

# Jubilee Bridge

My interest in the river crossings over the Don was sparked by an article from the Thorne and District Gazette reproduced on The History of Thorne website<sup>1</sup> describing the opening of Jubilee Bridge between Fishlake and Thorne on December 29, 1887. It was described as *“the completion of an undertaking which has been agitated now for sixty years”* and *“essential to connect the parishes of Thorne, Sykehouse, Fishlake and Wormley Hill”*.

Before the construction of Jubilee Bridge on Ferry Road, Thorne there was no convenient means of road travel between Thorne and settlements to the west – to get to Thorne from Fishlake by road involved either:

- a long detour via Stainforth Bridge – the listed stone bridge was built in 1768 and replaced a wooden bridge erected some 20/30 years before or
- going north, via Wormley Hill, over the River Went and on to, what is now, the A614 at Cowick.

The River Don effectively cut off any form of road travel between Fishlake and villages to the south and east.

*The article continues:*

*“It was eventually agreed that an effort should be made to obtain funds to build a bridge, and the Jubilee Committee took the affair in hand. This committee consisted of a Mr A L Pease, Mr W L Darley, Mr G Dunston Mr W M Darley, Mr O Haycroft, Mr S Duckett, Mr T E Stones, Mr G Maud, Mr T Bailey, Mr H Marsden, Mr Lynas, Mr Wood, Mr J Acaster and Mr W Armitage. It was eventually decided that Fratson's Ferry would be the most convenient place to build the bridge, and subsequently Mr Radcliffe, of Sheffield was consulted as to building it. In the meantime, a subscription list had been opened, and amongst the principal donors were the Jubilee Committee, £10; the Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire and North-Eastern Railway Committees each, £50; Mr A L Pease (in addition to his services), Mr G Dunston and Mr Lynas £10 each Mr Marsden, £100; the Badsworth Hunt, £75; and others.”*

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://historyofthorne.com>

An article in the Sheffield Independent on December 16 1886<sup>2</sup> reported that a public meeting held on December 15 1886 and presided over by a Mr Peace resolved to build what became Jubilee Bridge. £300 was pledged on the day towards the overall cost of £600.

Today we are used to public authorities financing our main roads and bridges; the decision-making being largely taken out of local hands. £600 was a large sum of money in 1886 (around £70,000 today) so why would a group of individuals invest their time and money into a project of this nature? Philanthropy? Self Interest? Perhaps a mixture of both?

Further information on the promoters of this scheme can be found in Appendix One.

The article continues:

*" The bridge was erected at Fratson's Ferry, about one mile from Thorne; and through' its erection there is a communication made with the Sykehouse Road and the Sour Sluice or in other words between Thorne, Sykehouse, and Fishlake. The bridge which is of iron, is 90 feet between cylinder and cylinder, with 20 feet on either side. It rests on two buttresses at each side, is equal to carry 10 tons, and is 12 feet wide. The main girders are of lattice type, and are 8 feet deep. The bridge is built 12 feet above the highest flood tide. The work has been carried out, under Mr Pease, by Mr Radcliffe of Sheffield, and is admitted on all hands the latter has well discharged his duties".*

Therefore, in less than a year the bridge was built and open to traffic. Two questions? Who or what was Fratson? Why was the bridge built in a location so far north of the village? I don't have the definitive answer to either but in order to make an educated guess it's perhaps useful to know a little of the history of the River Don in this area.

Before 1626 the River Don had two outlets, an eastern branch that made its way across Hatfield Chase to enter the River Trent, and a northern branch, which was a Roman navigation channel, and joined the River Aire at Turnbridge, near East Cowick. Cornelius Vermuyden was then invited to drain large parts of Hatfield Chase and the scheme (largely completed by 1628) included the construction of Ashfield Bank, which ran for almost two miles along the southern bank of the Don from Fishlake to Thorne. This effectively cut off the eastern branch of the old line of the River Don, leaving just the northern outlet to the sea.

