a well-filled wallet of Treasury notes, together with pipes, pouch, and tobacco, which gifts were subscribed by the principal traders using the station and Mr. King's late colleagues. The beneficiary suitably responded.



MR. G. KING

On retirement he and Mary lived in the pair of cottages to the east (right) of the present post office. An Invoice for decorating these two cottages ready for retirement shows the unbelievable prices for those days compared with today! The name "Stolworthy" appears as a partner on this Invoice and that name appears again with reference to the later occupants of Bridge House East.

SUTTON BRIDGE,

28 . 9 . 1926

Mr. G. King
Dr. to **Mallett & Co.,**

(Partners: -H. V. Mallett, J. W. Sewell, H. G. Stolworthy).

Painters, Decorators, Paperhangers,
 Writers, Grainers, Glaziers &c.

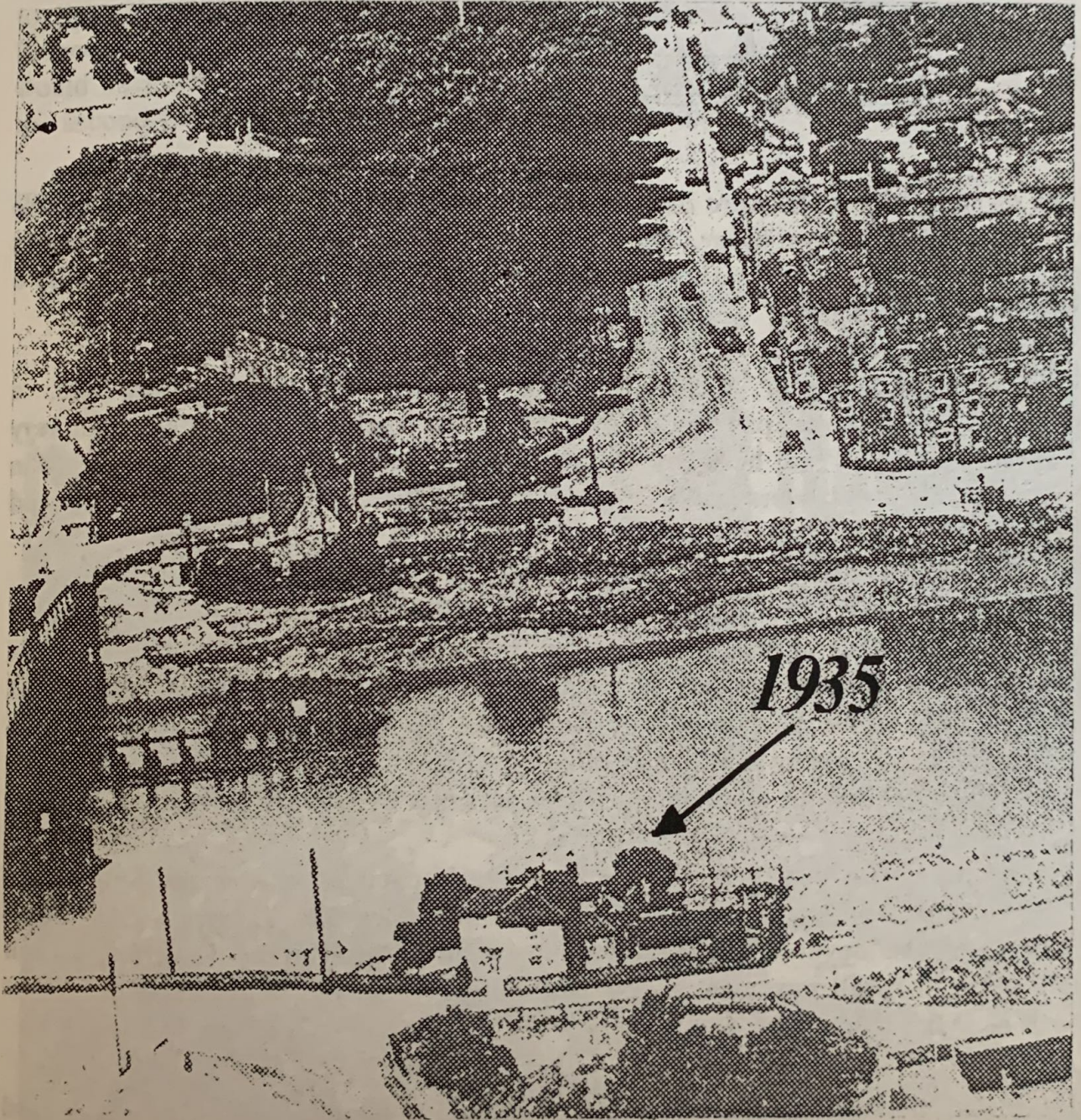
<i>To Burning off & Painting two Cottages on bridge Road</i>		
<i>25 lbs of Paint at 10^{/-} lb</i>	<i>£</i>	<i>1 0 11</i>
<i>1 Gall of Tar</i>		<i>9</i>
<i>1 pint of Varnish</i>		<i>2 3</i>
<i>Mens Time</i>		<i>3 5 0</i>
		<i>4 8 11</i>

