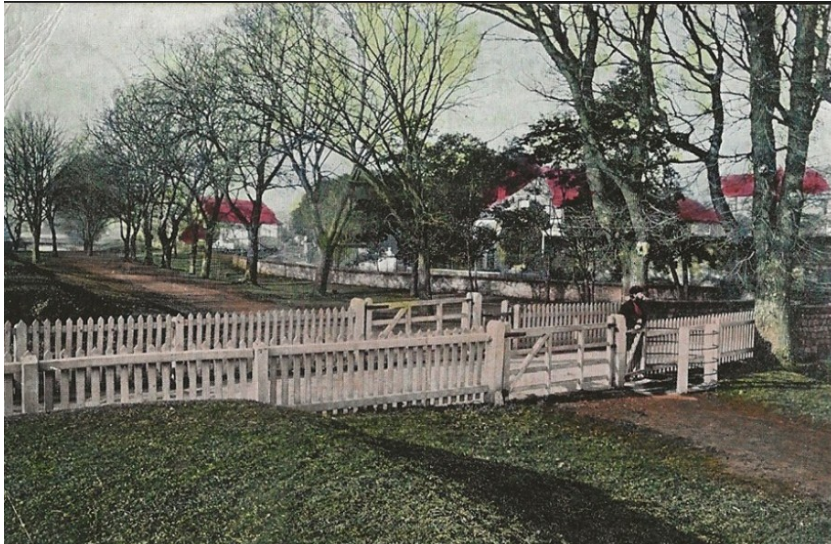


## The Story of Hythe's Ladies Walk Bridge

Ladies Walk in Hythe began life as Marine Walk, a pleasant route laid out around 1810 to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of King George III. The path linked the town to the sea through open meadows and pastureland. In 1813, a simple wooden bridge was built across the Royal Military Canal, creating an attractive traffic-free route that quickly became popular with local residents, particularly women enjoying leisurely strolls. Over time, the name Marine Walk gradually gave way to the more familiar "Ladies Walk."

Pictures of the bridge before the flood



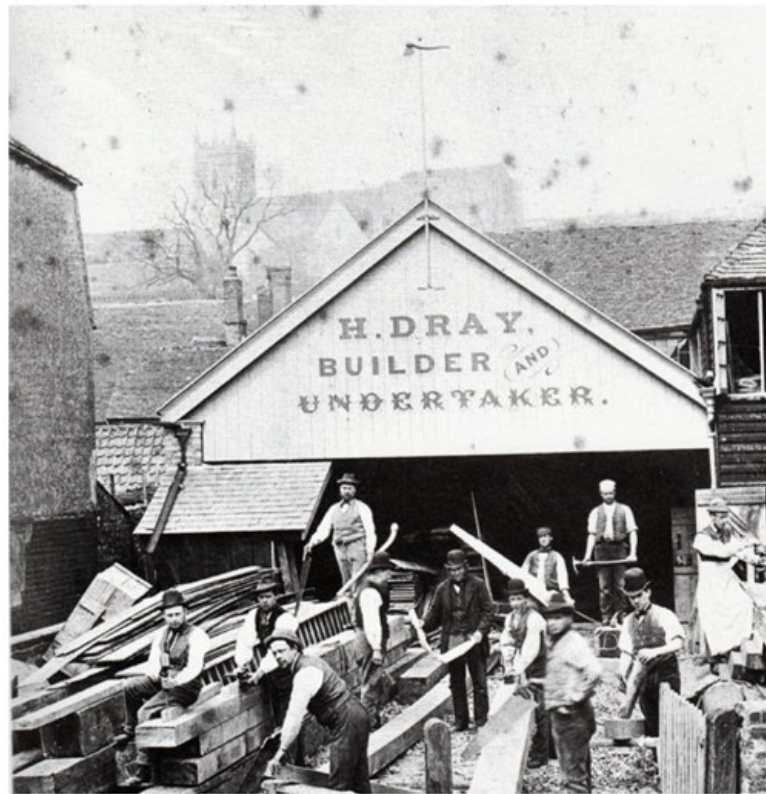


The walk was improved during the nineteenth century with benches, shade-providing elm trees, and a better surface. However, on New Year's Day 1877, a violent storm changed the landscape dramatically. The sea broke through the coastal defences, flooding the meadows between Hythe and Sandgate and surging across the canal. The floodwaters swept away the original wooden Ladies Walk Bridge before continuing into the town's streets.



**The Ladies' Walk, Hythe,**  
As it appeared in January, 1877, when inundated by the Sea.

Workmen from H. Dray are seen preparing timber for the new Ladies Walk Bridge in 1877 or 1878.



A replacement wooden bridge was built shortly afterwards, restoring the much-loved crossing. It served the community until 1894, when it became the centre of a dramatic incident during the Venetian Fête. Large crowds gathered on the bridge to watch the festivities, and the weight proved too much for the timber structure, causing it to collapse. Remarkably, despite the frightening accident and the number of people involved, **no one was killed**.

**To celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, a more decorative iron bridge was commissioned in 1897**

## **George William Higham and Hythe's Ladies' Walk Bridge**

### **Research and Newspaper Discoveries**

Much of the evidence linking George William Higham (1862–1904) to Hythe's Ladies' Walk Bridge comes from contemporary newspaper reports discovered by local researcher Debby Jones. Her discovery of reports in the Folkestone Express, Sandgate, Shorncliffe and Hythe Advertiser and the Folkestone Herald provides valuable primary-source evidence concerning both the bridge and Higham's connection with Hythe.