---

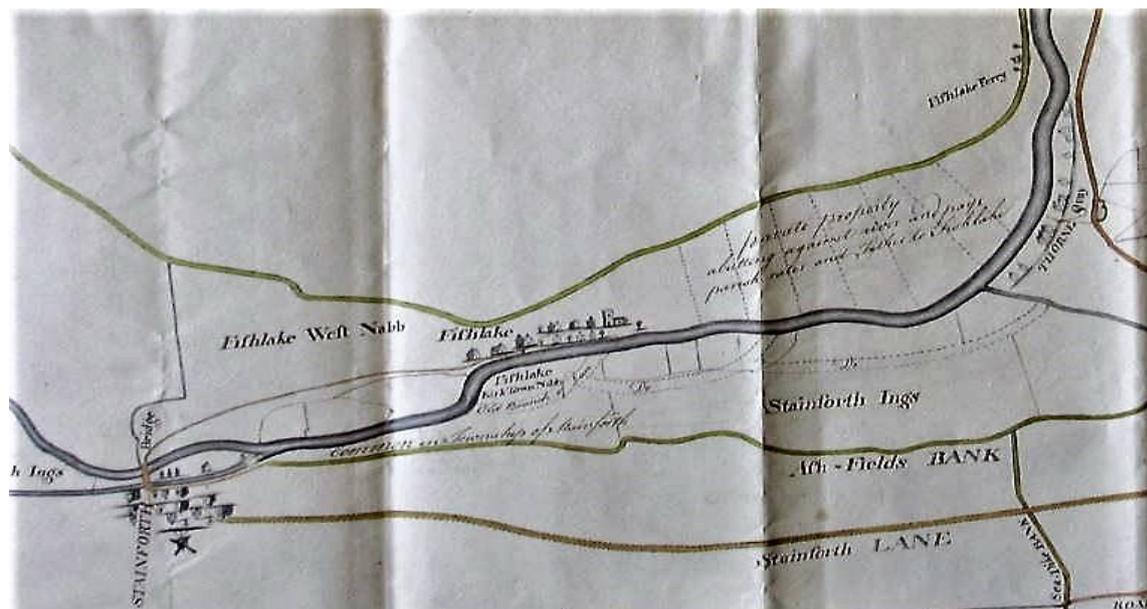
<sup>2</sup> <http://findmypast.co.uk>

Smaller boats could reach Doncaster for most of the year and large barges could do so when there was a flood tide.

During the 1700's there were attempts to seek powers to make more of the River Don navigable but these were hampered by opposition from local landowners and disunity between the authorities in Sheffield, Rotherham and Doncaster. A survey was commissioned from William Palmer and Partners with a view to making river improvements.

William Palmer was a York Surveyor who was later concerned with schemes for improving the Yorkshire Ouse. On the map produced to illustrate his survey "A Survey of the River Dun in order to improve the Navigation from Hull to Doncaster" dated 1722, there is a reference to a ferry crossing at, what is now known as, Jubilee Bridge. A copy of this map can be found in a book by T.S. Willan entitled "The Early History of the Don Navigation", which gives an interesting history of the early attempts to improve the River Don for water traffic. This is the earliest reference I can find to a ferry crossing over the Don at Jubilee Bridge.

The ferry crossing at Jubilee Bridge is also shown on "Map of Ditchmarsh alias North Common in the Parish of Thorne" dated 1792<sup>3</sup>, an extract from which I reproduce below. This map also clearly shows the extent of Ashfield Bank which I referred to earlier as well as the bridge crossing at Stainforth. Neither of these maps show any other ferry crossing, to/from Fishlake, but that does not mean that none existed over the long history of this village.



<sup>3</sup> DD/COV/9/2 Doncaster Archives, Doncaster



The 1854 Ordnance Survey map also refers to the crossing as Hangmans Hill Ferry. So why did Mr Pease refer to the site of Jubilee Bridge as Fratson's Ferry crossing? Who or what was Fratson? An examination of the census records provides the answer.

In the 1841 Census there is an entry under Hangsman Hill Ferry for Richard Fratson (aged 50), his wife, Elizabeth, (aged 40) and children, Eliza (15), George (13), John (6) and Charles (4). Richard Fratson is described as an agricultural labourer in this census. It appears however, that as well as the Fratson family, there was another family registered there – Luke (occupation - agricultural labourer) and Emma Glover, together with their four children.