Recd of G. King

Sept 26

H. Mallett.

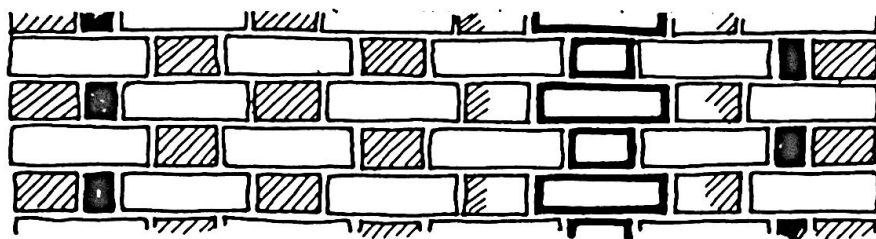
The registers also show George William Almey, whose grand-daughters, Rita Noble and Shirley Barton still live locally. He was also a Foreman at the Station and lived in the cottage from 1929/1930 until his death in 1944. The cottage had by now been named 65 Railway House, this being a Railway House Number with Number 66 being the Gate House at Foul Anchor. This was substantiated by Mr. Arthur Leonard of Mill Lane who lived in Number 66 as a child. The widow of George Almey, Florence, vacated the property for the last Railway family, Mr. Richard Ebbs with his wife, Phyllis, and daughter, Eileen (Warner) who lives in Crosby Row. In 1939 the Registers showed an extra member of the Almey family: William Almey.



An Aerial Photograph of the cottage in 1935

The Toll Keeper's cottage, East Bank, or 65 Railway House, or Bridge House, or later No. 65 Sutton Bridge was, before becoming Bridge House East, apparently typical of a line of cottages stretching along the main track from within Lincolnshire to within Norfolk.

It was a red brick, very substantial building with the brickwork being laid in Flemish Bond, a method of brick laying which was very popular from the eighteenth century.



The ground floor walls were built 18 inches thick with a slate damp proof course which is still effective today. The upper floor walls thinned down to 13 inches thick with casement and sash windows throughout. The whole was topped with a grey slate roof.

It was also, typically, a "two-up, two-down" cottage with, on the south side, a single storey entrance passage with a cold store to the left complete with very substantial shelves and hooks in the ceiling for meat and game. The flooring in the cold store and passage was made from red bricks. The shelves, hooks and flooring have been preserved.

On the north side (now the kitchen) was a scullery - probably flag floored with an iron oven with a fireplace underneath in one corner linked to a chimney together with a mini-range to its right and, also probably, a brown square sink with a pump to the outside cistern. The toilet, as was the custom in those days, was outside, draining into a brick-built "tank" and soakaway, which, in themselves, needed an architectural merit award!

The rooms downstairs were: on the east, the kitchen (now a cosy dining room) again probably with a flagged floor and an old black coal range on the central wall which was never allowed to die out. It can be imagined with furniture such as is seen in rural museums, typical of that age, or in period Television Dramas such as "Middlemarch."

From this room a door led to the stairs through a wooden wall, with a cupboard under the stairs next to the solid oak door leading to the entrance passage. The

cupboard and the door to the stairs are now gone but part of the wooden wall enclosing the stairs still stands, giving it an unique and attractive air. The room had two windows; one facing east (sash) and one facing north (casement).

On the north side, leading from the kitchen, was what would have been the parlour or "front room" (now a sitting room or lounge) probably only used on high days and holidays! This had two windows - one north and one south and an entrance door to the west, now a window. Again the furniture and decor, the lighting and comfort can only be imagined.

The stairs led from the door off the kitchen, with a casement window opposite to light the bottom of the stairs and up to a small landing with the main bedroom ahead. This had a window to the west and a fireplace and breast and would have afforded an excellent view of both the first Bridge to the north and the second Bridge which was immediately to the south.

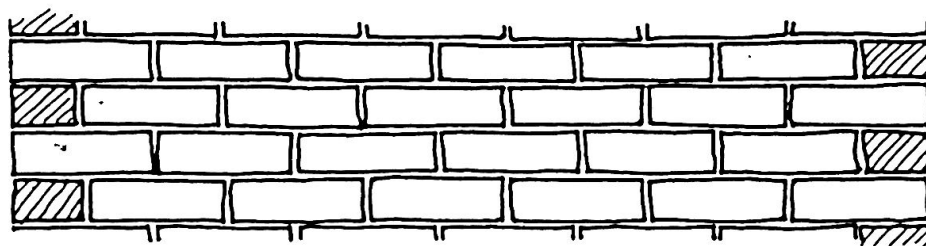
THE SITTING ROOM DOOR

(Now replaced by a window)



To the right of the landing was a second bedroom, the wall between it and the stairwell being a continuation of the wooden wall downstairs. There was, again, a fireplace backing that of the main bedroom and a single window to the east. There was also a large walk-in cupboard through the wooden wall over the stairs (now the airing cupboard).

Some time during the years a third small bedroom was built over the entrance passage and cold store, access being from the left of the landing. It is difficult, however, to know the year this was built. The photograph of the second, Stephenson Bridge, shows a single storey side structure, as does one photograph of the third Bridge, whereas the 1935 photograph shows a two storey structure. The addition of this third bedroom was very apparent as it was built with Stretcher Bond brickwork, a startling contrast to Flemish Bond.



