



The Story of
WANSFORD



Wansford Bridge and the Haycock Inn, 1790

The Continuing Story of an Ancient Village and its Community

David Stuart-Mogg

The Story of **WANSFORD**

A Community Project Dedicated to the Villagers of Wansford

Original contributors to Wansford at the Millennium:

David and Dora Baker, Stanley Chambers, Mary Gilbert, Tom Guy, Harry Hull, Don Jefferies, John and Barbie Kempe, Tony Palenski, Revd. Fr. Peter Pooley, David Powell, Doug Stafford, George Wingrove, Sue Woodcock and special thanks to John Bennett.

Also (2007) Canon Thomas Christie, Sibyl and Rex Audsley & Eric Standen.

In Memory of the late Douglas Stafford, without whose unfailing encouragement and enthusiasm the original compilation of 'Wansford at the Millennium' would have been the poorer.

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Wansford at the Millennium (2000) & *The Story of Wansford* (2007).

The Story of Wansford is a revised, updated and enlarged edition of *Wansford at the Millennium* with additional narrative, photographs and illustrations.

**Net proceeds from this publication will be donated to
St. Mary's Church, Wansford**

Printed by Peter Spiegl & Co., Stamford

I went thence to Wansford and passed by Mrs. St. John's house which stands on a hill a mile from ye town in a fine parke. There was no gate to Peterborough town and as I passed ye Road I saw upon ye walls of ye ordinary peoples houses and walls of their out houses, ye Cow dung plaister'd up to drie in Cakes which they use for firing, it's a very offensive fewell, but ye Country people use Little Else in these parts. Wansford is five mile from Peterborough, where I passed over the Bridge which Entered me into Northamptonshire, the town being part in that Shire which is towards London, ye other in Lincolnshire which a mile or two farther joyns with Rutlandshire at Stamford, which town stand in ye 3 Countyes, where I lay at "ye Swan in Wansford in England," being a jest on a man making haye fell asleep on a heap of it, and a great storm washed ye hay and man into ye River and Carry'd him to ye Bridge, where he awoke and knew not where he was, Called to ye people in ye grounds and told them he lived in a place Called Wansford in England which goes for a jest on ye men of Wansford to this Day.
Celia Fiennes 1698 (The Haycock was formerly The Swan.)

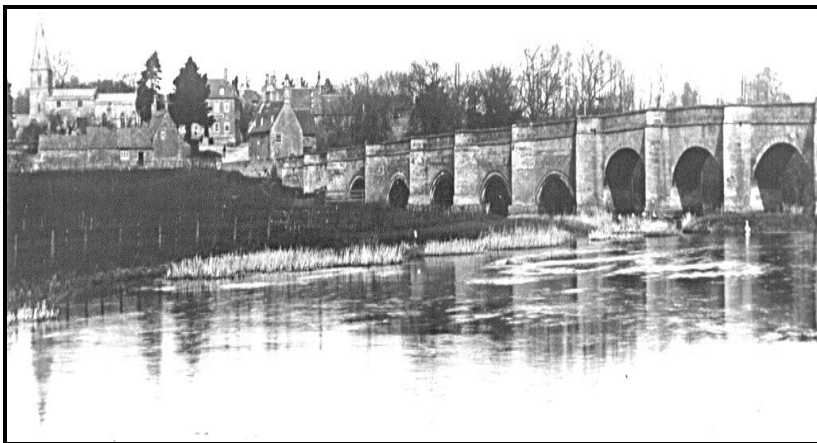
After dinner I resolv'd to be gay; and tho' in London I would not go two yards to see a play, yet for exercise and variety I rode six miles to Stamford on that account. After putting up my horse I perambulated the town and, at seven o'clock entering the playhouse, was shown into a side box (being too genteel). The next boxes were soon occupy'd by some old acquaintances, their daughters etc., who reside in this neighbourhood; and I received many kind invitations to return with them. (But lack-a-day, I should then have given up my supper and my bed at the Haycock Inn!!!) The bill of fare too long by half; but every performer must add more, and more, to tempt the half-price comers; three acts were enough for me, and they lasted till nine, o'clock. **John Byng, 1790**

This Wansford has obtained an idle addition to its name, from a story so firmly believ'd by the country people, that they will allow hardly any room for contradiction; namely, That a great flood coming hastily down the River Nyne, in hay-making time, a country fellow, having taken up his lodging on a cock of hay in the meadow, was driven down the stream in the night, while he was fast asleep; and the hay swimming, and the fellow sleeping, they drove together towards Wisbech in the Fens, whence he was fairly going on to the sea; when being wakened, he was seen and taken up by some fishermen, almost in the open sea; and being asked, who he was? he told them his name; and where he lived? he answer'd at Wansford in England; from this story the town is called Wansford in England; and we see at the `great inn, by the south end of the bridge, the sign of a man floating on a cock of hay, and over him written, Wansford in England.
Daniel Defoe

Foreword

This is the story of Wansford, described by its own villagers and friends from neighbouring communities. Such a venture is indicative of the continuing community spirit that was once widespread amongst adjacent rural settlements. Notwithstanding the significant increase in new housing in Wansford and the conversion of properties from agriculturally related or commercial use into domestic dwellings, the village has happily largely retained a spirit of common interest that was often shared amongst country dwellers in past centuries. Such people often lived barely above subsistence level, yet prided themselves in their necessary rugged individuality and ability to survive the seasonal vagaries of a largely agrarian based economy. Today's Wansford resident is most likely to have forsaken the stress and pollution of an urban environment by choice. The attractions of family life, or indeed retirement, enjoying reasonably unpolluted country air within a relatively low-density and largely crime-free environment, adjacent to fields and woodlands, are abundantly clear. Not that life in any village at the start of the twenty-first century should be painted as one of uninterrupted bucolic bliss. Increasingly, villages everywhere are threatened with the prospect of becoming mere dormitories for commuters who work, shop and often socialise away from their village. This potential is arguably encouraged by so-called 'brown-field development', where gardens are lost to new housing and properties demolished for profitable rebuilds at higher density levels; often at the cost of irreparable damage to long-term village ambiance. More cars, more motor mowers, more hedge-cutters, more strimmers, more power-washers, more bonfires, more fireworks – all occurring at ever closer proximities and with greater frequency – thereby detracting from those very qualities that have hitherto been a keynote attraction of villages and rural life everywhere. *Clearly, Wansford must evolve and grow if it is to survive.* However, such growth must surely be both sensitive and organic. In the wake of continuing losses of amenity, all manner of local enterprise comes under threat as Wansford and surrounding villages gradually morph into little more than suburbs of Peterborough – perhaps eventually with their own Tesco Metro supplanting the traditional village post office and stores! That said, Wansford is indeed fortunate in still having a community that welcomes, indeed embraces the new whilst, on occasion at least, minding a duty of care as custodian of the past.

Welcome to the story of Wansford – and part of Stibbington.



St. Mary's Church, the Mermaid Inn and Wharf House c1910

Past Confusions and Present Quandaries

For the purposes of the story about to unfold, the boundaries of the village of Wansford will be viewed generically, and will encompass those communities living both to the north and to the south of the River Nene. In the not too distant past this, without doubt, would cause a near-apoplectic reaction amongst certain sections of our community, for whom the river remained an 'iron curtain' which divided Stibbington in the south from Wansford in the north. Surprisingly few realise, including no doubt some villagers, that technically the name Wansford relates only to the community to the north of the river. To the south of the river lays Stibbington. Or, Sibson cum Stibbington to append its full parochial title.

John Speed's famous map of 1610 emphatically places *Walmfford* precisely between 1, Bridge End and Wharf House. This makes eminent sense. Being on higher ground, the area that is now known as Bridge End was far less liable to seasonal flooding and the effects of early morning river mists. It would therefore be the more obvious side to settle. To confuse matters yet further, on 1st April 1998 Peterborough achieved Unitary Authority status and became administratively responsible for Wansford village and the entirety of Wansford old bridge. Those dwellings in Stibbington/Wansford to the south of the river, since that same date, have been administratively within the District of Huntingdon and continue to be administered by Stibbington cum Sibson Parish Council.

That said, with very few exceptions indeed, as far as members of the community are concerned the Village of Wansford gladly embraces both sides of the river.



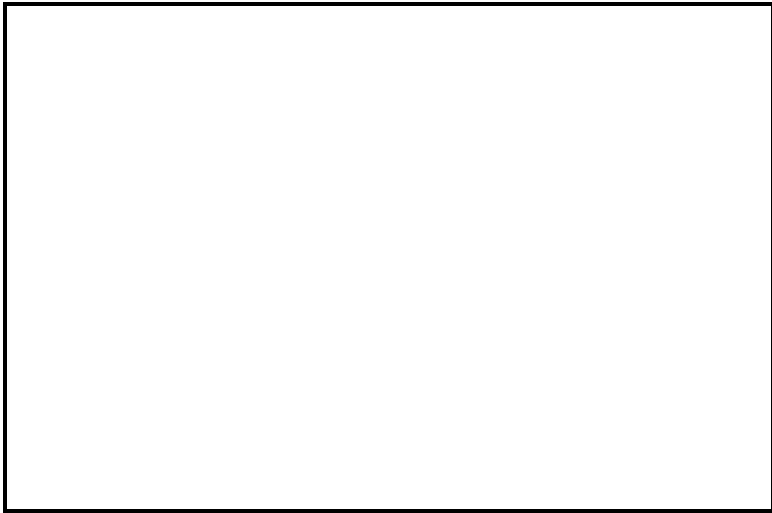
The Stibbington end of Wansford Bridge. Note the pedestrians on the towpath and the gated access to London Road.

As civil parishes, each side of the river has its own Parish Council: Wansford to the north and Stibbington cum Sibson to the south. Wansford does not even have its own Parish Church. St. Mary the Virgin is, properly, a chapel of ease belonging to St. Andrew's, Thornhaugh. A 'chapel of ease' may be described as a subsidiary place of worship to a mother church for the ease, or convenience, of parishioners who may live a distance from the main church. Indeed, once the whole of what may be termed 'generic Wansford' to the south of the river lay in the Diocese of Ely and thus belonged to the parish church of St. John the Baptist in Stibbington village, to the east of the A1 trunk road. Most sensibly, given the closeness to Wansford of the Stibbington community west of the A1, this part of the parish was ceded by Ely Diocese in 1978 and became part of the Parish of Thornhaugh cum Wansford. Confused? It becomes yet more complex!

The old Wansford railway station was even farther from Wansford than it was from Stibbington, being at Sibson. There was, in addition, another Wansford Road railway station in the nearby parish of Sutton. The Haycock Hotel advertises its location as being Wansford in England; as did the now demolished Mermaid Inn across the river, which faced St. Mary's church from what is now Wansford village green. Wansford post office, as was its immediate predecessor, is theoretically located in Stibbington. The original Wansford post office was in fact at 1, Bridge End, opposite the church on the corner of Bridge End and Peterborough Road. There still remains an Edward VII post box sited in the wall of the now private residence. An historical pageant enacted upon both a river barge and outside the Haycock in 1953, to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, was proudly advertised as being held at '*Sibson cum Stibbington (Wansford in England)*'.



The old Wansford railway station in the early 1900's



In spite of the apparent historical conundrum, essentially both sides of the river at Wansford / Stibbington unite in an inclusive and harmonious spirit via a varied number of associations and organisations which themselves largely recognise no social boundaries – be they civil or ecclesiastical.

Earliest days

There is ample evidence that mankind has lived, hunted, farmed and traded in the Wansford vicinity for at least 4,000 years; as Neolithic flint arrowheads, scrapers and domestic implements found in the area clearly testify.

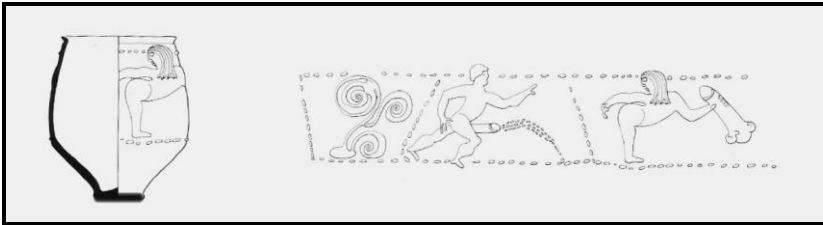


Polished, ceremonial flint axe head, some 4,000 years old, found in Wansford by the late Ernie Culpin in the 1930s whilst digging drainage channels. (approx. size 15cms x 5cms)

The foremost attraction of the location as a natural meeting point, and later a settlement, must surely have been the shallowness of the river at this point enabling first pedestrians and later horsemen, wagons and drovers with livestock to cross the river in comparative safety. Indeed, within living memory it has been possible to ford the river adjacent to Wansford old bridge. It was here that the draught-horses, towing flat-bottomed barges, waded across the width of the river to follow the line of the towpath as it changed banks. One generally accepted interpretation of the name 'Wansford', a name that has enjoyed many variations in spelling over the centuries at the hands of cartographers, is 'the ford by the spring'. The combination of a convenient ford, nearby freshwater springs, fertile water meadows, adjacent dryer high ground becoming a natural crossroads of main arterial routes north, south, east and west must gradually have seen temporary riverside encampments of travellers graduate to semi-permanent and then fully permanent dwellings. Such dwellings might well have included what today might be considered nascent 'service industries', providing shelter, locally produced food and other fundamental requirements and necessities for travellers. Later, as the settlement enlarged and became better known, itinerant metal workers, wood workers and leather workers would have been but three skills which would have found a ready market repairing and renewing the damaged accoutrements of soldiers, merchants as well as the growing local community at this increasingly busy entrepôt. Much later, a simple chapel was also built to fulfil the spiritual needs, and allay the fears, of those who crossed the river at Wansford; quite possibly on the site of a far earlier pagan temple that sought to achieve those self-same objectives in an former, yet more superstitious, era. Such sites, as were convenient, would later have been adopted by the Romans and 'recycled' for worship and sacrifices to their own gods. After the Emperor

Constantine declared Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire in 313 AD, such places and their altars were often translated into embryonic Christian churches. A simple exercise with dowsing rods at St. Mary's attracts a very strong reaction in the area of the altar, suggesting that it may well be placed over the site of a far earlier, pre-Christian altar; the precise location of which was chosen for reasons long lost to posterity.