In the 1851 Census return, Richard Fratson appears to occupy the same house but its' location is now described as "Fratson's Ferry". Richard lived there with his wife Elizabeth, (53), son Charles (14), described as being "At Home" and son Henry (9), described as a scholar. Interestingly Richard's occupation is described as a "Beer House Keeper". At this time, a beer house was sometimes no more than a room in a house and this was perhaps a good way of boosting the family income. Certainly, the location would have been busy, particular so at market times, with traffic to/from Thorne and beyond. Again, it appears that there were two families living at the ferry crossing, as the census also refers to a Thomas Jordan (39), Head, agricultural labourer, his wife Emma (30) and son George (5). Richard Fratson died in 1851 and was buried at Fishlake.

After Richard's death, Elizabeth Fratson continued to live at Fratson's Ferry as the entry in the 1861 Census describes her as the head of the household (63) and "Keeper of the Ferry and Beerhouse". At that time, she was living with her grand-daughter, Maria (14) who was described as a servant. Again, there were two families described as living at the ferry crossing. In addition to the Fratson family, Samuel Hall (54) and his wife Mary (53), his daughter Sarah Ann (17) described as being "At Home" and his granddaughter of three weeks lived there. Mary Hall died in 1868 and was registered as residing at "Ferry Hangman Hill".

Samuel Hall was still living at the ferry crossing in 1871 – the Census return describes him as an agricultural labourer living at Low Hill Ferry and aged 63. William Schofield (30), innkeeper and agricultural labourer, his wife Maria, innkeepers' wife (24) and three children also live at Low Hill Ferry. It is not clear from the census returns who operated the ferry. It is also interesting to note the change of name – Fratson's Ferry has become Low Hill Ferry. Could this be a reflection, not only of a change in the operators of the ferry, but also the

main users of the ferry crossing? Low Hill on the Thorne side of the River Don was developed as a large oil and cake mill in the 1860's (now demolished).

In 1881, the Census refers to a Charles Poskitt (40), Ferryman, wife Harriet, (22) and daughter Sarah (six months) living at Low Hill Ferry, and for the first time no other family is registered on the census. The census does however refer to a further building at Low Ferry as "uninhabited".

By the time of the 1891 Census, the new bridge had been open for four years and there was only one household living at, what was now known as, Jubilee Bridge. William Robinson (aged 57), agricultural labourer, was described as the head of the household and he lived there with his brother Edward Robinson (agricultural labourer, aged 55). The description was "Fratson's Ferry Jubilee Bridge". So, we now have a reversion back to Fratson's Ferry. So, the reference to its' former operators remains but the beerhouse, having lost its captive trade, has, perhaps unsurprisingly, now gone.

The 1901 census shows that both Robinson brothers were still living there. William is referred to as a "Farmer aged 60" and his brother as "Ordinary farm worker" aged 57. The 1911 census notes the occupiers of property at Jubilee Bridge as Thomas Wright (66), farm labourer, his wife Eliza (64), his single daughter Ruth (26) described as a servant, a son Arthur (21), a colliery worker and two grandchildren, Willie (8) and Harry, (7 months).

Now nothing remains of the original ferry nor of the house occupied by the ferry operators.

My second question – Why was Jubilee Bridge built in this position on the River Don? – is perhaps easier to answer. The bridge was built on the site of the existing ferry crossing. The 1825 map shows a 30 feet wide track leading from the east side of the river to Cowick Road and also shows the Fishlake side of the crossing as a "watering place" for cattle. The main tracks from Fishlake converge here. The River Don was relatively narrow at this point so the costs of construction would have been lower than bridging a wider span. It seems likely that, given the short timescale between its inception and completion, that either no land purchase was needed or the land necessary for the abutments was in the ownership of one of the promoters of the project. All these factors could well have supported the decision to build in its current location.

Construction of the bridge was fast but the arguments over its subsequent maintenance were seemingly endless. A newspaper cutting from the York Herald in 1890<sup>5</sup> refers to a report of

---

<sup>5</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)

the waywardens for Lower Strafforth and Tickhill to the Doncaster and District Highways Board outlining the desirability of making Jubilee Bridge a County Bridge (and therefore maintained at the expense of the West Riding County Council) – the matter was deferred.