However, all this was to change, to some degree, in later years.

The view from the bedroom window would, as stated, have given a good view of the second Bridge. It was intended, like Rennie's to deal only with road traffic. The Midland Railway acquired powers, in 1864, to use it for rail which commenced with the opening of the line in 1866. Road and rail traffic used the same trackway. In 1897 the third bridge was built, being freed from tolls in 1903.

Thus Bridge House East served as a railway house for many years - in fact a surveyor's report on one of the subsequent conveyances of the property even suggested, admittedly incorrectly, that the house was built at the same time as the third Bridge to house the Marshalling Yard Foreman (the map on page 10 refutes this). It served in this capacity until the closure of the railway, for passengers, on 28th February, 1959 and complete closure on 2nd April, 1965.

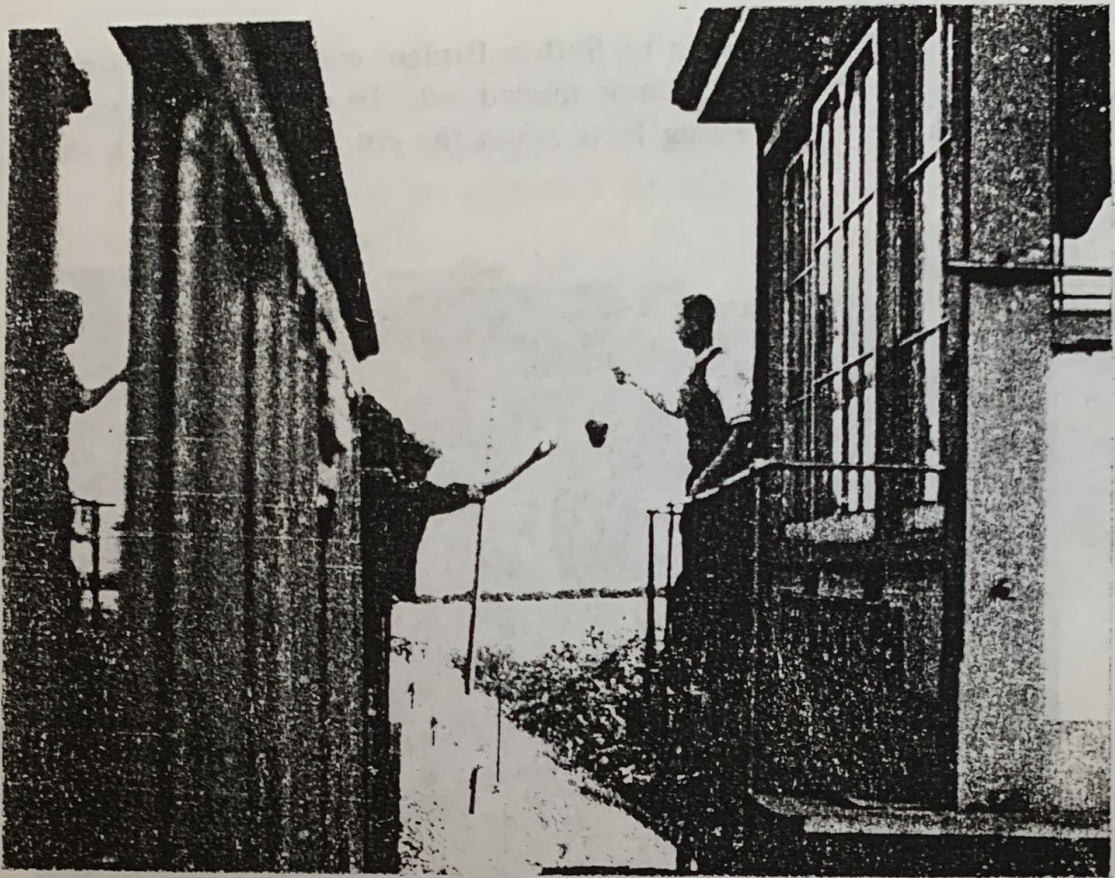
As previously stated, the house, now known simply as Bridge House, was occupied from 1944 to 1963 by Richard Ebbs, his wife, Phyllis and his daughter, Eileen. Mr Ebbs was a Signaller at Sutton Bridge Railway Station. He worked in the Sutton Bridge East Signal Box until it was knocked down and then he was

transferred to Gedney returning to Sutton Bridge, eventually, as Foreman. He retired in about 1963 when the family moved out. His daughter, Eileen, was able to describe some very interesting facts about the cottage from which she left to get married.



Photograph showing the Stretcher Bond brickwork of the third bedroom contrasting with the Flemish Bond brickwork of the store

The front gate was in the same place and the approach was also the same as now. The store on the left hand side of the entrance passage was their larder where they kept joints hanging from the hooks and preserves on the shelves. The hall was in its original form - now there is a cloak cupboard at the end.