During Roman times, the major town of *Dubroviae* arose close to the present village of Water Newton, a little over a mile to the south east of Wansford. There is clear evidence of Roman occupation in and around 'generic Wansford' itself and across the surrounding farmland, where a number of sites of Roman villas have been identified. Stone *sarcophagi* have long been traditional hazards for the unwary ploughman throughout the area. One villa, now long since quarried away, was alongside the King's Cliffe road, itself Roman in origin, where Rutland Oil now has a depôt. The King's Cliffe road originally branched off west from the great Roman thoroughfare of Ermine Street at Ailsworth passing Wansford to the north, just south of the present A47 before all trace of it is lost beyond King's Cliffe. Another Roman villa was behind Chapel Court in Elton Road. Evidence has also been found of a Roman wharf on the site of Wharf House, Bridge End.



An erotically decorated Roman beaker, excavated locally: late 2nd / early 3rd century. Apparently, not a wholly uncommon find in military cantonments such as nearby *Dubroviae*. (Peterborough City Museum & Art Gallery Department of Leisure and Amenities)

The convent at the nearby village of Castor was attacked and plundered by the Danes in the year 870, and by the year 1012 Castor Church was in ruins due to continued depredations by Viking raiders. It is not therefore impossible that Viking longboats may also have moored at Wansford during the period that has since become known as the Dark Ages.

On April 20th 1295, whilst staying at the Prebendal Manor in nearby Nassington, Bishop Oliver Sutton of Lincoln mandated 'to all who shall contribute to the upkeep or repair of Walsmesford Bridge' be granted 'twenty days indulgence' from purgatory. Clearly, the good men of Wansford had other things on their minds than their eternal souls as, by 1334, due to the 'ruinous' state of the bridge they were licensed to charge 'pontage', a bridge toll, to repair and maintain this vital road link.

Local historian the late John Gilbert records in his booklet '*Wansford*

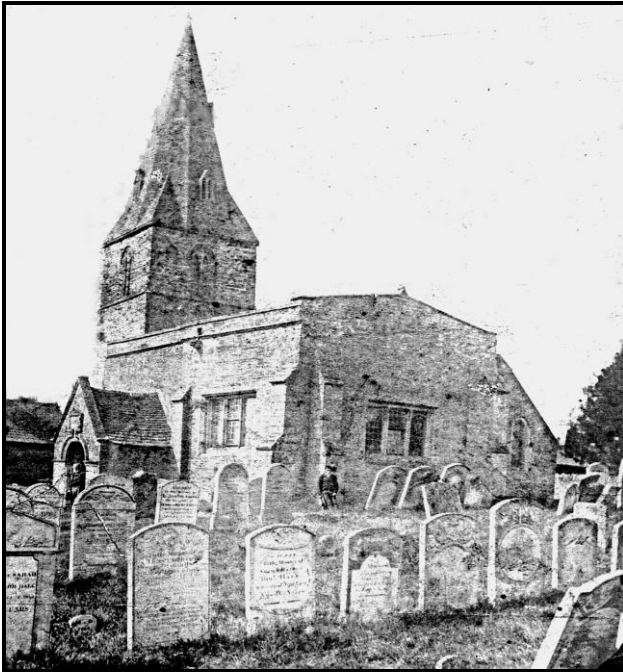
and its Church' that, in mediæval times, tournaments were held at Wansford Heath, near the Great North Road. Here, too, the northern and East Anglian lords met up in the early spring of 1215 to ride to Runnymede to confront King John and compel his acquiescence and seal to the *Magna Carta*; a claim also cited by Stamford. Being geographically a more convenient nodal point, Wansford might well have the more logical claim.

The Middle Ages would also have seen the River Nene increasingly used as a local means of transport up and down river, but not for any great distance. The great drainage systems had yet to be planned and dug and the fenlands beyond Peterborough, or *Medhamsted* as it was formerly called, were vast lakes and marshes with small settlements dotted around where the land rose barely a few feet above sea level. The first survey of the river Nene to improve navigation between Peterborough and Northampton was carried out under Sir William Fleetwood in 1606, the year after the Gunpowder Plot. In 1633 a Commission of Sewers, which today might well be called a Commission of Waterways, sat at Kettering to discuss damage occasioned to the lands abutting the River Nene. Remember, this was centuries before commercial and residential development on water meadows contributed in no little way to the spate of severe local flooding in Wansford and elsewhere that heralded to approach of the twenty-first century in 1998. He who ignores history is doomed to see history repeat itself. The 1633 survey began at Wansford Bridge where the height of the water was regulated and the silted-up water channels were ordered to be cleared and cleaned at the expense of the landowners. It was also ordered that the river be widened to its ancient, customary width. Even as comparatively late as 1889, the Ordnance Survey 1st edition, 25-inch maps in the Huntingdonshire series, clearly show the river Nene flowing through most if not all of the Wansford Bridge arches. How picturesque and fortuitous for Wansford if such were the case today!

The Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin

The parish church of St. Mary the Virgin, properly a chapel of ease to neighbouring St. Andrew's Church, Thornhaugh is of considerable antiquity being Saxon in origin and certainly 11th century if not earlier. A 'chapel of ease' is a subordinate place of worship to a mother church, in this case St. Andrew's at Thornhaugh, which is located for the ease, or convenience, of worshippers where the mother church may be a distance away.

St. Mary's possibly stands on the site of an earlier, wooden church which – given its location – may have replaced a pre-Christian temple or place of ritual. St. Mary's is strategically located in a dominant position at the top of the northern acclivity rising from the old bridge. It is also set at the nodal point of the former Great North Road to London and Scotland and the roads to Leicester, to Northampton, to Peterborough and also the road that wends to the market town Oundle via Yarwell, Nassington and Fotheringhay; latterly where stands the remaining portion of the once great collegiate church and the site of Fotheringhay Castle; the birthplace of King Richard III and the prison and place of execution of Mary Queen of Scots.



St. Mary's, before the addition of the new chancel in 1902

In 1221, it is recorded, indulgences were granted to all travellers giving alms for the repair of Walmesford Bridge

At an unrecorded date, possibly during the 1400's, the church lost its chancel and subsequently fell into a great state of disrepair and dilapidation. The photo shows St. Mary's in 1902, just before the new chancel was built and a vestry and organ chamber also added. Between those dates, St. Mary's laid claim to be the smallest parish church in England. Then the interior measurements were just short of 30 feet by 25½ feet comprising the tower, nave and north aisle. The tower is a mere 8 feet square internally and can be dated to the 13th century with its lancets, two light-bell openings and dog-tooth decoration. The broach spire is typical of the Nene valley, has two tiers of lucarnes and probably dates from c1300. It houses six bells. The fifth bell was donated in 1960 by the Barron Bell Trust and the sixth, known as the Barnaby Bell, was presented thanks to the efforts of the Haycock Hotel and installed in 1968.

The oldest part of the church is the 11th century Saxon window in the west (tower internal) wall. Below this window may be seen a dedication inscribed '*This loft erected by Pank Medmore, Esq. Merchant of this place. Janry 1st 1804*'. Such lofts, or galleries, were for the benefit singers and, perhaps on occasion, accompanying musicians and provided 'overflow' for the congregation when church attendance was high. Few such lofts, or galleries, once common in parish churches, remain anywhere today; the majority having been removed during

widespread ‘renovations’ during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. St. Mary’s loft suffered a similar fate. Beneath this dedication is a triptych. The first panel contains the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer and the second and third panels contain Exodus XX: the Ten Commandments.

The south doorway is Transitional c1200 and the north arcade of the nave was built soon after. The south wall of the nave was rebuilt in 1663 along with the porch, the latter providing a buttress to the ‘downhill’ aspect of the church. At the time of the building of the new chancel in 1902, the foundations of the old chancel were uncovered and so, appropriately, the site of the new chancel corresponds with its much earlier predecessor.

The church possesses an exceptionally fine font of Norman origin that has been dated at about 1120. It has striking figurative sculptures including warriors and probably John the Baptist and Jesus. It was rescued from nearby Sibberton Lodge, where it had been used as a cattle trough. It was possibly originally the property of the church of the abandoned village of Sibberton, or cast out of its rightful home during the turbulent times of the Reformation. During the excavations carried out during the building of the chancel, the broken bowl of what was possibly St. Mary’s original font was discovered and this was used to create a base for the rescued font. The bowl of the font is densely carved in the Saxon style, within what is described as a thirteen-bay arcade. A story ‘in the round’ if you will. Clearly such strong, visual representation would have been deeply significant to an overwhelmingly illiterate population almost one thousand years ago and during succeeding centuries. Sadly, interpretation is difficult and only informed guesses may be hazarded at both the identities of those depicted and the meaning. In part, it is thought to represent the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist. The bowl of the font is lead lined.

The altar was built by a Wansford craftsman, George Simpson, in 1967, and includes some oak from the earlier altar. Also, in 1967, pews were installed to replace chairs. The pews previously graced St. Mark’s Church, Camberwell and were donated by the Green House Trust, London.

The church plate comprises a silver cover paten (a chalice cover or plate) dated 1569, a silver communion cup dated 1570, a silver plated alms dish of about 1876, and a pewter flagon which was purchased by the church in 1740 at a cost of 9 shillings (45 pence). This ancient church silver is nowadays lodged in a bank vault for security reasons. The earliest interments evident in the churchyard date from the seventeenth century.

As we progress through the first decade of the second millennium, itself the celebration of the passing of two thousand years since the birth of Christ, it is entirely fitting that one ponders the likelihood that St. Mary’s Church could quite possibly be celebrating over one thousand years of continuous Christian worship at the same site. During those many centuries St. Mary’s has suffered neglect and damage as well as renewal and rebuilding; both in the spiritual and practical senses. During this entire period, St. Mary’s has remained a spiritual focus for both the local community and passing travellers: whilst more temporal institutions have come and gone in great numbers.



The interior of St. Mary's before the provision of electric lighting and later, in 1967, the provision of pews in place of chairs.

Is it not a fitting challenge that today's villagers and visitors, whatever their background or religious persuasion, should consider in what way, or manner, they might contribute to the future welfare and upkeep of our Parish church, Wansford's most ancient resident? Any contribution, however modest, will be most gratefully received and duly acknowledged.

Priest-in-charge:

Canon Thomas Christie
Tel. 01733 344228

16 College Park, Peterborough PE1 4AW
wansford@thomaschristie.plus.com

Treasurer:

Judith Rogers
Tel. 01780 783441

1 Robins Wood, Wansford, Peterborough PE8 6JQ
aej@robinswood18.freesevice.co.uk

Buildings, Businesses, River, Roads and Bridges

The land around Wansford, Thornhaugh and Stibbington came into the Bedford Estates through the marriage of Sir John Russell (the 1st Earl of Bedford) to Anne Sapcote of Elton in 1526. Sir John died in 1555 and his magnificent tomb may be seen in St. Andrew's Church, Thornhaugh. The Bedfords amassed vast lands and wealth and, locally through the dissolution of the monasteries, added Thorney Abbey to their estates along with land gained through fen drainage projects. By the 19th century the Wansford Estate was run from Thorney; however earlier, from 1625, when Francis, the 4th Earl moved to Woburn to escape the plague, Woburn became the Bedfords' principal residence.

The Wansford Estate included an important river crossing on the route north, where the medieval routes approached the bridge from Oundle down the Elton Road and the later Great North Road swung round, via London Road, into the village to approach the bridge past the Haycock by a sharp right turn. It was once noted as one of the most expensive toll-bridges in the country. Both Wansford on the north bank and the growing settlement on the south bank earned their keep from the drovers and travellers using the bridge and from servicing the Duke's estate. Wansford, both sides of the bridge, has all the characteristics of an estate village, with well-built houses in matching styles built around the middle of the 19th century. Once the Nene was made navigable, Wansford became a small river port with wharves on both sides of the river, which doubtless brought greater prosperity to the settlement. The oldest property in Wansford, other than the church, is Greystoke, Old North Road, presently the home of Dr. Don Jefferies. A date stone on the Old North Road frontage reads 1657, however this was probably the completion date as parts have been dated to c1620. It is informed opinion that building may have been delayed by the Civil War. This extended construction period allows this house to be considered variously Jacobean, Carolean and Commonwealth - all at the same time! In past times this property and outbuildings have supported both a bakery and maltings.

