

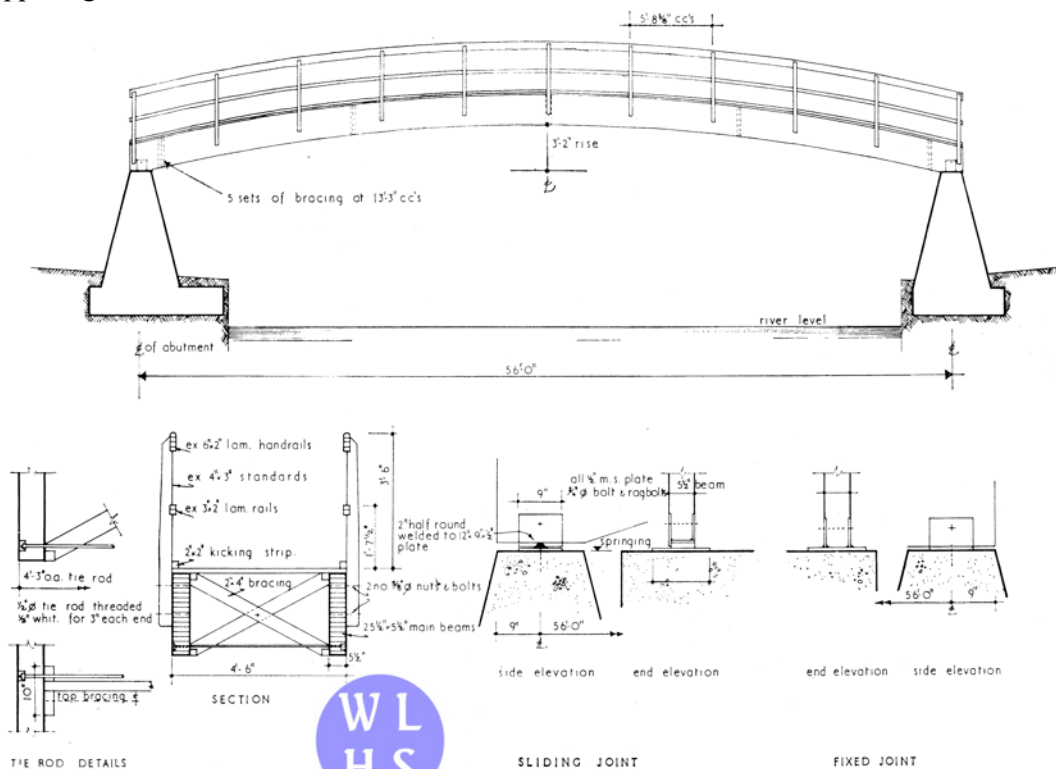
# Wargrave Local History Society

## *From the archives*

Although there are no road bridges across the River Thames between Sonning and Henley, there is of course a viaduct that carries the railway line. The original structure provided when the branch was built in 1857 was built of wood, but this was replaced by steel spans in 1898. The railway was a double track then, but the branch was converted to single track in 1966, and the spans furthest upstream were removed, although the supporting piers remain.

There have, however, been various proposals for bridges from Wargrave over the water. An anonymous donor made an offer to pay £500 towards the cost of a bridge, "in commemoration of the Jubilee of King George V". However, the Thames Conservancy (the then equivalent of the Environment Agency regarding the river) objected, as they thought a bridge would be a danger to navigation. However, Berkshire County Council suggested that a bridge cantilevered from the railway viaduct might prove acceptable, and in March 1936 the Parish Council received an offer to pay for a footbridge like that, providing the company (the GWR) would give permission. Opinion in the village as to if this was a good idea was divided, correspondence continuing into the 1940s, when war-time constraints put paid to any further progress.

In the mid 1990s, ideas for a bridge arose again, promoted as a Millennium Bridge that would again cross the river alongside the railway viaduct, this time making use of the redundant piers on the Shiplake Lock side. This gained the support of an organisation called Sustrans, aimed at promoting sustainable transport. In order to justify the expenditure, Sustrans produced estimates of the number of pedestrians and cyclists they thought would use the crossing. The prospect of so many then making their way to and from the bridge, in part on private roads, however, antagonised many local people, resulting in them strongly opposing the idea.



One bridge, however, was built and the illustrations come from the journal "Wood" dated November 1968. It links a small island near Camps Pool to the Wargrave bank, and the main section was made of laminated Douglas fir. There is a span of 57ft 6in, rising 3ft 3in in the middle, and supported on a 10ft high stone pier at either end. A floating crane was used to lift the pre-fabricated unit into place. The headway under the bridge was not so critical at this location, as it does not cross the main navigable channel of the Thames.

More recently there was a new suggestion for a bridge to cross the river, probably close to the St George and Dragon, close to the site of one of the ferries that used to ply across to the Shiplake bank.