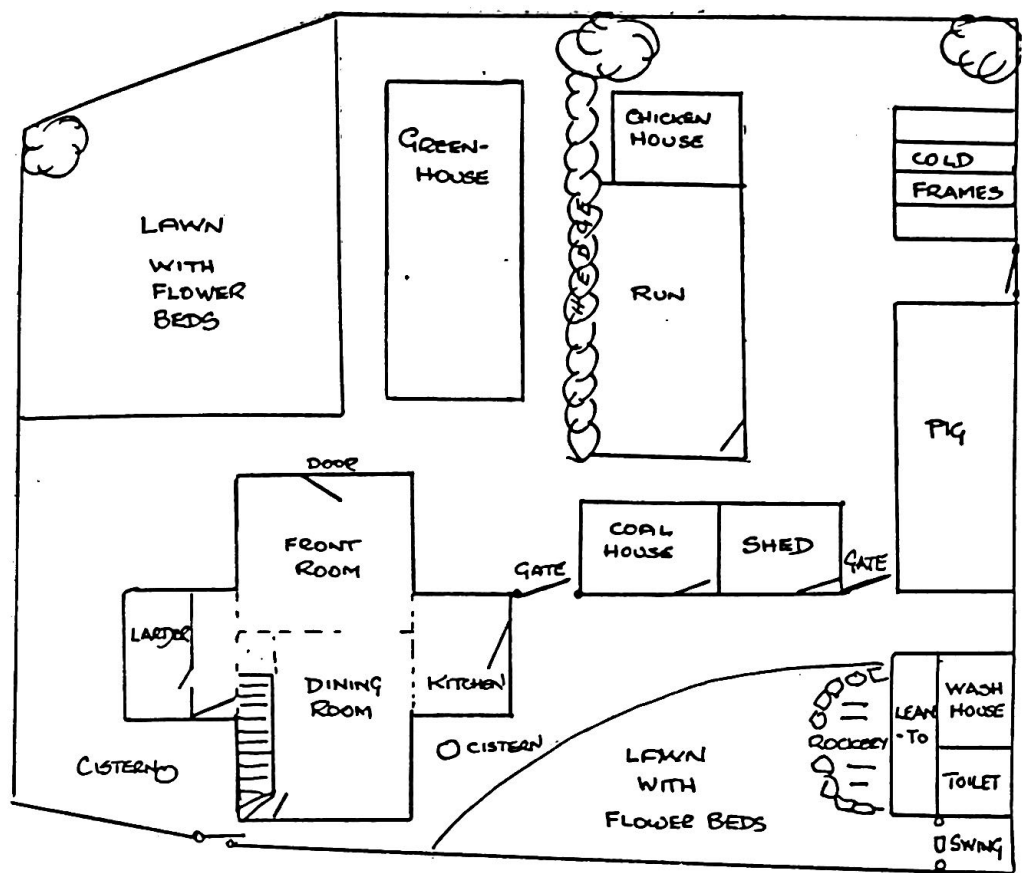


A view from the carriage window as the fireman delivers up the tablet to the Sutton Bridge East Box Signalman.

Their dining room was also in the old kitchen. It had a large black range with an oven at the side and a long mantelpiece over the top, which was taken out and replaced during this period. The glass-fronted crockery cupboard by the side of the range was original and still exists. There was also a cupboard under the stairs with a door opening at the sitting room end where Eileen kept her toys. The wooden door at the bottom of the stairs was still in existence.

The sitting room was used as the "front room" and had the original door opening on the river wall (west), hence the pelmet line is lower than the other two windows. This meant there were three outside entrances to the house. The room was decorated with panelled wallpaper. Throughout the lighting was by oil, until the twenty-two houses on the small council estate of Nenelands was built in 1953. This development brought electricity to the East Bank.

The kitchen, or old scullery, was used as today, but very changed. The fire and oven were still in the corner where the boiler chimney is today. The mini-range was built next to the chimney and Mrs Ebbs had a paraffin oil stove to the right of that. A large white Butler sink was situated to the left of the window together with a cold tap. The present conservatory, of course, was not there, but there was a wooden gate opening into the back garden (see Plan).



Up the stairs, Eileen remembered meat hanging from hooks in the stairwell. She had the small bedroom (now our office) and remembered watching the travellers to and from the coast from the window with her mother. The main bedroom was her parents' bedroom. The present bathroom was the guest bedroom, with an RAF family staying at one time. All had fireplaces.

Outside were numerous outbuildings: sheds, chicken house, pigsty (a pig killed every year), wash-house with a water boiler heated by coal, toilet, greenhouse, tool shed and coal sheds.

The garden consisted of flower beds and lawns with a rockery in front of the toilet and wash-house. Water for this wash-house was lifted, by bucket, from the outside cistern in front of the kitchen window. Vegetables for the family were grown, by Mr Ebbs, on an allotment near the railway track.

The name Stolworthy has been mentioned several times, during the research, as an occupant of the cottage, but nowhere in the Electoral Registers does this name appear. Quite accidentally, again, in conversation with an elderly

inhabitant of the village, it came out that a Miss Phyllis Stolworthy married a serviceman, George Fricker, and eventually moved to London. The conveyance for the property, on its sale by British Rail shows, that in 1963, it was extensively modernised by Mr George and Mrs Phyllis Fricker from London, who bought the property from British Rail for £1,000 and 65 Sutton Bridge, as it appeared on the conveyance, became Bridge House East. It is quite often the case, particularly in rural areas, that the local people refer to a married woman by her maiden name, hence the confusion.

