

# **Orient Way Footbridge**



## **A Historical Overview**

**by Adrian Frost**

# **Orient Way Footbridge – A Historical Overview**

Today over 150 people are part of a Facebook campaign to improve and upgrade Orient Way Footbridge, also known as Marsh Lane Footbridge. They are demanding access for all pedestrians and cyclists to this traffic-free way of getting from Marsh Lane to the Waterworks meadow section of Leyton Marshes and beyond. For centuries Leytonians have used Marsh Lane and the right of way that extends beyond it onto Leyton Marsh: to reach Clapton and Hackney via bridge or ferry, to graze livestock, and in modern times for sport, recreation and commuting. This booklet traces the history of the route, referring to some of the efforts of local people to preserve and improve it, often in the face of powerful vested interests.



*Illustration 1 (Cover) and Illustration 2 (above): Footbridge from Orient Way (Credit: Karl Weiss)*

## **Before the Railways**

“Head south down the village ‘Street’. About half-way along, turn right into Church Lane, pass the Vicarage and ancient Parish Church, bear right and after a few hundred yards turn left down Marsh Lane and out along a footpath across imperfectly drained Marshes, with ancient ‘Lammas’ grazing rights, towards a point where you cross both the local river and the parish boundary”. So far this could be a description of hundreds of English villages. This one, a ‘tun’ (settlement) by the river Lea (Lea– tun or Leyton) lies 5 miles northeast of London. The Domesday Book recorded 43 people. This had risen slightly to 49 in 1523-4. There were still only 83 houses by 1670.

Fast forward 350 years and the town by the Lea – Leyton - has become the vibrant London suburb we know today. ‘Street’ has become ‘High Road’, Church ‘Lane’ is now ‘Road’ and the path from Marsh Lane across the Marshes must negotiate several obstacles, including filter beds – turned nature reserve, Eurostar depot and railway tracks as well as Orient Way. The route that passes over today’s footbridge across railway and relief road has a venerable pedigree!



*Illustration 3: Rocque's 1747 map. From the extreme right-hand side Marsh Lane descends to Dagenham Brook and then heads out westwards across the Marshes to Jeremy's Ferry in an era when there was no Lea Bridge Road.*

The rural idyll of pre-industrial Leyton can be seen on Rocque's map of Leyton from 1747. It shows that by this date, as well as affording access to the Lammas Lands, Marsh Lane had also become the principal means of crossing Leyton Marshes to Clapton via Jeremy's Ferry. The previous centuries had seen the Lea crossed here by a mixture of fords, ferries and wooden bridges. The 'Lockbridge' is mentioned in 1486-7 but was reported broken in 1551 and collapsed finally between 1612 and 1630, being replaced by a ford – still known as Lockbridge - and a ferry for foot passengers. A causeway with 12 footbridges roughly along the line of what we now know as Lea Bridge Road linked Hemstall Green (just west of today's Markhouse Corner) with the Lockbridge at the Lea, but this too was in ruins by the late 1600s. By the time of Rocque's map, if Leytonians wanted to get to Clapton, they went via Marsh Lane!

The Lea Bridge Turnpike in 1757 and a direct road link to a new bridge over the Lea from Whipps Cross restored the old route via Hemstall Green, linking Clapton with Eagle Pond in Wanstead. Jeremy's ferry was closed, and the nearby ford destroyed. Marsh Lane and its path across the Marshes returned to their traditional role of providing access to the Lammas Lands.

### **The Importance of Leyton Marshes as Lammas Lands**

From ancient times until the early 20th Century, local people had traditional rights to farm most of the open expanse of fertile peaty marshland bordering the River Lea.

In spring and the first half of summer, the marshes were farmed as hay or corn meadows by local residents, for themselves or for others. The tradition of beating the bounds at Rogationtide in May brought the community together to 'ask' (rogare, Latin: to ask) for God's blessing on the crops. The marshland was periodically allocated in strips to tenants either by rotation, or by the drawing of lots, and possibly enclosed by temporary fencing, to stop stray livestock from eating the crop.

The ritual changeover from corn or hay crops to livestock grazing of the marshes had pre-Christian origins. With Christianisation and the merging of pagan and Christian traditions, the Celtic harvest festival was renamed from 'Lugnasad' to 'Lammas' Day, a name that derives from the Saxon / Old

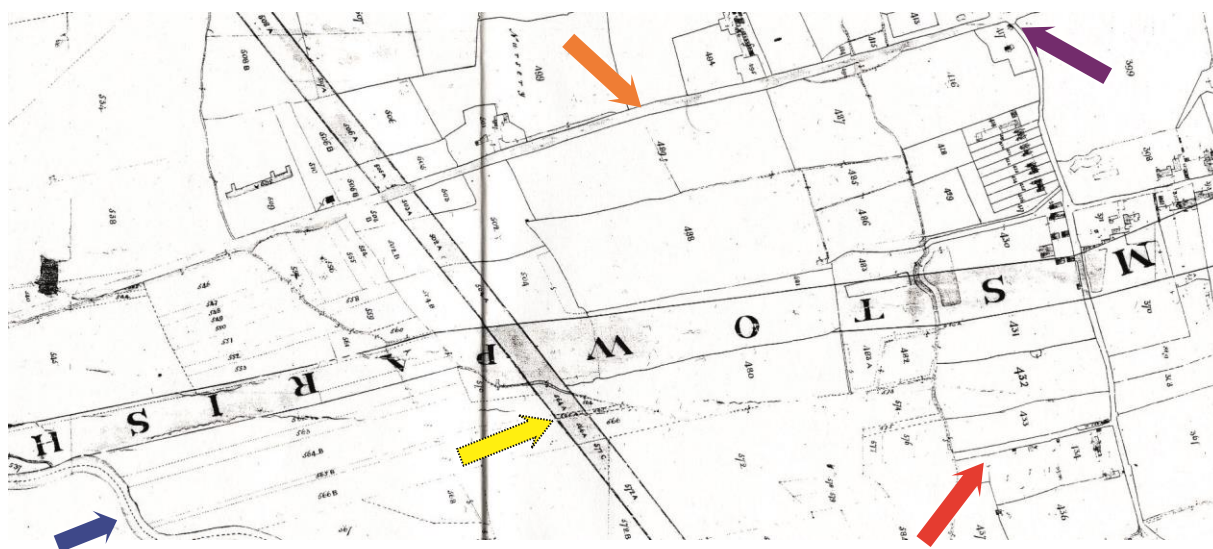


English 'hlafmaesse' meaning 'Loaf Mass' and celebrated on August 1st, when bread made from the first harvest would be blessed at mass in the local parish churches.