West Riding County Council was created in 1889 and one of its many functions was to take over the responsibility for the construction and maintenance of county roads and bridges from the local parishes. The actual process of transferring this responsibility for existing bridges was, however, fraught with argument and the vexed question of paying for maintenance of the bridge was not was not fully resolved until the mid-1900's.

Initially there were arguments that the bridge approach roads were not public highways, therefore the bridge could not be adopted but the main reason seems to be down to its inherent design. The bridge was not up to the standard expected of a county road – not only a single-track road bridge but because of the method of construction, it also had weight restrictions. It certainly compares badly with the eighteenth-century stone-built bridge over the Don at Stainforth (now listed).

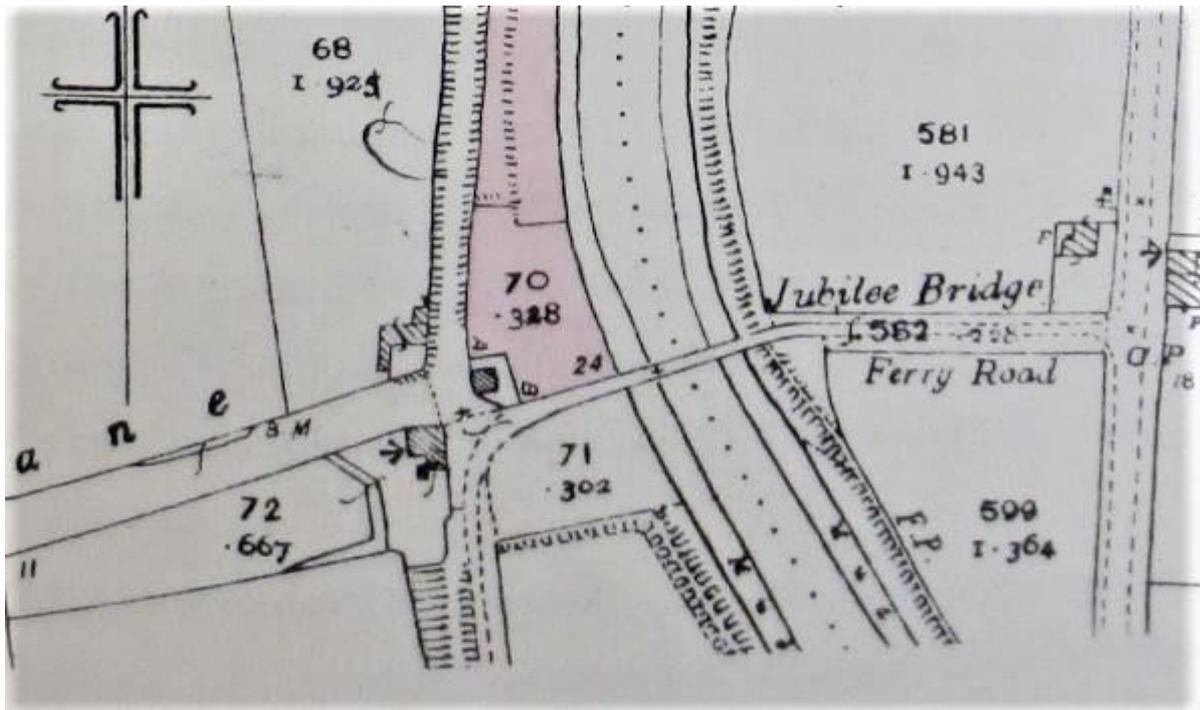
Over the next 50 years various repairs were carried out to the bridge, seemingly on an ad hoc basis, until finally in 1938 the West Riding County Council announced their intention to rebuild Jubilee Bridge to the south of the existing structure. Unfortunately, the advent of World War II put an end to schemes, of which this was one, regarded as non-essential to the war effort. So had it not been for the war Sour Lane may well have been a straight road link to the A614 rather than the dog leg it is today.