Now the outside walls were skilfully rendered to prevent further softening of the red bricks (quite common when situated by salt water), a conservatory was built and also a garage with access. The original second bedroom to the right of the landing was converted to a large bathroom and toilet and heating was installed. The fireplaces were completely blocked up, the chimneys sealed and electric storage heaters put in. These were eventually replaced at the beginning of the 1970's by oil fired central heating, there being no mains gas on the Wingland side of the river. The vent from the boiler is connected to what was the oven and range chimney. The planning sheet of 1964 shows the builder to be Messrs Dayport Building Co. Ltd. of New Road, Sutton Bridge.

From 1974 to 1977 the cottage was inhabited by Mr. Norman and Mrs. Kathleen Griffin when it again changed hands and the present owners of this uniquely situated property are Peter and Maureen Hunt originally of Bath and Ilford and countless other places in between! They are still carrying on the research but the old records show little about the property and who really knows by what name it was known in 1830 and for the next hundred years or so - a house in isolation, built on the earth turned up from the Nene Outfall - river to the west and marshes to the east!



WASH HOUSE AND TOILET
(With Mr. and Mrs. King and son-in-law Harold Newson)



WASH HOUSE AND TOILET

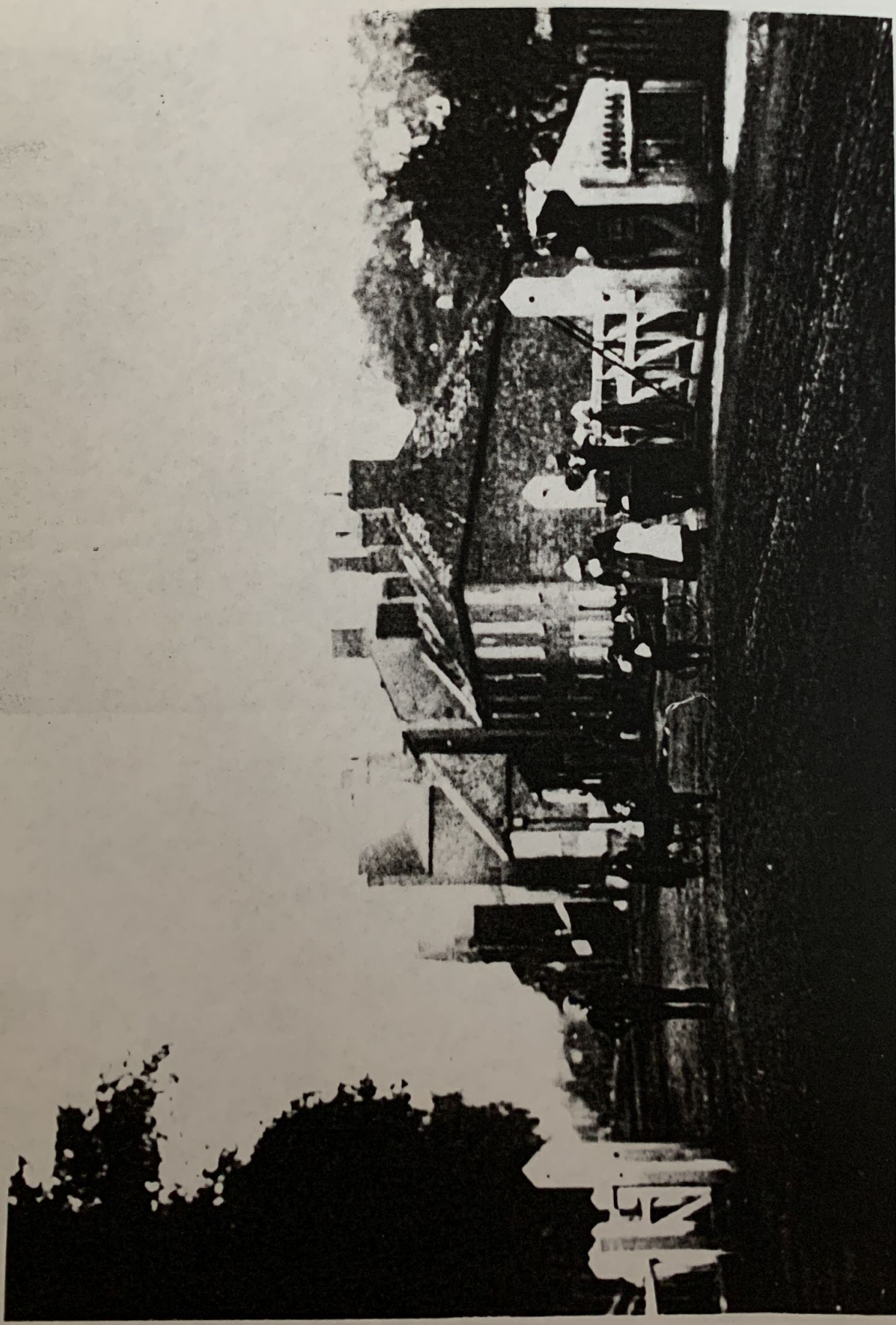
(With Mr. and Mrs. Almey)