After the harvest, the marshes were opened up as common pastures for all commoners' livestock to graze on through the winter until Lady Day in March.

### The Coming of the Railways

It is no surprise, therefore, that these commoners' rights of access were jealously guarded. But the coming of the railway to the Lea Valley in 1839 posed the first major threat to the Lammas Lands and their accessibility. The Northern and Eastern railway company acquired part of the marsh in 1838–9 for the new line as shown on the Tithe Map.



*Illustration 4: A section of the 1838/39 Tithe Map, with NNE at the top: Red - Marsh Lane; Blue - River Lea; Yellow – land for the railway; Orange - Lea Bridge Road; Mauve – Markhouse Corner*

About 5 acres of Leyton's Lammas lands were lost to the Stratford to Broxbourne section of the railway, which opened through Leyton Marshes, along with Lea Bridge Road (later Lea Bridge) Station on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1840. But the commoners were awarded compensation which was used to pay the parish share of building the Union workhouse. Most importantly for Marsh Lane, the railway company was required to build a subway or 'cattle creep' so that livestock could cross safely under the tracks, as well as allowing pedestrians to cross the tracks on a *de facto* level crossing. The subway and level crossing are marked on maps for the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and lasted until 1956.

This pattern is echoed in later developments: powerful vested interests attempt to encroach upon, and block access to, Leyton's Lammas Lands. The people of Leyton and their representatives resist. They safeguard access to the marshes and if some land must be lost, then only in return for compensation for the community.



*Illustration 5: the Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1863 shows Marsh Lane, leading down from Etloe House to the cattle creep under the tracks (centre left), but as yet no Temple Mills depot.*

### **From Village to Suburb**

The coming of the railways ushered in the population growth which saw Leyton transformed from sleepy Essex village to an East London suburb. There were 4,794 inhabitants in 1861. The number more than doubled every decade until 1891 when 63,056 were recorded. This almost doubled again to 124,735 by 1911. This process of urbanisation meant Leyton's marshes gradually relinquished their historic role as Lammas Lands and increasingly assumed a recreational function. But with their new role as a green lung for a large urban population the need to defend them from encroachment and to ensure that local people had access to them became even more pressing.

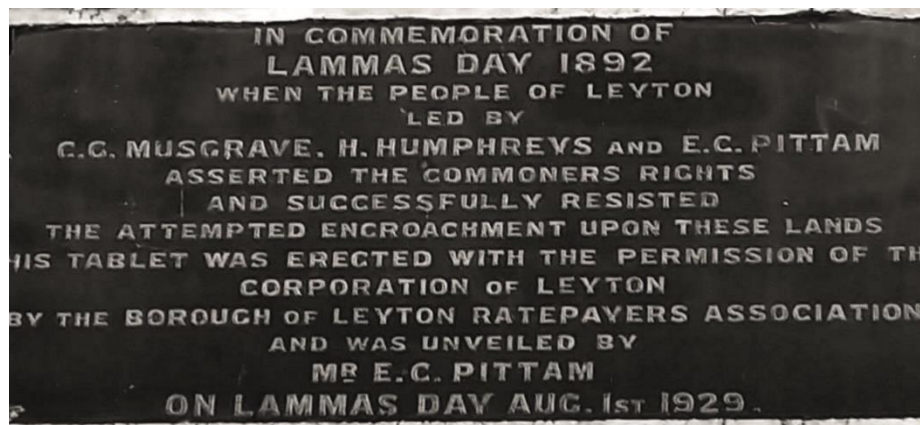
### **Land Grabs and Direct Action**

In 1854 the Enclosure Commissioners agreed that the compensation negotiated for 15 acres of Lammas land taken by the East London Waterworks Co. should be invested on behalf of the Leyton and Leytonstone national schools. More compensation was negotiated by a commoners' committee in 1868 for a further 25 acres taken by the waterworks company, and yet more was agreed for some 10 acres taken by the Great Eastern Railway Company in the 1870s for the beginnings of the Temple Mills Marshalling yards. The monies were invested and in 1884 the stock was sold by the local board and the proceeds used to buy the James Lane recreation ground (today's Abbotts Park).

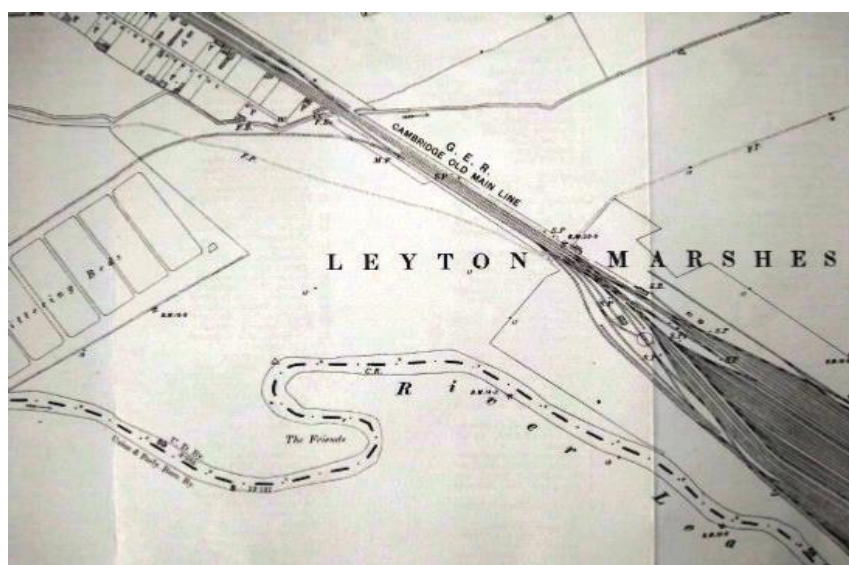
However, in 1890 the East London Waterworks company took a step too far, provoking unrest and direct action. They attempted to override the Lammas rights on 6 acres of marshland they had previously purchased, by laying a fenced-off railway to transport coal to fuel the pump houses at their new filter beds, thereby blocking the centuries-old right of way: the bridlepath roughly along the line of the pathway from the western end of today's Orient Way Footbridge to Lea Bridge Road via the Waterworks Centre.

