

## DORNEY AND THE MOTORWAY

Love it or hate it, the motorway is an integral part of living in Dorney, and its arrival had a profound effect on residents. Plans for a Maidenhead by-pass were first discussed in 1923, and work started in the 1930s on a dual carriageway with cycle tracks. It had progressed as far as construction of the supports for the bridge over the River Thames when war broke out in 1939. Although some work continued, and at one stage Italian prisoners of war were employed on it, progress was eventually halted. An aerial photo taken in 1949 shows the concrete supports for the bridge standing in isolation on the river banks, with a marked sweep of land to the east indicating the prospective route of the new road. You can see this at <https://britainfromabove.org.uk/image/EAW021557> .

In 1946, plans for a 'London-South Wales Motor Road' were published. This incorporated the planned Maidenhead by-pass into a dual 2-lane motorway. The planned route is shown clearly as an outline on the 1961 Ordnance Survey map, illustrating how two roads were to be rerouted as part of the project. The new route of Lake End Road was slightly to the west of the original, cutting across farmland and leaving a short section of dead-end road. The rerouting of Marsh Lane moved it to the east of the original, and the two sections of the old road were renamed, Old Marsh Lane north of the motorway and Oak Stubbs Lane to the south, named after the field on which Dorney Reach was built.

It is also clear from the aerial photos and the map that some houses in Dorney Reach lay in the path of the motorway, and must have been demolished. These were three detached houses on the east side of what is now Old Marsh Lane, at the southern end.

It took some time to obtain agreement to proceed with the plans, and construction was also delayed for financial reasons. It was not until 1959 that work was able to restart, and the Maidenhead by-pass was given priority because of difficult traffic conditions in the town. This was the first section of the motorway (other than the Chiswick flyover) to open to traffic, in May 1961, and extended from junction 7 to junction 9. Six miles long, it was hailed as "splendid" by the motoring correspondent of the Sphere when he took a car for a test drive, cruising at 80mph. It was joined only gradually by other sections; the M4 reached London only in 1965, while the section beyond Maidenhead down to junction 15 did not open until 1972.

By this time, it had already been decided to widen the stretches past Slough and Maidenhead to 3 lanes each way, and work on this was started in 1969.

The motorway bridge over the river is notable for having been designed by Sir Ralph Freeman, who was responsible for designing many famous bridges, including Sydney Harbour Bridge and Victoria Falls Bridge. Unfortunately, he did not live to see his bridge at Maidenhead completed. The bridge was also unusual in providing for a cycle track and footpath fenced off on each side of the carriageway. A meeting held in August 1959 observed that in summertime many people might be expected to cross from Bray to Dorney, where they could get access to the river to picnic, fish and bathe. I can't say I've noticed much of this!

So, the motorway brought us faster access by car to London and Bristol, and provided a new means of crossing the river on foot or bike. On the downside, it changed our road layout, demolished 3 houses and blighted others. Dorney has a permanent background of traffic noise and a level of air pollution. Now, we face several more years of upheaval while the motorway undergoes its most significant change since it was widened from 2 to 3 lanes. Just another chapter in the history of Dorney...