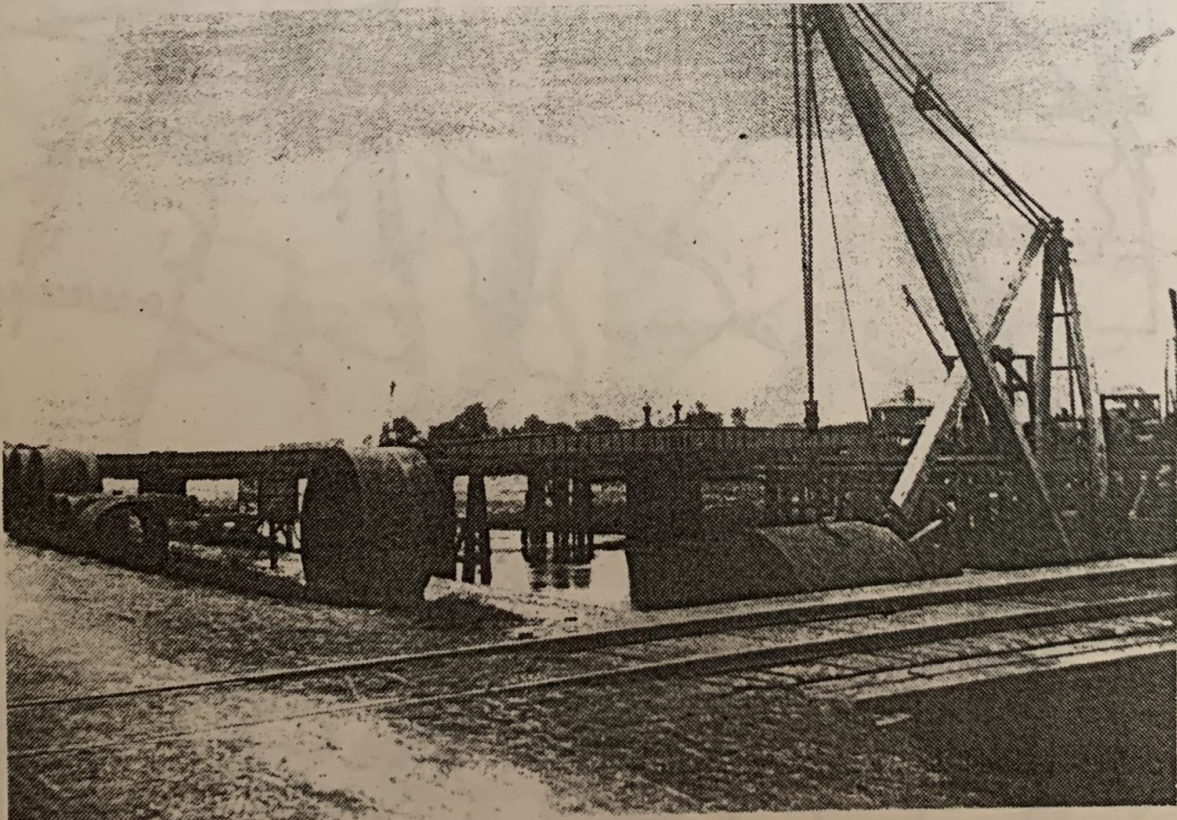
VILLAGE SCENES



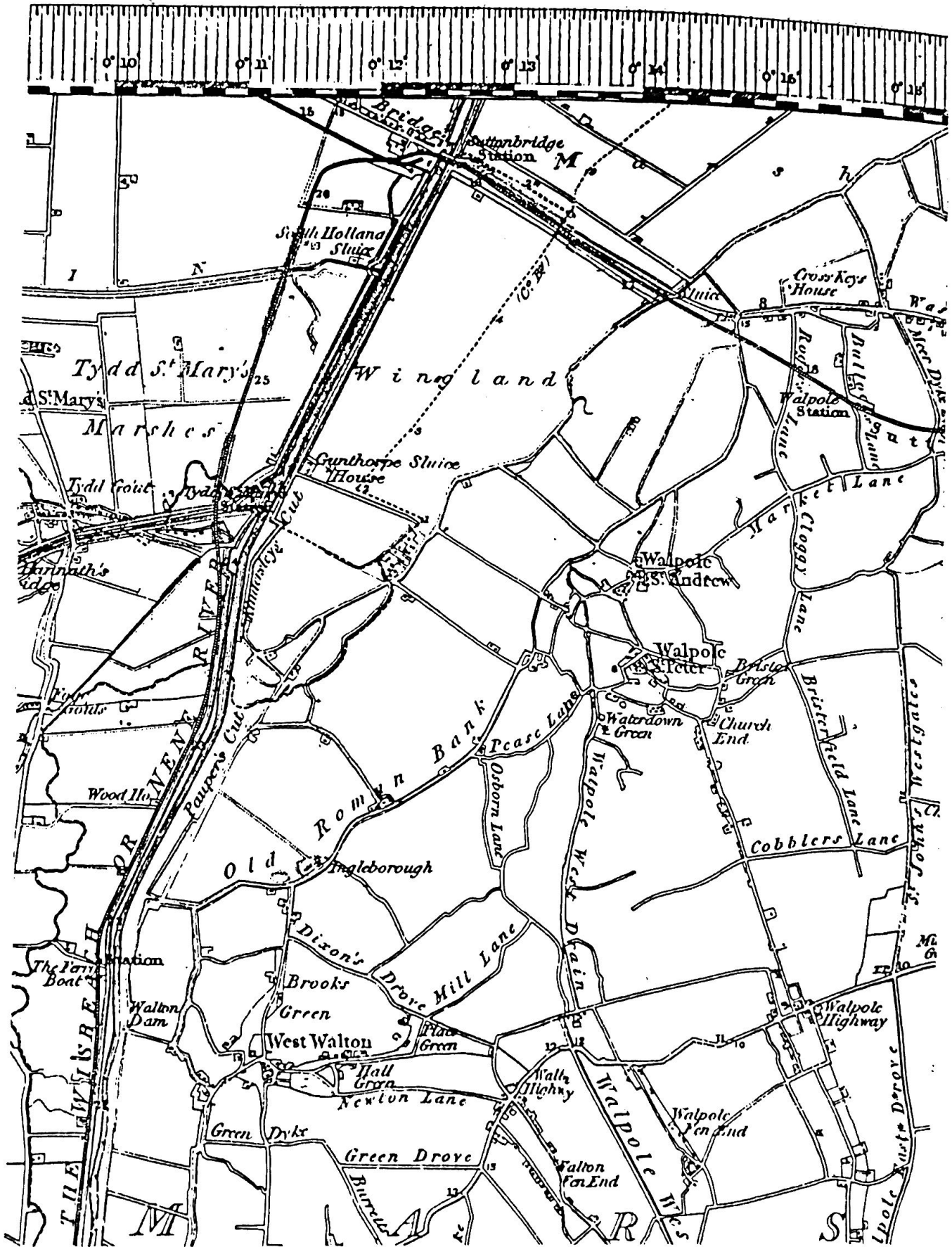
Top: Bridge Road Bottom: Barclays Bank



