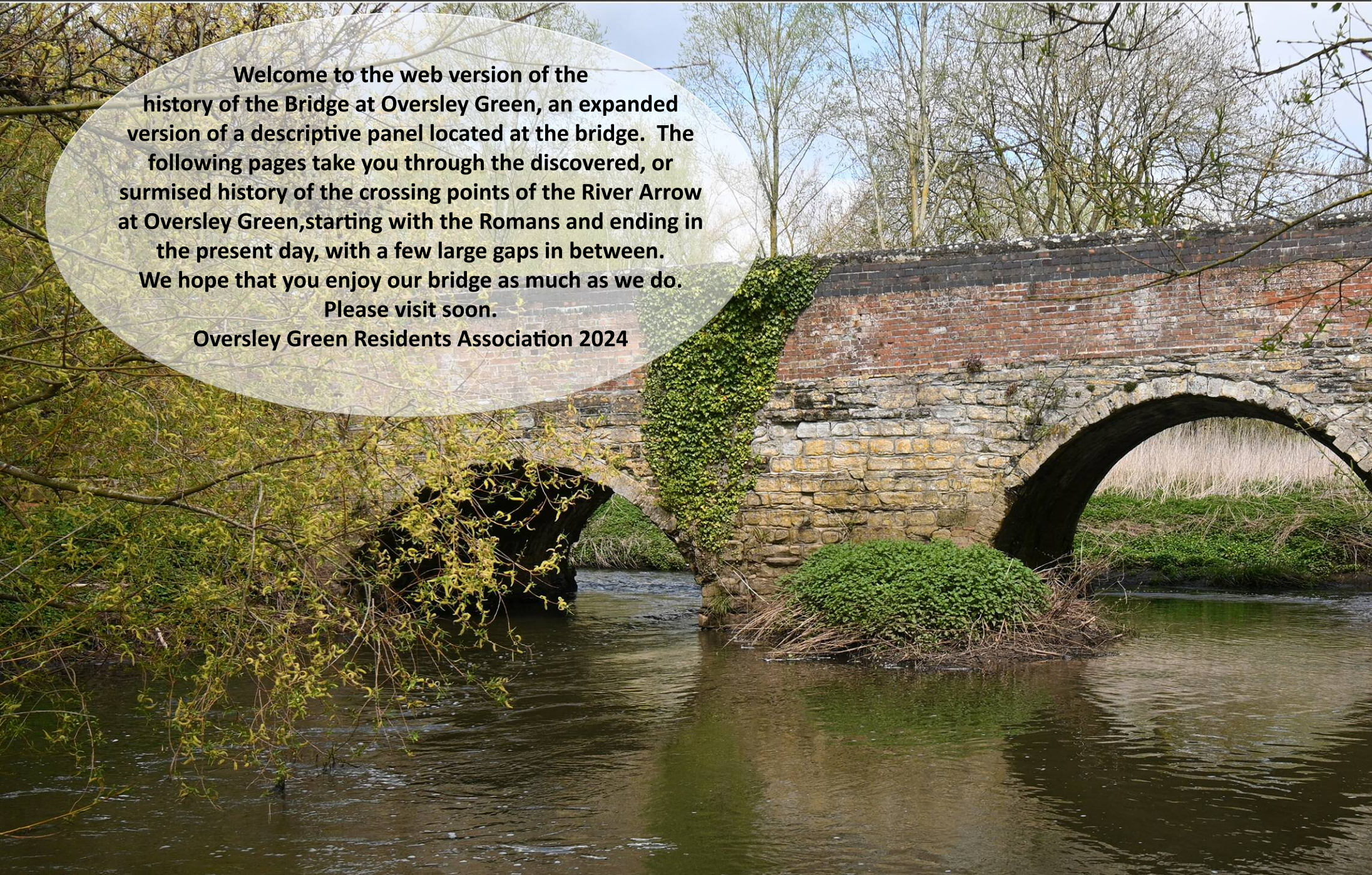


The Bridge at Oversley Green

Welcome to the web version of the history of the Bridge at Oversley Green, an expanded version of a descriptive panel located at the bridge. The following pages take you through the discovered, or surmised history of the crossing points of the River Arrow at Oversley Green, starting with the Romans and ending in the present day, with a few large gaps in between. We hope that you enjoy our bridge as much as we do. Please visit soon.

Oversley Green Residents Association 2024



Roman Times

Lorem Ipsum



The Romans first came to Alcester in AD47, establishing a fort on Primrose Hill.