The commoners dug their heels in and refused to sell their Lammas rights. On Lammas Day 1892, the company having failed to remove the rails and fence, the people of Leyton tore them up again. The company had to resort to horse and cart to get coal to its works at the filter beds and took proceedings against the protesters, who retaliated by appointing a Lammas Lands Defence Committee to oppose the parliamentary Bill promoted by the company. After a series of public meetings and public demonstrations of increasing vehemence, sometimes with several hundred protesters, compromise was reached in 1893, and confirmed in the East London Waterworks Act of 1894. The company withdrew all claim to enclose any part of the marsh, paid all costs, and provided £100 (worth £16,000 today) to improve the bridleway. In return the rails were allowed to remain in place, albeit without the fencing. A dramatic victory for people power! The success of this popular direct action is commemorated by the plaque on Marsh Lane Cottage, nowadays home to Eton Manor Athletic Club and the Community Café.

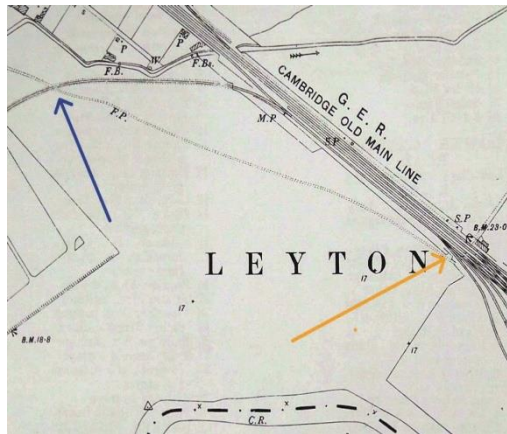
*Illustration 6: The Plaque on Marsh Lane Cottage*



*Illustration 7: Leyton Marshes from the OS map in 1894-6. Temple Mills marshalling yards are now in place to the SE and the railway spur curves round to the filter beds in the NW. But the footpath (F.P.) across it is still, triumphantly, in place!*







*Illustration 7a: The 1894 OS map with a closer view of the saved right of way (blue arrow) and the cattle creep (yellow arrow), now widened to extend under the extra tracks to the NW of the marshalling yard, as provided for in the 1889 Great Eastern Railway (General Powers) Act.*



*Illustration 8 looking NW towards the Waterworks Centre and*



*Illustration 9 looking towards the SW end of the footbridge, show the approximate location on today's Waterworks Meadow of the blue arrow in Illustration 7a, where our forebears tore down the fences and uprooted the rails in protest at their loss of right of way and access to their open space.*

## **The Decline of Leyton Marshes as Lammas Lands**

By 1893 over 65 acres of Lammas land had been bought up and 'dislammased' - over one third of the total. The commoners' committee campaigned tirelessly for their preservation as open space. Under the Leyton Urban District Council Act of 1904, the local authority was empowered to acquire the remaining Lammas Lands as open spaces and recreation grounds. In 1905 the commoners accepted the termination of their Lammas rights in return for compensation. In 1920 a small balance of funds held by surviving members of the commoners' committee was handed to the Urban District Council to endow the 'Lammas Essay prize' for local schoolchildren, which was still enthusiastically contested until World War 2 with the Mayor and Mayoress hosting elaborate prize-giving ceremonies at the Town Hall. Even so, some named individuals continued to graze livestock on the marshes beyond 1905, paying an annual retainer. As late as 1936, Council minutes show that a certain Mr T Viviers had taken over the grazing rights from the late Mr W J McCombie. Eye-witnesses reminiscing about the Marshes of their childhood recall the grazing of livestock in the interwar period.

## **Accessing Leyton Marshes for Sport and Recreation**

But the Council minutes make it clear that these rights are exercised on 'Leyton Playing Grounds' whose principal purpose is by now the recreation of the local population and Leyton Marshes are referred to as 'Recreation Grounds' on maps from 1915. Mrs Alice Lewis, reminiscing in the early 1970s about her childhood in the early interwar period for an article in Essex Countryside magazine, describes sheep grazing on the Marshes. More importantly for this text, she describes the cattle creep /underpass under the railway at Marsh Lane from a child's perspective.

“Following the avenue (of trees in Marsh Lane) to the level crossing one crossed over the railway..... As children we were not allowed to cross the railway line. The level crossing was little used, being for the odd railway lorry only and one had to open a little wicket gate on to the railway line, which was quite wide at this point, being at the beginning of the Temple mills railway sidings. We would stand for hours watching the trains taking on water. There was, however, an opening or bridge dug out under the railway line (the cattle creep, dating from 1840). Even in the driest weather there were puddles under this bridge and the surface of the road was covered in large boulders. To go under this bridge on a bicycle was quite a feat as there was hardly enough head room to go through when walking. One had to bend one's head down to the level of the handlebars and at the same time endeavour to dodge the puddles and large stones. Many a bicycle wheel was buckled under this bridge.”