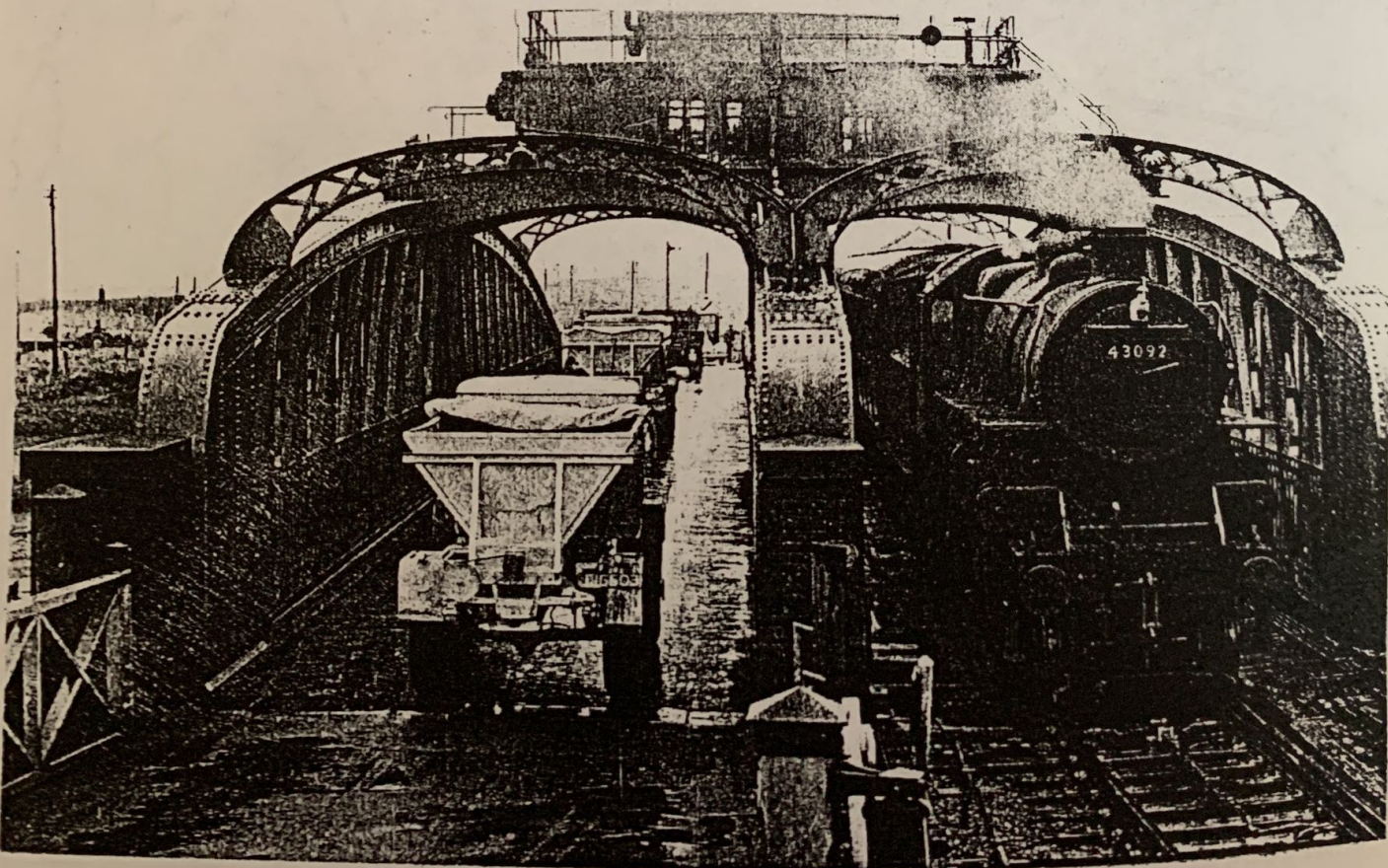
BUILDING THE THIRD BRIDGE

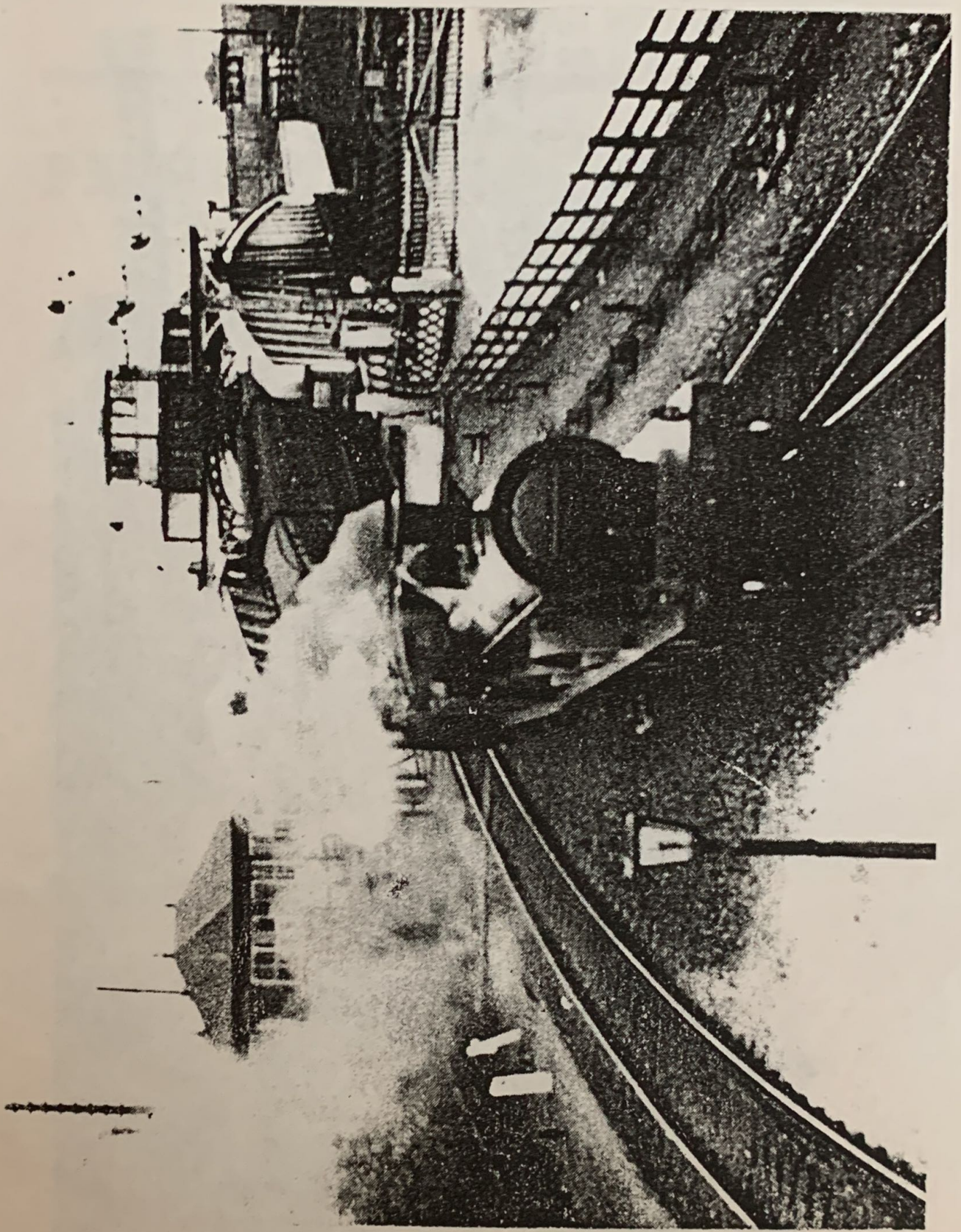


SECTION OF ORDNANCE MAP, 1824 - 1840
amended to 1867



THE THIRD BRIDGE AND RAILWAY





1897 BRIDGE SHOWING SINGLE STOREY COLD STORE
ON BRIDGE HOUSE EAST

