

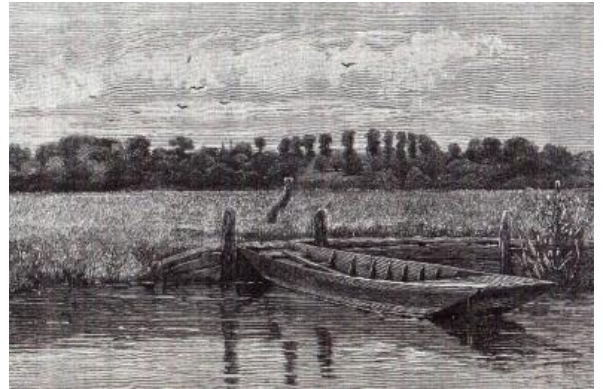
GETTING AROUND DORNEY

The ways in which we move within and around our village generate a good deal of interest. From the long running saga of the smart motorway to the temporary closure of favourite dog walking paths at Dorney Lake, via the heated debate over the proposed roundabout at Dent's Corner, the routes we and others take are rarely off the agenda. How far, I wondered, are we literally treading in the footsteps of past residents?

Our earliest forebears would have arrived on foot or by water. We know there were people here by about 10,000BC, and archaeological digs have found evidence of old trackways and of the use of the network of small waterways crossing the area to travel by boat.

Shifting across the floodplain, the river Thames changed course several times during these 12,000 or so years. The river has presented both an opportunity, to travel along it, and a barrier, to be crossed to the other side. Excavations during the construction of Dorney Lake revealed the remains of the earliest known bridge over the Thames, a wooden structure dating from 1520BC.

However, taking a boat across was generally the most direct way of crossing for people in Dorney. When a beer house opened up on Monkey Island in the mid-19th century, the incentive to reach the opposite bank increased, and there was still a ferry boat from Dorney Reach to Monkey Island in the early 20th century. Boats were not however without their hazards. Charles Beach, a builder involved in the early development of Dorney Reach, used his punt to cross the river several times a day, but drowned returning home from Dorney late one November evening in 1910.



It was only from the 1960s that Dorney gained the ability to cross the river on foot or bicycle courtesy of the motorway bridge, and later via Summerleaze Bridge formerly used to transport gravel extracted from the construction works at Dorney Lake. Otherwise, taking a vehicle across the river necessitated going via Windsor or Maidenhead, where bridges were first constructed in 1172 and 1280 respectively. Using those bridges was subject to payment of tolls, and until the present bridges were built poor maintenance or damage could cause them to be out of action for long periods.

In the ninth century, the invading Vikings discovered they could sail their longships up the Thames, and Dorney folk would have seen them passing by on their way to Oxford, just as they watched ammunition supply vessels making their way from London to Reading during the Civil War of the 1640s. The river became a major highway for transporting goods and its importance was enhanced when the system of locks was built in the late 18th century. The early 1800s were the peak years for commercial river traffic and Dorney would have been familiar with the horse-drawn barges going up and down. Barge Path, leading from Climo's Corner to the river, was a reminder of these times until the greater part of it disappeared under the surroundings of Dorney Lake. Boveney chapel is also believed to have served the bargees, and there used to be a wharf nearby. The river remains popular for leisure craft, while we also have a new waterway, the Jubilee River, enjoyed by paddleboarders and kayakers.

On land, early Dorney residents needed to walk between their homes and the fields where they worked. Over time, the routes followed by them and their animals became recognised ways. Other routes led to the church and to neighbouring settlements. The manor court rolls show how important it was to keep open access, especially to the common fields where everybody worked. In 1514, a fine was levied for blocking a plough track leading to the North Field. Thirty years later, another villager was required to make a gate to allow all the inhabitants of Dorney to go into and out of the field called Ashford. You could also get into trouble for making a path where

there shouldn't be one. The Abbess of Burnham was accused of doing this in 1540, by taking her loaded hay carts across meadow land in Boveney and by carrying her wood for winter fuel through other land belonging to Dorney's Lord of the Manor.



Outside the village, Burnham was a key local centre with its market, later effectively replaced by Maidenhead. Dorney Wood was part of Dorney parish to provide it with fuel and building material. Roads to these places were important, as was the Bath Road which became a major east-west highway with its fast mail coaches and big coaching inns. John Rocque's map of 1752 shows the main routes in and out of Dorney. By the time of the first Ordnance Survey map in 1822, the roads in and around Dorney had settled into the pattern we would recognise today, although Lake End Road passed to the east of Burnham Abbey rather than the west. A roadway also led from Ashford Lane north to West Town farm, and from there north to the Bath Road and east towards Burnham

Abbey. Barge Path and the towpath are clearly shown. The more detailed OS survey in the early 1870s shows some familiar footpaths, such as from what became Dorney Reach across the fields to Ashford Lane with a path down to Dent's Corner, though other paths have subsequently disappeared. Paths were not necessarily open to all to use. In June 1859, Henry Palmer reminded those in the habit of taking Barge Path to get to Monkey Island that they were effectively trespassing on his land; both Barge Path and the towpath were only to be used by barge horses and the bargees, who paid for the privilege.

Twentieth century developments did their best to disrupt our roads and paths. New roads were added in Dorney Reach and in the village. Locals had their own names for familiar ways. A villager directing visitors to the church in 1925 told them to take the "dilling lane" off Court Lane, "dilling" a dialect term usually meaning the littlest one. The passageway from Dorney Reach Road to the riverbank is known as the Snicket. In the 1960s the motorway carved through, rerouting Marsh Lane from its previous alignment of Oak Stubbs and Old Marsh Lane. The current widening of the M4 has again shifted the line of Marsh Lane, and of Lake End Road. Dorney Lake swallowed up Barge Path and realigned Court Lane but introduced new pathways including an off-road route to Boveney. The Jubilee River rerouted some old footpaths and established new ones. The underlying framework survives.

Further afield, the building of the railway damaged both road and river trade and was a catalyst for the expansion of housing in Dorney. While its competitiveness with road freight has lessened, the railway continues to wield influence as Crossrail creeps closer to completion. Overhead, we can see how air travel has grown, enabling us to fly far away from Dorney if we choose. Who knows what the future will bring; drones delivering goods are set to become an everyday reality and I hear that cars which can fly are on the cards. Our potential for getting around seems limitless.

With our feet on the ground, however, we are treading where the people of Dorney have travelled for centuries. When you walk along the riverbank, can you catch an echo of the horse on the towpath as the barge glides past? Is that a ploughman you glimpse heading for the field beside the Jubilee River, with his oxen? And furthest back in the mists of time, a shadowy group of people cross the river on a wooden bridge, close to the eastern end of Dorney Lake. The past is all around us....

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