The crossing and cattle creep referred to by Mrs Lewis are shown in the 1923 photo overleaf from Britain from the Air:





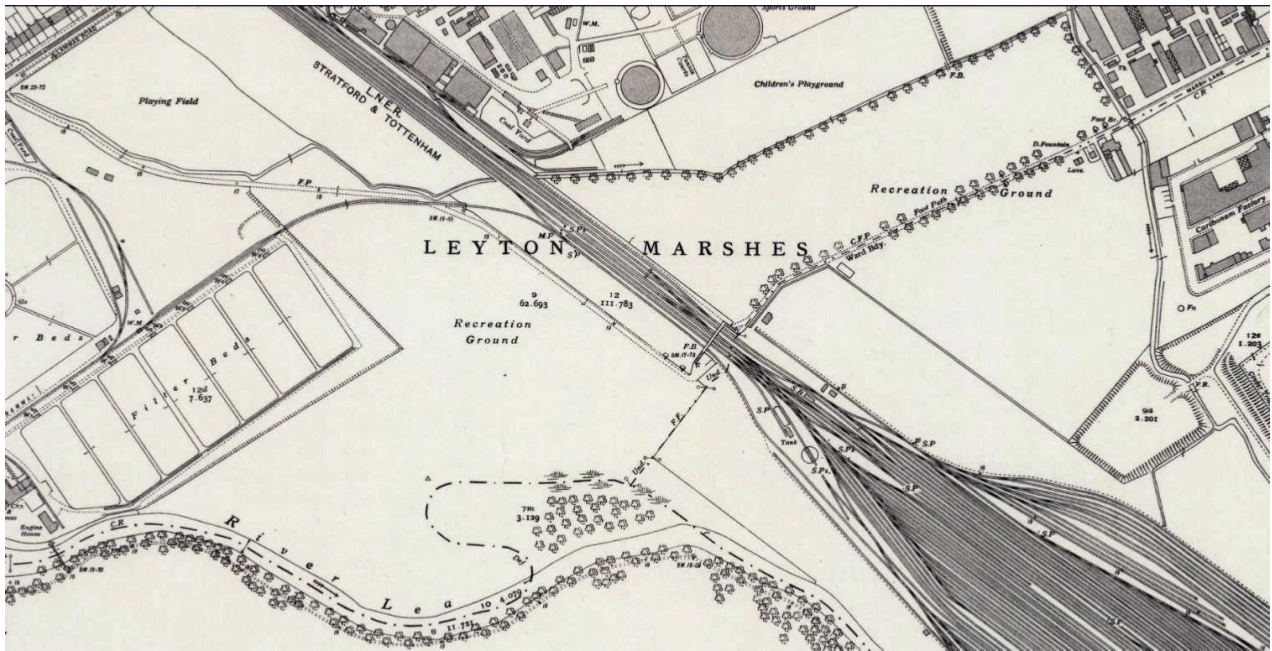
*Illustration 10: General view of the western end of Marsh Lane*



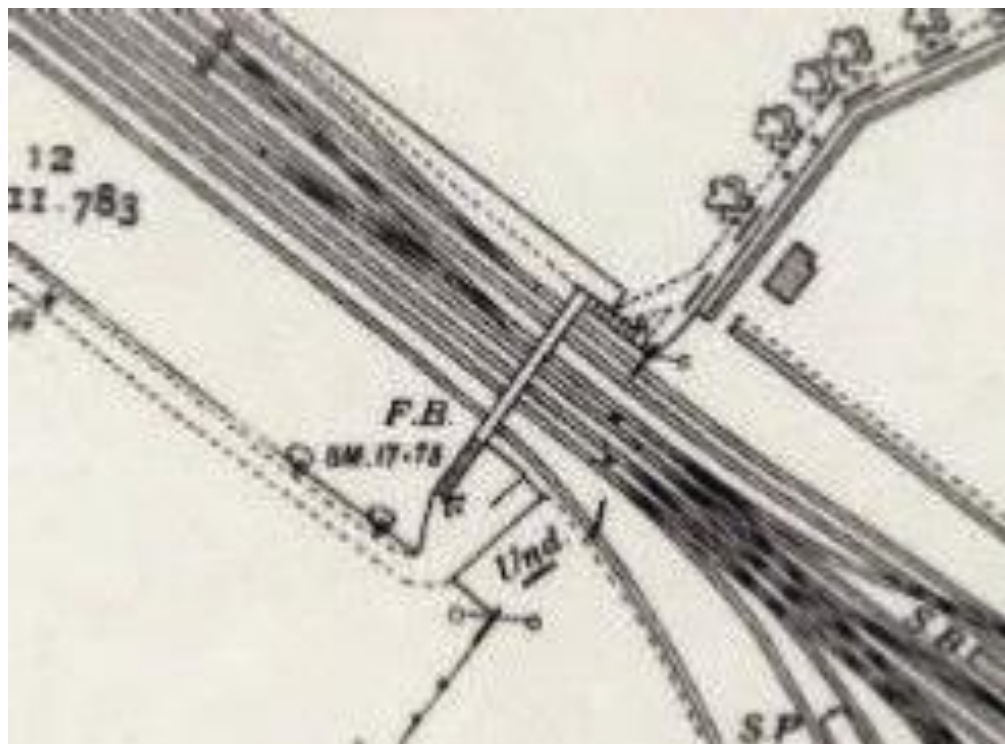
*Illustration 11: Close up of crossing and cattle creep*

### **The Brick Footbridge**

Mrs Lewis alludes to parental concerns about children using the level crossing. Given the need for pedestrians to cross the line here in increasing numbers for sport and recreation, council minutes in 1924 demonstrate a growing concern for safety. Leyton Council formally asked that the railway company provide a 'Watchman' for the level crossing. This request was roundly rejected on the grounds of cost. But the scene is set for the construction of a brick footbridge at the beginning of the 1930s to provide a safe and convenient pedestrian alternative to cattle creep and level crossing. Provision for this new footbridge had actually been made in the above-mentioned Great Eastern Railway (General Powers) Act of 1889 but had taken approximately 40 years to come to fruition!



*Illustration 12: OS Map from 1936 showing the newly built footbridge in the centre of a general view of the area.*



*Illustration 12a: a close-up of the same OS map from 1936, with the position of footbridge, steps and underpass (cattle creep) all clearly indicated.*



The following four photos from the early post war era show the scene at the western end of Marsh Lane at the time.