The architect responsible for the 'Wansford look' was Samuel Sanders Teulon (1812-1873). Teulon was from Huguenot stock and had a London office near Charing Cross. He practised between 1838 and his early death at 61 in 1873 and was best known for his country houses, urban villas, estate cottages, churches, parsonages and schools. One of Teulon's first large commissions was for estate cottages and other buildings on the Duke of Bedford's Thorney Estate which was supervised by his Steward, Mr. Tycho Wing, who also had charge of the Wansford Estate. The repeal of the Corn Laws and the subsequent rise in wheat prices meant rich landowners had money for building works. The Duke was interested in the 'model house' movement and Teulon advocated sanitation along the lines put forward by the Society for Improving Labourers' Cottages. Research by Alan Teulon, a descendant of Samuel Sanders, in the Bedford Papers coupled with the unmistakable similarity of architectural features – like the cast-iron latticed windows at Wansford and those at Thorney – has made it possible for a number of cottages in Wansford to be attributed to Teulon.

The main group of Teulon buildings is near the Elton Road / London Road junction and include the long terrace of six cottages numbered 1-11 Elton

Road (east side) dated 1856 and 'B' for Bedford, with their lean-to porches at angles and a porch to the north and south; the two estate houses numbered 6 and 8 London Road (west side) dated 1857 and the 'B'; the two estate houses numbered 18 and 20 London Road (west side) dated 1858 with the 'B' with coronet; the house 6 London Road (west side) built in 1848 for the Estate Steward, with a rear addition in 1850. Two other groups of cottages are listed as possibly by Teulon and are a decade earlier: numbers 13 and 15 Elton Road (east side), circa 1840, and numbers 2 and 4 Elton Road (Goss Cottage) with the pierced and shaped bargeboards.

One building noticeable on the skyline of Wansford is the gatehouse of Stibbington House along the Elton Road, with its spire-like pinnacle mirroring the spire of St. Mary's Church over the river. This house has all the attributes of a Teulon building with its bargeboards, intricate latticed windows and the amazing carved spirelet, which was a ventilator for an earth closet.



The Gatehouse, Stibbington House

The small spire offers reason to suspect Teulon was the architect, because in Stibbington village proper he was active in 1847-8 restoring the parish church of St. John and building a stable, coach house and cottage range for Stibbington Hall. A sketch exists showing his original design with a small spire next to the coach house. This was omitted from the final building and seems to have been 'transferred' to the gatehouse at Wansford. Correspondence shows that the Duke often criticised the extravagance and cost of Teulon's cottages, but the architect often got his own way eventually!



Views along Elton Road towards The Haycock in the 1900s. Note the cast-iron railings and ball-topped pillars to The Barracks, now called Chapel Court. The Cross Keys Inn sign is visible on the right.



Days when children could safely play in the middle of a traffic-free Elton Road.

The most interesting Teulon building in Wansford is 19, Old North Road, now called 'Hillside' but still known locally as 'Cooper's Cottage'. This estate cottage, in Tudor style, was built for cooper George Eayrs, whose grave can be seen to the right of the churchyard gate. Correspondence from the Bedford Records shows how the Duke was keen to house his employees in better homes. In a letter to Teulon dated 1850, 13th July, Tycho Wing says:

'...my anxiety is not to lose the fine season for Eayers's [sic] house. I cannot but feel we are to a certain extent responsible for the lives of his children of who he has lost 3 or 4 in that wretched cabin where they now live, and, he will lose more if we do not provide more space for them and he should not be driven so late in the season as to incur the risk of having his house exposed in bad weather.'

Tycho Wing goes on to worry about the cost of £300, with a bow window costing £20, and suggests plainer building; but leaves it to Teulon to decide. The finished result shows that Teulon prevailed and he lavishly included, as decoration, a stone barrel with the initials of the tenant, G. E. for George Eayrs, and the Duke's coat-of-arms on the gable.



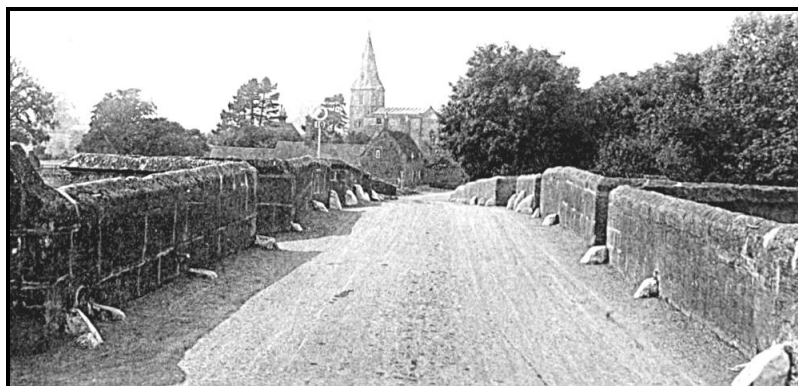
Cooper's Cottage, Stamford Road (now Old North Road)

In addition, there is the Duke's initial, F.B. (Francis Bedford), on the north side and the date 1850 on the spandrel of the porch, which suggests George Eayrs was in residence before the winter. To the left of the house is the single storey cooper's workshop. All this gives us an insight into the remarkable improvement in the quality of life that these estate cottages gave the workers on the Duke's Wansford Estate. During the last few years, this building has been subject to sensitive renovation and considerable enlargement. One cannot help but

feel Teulon would applaud the manner in which his style has been echoed by the present owners.

The settlements on both sides of the Nene (usually pronounced to rhyme with 'lean' locally and to rhyme with 'pen' around Northampton and upriver) are linked by Old Wansford Bridge.

The crossing of the Nene at this point started with a ford and we know that the predecessor to the present bridge was a wooden bridge of eight arches which was certainly here in 1221. In the 18th century, Wansford must have been a busy place, with horse-drawn coaches arriving at The Haycock Inn and large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and geese being driven to local and even London markets.



Looking north across Wansford Bridge towards St. Mary's Church c1905. The prominent roofline of a modern building, between the thatched Meadow Cottage and the church, now blocks this view of the chancel.

In 1571, a great 'tempest' swept away three arches of the wooden bridge and soon afterwards the bridge we know today began to take shape. In spite of its irregular shape, it has been described as 'a splendid specimen' and it is best viewed from the Nene Way footpath near the footbridge on the northern bank. Here you can see it gaining height and then descending to span the river near the Haycock. The first seven arches dated 1577 are the oldest, followed by three dated 1672-1674 and then the very wide elliptical arch of 1795 with a date-stone in the centre of the western side. This last arch replaced three arches damaged by ice in that year. There is one final, smaller arch taking a footpath under the bridge and perhaps relieving pressure when the river is in flood.

Today water normally flows through the 1795 arch, but in the great flood of Easter in April 1998, water was passing through all ten available arches and completely covered the water meadows and, indeed, the entire flood plain as well as flooding the Haycock and many houses along the southern bank. A local enthusiast was able to paddle his canoe along London Road with ease. The old bridge stood firm and provided a dry platform for the many hundreds of visitors who came to view the scene.

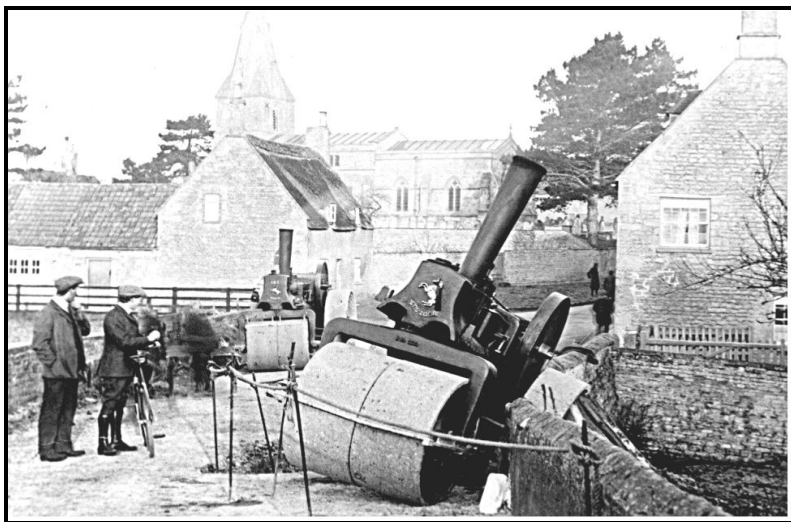
The Nene has delineated a dividing line for centuries and a cast iron bollard on the bridge defines the pre-1965 boundary between Huntingdonshire and the Soke of Peterborough. Looking west from the bridge on the northern bank, the small, nameless stream flowing into the Nene behind the first hedge represents the county boundary with Northamptonshire. Up until the coming of the railways, the main method of carrying heavy goods locally remained by water.

Thus the Nene, with the fenland waterways, enabled goods to be transported to and from the Wash ports of Wisbech and King's Lynn. Improvements to the navigation in the first half of the 18th century meant that eventually goods could be taken to Northampton and on into the Midlands canal system, passing Wansford on the way. Many small river ports grew up along the Nene serving a small hinterland. Wansford was one of these ports and most of the buildings near the river, on both sides of the bridge, are former warehouses.

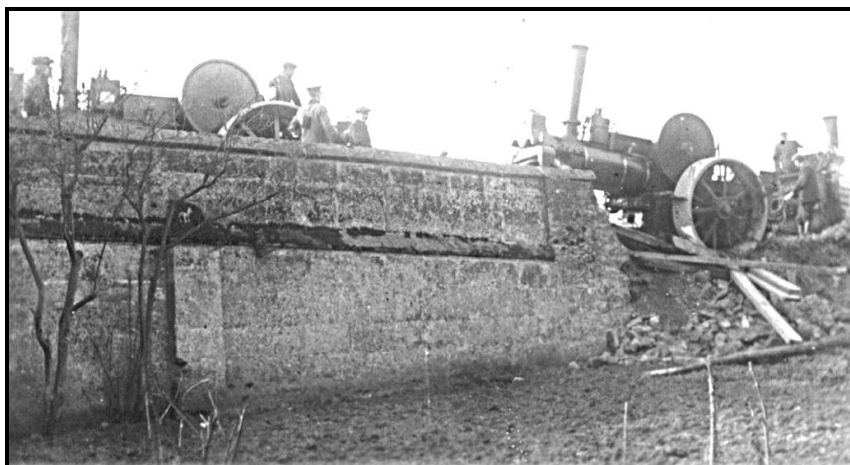
In the Middle Ages, the major industrial activity in this area was the quarrying of Barnack Stone and it is known that the stone was distributed in the Fenland region. There has been much discussion, but no firm conclusions, on how the stone was transported from Barnack to the nearest convenient waterway for onward transit to places like Peterborough, Ely and Bury St. Edmunds.

In his article '*Medieval Barge Traffic and the Building of Peterborough Cathedral*', in *Northampton Past and Present*, HJK Jenkins suggests that one likely route might be by sledge southwards through Southorpe to a point near Wansford, where it could be loaded onto barges each carrying four to eight stones. On the ground, it would seem likely that this could have been done somewhere a little downstream from the petrol station on the A47 just to the east of Wansford and almost opposite the entrance to Sacrewell Farm. Since at this time the journey downstream would have been quite hazardous, another suggestion is that the stone was transported overland to another possible point of embarkation at Castor (the Latin *castra* means encampment).

Before the 18th century the head of navigation for the Nene was at Alwalton, so the only boats seen at Wansford would have been small, punt-like craft that had to be manhandled around many of the mills and staunches en route to the Midlands. Between 1710 and 1724, the Duke of Bedford was involved in efforts to improve the river above Alwalton and after 1724, when locks were built, Wansford saw larger boats or lighters and the gradual development of a river port. By the end of the 1730's, the locks had reached Thrapston and by 1761, the river was navigable to Northampton, so it was possible for sea-coal from Newcastle to reach the town and later for coal to come in the opposite direction from the Midlands to Peterborough and the fens. John Gilbert records in his publication '*Stibbington Church and Parish*' (1978) that the buildings at numbers 2 and 4 London Road were in 1759 used as granaries for goods received at the nearby wharves; and after 1803 by dealers in cake (animal), corn, coal, timber and salt. Later, in 1843, Messrs. English Bros. (Timber Merchants), who traded in Peterborough (opposite the Key Theatre), started their business in these premises and also in Wharf House – number 11 Bridge End – on the Wansford bank. During the 18th and the first half of the 19th century the riverside at Wansford was a busy place and the river traffic required boat-building and repair yards.

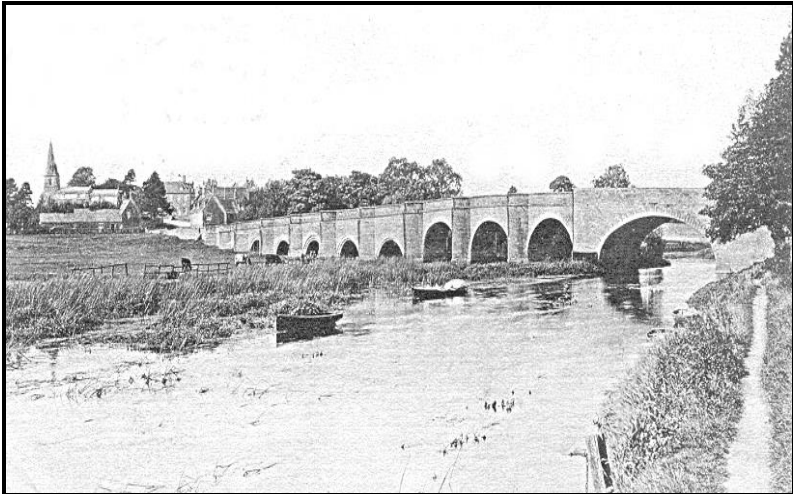


In 1912, a steamroller proved too heavy for Wansford Bridge and almost ended up in the kitchen garden of Wharf House. During the early 1990s, the original repairs for this damage proved inadequate and the bridge had to undergo significant remedial work when collapse again threatened.





