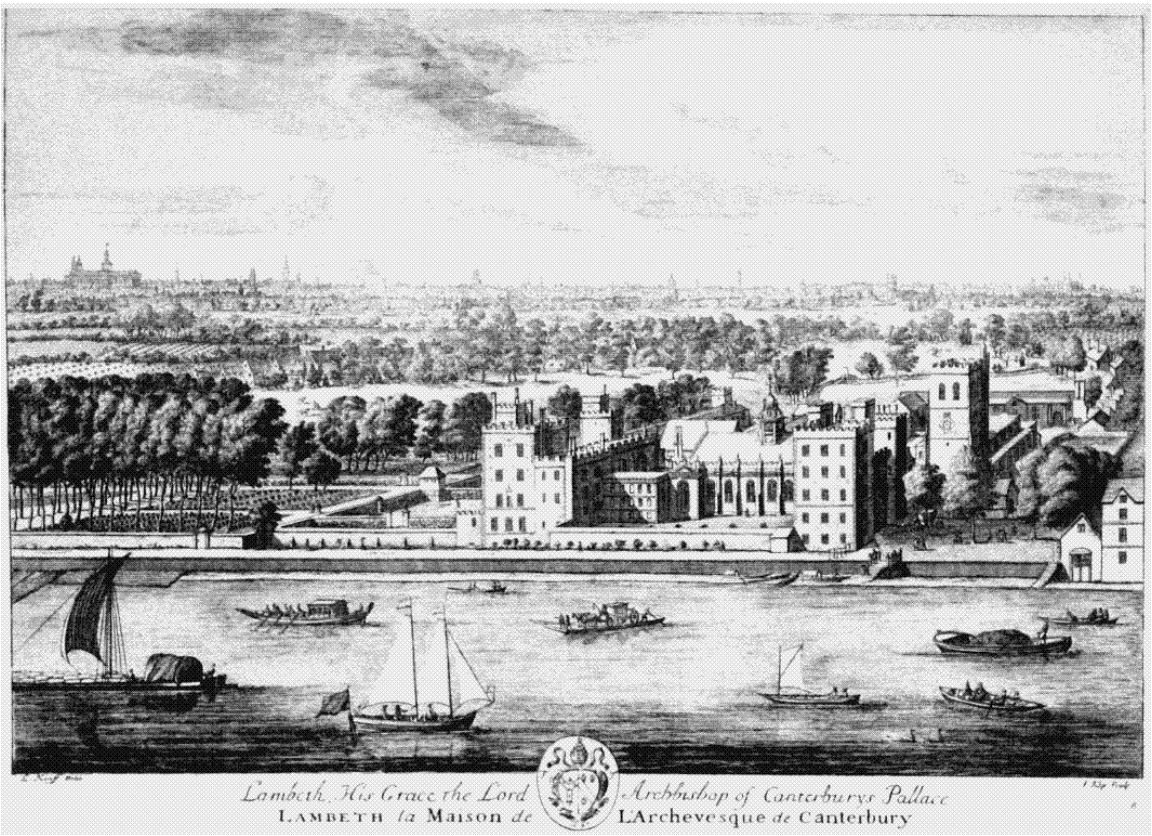
LAMBETH BRIDGE AND ITS PREDECESSOR THE HORSEFERRY

The Horseferry

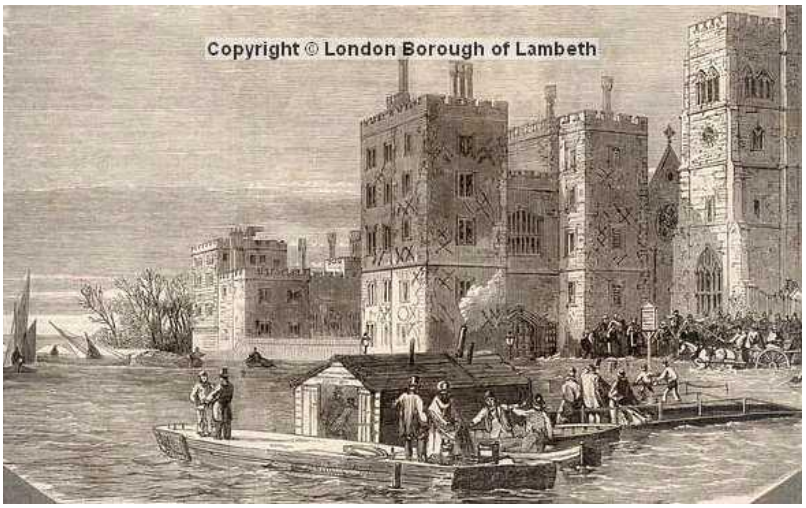


Some authorities hold that there was an ancient British ford, subsequently used by the Romans near the site of Lambeth Palace or a little down the river at Stangate. (ref. 228) Whether this was so or not, it is certain that from the time of the establishment of a town house of the Archbishops of Canterbury at Lambeth there must have been a constant plying across the river between Lambeth House (or Palace) and the King's palace at Westminster, especially as many of the mediaeval Archbishops held high offices of state. In 1367, for example, a sum of £16 was paid to the clerks of chancery for the barge “for passage to and fro across the Thames to the manor of Lambheth of Simon archbishop of Canterbury the chancellor where the inn of chancery is now held, and for wages of the keepers of the said barge.” (ref. 16)

When the Horseferry was first established at Lambeth is not known. The earliest specific reference to it which has been found is in the year 1513, (ref. 229) when the Archbishop granted the ferry over the Thames from Lambeth to Westminster to Humphrey Trevilyan at the rent of 16d. a year. A provision was included in the grant that the Archbishop and his servants and his goods and chattels should be carried free. Similar grants of a later date are to be found among the records at Lambeth Palace. In Thomas Cromwell's accounts (ref. 23) for the year 1538 is an entry for the “ferryage” of his horses at Lambeth and there is also extant a bill dated 1546 from Edmonde Lewes, “Feryman” for ferrying the king's horses “over the water at Lambyth ferry.” (ref. 23)

Archbishop Laud's arrival at Lambeth was marked by an accident which was afterwards regarded as an omen of his unhappy fate. The overladen ferryboat as it crossed the river with his servants and horses sank to the bottom, though happily without loss of life. (ref. 230) The incident was remembered when in 1656 a like accident befell Protector Cromwell's coach and horses and it was suggested that he too might be heading for disaster. (ref. 231)