At some stage either during the war or shortly after, the County Council did take on full responsibility for the full repair of the structure. In 1951 tenders were invited to carry out piling works to strengthen the timber trestle – all works to be paid for and materials supplied by the West Riding County Council.

Extensive works were started in the 1930's, continuing into the mid 1940's to improve the River Don and alleviate the severe flooding in the Don Valley. I am very grateful to Peter Tidball, a fellow Society member for giving me a copy of a June 1937 conveyance plan for land near Jubilee Bridge which was purchased by the River Ouse Catchment Board (the body responsible for the river improvement works). The plan (see next page) shows, coloured pink, the area of land purchased for the river improvements at Jubilee Bridge.

Of even greater interest however, is the description of the land purchased – Field No 70 is described as part of the garden of Ferry House so, was the building immediately adjacent to the land coloured pink, the original ferry house?

The census returns of 1841-1871 refer to two families living at, what is now, Jubilee Bridge and this plan also shows the location of a second property, lying on the diagonally opposite corner (adjacent to the benchmark shown on the plan). Were these the buildings home to the two families during this period?



An article in the Doncaster Gazette dated 06 July 1939 referred to the river improvements in this area: -

*“The River Ouse Catchment Board are carrying out extensive remedial work in the River Don adjacent to Jubilee Bridge. Two cottages which have experienced flooding have been demolished and an embankment is being constructed so that there will be no fear of the river flooding the main Selby Road at this point. The cottages were on a bend and the bank was comparatively low while at good tide the water came to the edge of the footpath for a distance of several yards. It is anticipated that the new cutting, which is being constructed for a distance of about a mile from Thorne to Fishlake, will be open this summer”.*

This article seemed to confirm that the two houses referred to were perhaps the two buildings shown on the above-mentioned conveyance plan and seems to confirm that they were demolished as part of the river improvements, just before the war. Frustratingly I couldn't find a photograph of the area, but this seemed a logical conclusion, until Rob Downing, a fellow Society member, sent me a copy of a photograph he had found on his researches, which is reproduced below.



This photograph was taken by a gentleman called Ken Ford and kindly uploaded on to the Flickr website. It is the only photograph I am aware of which shows property on the Fishlake side of Jubilee Bridge and dates from 1955. I am very grateful to Ken Ford for sharing this photograph.

The two buildings, one facing the river, the other shown by an arrow on the photograph are largely in the positions shown on the 1937 purchase plan reproduced earlier in this article. When we discussed this area at a Society meeting in 2017, members suggested that the larger property on the left-hand side of the photograph was certainly there until the 1970's. The smaller property, the roof of which can only be seen in the photograph (red arrow), was thought to be a washhouse/coalhouse. This was confirmed recently, (posts on our Society's Facebook page), by the granddaughter of the occupiers of the larger house in the 1960's, a Mr and Mrs Hutchinson. She also advised that the house did have cellars and had been told that it was the old ferry inn. I suspect we will never know whether this property was

occupied by two families in the mid 1800's. Perhaps one family occupied what became Mr and Mrs Hutchinson's coalhouse/washhouse? Or perhaps one family occupied the cellars referred to in Mr and Mrs Hutchinson's time and the other family occupied the house above? Interestingly the 1911 census describes the house facing the river as having "3 bedrooms and two low rooms". Could the "low rooms" have been the cellars and a separate dwelling in the nineteenth century?

Next time you are out walking in this area look at the bend in the road – the house facing the river would have been very restricted in depth – there is a significant drop to the fields at the rear which might explain the description of the "low rooms". Also, if you look carefully on the ground you can see some remains of the walls of the "washhouse" building on what is now used as an informal car park. My best guess is that there were two separate properties, diagonally opposite each other, the older one being the ferry house ( subsequently used as a washhouse for the larger property fronting the river) and the other facing the river in the photograph.

The 1939 Register shows one person living on the Fishlake side of Jubilee Bridge – a Thomas Large, described as a single, born in 1903 and whose occupation was a "cowman". The 1939 Register was a National Register that listed the personal details of every civilian in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This Register was also used to issue identity cards, organise rationing and was essential to the war effort. National Registration Day was September 29th 1939.