Captain Vipan of Water Newton aboard his steamboat 'Vampire', 1883



**Wansford Bridge and St. Mary's Church c.1905.
Note the tow-path to the right.**

HJK Jenkins observes: *'Among the better established yards was the firm of Stillyards and Loal, near Wansford. This firm expanded at the start of the nineteenth century, and enjoyed a good reputation for the quality of its work, advertising in the Stamford Mercury on 21st February 1800 for 'journeymen boatbuilders'.*

In 1928 an article in the Peterborough Citizen (5th June), Mr. Lester C. Gilbert, who was seventy-five years old, related stories about Wansford and its river traffic and of a flagstone wharf on a creek on the north bank by the bridge. He could remember *'hogsheads of sugar being unloaded'* and had been told by an old lady of *'a queue of carts waiting for goods by the old wharf steps'*. As late as 1928 some of the wharf steps and the massive mooring posts still remained. He also mentioned the whale's jawbones which at one time formed an arch over the wharf steps. Remains of the bones were found at Wharf House and there was once a piece in The Haycock garden. In the garden of Wharf House some large stones and a terrace reminiscent of a wharf-side remained until recently.

The arrival of the railways in the mid-19th century and deterioration in the condition of the navigation channels saw a decline in traffic. In 1928, there was 'very little trade' between Northampton and Peterborough, but fenland lighters were still coming to Wansford for stone from the Ship End Quarry, a tug replacing the horse as locomotion.



The old Wansford Post Office, Bridge End in 1950s.

Up to the late 1940's, boats still came from Northampton to Peterborough for bricks. From the 1950's, the Nene Barge and Lighter Company used tug-towed wooden barges to carry stone from Wansford's Ship End Quarry to reinforce the banks of the Nene between Wisbech and the sea.

Later, in the 1970's, the Nene Barge and Lighter Company changed to self-propelled steel barges in the same trade, but this had stopped by the end of the decade although the Company still continued its quarrying operations and the delivery of sand and gravel until recent years. A number of sunken wooden lighters have been located near the quarry at Wansford and it was hoped that these

might be raised and preserved by the Fenland Lighter Project. All the river traffic is now leisure orientated, with the Nene still providing an important link to the canal system. There is still a yard building and repairing steel narrow boats in Stibbington village east of the A1 and a marina with residential accommodation has been built at Ship End Quarry, Sibson.



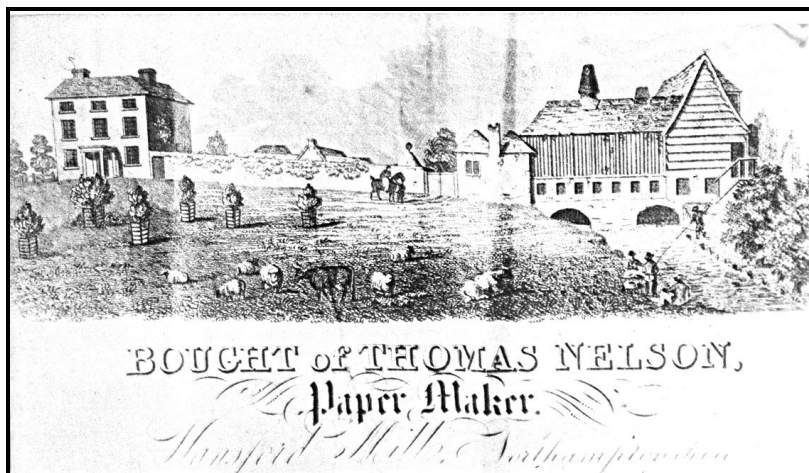
A stone-laden Wansford barge of the 1940s

There was one significant industry, paper making, which grew up and gave prosperity to the village in the 18th and 19th centuries, which relied on the river for the import of raw materials. Its development coincided with the opening up of the river for navigation in the 1730's. The Wansford Paper Mills were in the grounds of Stibbington House and were on the site of two former water-driven corn mills and a fulling (cloth) mill. The earliest record of a paper mill is in 1704. The mills were owned in the 18th century by the Page / Walcot families and leased to master paper makers in the Hayes family from 1725 to 1793 and after to Charles Hamerton. In 1805 a fire occurred, caused by a boy entering the rag room with an unprotected candle; the result being the manufactory was burned down. Ten years later, in 1815, Hamerton went bankrupt and two further paper makers leased the property until the mill moved into its most prosperous period when Robert Newcomb, owner of the *Stamford Mercury*, took over.

In 1824, Robert Newcomb purchased the mills and increased their efficiency. His paper was used for *The Stamford Mercury*, *The Weekly Dispatch* and, occasionally, *The Times*. By 1841, there was a Paper Mills Wharf and William Hills was its wharfinger. Here, the rags for papermaking were unloaded from lighters; but other goods like timber, deals, battens, welsh slates, Yorkshire paving, linseed and rape cake, salt, pipe clay, whiting and best sea-coal were also imported for distribution and sale. Most of these goods would have been brought in by river.

Considerable labour was required to cut rags and remove buttons. Forty

to fifty local women were employed in this task, with twenty men employed in the mills. In the field between the mills and Ship End Quarry, old buttons can still, apparently, be found.



Wansford Mills. The property to the left, since considerably enlarged, is now Stibbington House

The rather severe three-storey building with the new archway, now known as Chapel Court but previously named The Barracks, was built for the mill workers together with a club room, in which Newcomb allowed the Wesleyans to worship: and hence the later construction of the (former) Methodist Chapel adjacent.

In 1851, Robert Newcomb died and the mills passed to his bachelor nephew Robert Nicholas Newcomb. In May 1855 an explosion occurred, caused by a poker blocking a safety valve on one of the two boilers. This caused the boiler to burst, demolishing the building. The mill continued until 1859, when papermaking ceased. It is probable that by this time the mill, with its labour intensive processes, was not economical and the new developments in North America using wood pulp and further mechanisation were making the hand-made rag method too expensive. This closure certainly affected Wansford and in 1911, Charles Kent reminisced about his career in the mills in the *Peterborough Advertiser*, indicating that the works closing made a difference to the general prosperity of the village. They were also partly responsible for the growth of the village in Stibbington parish. All that remains is the mill house, which is Stibbington House; the Soll, where paper was sorted, examined and packed and the Pits, where the rags were washed and bleached. The Paper Mills Inn with its sign redolent of past, related activity has but slight connection with the industry. Charles Hamerton, a previous papermaker tenant, owned this property after his former house, next to the manufactory, was destroyed in the 1805 fire.

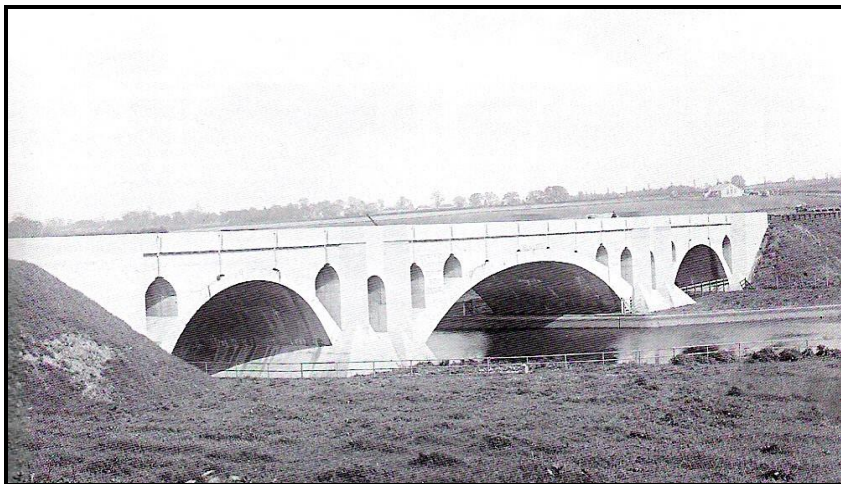
The Great North Road crossing the river has, from the earliest times, given life to Wansford. There was an abandoned attempt by the Trustees of the North Road to widen the bridge in 1856, but by 1924 – about a quarter of a century after the introduction of the motor car – life was becoming very uncomfortable for most of the inhabitants of the village because motorists were finding the acute corner at The Haycock, the narrow bridge and the ‘death-trap’ crossroads by the church increasingly difficult to negotiate safely. In the September of that year a map and article appeared in the *Peterborough Advertiser* (12th September 1934) giving details of ‘*a Relief Road which shall altogether by-pass [sic] the village*’. It was to be ‘*a mile and a half long...crossing with much roominess agricultural lands, and will span the Nene and valley with a spacious steel bridge with stone approaches*’.

Nearly two years later *The Advertiser* (30th July 1928) was able to announce that the ‘*contract for the work had been signed and sealed*’ and would cost in the region of £100,000. This was cheaper than the original estimate which was to include the bridging of the level crossing at Wansford Station. They included an artist’s impression of the bridge from the east showing the village beyond. The designer was stated to be Sir Owen Williams, who had previously designed the old Wembley Stadium. Under his influence the bridge was, like the recently demolished stadium, to be made of concrete. Work commenced in September 1926 and, by the summer of 1927, *The Advertiser* (29 July 1927) was able to announce that the foundations were nearly complete. What was unusual about the undertaking was that all the gravel for the construction was drawn up by suction from gravel pits on the south bank east of the new bridge and the stone for the foundations was close-by. The gravel pits still survive as lakes opposite the Picnic Area. The cutting on the north bank provided material for the embankment in the low-lying area near The Haycock. The newspaper also expounded further on the design team with the architects being Sir John Simpson and Mr. Maxwell Ayrton with ‘*the collaboration of Sir Owen Williams as consulting engineer*’.

The bridge was ready for testing on Friday, 8th March 1929 and *The Advertiser* reported the event under the banner headline ‘TESTING WANSFORD’S GREAT BY-PASS VIADUCT’ (15 March). Sir Owen Williams was present along with other ‘*notable*’ engineers and local government representatives. The tests consisted of two ‘*trains*’ of four traction engines ‘*coupled by stout chains*’ and with a weight totalling 120 tons approaching each other and meeting firstly over the central span and then subsequently over the north and south arches. Finally, the two trains passed over the bridge in the same direction, travelling abreast, coming to a halt over the main arch for a few minutes. The weight over the central arch caused a deflection of half a millimetre which returned to zero as the load moved off.

The newspaper went on to explain that the bridge was the:

‘*...first of its kind to be constructed in real concrete. It was unique in that the construction consisted of mass concrete sections, cast in situ, the key spaces being filled in afterwards with richer concrete.*’



**Wansford viaduct & by-pass in 1929; now, less prosaically,
the A1 northbound carriageway**

They were at great pains to point out that the bridge was not re-enforced concrete, but of first class concrete. Over 20,000 tons of concrete were used and the total price of the by-pass was £70,000. After the tests, Sir Owen Williams took all those who had been taking part to the Haycock where a toast was proposed *'to all those who in thought, labour and loyalty contributed to the bridge.'*

The 'ceremonial opening of the Wansford Viaduct and By-Pass' took place at noon on Friday, 22nd March 1929 before a 'large assembly'. After arriving from London, via Peterborough, by train and motor car, the Minister of Transport, Colonel Ashley with Mrs. Ashley, walked from the Peterborough end to the centre of the bridge for a series of speeches from Mr. Aubrey Watson, the contractor, who praised the designers and the British working man, and also the Minister, the Marquis of Exeter and Alderman Tebbutt, who represented the local councils. Among the 'great and good' from local councils and other interested parties were Mr. W. S. Abbott and Mr. L. Gilbert, who owned the land on which the bridge was built and the Rev. J. R. H. Duke, the Rector of Thornhaugh cum Wansford, who was also on Barnack Rural District Council. The Marquis of Exeter invited Mrs. Ashley to perform the ceremony of opening the bridge to the 'British public' by cutting the ribbon, stretched across the bridge, with a pair of silver scissors.



Mrs. Ashley with her husband, the Minister of Transport, Colonel Ashley at the opening of the Wansford Viaduct and Bypass, 22 March 1929. Mrs. Ashley is here meeting 13 year-old Gladys Chambers, introduced by her headmaster, Tom Stafford (facing) and watched by fellow pupils of Stibbington School.