During the Civil War, Lambeth Ferry was confiscated with the rest of the Archbishop's property, and on 6th December, 1648, was sold to Christopher Wormeall. (ref. 232) On 7th July of that year, when there was insurrection in Surrey, instructions were issued to the keepers of the various ferries over the Thames from Lambeth upwards, “the better to prevent the confluence of people to those who have taken up arms against the Parliament,” to arrange for the Horseferry boat to be kept on the Middlesex shore between sunset and sunrise, and for guards to be placed “so that none be suffered to pass in the daytime except market people, and such as have business from the State and passes to warrant their crossing over.” (ref. 233)



At the Restoration the ferry reverted to the Archbishop. In 1664 he granted a lease of it to Mrs. Leventhorp, (ref. 234) whose successors do not seem to have carried out their public obligations, for some 40 years later the churchwardens and inhabitants of the parish of St. Margaret, Westminster, complained of Mr. Leventhorp's “usurping the whole profits of the horseferry, and neglecting to repair the roads leading thereto.” (ref. 235)

In 1688 Lambeth Ferry was the scene of one of the scene of one of the most dramatic events connected with the expulsion of the Stuarts. On the night of 9–10th December, Mary of Modena, James II's queen, and the baby prince (afterwards the Old Pretender) with two nurses left Whitehall under the guidance of De Lauzun and St. Victor, and drove to the Horseferry. The night was stormy and so dark that the passengers could not see each other in the boat though they were closely seated. According to some accounts the queen and her baby had to spend an hour under the walls of the old church waiting for a coach, (fn. a) but St. Victor records that a coach and six were ready in an inn adjoining the landing place and took the party to Gravesend. (ref. 237)