*Illustration 13: from 1947, with East at the top, showing the brick bridge over the railway above right. The level crossing and cattle creep can also be made out. The Lea Bridge Gas Works complex, with its two gasholders, command the centre. Leabridge Road is bottom left. Note that today's London plane trees in Marsh Lane have just been planted. (The row of mature elm trees to the left follows the line of the underground Shortlands sewer.) Credit: Britain from the Air.*





*Illustrations 14 (above) and 14a (detail, below) show a close-up of the footbridge in 1955, shortly before demolition, taken from the SW side of the tracks, facing NW towards Lea Bridge Road. Part of a gasholder can be made out beyond the tracks. (Credit: Thames Water)*





*Illustration 15: shows the scene in 1952 with SE at the top, this time from a lower angle (Credit: Britain from the Air). The plane trees on Marsh Lane are starting to grow whilst the elms marking the Shortlands sewer are still in place. The Temple Mills marshalling yards still end at Marsh Lane – but not for long.....*

### **The re-modelling of Temple Mills and today's Footbridge**

The brick footbridge survived the bombing of World War 2, but a large-scale expansion and re-modelling of the post war Temple Mills goods yard would spell the end for that bridge, cattle creep and level crossing.

As the proposals progressed in 1951/52, there was much discussion on Leyton Council about the implications for the locality. More land was required, and the newly expanded sidings would be too wide for the bridge and the cattle creep. When British Railways also requested closure of the level crossing councillors met railway officials to explain in no uncertain terms that this would mean loss of access to Leyton's playing grounds to the southwest of the railway. The upshot of the various discussions was the construction of today's footbridge in compensation! A structure mainly of steel, with concrete staircases at each end.

The British Transport Commission Act of 1954 provided for the extinguishment (stopping up) of Marsh Lane level crossing and the cattle creep, demolition of the brick footbridge and their replacement with the new bridge about 200 yards to the northwest. British Rail records show the process was not complete until 1956. Council minutes in early 1956 report that the new bridge was 'nearly ready' on February 7<sup>th</sup> 1956.



*Illustration 16: Ordnance Survey map showing the modern layout as it has been since 1956, with the red arrow indicating the new footbridge c200 metres to the NW of where the old brick footbridge, cattle creep and level crossing had been. The orange arrow indicates Marsh Lane.*

### **The Decline of Temple Mills Goods Yard**

The expansion of Britain's motorway network in the 1970s corresponded with the decline in the importance of railway marshalling yards like Temple Mills. By the 1980s the sidings in Leyton had largely fallen into disuse. Nature re-asserted itself and a wilderness grew where once there had been busy sidings, as can be seen in a picture of the scene below from 1988 looking towards the gasholders with the footbridge on the right of the photo.



*Illustration 17: Looking over the disused sidings towards the gasholders in 1988 (credit: author)*



The construction of Orient Way, begun in 1993, covered some of this wilderness, with all the land being cleared in preparation. Plans for the “relief road”, to be built in conjunction with the new Leyton Mills Retail Park, are shown on the map below which accompanied Waltham Forest’s consultations in 1989. A campaign to prevent the road being built was unsuccessful. However, the land indicated by “10” on the map was not released for development as envisaged and the access roads to connect Orient Way with industrial estates via Marsh Lane (“9”) and Ive Farm never materialised. Marsh Lane remained a quiet route and the footbridge survived!



Illustration 18 (credit: Waltham Forest Council)



*Illustration 19: (credit: Karl Weiss) A view southeast from Marsh Lane Footbridge showing the extent of land clearance prior to the construction of Orient Way looking towards a pre-Olympic Stratford. The pylons were removed in preparation for the 2012 Games. Note the tower blocks by Oliver Road on the left. Demolition of these was completed in 2002. On the right note the long-disused water tank for steam engines, possibly the one mentioned by Mrs Lewis on page 8. The plinth which supported this structure is still visible.*



*Illustration 20: (credit: Karl Weiss) View from the footbridge looking north towards Lea Bridge Road with land cleared for the building of Orient Way. Note the shadow of the footbridge! Just to the left of the gasholders, beyond Clementina Road, is the spire of St Saviour's Church in Markhouse Road, and beyond that the long-demolished St Michael's Tower off Gosport Road E17.*

## **Saving the Footbridge in 2004**

The right of way across the Marshes from Marsh Lane had survived the coming of the railways, land grabs by water and gas companies, the end of Lammas rights, the air raids of two world wars, the expansion and decline of the railway sidings and their partial replacement by a 'relief road'.

As well as its historical role of linking both parts of Leyton Marshes along a route roughly heading over towards Lea Bridge Road and the river crossing, the bridge had recently assumed another function – as a link from Leyton across the Lea Valley Regional Park (LVRPA) Pitch and Putt course (today's Waterworks Meadow) via a new permissive path laid in 2000 to link up with the recently constructed Sustrans cycle path along the filled-in aqueduct. The new red 'Friends' Bridge then led from Leyton into Hackney Marshes. Marsh Lane and its footbridge were now more important than ever.....

On Monday 26 April 2004 executives from the CTRL (Channel Tunnel Rail Link) attended a Councillors' Neighbourhood Forum at George Mitchell School on behalf of Union Rail and sought to calm residents' nerves about the effect on the local community of the construction of the new Eurostar Depot, to be built on the remaining railway land between Orient Way and the then rarely used Stratford – Tottenham Hale line.

A worried resident asked about the future of the footbridge over the railway, and the CTRL representatives assured the meeting that Eurostar posed no threat to the bridge. In fact, notices announcing the demolition of the footbridge and the extinguishing of the historic right of way across the Marshes had already been posted up on either side of the bridge.

A spurious survey had been conducted the previous winter during weekday working hours which purported to show only light usage of the bridge. The local police, asked about security issues given the 'remote' location of the bridge, gave the expected response that they had 'concerns'. (It was later clarified that they had at the time no previous record of a crime ever having taken place at the footbridge or its vicinity). Borough engineers had conceded that there was no alternative to the removal of the bridge to accommodate the increased height of Eurostar train carriages.