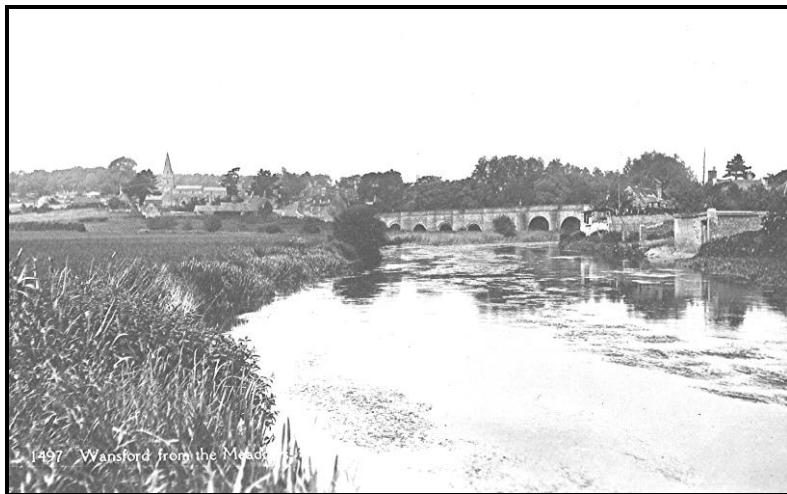
The Advertiser (29th March) reported:

Hearty cheers were given to Mrs. Ashley and the ceremony concluded with the singing of the National Anthem, led by children of Stibbington School, who were assembled under Mr. T. Stafford, headmaster. The visitors then drove along the by-pass from the Stibbington end, over the bridge and along the northern section. A return was made to The Haycock, where, under the supervision of Miss Allday, a popular hostess, a delightful sandwich luncheon was served.

It is interesting to note that while the opening ceremony took place in 1929, the date in Roman numerals over the central arch of the bridge is MCMXXVIII – 1928.

The removal of the Great North Road traffic from the village and the old bridge must have brought great relief to the residents, but those who had businesses relying on passing trade must have been worried. The Haycock was lucky to have a back entrance near the bottom of the slope up to the new bridge and, until that entrance was closed, some residents may remember the large inn sign with 'THE HAYCOCK NIGHT PORTER' placed to attract travellers at any hour of the night. In the 1930's new roads and junctions attracted new businesses catering for the traveller, just as they do today, and in 1932, the 'Knights of the Road' chain opened its fifth roadhouse at the staggered crossroads of the Peterborough Road and the Great North Road. It opened on 15th. December and provided 'a restaurant, lounge and sleeping accommodation for motorists with service'. It was built in what was termed the 'moderne', continental style of architecture with flat roofs, horizontal canopies, painted white rendering and curved, metal windows and emblazoned with its name – The Wansford Knight – above the canopy.

Although closed early in 2007, the building until recently retained the corporate livery of the Little Chef chain; previous to which it was a pub, the New Mermaid. Much of the style of the building has been lost since the latter owners replaced the original, metal windows. The ‘*moderne*’ style, in close proximity to the vernacular of a stone village, caused the local *Advertiser* (9th December 1932) to comment: ‘*The design for an English landscape arouses criticism*’. Presumably, adverse criticism! However, the new hotel did have one welcome innovation well ahead of its period – each bedroom had its own en-suite bathroom! Presumably the building was larger than today.



The River Nene meandering lazily through multiple arches of the bridge in the 1920s. The old smithy may just be seen to the right of the bridge alongside the towpath.

Although the by-pass helped the north-south route through the village, the Leicester to Peterborough Road still had to cross the Great North Road and negotiate the staggered, narrow Mermaid Inn (old location) / Bridgend crossroads to the north of the old bridge. In 1934, four years after the opening of the by-pass, *The Advertiser* (19th October) reported that ‘*today the Leicester Road (now Old Leicester Road) carries an immense volume of traffic and but for the vigilance of AA patrols — using a sentry-type box — on the Church corner, there is little doubt that serious crashes would occur*’. Tentative proposals by the Soke of Peterborough Council to widen and simplify the crossroads had reached ‘*preliminary bargaining stage*’, but approaches to purchase the Mermaid Inn from Messrs. Lowe, Son and Cobbold, of Stamford, were reported to have ‘*dropped through*’. Other buildings belonging to Mr. Ernest Gilbert and the butcher’s shop occupied by Mr. Tom Stokes, and owned by Mr. W. S. Abbott, had also to be purchased.



The Wansford & District Ambulance was garaged at the Haycock c1930. L to R: Stibbington School headmaster Tom Stafford and his son Douglas, – Fosdyke, Austin Herbert, – Cliffe, Albert Easson

The brewery must have held its position until September 1936 when *The Peterborough Standard* (18th September) ‘understood on good authority’ that Messrs. Lowe, Son and Cobbold had acquired The Wansford Knight and had applied for the Mermaid Inn licence to be transferred to those premises.

This released the old building so that widening plans could go ahead at the junction where ‘buildings on every corner make the crossing one of the most dangerous in the district’. This meant the fine old, stone Mermaid Inn, with its hanging sign locating it in Wansford in England with its Collyweston slate roof and picturesque dormer windows was to disappear and re-emerge as a modernist roadhouse; although the brewery kept a link with the old by renaming The Wansford Knight as The New Mermaid. Within seven months, a plan of the new junction was released by the Ministry of Transport. Villagers saw that the old Mermaid would disappear, along with the butcher’s shop and farm buildings on the corner of the (old) Leicester Road. The Leicester Road would now be a through-road with traffic islands to assist pedestrians across the great North Road.

Since that date there have been few subsequent changes to the junction other than the disappearance of the pedestrian islands and the addition of a zebra crossing.

Roads still dominate the daily lives of Wansford villagers and using the A1 and the A47 remains an increasingly hazardous part of their lives and those who pass through our village. Road improvements have continued since the Second World War with the provision of a dual carriageway on the A1 in the late 1950’s and the completion of the A47 by-pass with a bridge over the A1 in the early 1960’s. The A1 still had a bottleneck at the 1929 bridge where both north

and south bound carriageways had to merge into a single carriageway and cross the Nene until 1975, when another bridge was built for southbound traffic. The sound of the emergency services rushing to traffic accidents in the vicinity is a common occurrence. In 2001 two, new roundabouts were built at the junctions of each of the A1 slip-roads and the A47, which has increased safety if not eased congestion. As throughout their long and complex history, local roads will undoubtedly remain a factor of considerable interest to Wansford folk for the foreseeable future.



The Mermaid in 1909, looking East.

The butcher's shop is on the opposite corner behind the Mermaid and the Post Office on the corner of Bridge End is facing.

The Old Pump House

Before the days of universal piped water to every household water was drawn from wells, or drawn, stored and then pumped to key points in the village from the (Old) Pump House situated at the junction of Old Leicester Road and King's Cliffe Road.

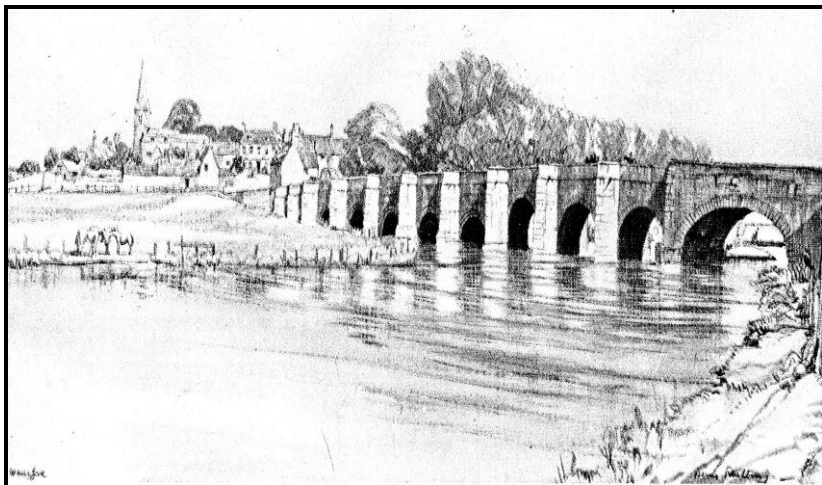
The 2 roods and 29 perches of land (roughly two-thirds of an acre), upon which the Pump House was built, was purchased from Earl Fitzwilliam on 26 February 1915 for £102; plus a further £5 for the right to lay, maintain and replace all necessary pipe-work. The purchaser was not Wansford, as might be assumed, but the Rural District Council of Stibington in Huntingdonshire. Plans attached to the deeds show the proposed path of a 3 inch water main crossing

under the River Nene into Stibbington, to the west of the bridge, and down London Road into Elton Road.

Alongside the water source, an engine shed was constructed containing a *Blackstone Horizontal Vapouriser Oil Engine*, with a blowlamp starter, producing 12 brake horsepower. A tank house was also built to contain a water storage tank. This tank was constructed of 2 ft. steel panels and contained thirty thousand gallons of water, which was pumped to hydrants in the village. Water was accessed from these hydrants by authorised villagers using a triangular key. Upon the introduction of mains water at around the time of the Second World War, the Pump House fell into disuse and was subsequently redeveloped, extended and converted into a private residence.



The Mermaid Inn and Old North Road in 1925



View of the river flowing through multiple arches before the river was dredged in 1937 to allow the transit of deeper draught barges.



Eighteenth century ASBOs? John Gilbert writes of village stocks and a whipping post that once stood near St. Mary's Church in Wansford. Both would have been similar, if not identical, to those in nearby Apethorpe as depicted in the above postcard from early 1900s.

The Haycock Hotel



The Haycock Inn and Wansford Bridge, 1790. Note that coaches entered the inn driving through what is today the hotel's main entrance. In the rear stable yard passengers alighted and refreshed, whilst fresh horses were harnessed for the next stage of the journey

The Haycock Hotel, Wansford in England, is an ancient hostelry that has enjoyed a delightfully chequered and fascinating history spanning many centuries.

There has most likely been some form of tavern or inn on the site since the ford, and later a wooden bridge, became a nodal point for through-traffic travelling from all points of the compass.

As the Great North Road, as it was known, between London and Scotland grew in importance and travel became relatively safer, so travellers would congregate at staging posts such as the Haycock to gain news of the road and weather ahead, change horses or band together in groups as insurance against mishap or banditry along the road. Safe shelter, good food and convivial company then, as today, marked out favoured havens for the tired and dusty - more likely muddy - traveller. From earliest records it is clear that the Haycock has always enjoyed an enviable reputation as just such a welcoming respite.

Formerly known as The Swan Inn, with the site of its adjacent present-day cricket ground known as Swan Close, it has been suggested that the name Wansford might even be a corruption of "Swansford". However, it is most widely accepted that the name derives from the Anglo-Saxon word "*weilm*" meaning a spring, thus "*wielms-ford*" referring to a spring that flows into the river close to the bridge: the site of the old ford. The Haycock was known as The Swan

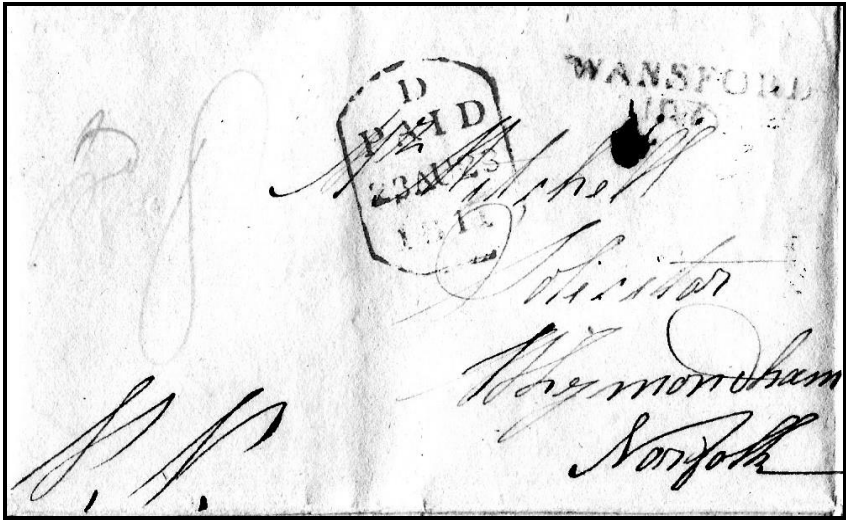
in 1571, when devastating storms washed away three arches of the wooden bridge which was followed by such flooding that *“at The Swan Inn, three storeys high, the water flowed into the bedrooms. Walls of the stables were broken down and horses tied to the manger were drowned”*. Bridge maintenance can have but little improved during the following decade as, in 1581, it was arbitrarily ‘nationalised’ by her ‘Queen’s Majesty’ Elizabeth I. Today, Wansford’s historic old bridge is in the care of the Peterborough Unitary Authority: whilst the Haycock remains resolutely in Huntingdonshire.

The main building was originally designed on the familiar E-shaped plan and constructed of local stone under a Collyweston slate roof. Part of the former stables are thought to be older than the main Inn and possibly date from the early sixteenth century. There is a dated stone, 1632, that long ago was found in the Haycock gardens and is now displayed within the hotel. This is thought to have date-marked the remodelling of the Haycock as a posting house to serve the coaches carrying mails and passengers north and south with fresh horses, food and shelter.

As seen in the earlier illustration, riders and horse-drawn vehicles entered the Haycock through an open archway where today’s enclosed main entrance offers visitors a more inviting, less draughty welcome. In those days the Haycock was only as deep as the entrance hall and the area of the present reception desk would, in those days, have found itself situated outside in the large courtyard. It was in this courtyard that travellers would have dismounted or alighted from their horses and coaches and either made their way to the Tap Room for food, drink and quite possibly warmth, or climbed the wooden staircases to the gallery, which ran at first floor level entirely around the courtyard, to gain access to the bedrooms. This gallery is thought to have been enclosed towards the mid-1800s and what remains of those passageways still connect some of the bedrooms.