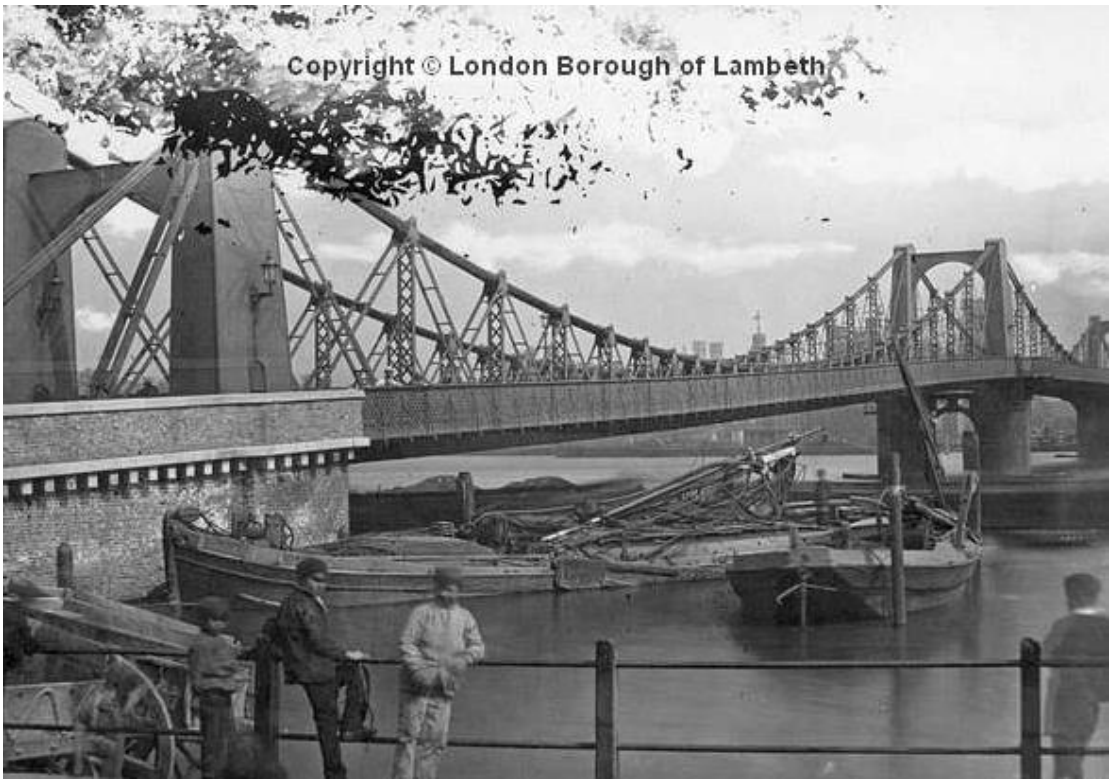
Kip's view of Lambeth Palace, reproduced on Plate 64, shows the ferryboat crossing the river. It suggests that the ferry plied to and from Lambeth Palace stairs, but this was not so, the landing place on the Lambeth side being a little farther south. (fn. b) On arrival there traffic turned left for a few yards along the northern end of Fore Street (now swallowed up by the Albert Embankment) and then to the right along Church Street (now Lambeth Road).

An account of the ferry in the year 1708 contains details of the fees charged—

	s.	d
“For a Man and Horse	0	2
For a Horse and Chaze	1	0
For a Coach and 2 Horses	1	6
a Coach and 4	2	0
a Coach and 6	2	6
a Cart loaden	2	6
a Cart or Waggon, each	2	0” (ref. 63)

The Suspension Bridge

As early as 1664 a proposal was made for the building of a bridge between Westminster and Lambeth, but had to be dropped because of the opposition of the citizens of London and the watermen. (ref. 233) It was not until 1736 that an Act was passed authorizing the building of a bridge at Westminster. (ref. 148) The Act provided for the payment of compensation to the Archbishop and his lessees for damage to the Horseferry, and on the opening of the bridge in 1750 a sum of £3,780 was paid over and the Horseferry ceased to operate. It appears from the enquiries made at the time that the profits of the ferry during its last seven years amounted to £928, a sum which would have been much increased if the patentees had not been at the expense of building two new boats “the Ferry being in a very bad condition at the commencement of these 7 years.” (ref. 238)



In 1737 an amending Act (ref. 239) had been passed providing inter alia for the new bridge to be built either from New Palace Yard or on the site of the Horseferry. The erection of Westminster Bridge put and end for the time being to proposals for a bridge on the Horseferry site, but at the beginning of the 19th century these began to revive. In 1809 an Act (ref. 240) was actually passed for the erection of a bridge on that site, but nothing came of it. In 1828 two bills, one for the construction of a stone bridge, to be called “the Royal Clarence Bridge,” and the other for a chain suspension bridge, were introduced into the House, but because of the opposition they excited were not proceeded with. (ref. 241) In 1836 (ref. 242) an Act was passed incorporating the Metropolitan Suspension Bridge Company for making a bridge at Lambeth, but nothing was done, and the powers conferred lapsed. In 1844 Sir Samuel Brown, R.N., and others, attended a meeting of Lambeth Vestry and produced a model “of the intended Suspension Bridge from Church Street to Millbank” and solicited the support of the churchwarden and overseers to obtain an Act. (ref. 82) This again proved fruitless, but finally in 1861 (ref. 243) the Lambeth Bridge Act incorporated a company to construct a bridge to connect Church Street (now Lambeth Road), Lambeth, with Market Street (now Horseferry Road), Westminster. The bridge, erected from the designs of P.W. Barlow at a cost of £48,924, was opened in November, 1862. The termination on the Lambeth side was a few yards north of the old Horseferry landing stage. (ref. 241)

