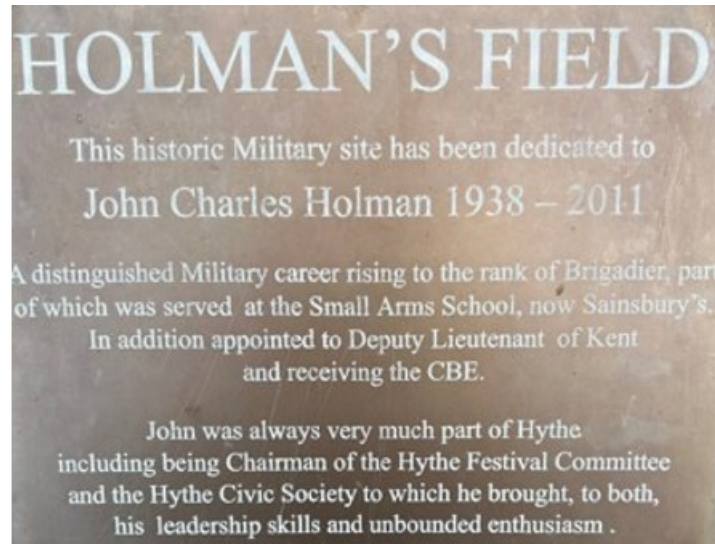


Military Road Bridge, Barrack Bridge, Footbridge

Located between Dukes Head Bridge and Scanlon's Bridge

The iron footbridge located directly opposite Sainsbury's Supermarket, connecting Military Road to Holman's Field is a significant local landmark. Formally known as Holman's Field Footbridge, it is more commonly referred to as the Musketry Bridge, Barrack Bridge, Military Road Bridge & Sainsbury Bridge.



The Name

Its nicknames derive from its proximity to the former Hythe Barracks (the School of Musketry), which stood a short distance away. For over a century, the bridge provided a vital shortcut for soldiers and personnel travelling between the barracks and the ranges, recreational or training grounds on the south side of the canal.

Origin

The present iron and steel structure is not the original bridge. When the Royal Military Canal was constructed between 1804 and 1809, all crossings were movable wooden bridges. These were designed to be quickly dismantled or destroyed in the event of a Napoleonic invasion, preventing enemy troops from advancing inland.

Construction

The current bridge that exists now has replaced the original iron footbridge that was installed in the late nineteenth century (approximately between 1860 and 1890). During this period, many of the original temporary wooden crossings along the canal were replaced with more permanent Victorian ironwork to accommodate the expanding town and the established military presence in Hythe.

Barrack Bridge Washed Away in the Flood of 1877

The cold morning of New Year's Day in 1877 started out beautifully mild for the coastal town of Hythe, but by midday, the peace was entirely shattered. A sudden, violent shift in the wind transformed a gentle westerly breeze into a raging south-west hurricane, driving a disastrous overflow of the sea directly into the town.

As the sea breached the land, the nearby canal quickly filled to its brim. Water spilled over the banks, submerging the surrounding pasture lands and turning the streets into deep, impassable torrents.

Among the structures standing directly in the path of this destruction was the Barrack Bridge. A critical and heavily utilised crossing, the bridge served as the primary route for the Military, who relied on it daily to travel from the School of Musketry to the nearby shooting ranges.

As the floodwaters rose, the structure was subjected to immense, relentless pressure. The raw force of the rushing water proved too much for the bridge to bear. In a matter of hours, the entire structure succumbed to the torrent and was completely washed away by the current.

The destruction of the bridge was so swift and total that it resulted in a terrifyingly narrow escape for a local resident. Mr. Henry Nelson had walked across the Barrack Bridge after checking on some sheep belonging to a Mr. Watts along the Dymchurch-road. In a stroke of incredible fortune, almost the exact moment he stepped safely off the structure, the entire bridge gave way behind him, collapsing completely into the raging floodwaters.

In the days following the disaster, the loss of the Barrack Bridge stood out as a prominent example of the storm's severity. It left the Military cut off from their training grounds and prompted the Hythe Town Council to form a dedicated emergency committee to oversee the urgent and extensive repairs needed for the district's shattered infrastructure.

Source: Kentish Express and Ashford News on Saturday, January 6, 1877

Structure

The bridge is a traditional, narrow iron-railed footbridge. Unlike the nearby Twiss Road and Town Bridges, it has never been open to vehicular traffic, maintaining its role as a dedicated pedestrian crossing.

Modern Importance

Today, it remains one of the most frequently used access points for residents and visitors. It serves as the principal entrance to Holman's Field, which hosts major community events, including the Hythe Food and Water Festival and various seasonal fairs.

Heritage Status

The bridge forms part of the protected environment of the Royal Military Canal, a Scheduled Ancient Monument. This designation ensures that any maintenance or repairs to the Military Bridge must respect its historic character and the unique defensive heritage of the waterway.

