



NOTES FROM THE MUSEUM

The Changing Landscape

The road to Thorpeness as we know it is only 80 years old. Once Thorpe Haven at the mouth of the River Hundred was Aldeburgh's main port, but by late Tudor times it was silting up and becoming a boggy tidal mere. Until Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee there was only a footpath between Aldeburgh and the hamlet known simply as 'Thorpe'. No horse drawn vehicles could cross the mere, but had to make a five mile trip via Aldringham. Those on foot used the 'Rattlebone Bridge' near Haven House which is described in the book 'Up The Steps' written by the Aldeburgh doctor Nora Acheson in which she drew on the local knowledge passed on to her by her patients. 'It was a rickety old timber bridge crossing the mud banks of a stream, the River Hundred, running into the sea from the swampy ground which spread between Thorpe and Aldeburgh just inland from the dunes.....the old bridge shivered as they ran across.'

Amongst the commemorations of the Queen's Jubilee a road bridge, described as 'a substantial wooden affair', was built and opened in September 1898 by Captain Wentworth's daughter. It was named The Victoria Bridge, but was often referred to as The Jubilee Bridge. At this time there was no road in front of the Wentworth Hotel and the road to Thorpe was an extension of Crag Path.



When Thorpe was developed into a holiday village by Glencairn Stuart Ogilvie and renamed Thorpeness there was far more traffic using the coastal road, and by the mid 1920's the bridge was collapsing. The mere under the bridge was successfully drained and the River Hundred pumped out to sea, with a tidal flap at the end of the pipe so that the salt marsh was no longer controlled by the tide. (Although sometimes the highest of tides still make the road impassable as happened last November.) It was then possible to build a road that ran straight through without a bridge. During 'slack' periods many of Aldeburgh's fishermen and seamen worked on the road which was opened in 1928.

The Jubilee Bridge

The museum has photos of the Jubilee Bridge and the building of the Thorpe Road. There are also several pictures of the Rattlebone Bridge, but some of these may be a romantic idea of the bridge rather than an accurate representation. The museum will reopen at Easter. Museum staff can be contacted email at enquiries@aldeburghmuseum.org.uk. The web site is www.aldeburghmuseum.org.uk.