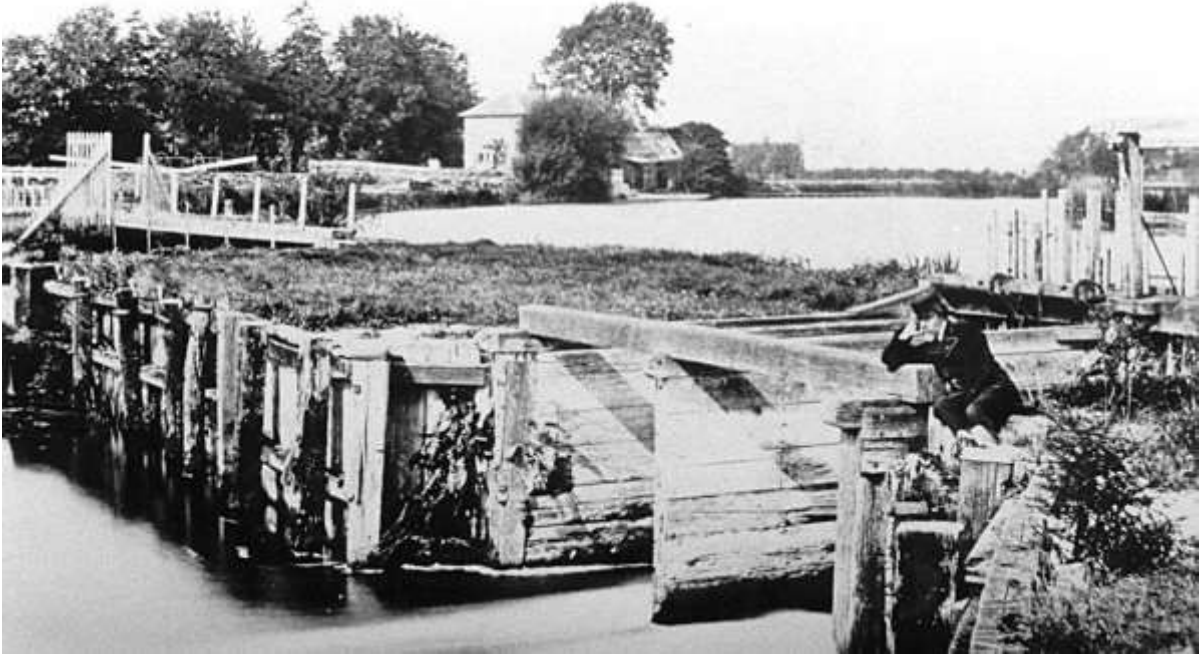


JOHN AND HENRY WHITEMAN



1886 photograph of **John Whiteman**, the lock keeper, who drowned in 1887.

The lock-keeper's house on the island can be seen in the background.

John Whiteman born in 1829 was the sixth child of Thomas and Ann Whiteman. John, a fisherman, married Emma Allum in 1852 and they had eleven children. They had lived in Wallingford, Crowmarsh Gifford (*formerly called Long Crowmarsh*) and Cholsey.

In the 1871 census, John the lock keeper, aged 41 and his wife Emma also aged 41, lived on the lock island, which at that time was in Clapcot, Wallingford, Berkshire. (*The lock island is nearer the Wallingford bank of the river. Clapcot in the parish of All Hallows, Wallingford included the western part of the island.*) Their two eldest sons, John and Alfred were both employed as lock keepers. Their son, Henry was aged 7 and born in Cholsey in 1862.

In the 1881 census, John Whiteman, (51) born in the district of Wallingford was living in Benson Pound House (*lock keeper's house*) with his wife Emma (51). (*Pound describes a chamber lock.*) They had four sons and two daughters, but Henry was not at home.

After John Whiteman died in 1887, his son Henry took over. Henry had valiantly rescued a rowing crew from drowning in December 1886.

December 18, 1886

Alarming accident at Benson Lock. — There was considerable excitement in the neighbourhood on Saturday last. It appears that two crews set out from Oxford for Moulford to be present at the "Trial Eights." Notwithstanding that the river was swollen and the currents very strong, they accomplished the voyage safely until they arrived at Benson. By using very great care, the first of the crews passed the dangerous place here with no hurt, but the second crew (of Magdalen) got too far before the Coxswain perceived the danger post. The crew pulled as hard as possible, but the boat was drawn against the post, and wrecked. All the men were immediately struggling in the water, and the current was so strong that it was impossible for any of them to swim ashore.

Fortunately the accident had been witnessed by two of Messrs Weedon's men, at the coal-wharf, who immediately went to the rescue. Whiteman, the lock-keeper, also put out in a boat, and all three, at great peril to themselves, succeeded in rescuing every one of the crew. The boat, however, was past saving, and portions of it were carried on to Wallingford. Several watches and other valuables also went to the bottom, near the lock. The rescued men

Henry was presented with an award the following April

BENSON.

REWARD FOR GALLANTRY.—On Monday afternoon, at a public meeting held in the National School at Benson, the Mayor of Wallingford presented Henry Whiteman and Benjamin Beasley with framed certificates from the Royal Humane Society, for having rescued the crew of an Oxford "Lincoln College" eight-oar boat, who came to grief while endeavouring to enter Benson Lock, on the occasion of the "Trial Eights" at Moulford.

Jackson's Oxford Journal April 1887

The newspaper report described Henry as a skilled boatman, who unhesitatingly launched his boat in the fast flowing weir stream, and with great expertise rescued four of the oarsmen. Beasley, who was less skilled and could not swim, nevertheless went out in a punt and recovered three of the remaining men. He and Whiteman together had then succeeded in rescuing the last man, who by this time was clinging for his life to a post at the top of the weir.



The weir in 1880 with the mill chimney in the background

In the 1891 census, Henry had taken over as head of the household and he was a lock keeper, aged 29 living with 2 brothers and a sister. His brother, William was an assistant lock keeper. Henry married Jane Matilda Green, later that year.

1891 Henry Whiteman of Clapcot, Wallingford, lock-keeper married Jane Matilda Green of Preston Crowmarsh, daughter of George Green, basket maker.

Dec 3rd 1892 John Henry Whiteman, born Oct 23rd was baptised. He was the son of Henry Whiteman and Jane Matilda Whiteman.

April 1893 Jane Matilda Whiteman died aged 34 and was buried at St. Helen's Church, Benson.

Sadly, Henry died in March 1901 at the age of thirty-nine and was buried at St. Helen's Church.



One of the ferries which once crossed The Thames at Benson