## **An Engineer with National Experience**

George William Higham was born at Faversham on 27 April 1862. He trained at the Thames Ironworks, Blackwall, and worked on Blackfriars Railway Bridge, Barry Docks and Tower Bridge before entering partnership with Herbert Barry in 1893 under the name Barry & Higham.

## **Hythe Town Council Considers a New Bridge**

At a special meeting of Hythe Town Council reported in the Folkestone Express, Sandgate, Shorncliffe and Hythe Advertiser on 10 April 1897, councillors considered tenders for a new Ladies' Walk Bridge. The newspaper listed the tenders as: Barry and Higham, London (£618); W. Jones and Son (£628 15s. 6d.); J. R. Brettall, Worcester (£499 13s. 7d.); and A. Thorne (£990). Some councillors thought the prices excessive because £400 had been mentioned as the maximum expected cost.

## **Debate in the Council Chamber**

Alderman Scott argued that the cost reflected additional engineering work and considered the prices reasonable. Councillor Blaxland warned against delay because of concerns about the condition of the existing bridge. Councillor Manning stated that it was high time the bridge was erected or an accident might occur. Alderman H. T. Coby strongly supported the scheme and said the bridge would be 'much larger and wider, and constitute quite an ornamental feature of the place.' The council ultimately approved the project by an overwhelming majority, with Councillor Price the only member voting against.

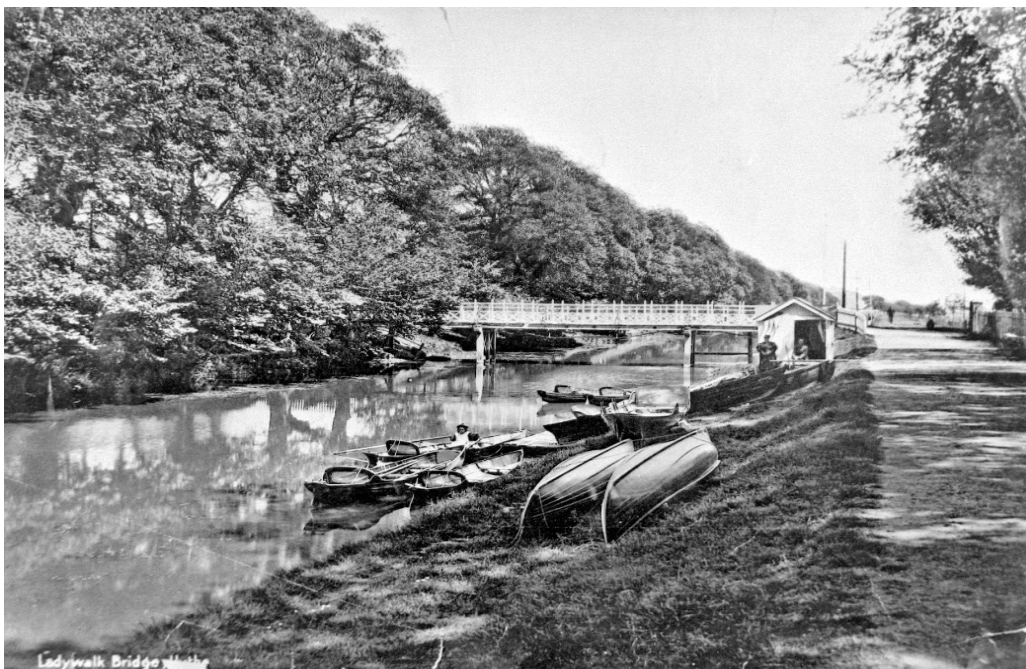
## **Higham's Direct Connection with the Bridge**

The *Folkestone Herald* of 28 May 1904 reported the death of George William Higham at his residence in Douglas Avenue, Hythe, after a lengthy illness. He was only 42 years old when he died. The obituary stated that during his partnership with Herbert Barry, he "erected the Ladies' Walk Bridge, Hythe." This is the strongest contemporary evidence linking Higham directly with the bridge.

## **Final Years in Hythe**

Higham retired from professional work in 1901 because of ill health, but remained interested in engineering matters. He died in Hythe on 21 May 1904. The *Folkestone Herald* recorded that his funeral took place on the following Tuesday and was attended by Sir Thomas Higham, K.C.I.E., among others.





The elegant structure became a distinctive feature of Ladies Walk and remained in place until the outbreak of the Second World War, when it was demolished as a wartime precaution.



For decades the crossing was absent, but in 1976 the iron bridge was rebuilt, restoring an important part of Hythe's historic landscape. At the same time, local organisations planted ash trees along the walk, continuing efforts to enhance this cherished route. Although many of those trees were later lost to ash dieback disease, several still survive today.





LADIES WALK BRIDGE . HYTHE



ROYAL MILITARY CANAL HYTHE

The story of Ladies Walk Bridge is one of endurance and renewal. Floods, structural failure, and war each brought an end to successive bridges, yet the people of Hythe rebuilt them time and again. The bridge that stands today is a reminder not only of the town's history but also of its determination to preserve a much-loved local landmark.



### **Acknowledgement**

The author gratefully acknowledges the research of Debby Jones, whose discovery of contemporary newspaper reports has greatly enhanced our understanding of George William Higham's association with Hythe and the Ladies' Walk Bridge. Special thanks are also extended to **Anne Petrie** for generously sharing all her extensive research on bridges and more.

### **References**

- *Folkestone Express, Sandgate, Shorncliffe and Hythe Advertiser*, 10 April 1897, 'Hythe Town Council – Tenders for Ladies' Walk Bridge'.
- *The Folkestone Herald*, 28 May 1904, 'Death of Mr. G. W. Higham'.
- Institution of Civil Engineers, Obituary of George William Higham (1862–1904).