So, we have a newspaper article in July 1939 reporting that two cottages on the Fishlake side of the river had been demolished for river improvements and the census (September 1939) reporting Thomas Large living in one of them. We also have evidence that the house fronting the river shown in the photograph certainly existed until the mid- sixties at least. A little confusing to say the least.

My theory is that the River Ouse Catchment Board intended to demolish both cottages as part of the improvement works and build a new bridge further downstream. Because the

scheme was curtailed due to the war, they were left in situ. The demolitions reported in the July 1939 Doncaster Gazette article were incorrect - perhaps a genuine mistake or just lazy reporting - but the reporter could perhaps be forgiven as there was, at that time, far more important issues on everyone's mind.

On the Thorne side of Jubilee Bridge another building fronted Ferry Lane. Maps in the 1950's show both this property and the one occupied by Thomas Large on the Fishlake side, forming part of Jubilee Bridge Farm. The photograph below (my thanks to Rob Downing) shows this property in the 1970's.



According to the 1939 Register, this property was, at that time, occupied by the Hibbert family. Harry Hibbert (45) was the head of the household and worked as an advice clerk at Thorne Colliery, his wife Lilian (52), daughter Gladstone (23) described as a domestic servant, son, Harry Jnr. (19) described as a dairy farmer and daughter, Elizabeth (13), scholar. This property was owned by William Bisatt of Thorne, who died in 1940. David Ward (thanks to Stephen Lee for the information) lived in the house up to the mid 1960's.

I will be continuing my research into the ferry crossings over the River Don in the Fishlake area as I believe there may be at least two more – Roperly Ferry at Waterside and a further ferry crossing near the Church in the village centre.

I hope you enjoyed reading this article. If you have any information which could add to this article or information on the other ferry crossings it would be very gratefully received - please do get in touch via the Fishlake History website. <http://fishlakehistorysociety.uk>. or mail me on [fishlakehistorysociety@gmail.com](mailto:fishlakehistorysociety@gmail.com).

**Carole Smith**

**January 2021**

## Appendix One

The result of my further research into the main promoters of the project is as follows:

**Mr Peace** – although the Gazette article refers to him as Mr Pease, it seems clear from the census returns that his name was actually Peace. The Yorkshire Post on 08 May 1889<sup>6</sup> reports him as the Vice–Chairman of the Doncaster Highways Board. Alfred Peace was born in Huddersfield in 1838 and moved to Thorne at some point between 1851 and 1859 when he married Wilhelmina Meggitt. At the time of his marriage, he described himself as a Land Surveyor, so perhaps he moved to Thorne to specifically take up employment with the local Highways Board. In 1881, he was living in Ellison Street, Thorne and described himself as a Civil Engineers Assistant. He therefore was in a position to take the project forward.

**Mr H Marsden** - by far the biggest contributor in money terms to the project. The 1861 and 1871 Census returns show the Marsden family living at Thorninghirst (Thorninghurst) Manor, a large farmhouse close to Jubilee Bridge. John Henry Marsden (born 1834) is described as a farmer of 220 acres. The 1881 Census Return shows the Marsden family living at Bramwith Hall but they probably retained land holdings in this area which would have made the bridge extremely useful.

**Mr G. Dunston** – the name of Dunston is synonymous with shipbuilding in Thorne. Richard Dunston moved from Torksey in Lincolnshire and set up a shipbuilding business on the banks of the canal at Thorne. George Dunston was one of Richard's sons and in the 1891 Census was described a roper, living at Union Lane, Thorne with his wife and family.

**Mr W. M. Darley** – William Marsdin Darley was the founder of a family brewing business at King Street Thorne. It is thought that brewing began on the site in the 1850's - before this the Whitfield family had operated a brewery on the same site. Around the 1880's Darley's ale would have been largely transported by horse and dray and by water, but access to markets in the Doncaster area was difficult, not least by the swing bridge over the canal at Thorne.

**The Badsworth Hunt** – thought to be one of the oldest Hunts in Yorkshire (records go back to the early 1720's) and covering a large part of South Yorkshire. Merged with the Braham Moor Hounds in 2002. The bridge would have formed a useful link to the Thorne/Goole area.

---

<sup>6</sup>[www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)