In response to a query from a ward constituent, the then Lea Bridge Councillor Stella Creasy elicited the following response from the borough engineering department:

From: "Tony Martin" <Tony.Martin@lbwf.gov.uk>

To: <cllrs.creasy@lbwf.gov.uk>

Sent: Wednesday, April 28, 2004 1:38 PM

Subject: Marsh Lane Footbridge

Dear Councillor Creasy

We have received formal notice from Rail Link Engineering (RLE) that it has made an application to DEFRA on behalf of Union Rail to stop-up the Marsh Lane footbridge. The application is made under Schedule 3 Paragraph 2 of the Channel Tunnel Act (1996)



The reason given for the stopping up, and the subsequent removal of the bridge is that the clearance under the existing footbridge is insufficient to accommodate the Eurostar trains. RLE say that it has looked at increasing the height of the bridge but in view of the low pedestrian usage it cannot justify the cost against removing the bridge and diverting the pedestrians along Orient Way and Lea Bridge Road. I also understand that there are security problems with an isolated footbridge crossing over an international depot and that the metropolitan police support the removal of the structure.....

.....I understand that the persons representing CTRL at last Monday's Community Council meeting denied that the CTRL project required the removal of the footbridge but I can confirm that was an error on their part and I can categorically confirm that is the sole reason for stopping-up the route and removal of the bridge.

Any person wishing to make representation to DEFRA on this proposal should put them in writing by 20 May 2004 to:

Lyndy Beyer  
DEFRA  
Countryside (Recreation and Landscape) Division  
Room 1/01, Temple Quay House  
2 The Square, Temple Quay  
Bristol BS1  
6 EB

I hope this is of help but if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me

Tony Martin  
Engineering Design Manager  
Chingford Municipal Offices  
16 The Ridgeway  
Chingford LONDON E4 6PS

Wrong-footed by inaccurate replies from CTRL executives, delayed by the Bank Holiday weekend, residents had just 3 weeks to make as much fuss as they could.....

# Race against time

## Running club vows to fight planned bridge closure

THE closure of an historic footpath will affect runners, walkers, birdwatchers, golfers and cyclists, according to members of a Leyton running club.

The Eton Manor Athletic Club, based in Marsh Lane, uses the Marsh Lane footbridge regularly and is planning to write to the Government opposing plans to shut it down.

The bridge is around 400m to the southeast of Lea Bridge Road and connects land either side of the Temple Mills rail land and Orient Way.

It follows the Low Leyton Stream, marking the boundary of the former Leyton Lammas Lands – a pre-Saxon route believed to be at least 2,000 years old.

Union Railways is planning to close the footbridge as part of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) expansion project. Work is continuing to extend the Channel tunnel link to King's Cross via Stratford.

Lea Bridge ward councillor Stella Creasy is organising a public meeting with concerned groups, local MPs Neil Gerrard and Harry Cohen, and council

by Tom Hutchison

leader Cllr Clyde Loakes.

She said: "We are sympathetic towards the residents' concerns. We feel that not all options have been looked at and we are very supportive of looking into this further."

Mr Gerrard said the two MPs would make representations to the Government department which would ultimately make the decision on whether to close the bridge.

He claimed that when the Channel tunnel extension proposal was going through Parliament in 1996 there were undertakings given about the bridge which have since been reneged on.

The New Lammas Lands Defence Committee (NLLDC) will be joining the Eton Manor runners to fight the plans.

Eton Manor member Adrian Frost said: "The only way Leyton residents have of accessing the facilities in the Lee Valley Park without going along busy and dangerous roads (Lea Bridge or Ruckholt) is now to be abolished.



Angry: Members of the Eton Manor Athletic Club on the Marsh Lane footbridge on Tuesday evening (K4W1970)

"The closure will affect runners, walkers, birdwatchers, golfers and cyclists alike. Pupils at the nearby Lammas School and others will no longer have a safe route to facilities such as the Waterworks Centre."

The NLLDC was due to meet at the Eton Manor Cottage, Marsh Lane, last night to discuss the plans. Hundreds of locals have already signed a petition against the closure.

A CTRL spokeswoman said an

alternative route would be made available if the footbridge closed. The proposal and objections to it will be considered by an inspector appointed by the Environment Department shortly.

She said: "The Marsh Lane footbridge crosses land on which the planned new train maintenance depot for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link will be built."

"An alternative route along Orient Way and Lea Bridge Road has been proposed."

*Illustration 21: Race against time (credit: Waltham Forest Guardian, May 6<sup>th</sup> 2004)*

In the frenzied days that followed, a coalition of over 20 community groups (running and athletics clubs, cycling campaigns, walking and conservation groups, local branches of political parties, schools, churches, allotment holders and many more) came together to ensure over 100 letters of objection and a 2,000 signature petition were sent to DEFRA. The annual Beating of the Bounds procession – organised by the New Lammas Lands Defence Committee, a revived version of its predecessor from the 1892 campaign – staged a sit-down protest on the footbridge. A public meeting at the Lammas School, supported by both Labour and Lib Dem Councillors and local MP Neil Gerrard, attracted 200 angry protesters, who made their feelings clear to CTRL officials. The Waltham Forest Guardian takes up the story.....



# BRIDGE OF SIZE



Neil Gerrard MP, next to Lea Bridge ward councillor Stella Creasy, as he made a passionate address to the audience (K4W2615)

## Battle is on to save 'too low' rail crossing

PASSIONS spilled over as residents, councillors and MPs united at a public meeting to save a threatened footbridge.

The Save Our Bridge campaign gathered pace on Tuesday evening when over 150 people attended a public meeting at the Lamas School, Leyton.

Outrage that the public right of way between Marsh Lane Fields, Leyton, and the Hackney side of the Lee Valley Park is being threatened by new development was made crystal clear to Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) representative Ian Bond.

He also faced wrath after it emerged that CTRL's initial declaration – "this bridge has nothing to do with us, it won't be affected" – had been reneged on.

Leading the fight was Walthamstow MP Neil Gerrard who said: "Anybody affected must respond to DEFRA (the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) not just with the petition, which already has over 1,600 signatures, but with your own responses."