The tired horses were tethered in the Cooling Arch, where tethering rings may still be seen on the walls. It remains on the far side of today’s, much reduced, courtyard and from which the state of the art Business Centre is now accessed. The fact that upwards of one hundred and fifty horses were stabled and dozens of grooms, ostlers and stable-lads employed gives good indication of what a busy, thriving hive of activity prospered. There were also some dozen other minor inns and beer houses within a half-mile radius! The Haycock’s old in-house brewery is now a storeroom and where the hotel’s famous floral arrangements are conceived and skilfully executed.

The Cock Fighting Loft has long since been incorporated into the main hotel. The ancient stone steps that led to the Cock Fighting Loft – during the First World War it became an independent munitions factory – are still to be seen in the courtyard on either side of the Cooling Arch. Within the steps can be seen kennels within each of which once a fox was tethered. The running fox weathervane has been replaced numerous times in the past, due to local yeomen returning from a day’s shooting and emptying their charged guns at the weathervane before entering the inn. This bucolic practice continued until around the start of the Second World War.



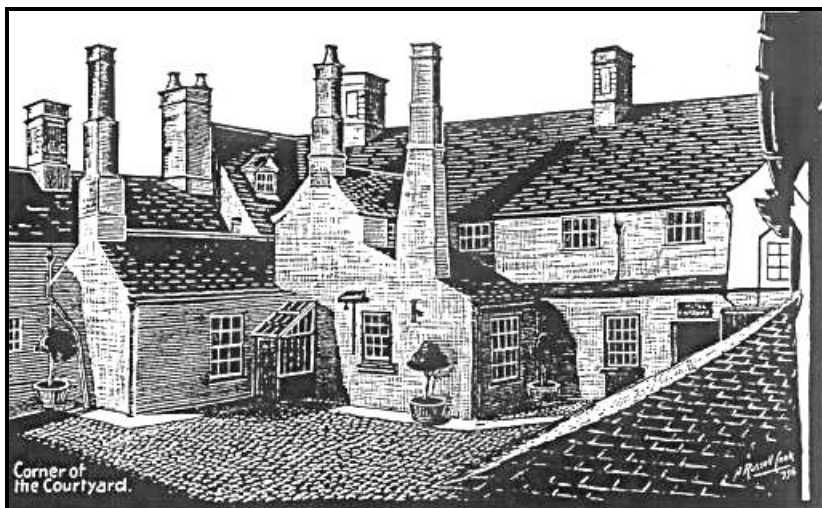
A letter posted at The Haycock on 23 August 1811 by Charles Hamerton (about whom see p. 20) via the mail coach. Postage stamps were not introduced until thirty years later.

The rustic character Barnaby, who features on the famous inn sign, first gains mention in the *Natural History of Northampton* by the Revd. John Morton and published in 1712.

The Haycock derives its name from a volume of doggerel written in both English and Latin by Richard Braithwaite and published in 1638 entitled '*Barnabae Itinerarium*' (Barnaby's Travels). The 'poem' concerns the adventures of a rural peddler known as '*drunken Barnabee*'. It relates how Barnaby, now depicted on the inn sign, arrived at Wansford exhausted and sought accommodation. Upon seeing a cottage door inscribed '*Lord have mercy on me*', he realised that plague was cutting one of its cyclic swathes through Wansford and beat a hasty retreat to the river bank where he soon fell asleep upon a haycock (bale of hay).

In the poem, Barnaby subsequently relates:

*On a haycock sleeping soundly,
Th' river rose and tooke me roundly;
Downe the currente, people cryed,
Sleeping, down the streame I hyed,
"Where away," quoth they, "from Greenland?"
"No, from Wansford Brigs in England."*



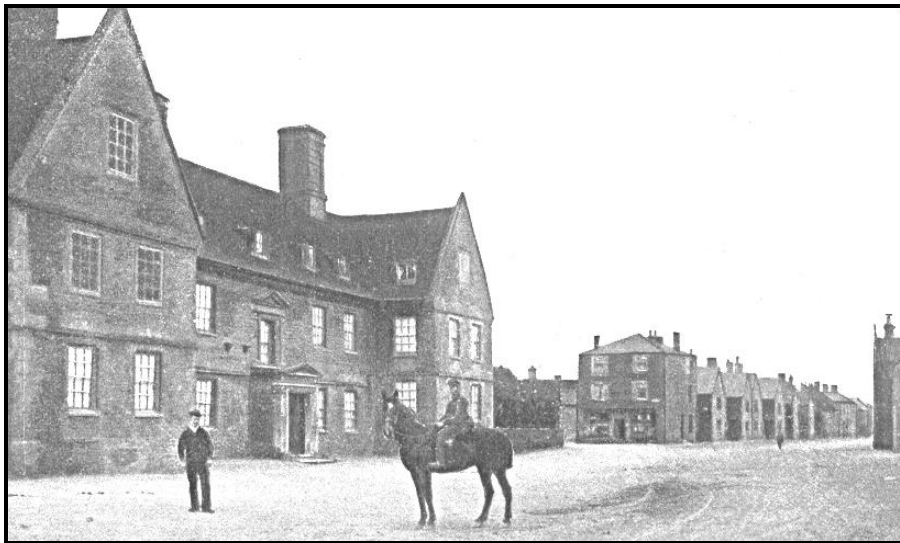
The Haycock courtyard in the 1930s

It is claimed Mary Queen of Scots was lodged at The Haycock on her way to her imprisonment and later execution at nearby Fotheringhay Castle. In 1790, the same year that the picture of the Haycock on the cover was painted, Lord Torrington noted in his journal:

'29th June. A fine day. I arrived here last night, to good supper and a good night's rest, in the best of Inns, pleasantly situated, the bridge, the river, the church beyond, and all about constitute the right Inn scenery.... I returned to a good breakfast with excellent tea. I seldom remark upon tea, but here everything seems to be good.' and 'Nothing could equal my good dinner but my good disposition towards it. This is a nice Inn. Everything clean and in order, the beds and stabling excellent'. 'I have written many letters today, relative to my intention of returning here, after a short absence: and where better than to this House, with its surrounding pleasures and interior comforts, as put most private houses at defiance.' 'My situation was opposite some upland closes, to my left Wansford Bridge and village. Surely to a man much confined to town, these scenes afford true pleasure.'

Princess Alexandrina Victoria, later to be crowned Queen Victoria, stayed at the Haycock on 2nd September 1832 on her way to visit the Archbishop of York. During the nineteenth century the Haycock was a much favoured hostelry for European royalty indulging their passion for the chase. Empress Elizabeth of Austria, the Prince of Liechtenstein and numerous other princes, princesses all stayed at the Haycock in season to ride to hounds. Over the centuries, armies marching north to confront the Scots or south to fight the French

doubtless refreshed themselves in its yards and bar, even the redoubtable Dr. Johnson and the long-suffering Boswell on their epic visit to Scotland – and back. Notionally, at least, the highwayman Dick Turpin astride his mare Black Bess on his fabled ride to York ‘could’ have thundered past. Every prince and pauper travelling the Great North Road of old would surely have noted welcoming sight of the Haycock situated on the sudden, tight bend in the road adjacent to the old bridge and river crossing.



The Haycock during the first decade of the 20th century. It was still an unmetalled, dirt road – with not a car to be seen! This particular (coloured) postcard is inscribed: ‘Dear Mother. Arrived safe (from Leicester) after a very cold ride. Lots of good cigars and whisky! So long. Bert.’

The first recorded innkeeper was one William Hodgson, who died in 1706. Early in the following century, 1804, the inn was in the hands of Jeremiah Mallatratt who just four years later, in 1808, lost ownership of the inn at a game of cards with Anthony Percival of Greetham. The Haycock subsequently remained in the Percival family’s hands for virtually the rest of the century, until 1898, with the death of Elizabeth Percival.

During most of the nineteenth century it prospered considerably, at one period during the middle of the century also farming 625 acres and employing some ten labourers. The bell tower seen on the cover picture would have been used to both summon workers and alert them of the time of day whilst labouring out in the fields.



Across the bridge to St. Mary's Church, a magical pre-war view now hidden by building and trees. The wrought-iron figure of a reclining Barnaby was made in the village by local engineer, Samuel Gilbert.

The Haycock was for a long time entirely self-sufficient in home-grown produce, having a large and well-stocked kitchen garden which today has become the more familiar formal gardens between the Haycock and the river.

Thomas Percival, son of the fortunate card-player Anthony Percival, as well as running The Haycock was also the Proprietor of the famous and exclusive White's Club in London. After the death of Mrs. Elizabeth Percival in 1898, the Haycock relinquished its licence and became the private residence of Major-General Charles Cavendish, 3rd Baron Lord Chesham, who was killed in the field whilst hunting with the Pytchley.

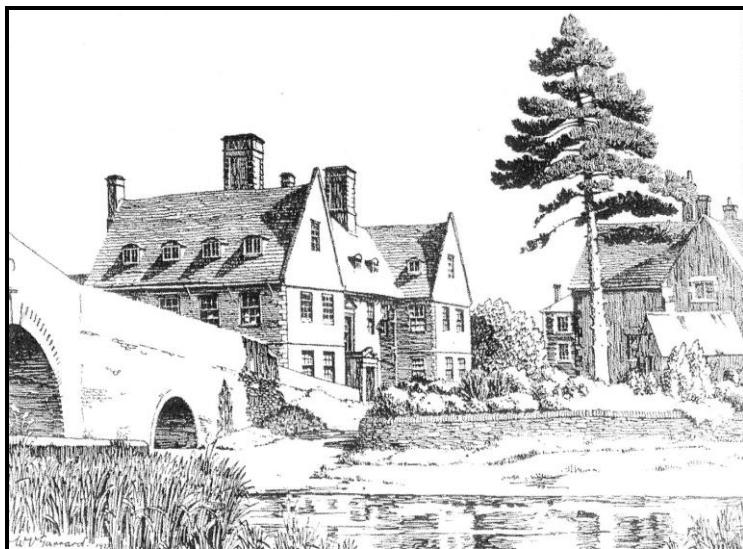
The next owner was Lionel Digby Esq., racehorse owner, shortly followed by a Captain Munday and a Captain White. It next became the temporary home of L. Woodforde Esq. whilst his property Hill House, Yarwell, was being built after which the Haycock, in 1911, became the residence of Stanley Brotherhood Esq. whilst Thornhaugh Hall was being built.

In 1914, Sir Bache Cunard, grandson of Samuel Cunard the founder of the famous Cunard shipping line, took up residence after financial commitments caused him to leave his Leicestershire estate at Nevill Holt. A noted huntsman, upon retiring as Master of Foxhounds of what after became known as the Fernie Hunt, he was presented with a life-size model of a silver fox. He married a wealthy American, Maud Burke, by whom he had a daughter who became the multi-talented socialite, Nancy Cunard.



Nancy an author, publisher and actress, notoriously scandalised ‘polite society’ on both sides of the Atlantic when she took up with an Afro-American jazz musician. Nancy Cunard has since been recognised as socially in advance of her time and a leading Afrophile of her day. In the 1930s she compiled an internationally acclaimed book entitled ‘Negro’ to which many famous Africans and Afro-Americans contributed. However, in this rural corner of old England the effect on Wansford gossips when she was seen walking hand-in-hand with her jazz musician through the village can, in those far off days, best be imagined!

Within a year of moving into the Haycock, with the First World War intensifying, Sir Bache opened his own ordnance factory in the old Cock Fighting loft above the stables to manufacture munitions components.



The Haycock drawn in the 1920s by W. Garrard, Art Master at the King’s School, Peterborough.

At the peak of productivity, in 1916, he employed some half-dozen women and could turn out up to 500 shell bases a day. Sea mine and depth charge components, as well as detonators, were also manufactured.

A man of many parts, he was also a highly-skilled silversmith who made the gilt and silver Communion chalice still in use at St. John's Church, Stibbington, and which bears his registered touch mark. Around the rim is inscribed: *A.M.D.G. Sus manu fecit et dono dedit Bache Cunard Stibbington MCMXXII* – Made and given by Bache Cunard, Stibbington 1922.

Sir Bache died at the Haycock in 1925 aged 74. A countryman at heart, he instructed in his will that his coffin be taken from the Haycock to be buried at St. John's Church, Stibbington in a humble farm wagon, rather than a hearse, and without the traditional black horses.

The Haycock did not revert to its original calling as an inn until 1928, when it was purchased by a local Fotheringhay dairy farmer, Charles Allday, who then ran the inn with his sister, Evelyn Allday. It was at this time that the Haycock, ever at the forefront of innovation, had its own air-strip alongside the river where the Cricket Ground now lies. If you look on the Roof of the former Belton's Country Shop alongside the Haycock car park, you can still just make out the word WANSFORD painted on the tiles. The air-strip ceased functioning when a new bridge was built across the River Nene and opened in 1929.



Sir Bache Cunard (bottom left). The Rev. Sidney Warde poses with some of the gallant band of munitions workers, including Ida and Ernest Gilbert, on the steps to the 'factory' in the Haycock courtyard.

Traffic was diverted from the old bridge and since then has passed across the rear of the Haycock, along the A1, and no longer past the front door. In 1930, The Haycock changed hands yet again to Phillip Thompson who ran it until 1935, when he had to sell due to ill health. It was in the 1930s that the 'sprung' floor of the Opera House, Covent Garden, was purchased during refurbishments and expertly laid in the (former) Haycock Ballroom. Couples came from miles around to enjoy the experience of dancing on its immaculate, 'springy' surface. Enormous care was taken of it for many years until the gradual demise of interest in ballroom dancing during the post-war period.