The bridge was of stiffened suspension type, 828 feet long, divided into three spans, each 268 feet wide, by piers carrying the towers which supported the suspension cables. It was 31 feet 9 inches wide between the parapets. (ref. 241)

While the bridge was the property of a company tolls were charged on all who used it. It was subsequently bought by the Metropolitan Board of Works under the provisions of the Metropolitan Toll Bridges Act, 1877, for £35, 974 and freed from toll.

The Present Bridge

Even in 1879, when it had been in existence only 17 years, old Lambeth Bridge was in an unsatisfactory condition. The twisted cables had suffered from oxidation and the girders were also rusting badly. In spite of remedial measures the state of the bridge continued to deteriorate and in 1910 it had to be closed to vehicular traffic. Rebuilding was delayed owing to the 1914–18 war, but in 1924 the London County Council obtained parliamentary powers to construct a new bridge and to widen and raise the approaches at either end. The new bridge was completed and opened in 1932. (ref. 241)

THE LEADER OF THE NATION LEADS THE WAY ACROSS THE NATION'S NEW BRIDGE

To the loyal strains of "God Save the King," roared from loyal throats, and escorted by the blazonry of the scarlet and silver of the Life Guards, the scarlet and towering bearskins of the Grenadier Guards, the King and Queen progressed across the new Lambeth Bridge

The present bridge, which has five spans and is of steel construction, extends from the site of the old abutment on the Westminster side to a point 81 feet upstream of the centre of the old Lambeth abutment. The width between the balustrades is 60 feet, there being a 36—foot roadway with 12—foot footways on each side. The balustrade is of cast-iron seated on a steel cornice and it is surmounted by cast-iron lamp standards, two on either side of the bridge in each span. There are also granite lamp standards above the carved panels over the buttresses at the ends of each pier. These piers and buttresses with the standards and panels are all built in granite. The obelisks on either side of the bridge approaches are also of granite; each stands on a pedestal and is terminated by a pineapple finial. The design was in the main the responsibility of Sir George W. Humphreys, then Chief Engineer to the Council, in collaboration with the architects, Sir Reginald Blomfield and G. Topham Forrest.

Footnotes

a See, for example, Macaulay— “She remained with her child, cowering for shelter from the storm under the tower of Lambeth Church and distracted by terror whenever the ostler approached her with his lanthern.” (ref. 236) Macaulay also tells us that when James II took flight the next night he crossed the Thames from Millbank to Vauxhall in a small wherry. “As he passed Lambeth he flung the great seal into the midst of the stream, whence, after many months, it was accidently caught by a fishing net and dragged up.”

b The Horseferry landing place is clearly shown on Rocque's and other 18th century maps.

References

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148.A Public act for building a bridge across the River Thames, from the New Palace Yard in the City of Westminster to the opposite shore … 9 Geo. II, cap. 29.

228.Polychronicon, by Ralph Higden, Rolls Series. II.

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230.Diary of the life of Archbishop Laud (1695 ed.).

231.Hist. MSS. Comm., App. to 5th Rep.

232.P.R.O.C 54/3414.

233.Cal. of S.P. Dom., 1648–64.

234.Hist, MSS. Comm., 9th Rep., App. I.

235.Ibid., 4th Rep., App.

236.History of England, by Lord Macaulay, 1849 ed.

237.Lives of Queens of England, by Agnes Strickland,1852.

238.P.R.O. Works 6/32, pp. 248, 274.

239.Public Act, 10 Geo. II, cap.16.

240.Local Act, 49 Geo III, cap. 142.

241.L.C.C. Ceremonial pamphlet: Opening of Lambeth Bridge… 19th July, 1932.

242.Local Act, 6 and 7 Wm. IV, cap. 134.

243.Local Act, 24 and 25 Vic., cap. 117.