"If there is the possibility of a public inquiry it really does make a difference – that weight of opinion matters."

Lea Bridge ward councillor Stella Creasy cited the campaign

by Chris Whyatt

for the EMD Cinema in Hoe Street, Walthamstow, as a successful example. She said: "This is not a done deal – the Home Office has to listen to local feeling."

CTRL wants to move the footbridge because it is too low for new trains at what will become a Channel Tunnel train maintenance depot.

Spokesmen have suggested that the busy Lea Bridge Road should be used as an alternative route, though it could add an extra mile to the journey for Leyton people.

Mr Bond, to the shock and dismay of all present, described this as 'a safe option'. It is, however, hoped an alternative can be found.

Leyton councillors and MP Harry Cohen have put forward proposals to shift the bridge 50 to 100 metres towards Lea Bridge Road, which CTRL is presently looking into. Otherwise, a public inquiry lies in wait.

The date for objections has now been extended to June 4. They should be sent to Lyndy Beyer, DEFRA, Countryside (Recreation and Landscape) Division, Room 1/01 Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol BS1 6EB.



Campaigners posed on the threatened Marsh Lane Bridge on Sunday during the annual Beating the Bounds walk (c)

Illustration 22: 'Bridge of Size' (credit: Waltham Forest Guardian, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2004)

Of all the many objection letters sent to DEFRA, excerpts from the one on behalf of the Waltham Forest Open Spaces and Nature Conservation Group sum it up aptly:

Our Group was one of a number formed as part of the Local Agenda 21 initiative and is a partnership between the local authority (the London Borough of Waltham Forest) and individuals in the community with a commitment to environmental issues. Walking routes are one of the best ways to promote use of our local green open spaces and widen appreciation of their value.

One such route runs from Marsh Lane, Leyton, London E10 to the Lee Valley Park Authority's "Waterworks" environmental centre and nature reserve. The route uses the footbridge Union Railways wish to close.



The applicants are not offering an alternative route but suggesting every user of the current footpath abandon it and walk 700m alongside very busy roads. These roads are very unpleasant places to walk on, being noisy and heavy with the fumes of traffic, often stationary.

The importance of the footpath and footbridge is that they connect Marsh Lane Playing Fields [known since 2012 as the Leyton Jubilee Park], an area of green open space, which at 19 acres is extensive for the area, with further open space in the Lee Valley Park. The path and footbridge linking two such areas effectively double their worth as a public amenity. The bridge offers the only traffic-free access route to facilities in the Lea Valley from the heavily built-up area of Leyton, which suffers exceptionally high social deprivation by national standards and has limited alternative open space.

'Marsh Lane Playing Fields' are also known as 'Seymour Fields', 'Marsh Lane Fields' and 'Marsh Lane Recreation Ground'. They are part of the former Lammas Lands on which grazing rights were voluntarily given up 100 years ago in 1904, in exchange for the right of free access in perpetuity. The connection between the former Lammas Lands to the west of Orient Way and the railway lines, and those to the east, the Marsh Lane Playing Fields, should be maintained as an important part of Leyton's heritage.

The applicants are able to construct their railway facilities without major harm to the amenities of east London. They should be required to do so.

Yours sincerely, David Boote

Councillor Creasy summed up the strength of feeling in her own objection letter to DEFRA:

“By now I am sure that your department has been made well aware of the potency of local feeling in this community about the proposals. As ... local councillor I know first-hand how strongly local residents feel that this bridge is vital to their quality of life.....put simply I do not believe that a strong enough case has been made for the removal and non-replacement of this bridge in order to facilitate the CTRL depot at Temple Mills and so I ask you as a result to reject this application.”

## **A Stay of Execution**

On 20<sup>th</sup> June 2004 CTRL wrote to councillors stating that they had withdrawn their application to remove the right of way and the Marsh Lane Footbridge.....for the time being! The letter stated that they would be building the depot in stages - having originally planned to build a 12-track shed with sidings they would start with an 8-track building which did not require the removal of the bridge.

"We therefore do not presently intend to pursue this proposal any further and will not be making an application to DEFRA for closure of the right of way."

At the public meeting at Lammas School on 18th May CTRL representatives had re-stated the "Absolute necessity of demolishing the bridge - even if we're forced to provide a replacement"

But when faced with the possibility of a lengthy public enquiry and being required to build a higher replacement footbridge, suddenly not so much land was needed, and a smaller depot could be built-at least initially!

After the 'stay of execution' minor improvements to the bridge and signs to it were agreed by local councillors and council officials, as outlined in the following email:

Gina.Harkell@lbwf.gov.uk 13 Dec 2004, 11:31 Monday

To: Bob F Sullivan

Subject: Re: Marsh Lane bridge signs

Dear Cllr. Sullivan,

Thank you for your email re the above. We have been successful in our bid to Transport for London to provide cycle ramps [ie the wheel channels existing on the steps at the time of writing] on Marsh Lane footbridge in 2005/6. I suggest that we do a full signing scheme to and from the bridge at the same time.

The funding will ensure that a coherent route is provided.

Let me know if you need further information.

Regards,

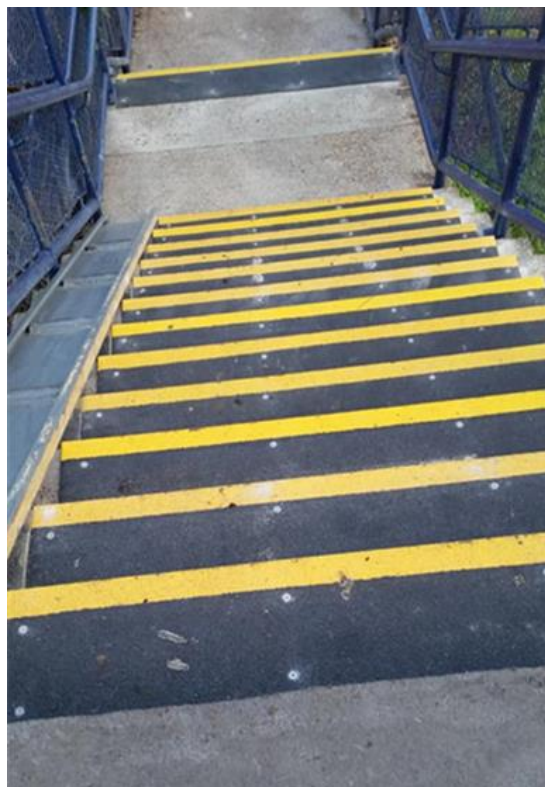
Gina Harkell

Principal Transport Officer LB

Waltham Forest.