Permanent accommodation was booked at the Haycock by the old Embassy Theatre in Peterborough for the famous artists who appeared there. Aficionados of revues and old-time music hall will recognise names such as Laurel and Hardy, Gracie Fields, George Formby, Elsie and Doris Waters amongst the host of national and international stars who dined and slept at the Haycock.

The new proprietors in 1935 were Ian Drayton and his wife. The licence was transferred to Mrs. Drayton when her husband was called-up for service during the Second World War.

During this turbulent period, the Haycock proved a popular watering-hole for locally-stationed RAF pilots and crews. They were later joined by the large contingent of Americans who flew from the many surrounding fighter and bomber stations. The film star Clarke Gable was just one of the galaxy of famous names who appeared in uniform at the bar of the Haycock and other local hostelrys. In 1942, one visitor was a young fighter pilot from Rhodesia who, having been shot down over Europe, evaded capture and eventually found his way back to England. He was being 'de-briefed' at RAF Wittering to ensure he was who and what he claimed and not a 'fifth columnist': a German infiltrator. His name was Ian Douglas Smith, later to become Prime Minister of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). It was at this time that the popular, public bar became known as '*The Glayserie*' in self-deprecating mockery of the clipped, received pronunciation, officer-class accents to be heard inviting one another to '*Have another glayse (glass) of beer, old boy*'. This (redundant) sign now hangs over the entrance to the Hotel Reception area.

In 1961, The Haycock was purchased by George Hotels of Stamford Ltd. and, in 1971, was taken over by Poste Hotels Ltd., in whose able hands it remained until 1995. It was then purchased by Arcadian Hotels who sold it on in 1999 to Hand Picked Hotels, on behalf of whom it was managed by the Macdonald Hotel Group.

With the investment of very many hundreds of thousands of pounds from the 1970's onwards, the Haycock substantially increased capacity both in terms of bedrooms available and facilities offered. The ambiance was changed to reflect the 'country house' hotel model which increasingly became fashionable during this period.

In 2003, The Haycock was purchased by its present owners, Mr and Mrs Phillip Carter, who have extensively renovated and restored this fine, historic building and remodelled the interior whilst sensitively increasing capacity

significantly. Today, the Haycock may be said to reflect the ‘boutique’ hotel genre and is marketed as an increasingly popular wedding venue and successful corporate conference and banqueting centre, with well-patronised restaurants of international standard.



This imaginative example of clipped box tree topiary depicts ‘drunken Barnaby’ astride his haycock. It was the work of Sir Bache Cunard and stood in the garden between the Haycock and the old bridge, until becoming neglected after his death. The fir tree (below) still stands above the river across the road from the Haycock





The Haycock in the 1930s. Note the old Cleveland petrol pump on the right at Collier's smithy and engineering workshop. In earlier years petrol was sold in 2 gallon cans from the end-corner of the adjacent bridge parapet. It was then said to be one of only two petrol stops between London and York.



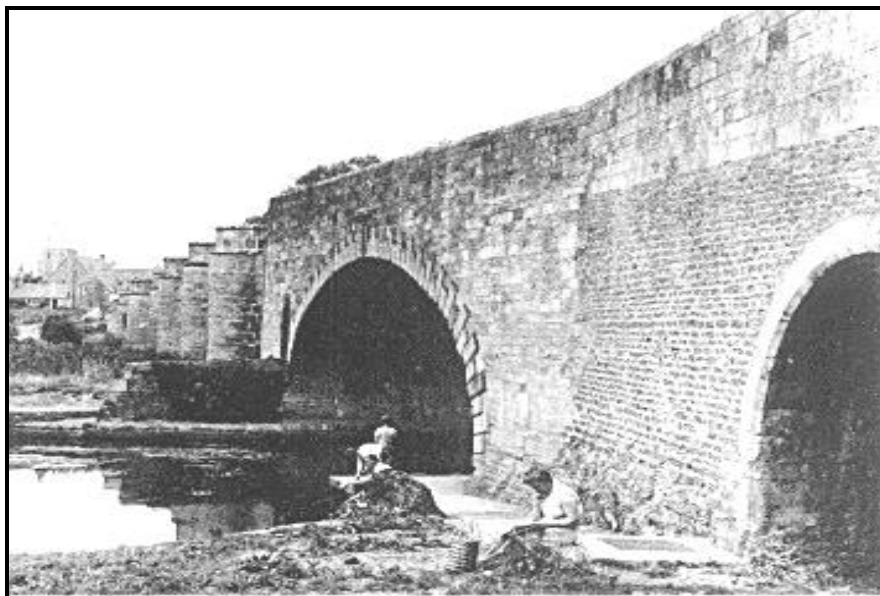
Wansford's first cab c1900. Charles Dixon, of London Road, carried Haycock visitors to and from Wansford Station, as well as between neighbouring villages. He also carried the Royal Mail between Wansford post office at Bridge End and the railway station



The celebrated Fitzwilliam Hunt meets outside The Haycock (c1950)

There are two, other justly popular inns in Wansford: The Paper Mills, which has been mentioned briefly earlier, and the Cross Keys. The Paper Mills faces onto London Road, as it curves right towards the old bridge. It was converted from residential use to an inn about 1820, its first recorded proprietor being John Clipsham of Thornhaugh. It remained within that same family for over one hundred years. In more recent times, the inn has been much extended and greatly refurbished. The Cross Keys, on the east side of Elton Road, was built in about 1750 and is just a very short distance down the road from the Paper Mills. The first innkeeper recorded is John Cant in 1810. In the past, the Cross Keys as well as being a hostelry has also been home to a butcher, a cobbler and a clockmaker.

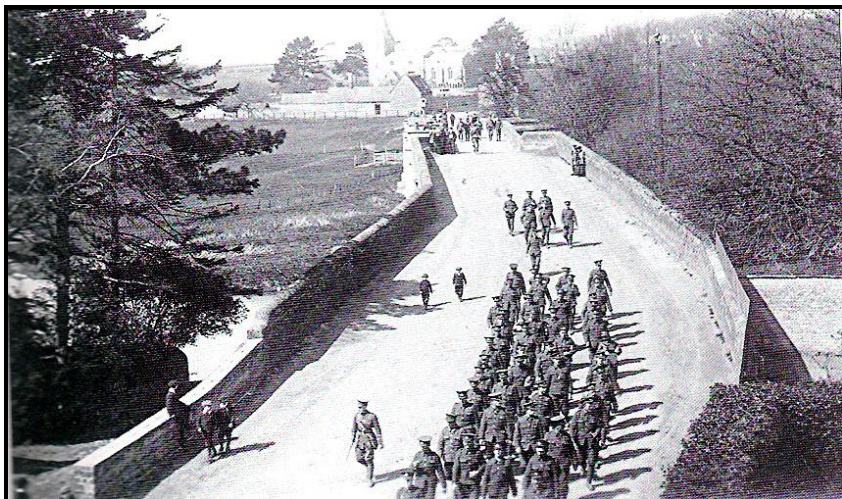
Whether there was any connection with, or continuation from, the old Cross Keys Inn once situated over the river on the Bridge End incline to the church is unknown.



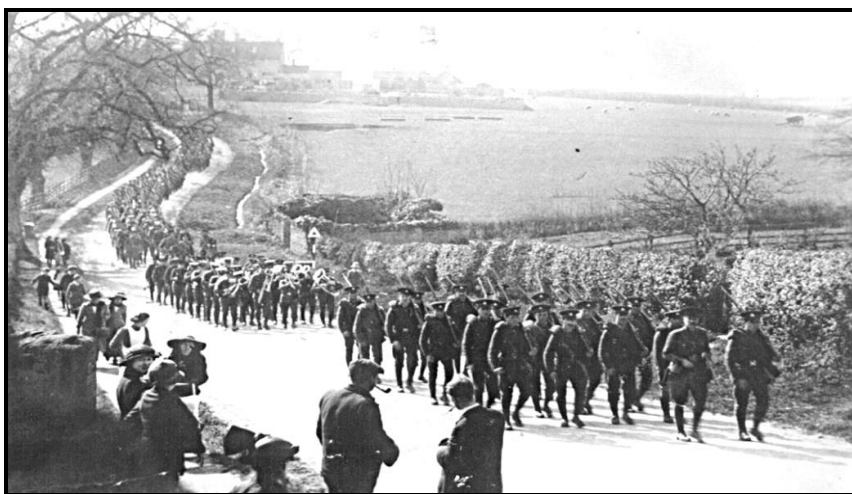
Relaxing by the old tow path, Wansford Bridge.



Elton Road towards Stibington House



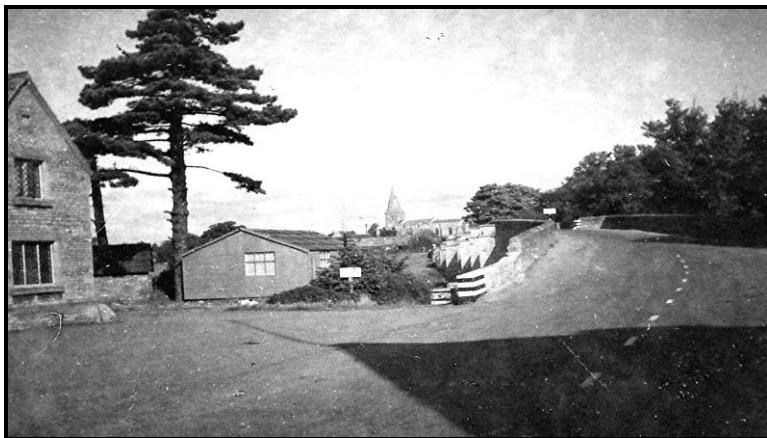
Troops of the Northamptonshire Regiment on their way to war in 1914 or 1915. (Below) Yarwell Road. Note the old, rectangular village pound, centre right beyond the triangular warning road sign, where stray horses and cattle were impounded until claimed and a fine paid. Its location next to the stream is entirely logical. Evidence of this ancient village pound is still extant in the rear garden of 'Holystones'.





Opposing views along Elton Road in the days before it was metalled





Eric Collier's billiard room

In the days when planning regulations, where they applied, were more 'informal', it is alleged that the late Eric Collier and a group of friends -- who were habitués and regular billiard players at The Haycock -- had a 'misunderstanding' with the hotel management. Eric's pragmatic response was to build a billiard room in his own front garden!



The London Road approach to the old bridge



London Road during the widespread floods of August 1912. On the signboard to the left of the bridge approach the name Collier is just visible. Folklore regarding 'pigs' and 'swimming' appears on the point of being tested. The punt is a nice, atmospheric touch.



View from the Mermaid Inn (on right) to Meadow Cottage, the river and water meadows. This panoramic view is now largely blocked by trees. The AA patrolman (centre) on permanent duty was a familiar sight at the crossroads for many years.

Wansford's 'Vagabond' Poet



E. V. Barclay (right), who wrote under the name of Colin Clout, a pseudonym doubtless culled from Edmund Spencer's classic poem *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*, seen here alongside his gypsy caravan in Wansford, sometime during the first decade of the last century.

Edward V. Barclay was a bank clerk employed by the Spalding and Boston Banking Company in Stamford and who lodged with a Mrs. Banwell in Wansford. Of stern stuff, he bathed in the Nene every day of the year, irrespective of the weather, and was one of the very first in the area to volunteer to go to South Africa and fight in the Boer War. After active service with the Natal Carabineers, he returned to his lodgings in Wansford to a tumultuous, hero's welcome. Met by a welcoming committee led by the headmaster of Stibbington School, W. J. Henden and Charles Dixon, Wansford's own 'cabbie', the Wansford Fife and Drum Band played him all the way home in martial triumph.

In 1904, he published his first book, *The Village Wedding*, apparently based on a true story. The year following, feeling the call of the road and a bohemian desire to escape the routine of banking, he purchased a caravan and a horse called Josh from a gypsy dealer in Kettering and, investing in 500 popular 'penny books', copies of *Books for the Bairns* and *Penny Poets* purchased from his publisher, he set off on the open road as an itinerant book-seller and poet.



The Wansford Fife and Drum Band that welcomed Barclay on his return to Wansford from the Boer War.

He also carried a second reprint of *A Village Wedding* in addition to two further of his own publications, *The Pleasure Fare* and *The Call of the Country and Other Verses*. He had the front of his gypsy caravan inscribed:

*Who doth ambition shun,
And loves to live i' the sun,
Seeking the food he eats,
And pleased with what he gets,
Come hither, come hither, come hither.*

On the 21st April, 1905 he set out from Wansford accompanied by two local lads; one to cook and one to look after the horse. He meandered his way down to Dorset selling as many as 150 books in a day, returning to Wansford by a different route. He attended fairs and, from the footboard of his caravan, offered to write 'instant' verses for any girls in the crowd who were 'suffering from the complaint of love'. All he required was the sweetheart's name and a brief description; all the while accompanied by music played on his phonograph.

