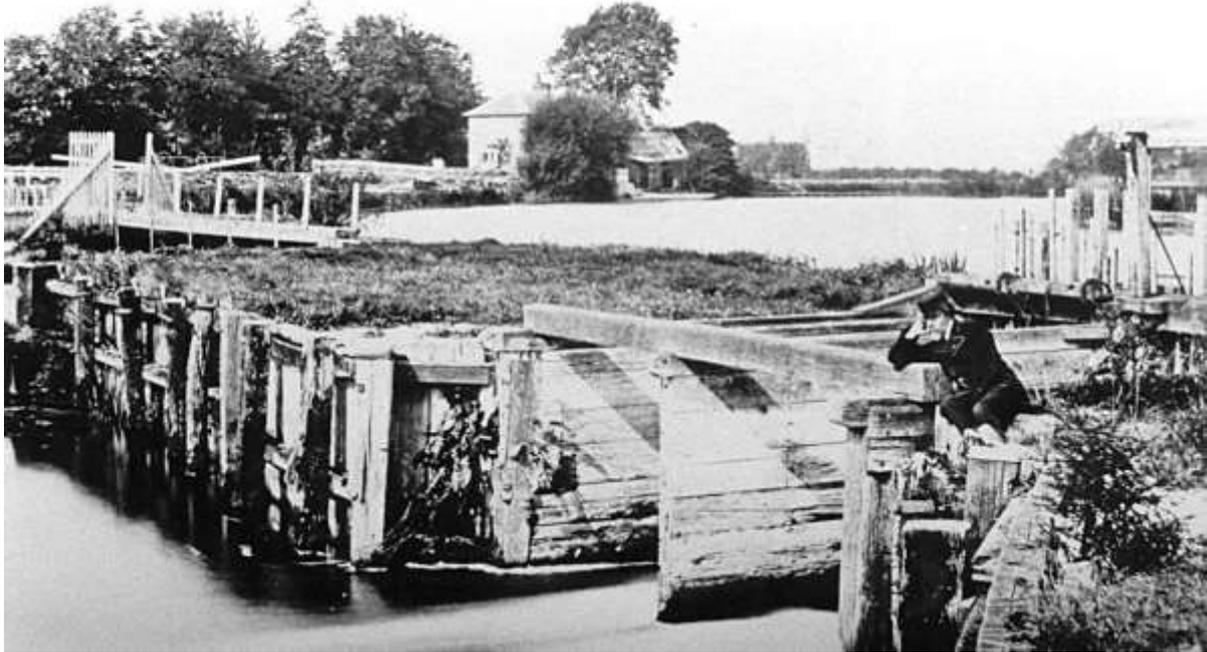


## JOHN AND HENRY WHITEMAN



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** was first recorded as the keeper at Benson in October 1866. He was born in 1829, the sixth child of Thomas and Ann Whiteman. John, a fisherman, had married Emma Allum in 1852 and they had eleven children. They lived in Crowmarsh Gifford (*formerly called Long Crowmarsh*) and Cholsey, before coming to Benson.

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 the registration district of Clapcot, Wallingford, Berkshire. (*The lock island is nearer the Wallingford bank of the river. Clapcot in the parish of All Hallows, Wallingford included 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.

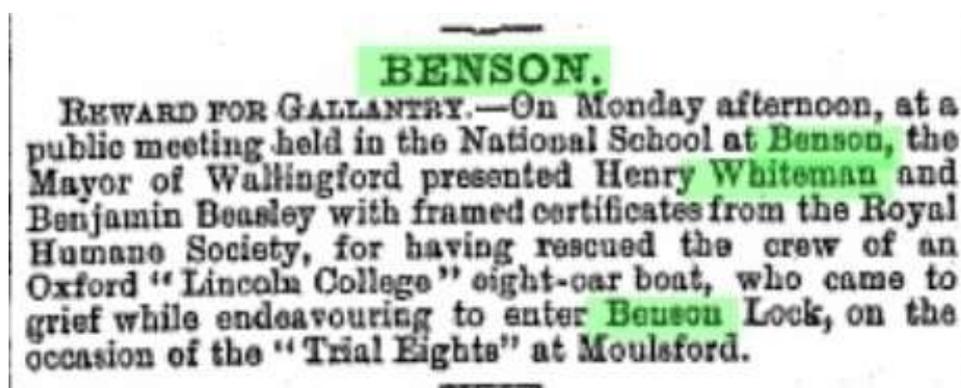
After John Whiteman died in 1887, his son Henry took over. Henry had valiantly rescued a rowing crew from drowning in December 1886.

The newspaper report described how, *"Two crews set out from Oxford for Moulsoford 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 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."*

Henry was presented with an award the following April



Another 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 after the death of his father. He was a lock keeper, aged 29 living with two brothers and a sister. His brother, William was an assistant lock keeper. Henry married Jane Matilda Green, later that year.

In October 1891, Henry Whiteman of Clapcot, Wallingford, lock-keeper married Jane Matilda Green of Preston Crowmarsh, daughter of George Green, basket maker. (*See the marriage register extract below.*)

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1891. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Benson in the County of Oxford

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
315	October 22 1891	Henry Whiteman Jane Matilda Green	31 31	Bachelor Spinster	Lock Keeper —	Chaplain in the Parish of All Hallows Wallingford Preston Crossmarch	John Whiteman George Green	Lock Keeper (deceased) Baker- maker

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England, after Banns, by Mr. J. E. Field, Vicar

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Henry Whiteman in the Presence of us, Arthur Avery Green  
Jane Matilda Green Ada Green

On Dec 3<sup>rd</sup> 1892, John Henry Whiteman, born Oct 23<sup>rd</sup> was baptised in St Helen's Church, Benson. He was the son of Henry Whiteman and Jane Matilda Whiteman.

Tragically, after just two years of marriage, in April 1893, Jane Matilda Whiteman died aged 34 and was buried at St. Helen's Church, Benson.

In July 1894, Henry Whiteman, now a widower, married Elizabeth Anne Balls, a domestic servant, in Warborough Parish Church. Elizabeth, who was aged 40, was the daughter of James Balls, a labourer of Warborough. (See the marriage register extract below.)

1894 Marriage solemnized at St Andrew's Church in the Parish of Warborough in the County of Oxford

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
200	July 11.	Henry Whiteman Elizabeth Anne Balls	35 40	Widower Spinster	Lock Keeper Domestic Servant	Wallingford Warborough	John Whiteman James Balls	Lock-keeper Labourer

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by Mr. Walter Harrington

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Henry Whiteman in the Presence of us, Charles Johnson  
Elizabeth Anne Balls Louise Russell

According to the Burial Register of St Helen's Church, Henry's wife, Elizabeth Anne aged 47, died in February 1901, after less than six years of marriage and was buried in the churchyard on the 8<sup>th</sup> of the month.

Poor Henry died a month later, in March 1901 at the age of 39 and was buried in the churchyard on the 9<sup>th</sup> of the month. (*The death register of St Helen's Church records the address of both Henry and Elizabeth as "Benson Lock in Clapcot".*)

### Henry's son, the orphaned John Henry

By March 1901, John Henry Whiteman, aged 8 was living with his grandparents, George and Sarah Green in Preston Crowmarsh, near Benson.

By 1911, John Henry Whiteman, son of Henry and Jane Matilda, (who was born in 1892 in Benson), was working as a horseman on a farm in Kirby in the West Riding of Yorkshire.



One of the ferries which once crossed The Thames at Benson. The public footpath that passengers once used for access can still be found at Preston Crowmarsh, 100m south of Benson Brook.