### **Into the era of social media: A New Campaign to improve the Footbridge!**

The minor improvements gained in 2006 were looking tired and inadequate by 2020 and in November of that year a new campaign on Facebook alongside a petition on change.org took up the cudgels in a modern context to press for improvements or even a modern replacement footbridge. The Facebook group soon had over 150 enthusiastic members and the on-line petition quickly gained over 1000 signatures. Sustained pressure on Network Rail and Waltham Forest Council, joint owners of the footbridge, eventually yielded repairs to the enhancements dating back to 2006.



*Illustration 23: A repaired staircase on the on the bridge. (Credit: Ricca Bunda)*

Could the Property Developers vying to build tower blocks all around Lea Bridge be made to stump up some or all of the cash for a completely new bridge, or at least sufficient for upgrades with ramps to bring it into line with modern expectations of inclusivity, not least in compliance with the Equality Act of 2010?



*Illustration 24: Solène Fabios struggles on the stairs with pushchair. (Credit: Karl Weiss)*

*Illustration 25: Local activist Claire Weiss explained the modern campaign in this article for the Waltham Forest Echo. [walthamforestecho.co.uk/2020/12/21/we-deserve-a-better-bridge/](https://walthamforestecho.co.uk/2020/12/21/we-deserve-a-better-bridge/)*

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# We deserve a better bridge

Claire Weiss from Love Lea Bridge wants a new crossing over Orient Way

A footbridge has been conveying walkers and cyclists over the industrial traffic route of Orient Way and the Greater Anglia railway lines for nearly 20 years.

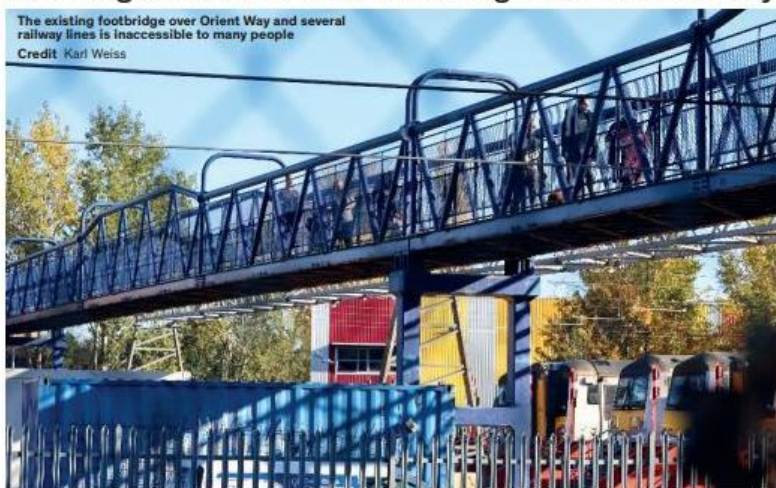
Jointly-owned by Waltham Forest Council and Network Rail and linking Marsh Lane to Leyton Marshes, it's now becoming more important to wider groups of people, as it is a brilliant shortcut for pedestrian and cyclist journeys between Waltham Forest and Hackney.

Unfortunately, the bridge parapet is disintegrating, and the walking surfaces are degrading. A report about its hazards has been filed with the Health and Safety Executive. The intention of Waltham Forest Council and developers to increase the local population by 8,000 people, by building several new 'car free' estates nearby, urgently raises the need for a more accessible and amenable footbridge.

One day in early November I chatted to local residents and asked them about their journeys. A group of people explained that they use the bridge regularly as part of their walks for exercise and mental health. Two women, each with a small baby in a pram, said they found it very useful for reaching the open spaces of the marshes via an off-road route. Others using bicycles were going to work, while some on foot were visiting friends or collecting children from care.

I had also spoken to some people who don't use the bridge. It's a formidable structure in terms of height, span and exposure to the elements, and as such it is unapproachable by people with a fear of heights, those who

The existing footbridge over Orient Way and several railway lines is inaccessible to many people  
Credit: Karl Weiss



feel unprotected because of the open sides, and others who feel too closed in by the narrowness of it.

Clearly, the bridge is also inaccessible to anyone whose mobility or physiological capacity stops them from climbing the 30 steps. People also told me there were better-designed footbridges in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and elsewhere, for instance over the A12 and the Central Line in Leytonstone.

The Orient Way bridge's limitations are not only the number of steps, their height, and steepness, but also the badly-positioned wheel channel, the partial absence of a handrail, and the narrow footway that prevents social distancing. I witnessed people struggling with all of

these shortcomings, most poignantly those crossing with small children, pushchairs and bikes. I saw that if you have a pushchair, the child must get out and climb on their own. Modern bikes are incompatible with the position of the wheel channel, so cyclists are wielding their bikes perilously as they clamber the steep steps.

The Love Lea Bridge residents' group has contacted the council and Network Rail and is campaigning for a replacement bridge which would be wider and have ramps to accommodate cargo bikes, prams and wheelchairs. We believe that funding for this new bridge should come from the community obligations of the many large housing developments planned in the area.



On 20 November 2021, Deputy Leader of Waltham Forest Council Clyde Loakes emailed to announce: 'A study that considers the feasibility of providing step free access at each end of the existing structure.... to improve, in particular, access for cyclists, people with pushchairs and those with reduced mobility.'

And in a further development, proposed improvements to the Footbridge have been included and are now referred to in the Waltham Forest Plan.

## **The almost 200-year-old fight goes on for access from Marsh Lane to the open space beyond! And it seems like the people of Leyton are still up for it!**

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