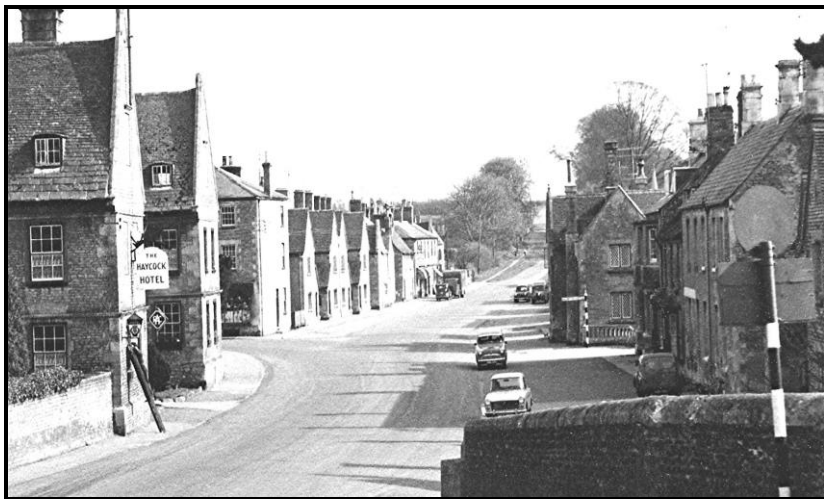
Contemporary criticism rated *The Call of the Country and Other Verses* as probably his best published work. Included in this work was *The Haunt of the Swimmer*, in which he refers to the old stanch or staunch (lock) that straddled the Nene near the first bend in the river between Wansford and Sutton. The stanch was demolished in 1937 when the river was deepened; which also caused the Nene to abandon its ancient course through the many arches of Wansford Bridge. Until that date it had been possible to ford the river at Wansford Bridge upon submerged stepping stones:

*The grey old stanch stands, nods and dreams,
 Beneath its shadow sways and gleams
 And through its weather-beaten beams
 The river glides
 And makes sweet music as it streams
 About its sides.*

Another of his poems, *Children at Play*, ends with the verse:

*The children seek their village homes,
 A whispering little clan,
 With phrases from their mother's lips,
 To gossip and to plan,
 And all night long in happy dreams,
 They roam the meadow-lands,
 Amid a store of golden flowers,
 They pluck with eager hands.*

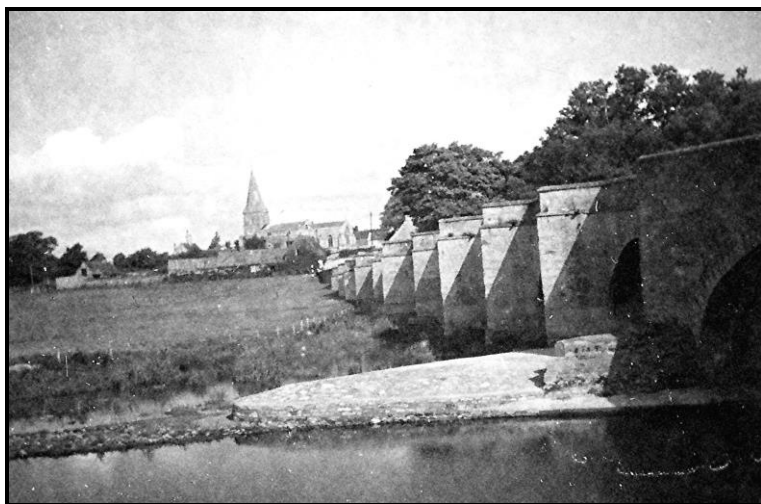
One instinctively feels that Tasmanian-born Barclay, clearly an educated and well-read man, might not have felt out of place amongst the existentialists of post-War Paris; or even amongst the emerging Hippy tribes of the early 1960s, before they became almost synonymous with the Traveller cult. Sometime around the beginning of the First World War, Barclay vanished from view. It was thought he possibly re-enlisted to fight the Germans. For the present, however, his fate remains a closed book. Perhaps, like other Soldier Poets, he met his end in Flanders Field or in the muddy hell of the Somme. A reward of £100 for information about his whereabouts, or fate, failed to find a claimant. (*Sourced from local research, unattributed, undated vintage press cuttings and author's collection of Barclay's publications*)



London Road and Elton Road



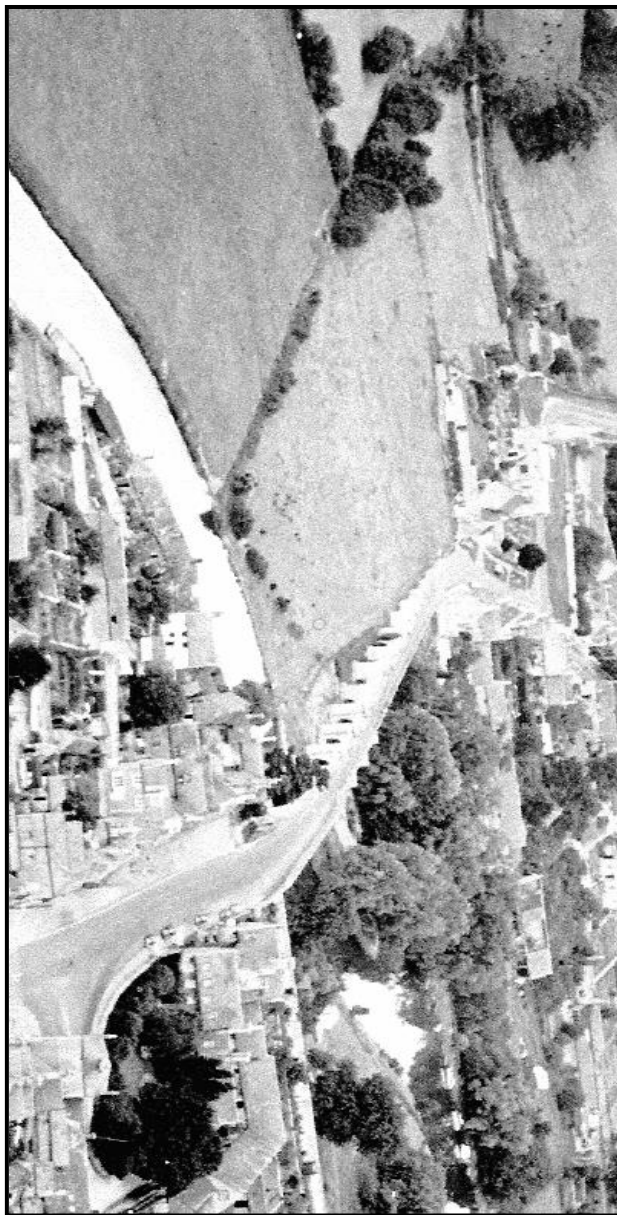
A 're-enactment' stage coach visits the Haycock in the 1950's



View across the water meadow towards St. Mary's. The enclosed boggy nettle and bramble beds fronting the river and adjacent to the arches, essentially a seasonal wetland habitat, were designated a County Wildlife Reserve by Cambridgeshire County Council; the haunt of numerous bird species attracted by the abundant butterflies, moths and insects.



The general store on the corner of London Road run by the two Misses Mould.



An aerial view of the old bridge probably taken in the 1950s.



A bosky idyll. A riverside view of St. Mary's on a hazy summer's day in about 1900.



Note the 10 mph speed restriction! As the projecting hubs of cart wheels would score bridge parapets, stones were set to protect the walls so that the wooden wheels of passing carts risked significant damage if driven too close



The original Wansford crest included the rose of Northamptonshire. This has since been replaced to reflect Wansford's move, after an interim period in Cambridgeshire, to the jurisdiction of the Peterborough Unitary Authority.



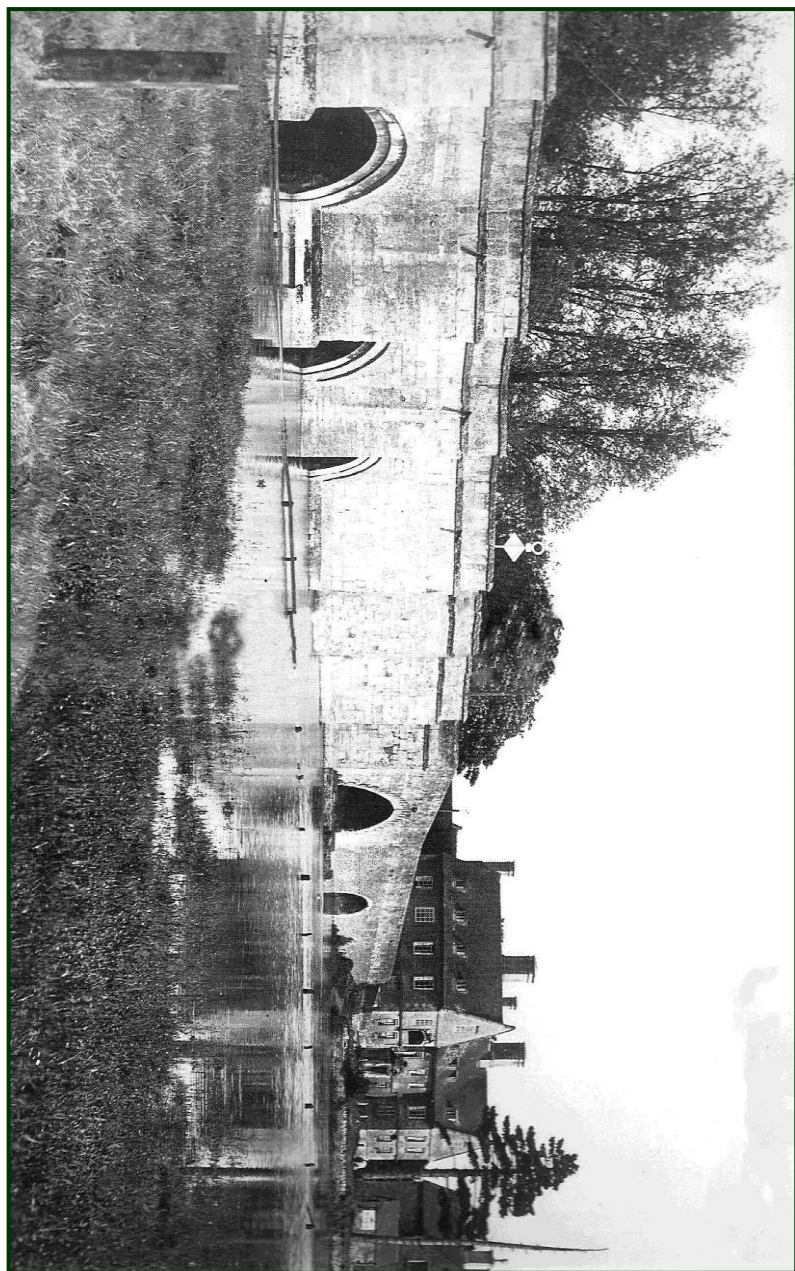
The Mayor of Peterborough, the late John Horrell, re-opens Wansford Bridge in 2005 after a £165,000 restoration initiative by Peterborough City Council. (l to r) Patricia Stuart-Mogg, Wansford Parish Clerk; Richard Clarke, Wansford PC Chairman; Cllr. John Horrell, the Mayor of Peterborough; Paul Green, Bridge Engineer Peterborough CC; Peter Gatheral, Cllr. Stibbington PC.



A northerly view up Stamford Road (Old North Road) towards the A47



Looking south along Stamford Road (Old North Road) in about 1910. Cooper's Cottage is to the extreme right. Note thatched cottage to left.

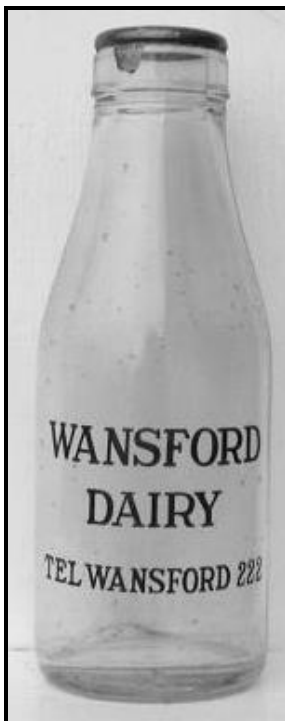


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Please note

1. Newspaper references in the text were found at Peterborough Library, Broadway, Peterborough.
2. The letter from Tycho Wing to S. S. Teulon can be sourced from the Bedford Papers in the Bedfordshire Record Office, Bedford.
3. Acknowledgements are due to Alan Teulon for information from his researches into the buildings of S. S. Teulon.



Complete with a red foil top!

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e-mail: david.stuarmogg@btinternet.com

WANSFORD IN ENGLAND

Two miles east of Nassington is WALNSFORD, worthy of notice for the length and height of its bridge over the river Nen or Nine... This is reckoned one of the pleasantest villages in England, on account of its air and situation, lying on the centre of five capital turnpike roads, viz. to London, to Scotland, to Northampton, to Leicester, to Peterborough, and communicating to all parts of the kingdom, having fine open country to the south, rich meadows to the west, woods and enclosures to the north and eastward, and a clean gravelly soil, is near several noblemens seats, and a good neighbourhood, and within an hour's ride of the city of Peterborough, the borough of Stamford, and the market town of Oundle...and near the field where the notable battle was fought between the Saxons and Danes, when the latter destroyed with fire and sword the abbies of Croiland, and Peterborough, with all the country round about.

THE HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF THE TOWN, COLLEGE, AND CASTLE OF FOTHERINGHAY IN THE COUNTY OF NORTHAMPTON. J. Nicholls, Printer to the Society of Antiquaries, 1787. (pp.45, 46)

BACK COVER (OUTER)

FULL PAGE HAYCOCK ADVERTISEMENT

(ON WHITE BACKGROUND)