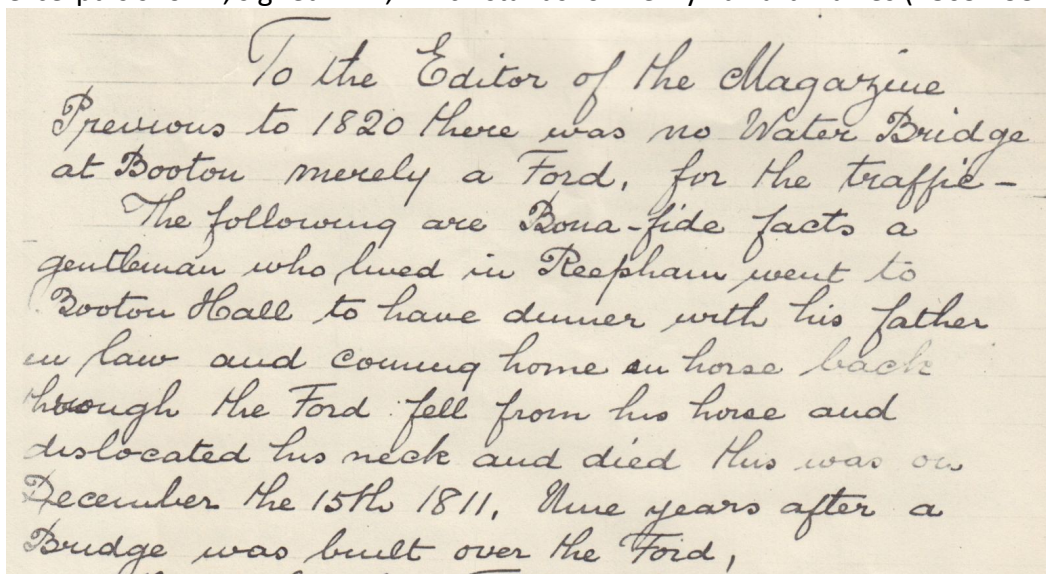


Conflicting stories over Booton Beck accident

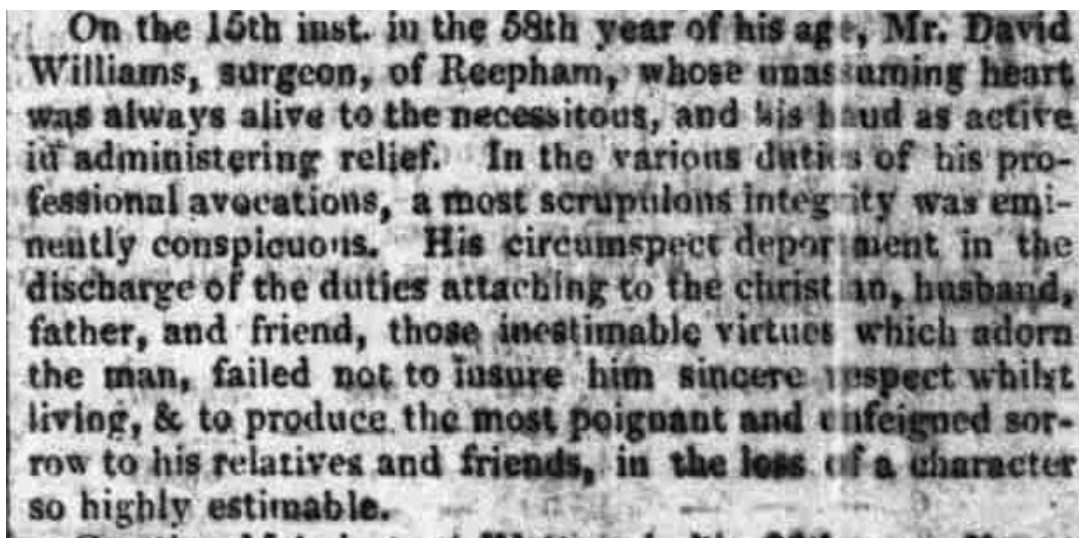
November's illustration in the 2022 Reepham Life Calendar shows a copy of a 19th century lithograph published by Stone & Hodgson in "The Picturesque Views of all the Bridges belonging to the County of Norfolk", based on detailed accurate drawings made by Francis Stone (1765-1835). A previous item on the Reepham Life website (December 2013) stated that the bridge over the Eyn Brook was erected in 1820 and that David Williams, riding back from dinner with his brother-in-law Peter Elwin at Booton Hall, fell from his horse and broke his neck crossing the ford over the Eyn Brook at Booton.

Part of this information originally came from a photocopy of a handwritten item in our files. An excerpt is shown, signed HEH, which stands for Henry Edward Hawes (1863-1957).



To the Editor of the Magazine
Previous to 1820 there was no Water Bridge
at Booton merely a Ford, for the traffic -
The following are bona-fide facts a
gentleman who lived in Reepham went to
Booton Hall to have dinner with his father
in law and coming home on horse back
through the Ford fell from his horse and
dislocated his neck and died this was on
December the 15th 1811, Nine years after a
bridge was built over the Ford,

Researching the Williams family it transpires that David Williams died in 1811, with no mention of an accident in his death announcement and no reports of an inquest into his death (Norfolk Chronicle, 28 December 1811).



On the 15th inst. in the 58th year of his age, Mr. David Williams, surgeon, of Reepham, whose unassuming heart was always alive to the necessitous, and his hand as active in administering relief. In the various duties of his professional avocations, a most scrupulous integrity was eminently conspicuous. His circumspect deportment in the discharge of the duties attaching to the christian, husband, father, and friend, those inestimable virtues which adorn the man, failed not to insure him sincere respect whilst living, & to produce the most poignant and unfeigned sorrow to his relatives and friends, in the loss of a character so highly estimable.

Harry Hawes wrote down his recollections when he was in his 80s, so he will have first heard versions of this tale in the 1870s when he was a child.

David Williams' son Peter Elwin Williams (1789-1826) was a surgeon living in Reepham. His death was recorded in the local papers (Norwich Mercury & Bury and Norwich Post, March 1826).

On Saturday se'nnight, aged 56, Mr. Peter Elwin Williams, surgeon, of Hackford, grandson of the late Peter Elwin, Esq. of Booton Hall. His body was found about one o'clock on Sunday morning, in shallow water in Booton Beck. He was returning from Norwich, and it is conjectured, either that he was asleep, and his horse pulled him into the water in endeavouring to drink, or that he fell off in a fit. The body, when found, was not cold, and every means were tried for some time to restore animation, but without effect. A Coroner's Jury sat on the body on Monday, and returned a verdict of Accidental Death.

Below is a photograph of the plaque on the bridge as it is today (Courtesy of M. Rogers).



There was a discussion at a Booton parish meeting in the summer about restoring the memorial stone on the bridge, but, as the inscription is barely visible, this is probably not possible.

Janet Archer