In the years that followed they developed the area around Alcester and developed roads, amongst them The Saltway, which ran from the salt mines at Droitwich towards London and the South East. The map shows the modern hamlet of Oversley Green, with the black line running roughly East/West indicating the route that archaeologists believe the road followed. This places the

crossing point of the River Arrow, then probably a simple ford, just north of the current bridge although other sites for fords exist to the north and south. As time passed it is reasonable to believe that increasing traffic mandated a better means of crossing and the first bridge was constructed.



1444 Onwards

The earliest evidence of a bridge in Oversley Green is contained in documents from around 1444 when a “Oversley Brugge” is identified as a landmark. Both John (Lord) Beauchamp and Ralf Neville, Lord of Oversley are mentioned around this time but ownership is not clear and may have been deliberately ambiguous as the bridge required maintenance and that meant cost. Records over the following centuries all focus on maintenance costs. In 1528, the Manor Court ordered repairs to the bridge at “Osley” and by 1543 Sir Fulke Greville, (1536 to 1606) then Lord of the Manor was also involved, supporting the repairs with grants to the Priest for annual maintenance. More piecemeal awards followed during the 17th Century. A stone still visible on the bridge marks the date of one such renovation in 1600 but the major work seems to have been started in 1659 when County Constables were ordered to raise the sum of £120, followed in 1660 by a further £45, for the repair of a bridge that had assumed County importance. It took over 10 years for the contractors to be paid but despite this attention by 1706 it was again “Very ruinous”. Things only improved when in 1754 the bridges became the responsibility of The Turnpike Trusts and finally the County Council in 1855.



Oversley Bridge, circa 1910

How the Bridge Evolved

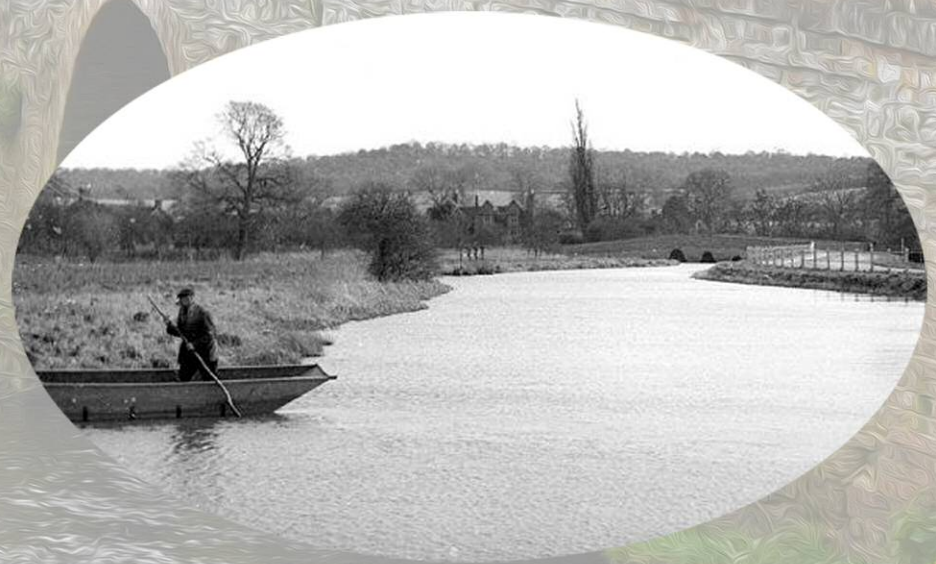
We know that the bridge ("brugge") was here in 1444 but little else. No one kept a log of things in those days, and we have no records of how the bridge evolved but there are clues and perhaps not surprisingly they are financial as well as physical. Physically a "Refuge" or "Cutaway" in the South side of the bridge is the best clue. Not needed with the wider designs of today it would have been vital for single lane traffic, so in earlier times the width was clearly much narrower than today. The assumption then is that the southern side of the bridge is the remaining part of an earlier narrower bridge of stone and that at some point the bridge was widened to allow more traffic and services. Quite when is not known but again there are clues, this time financial.

By 1659 the bridge had been acknowledged as a "County Bridge" with considerable sums being granted at the Quarter Sessions in 1659 (£120) and 1660 (£45) for its repair. This was a lot of money in the 1600s', again indicating a stone bridge but there may well have been earlier changes. A stone embedded in the South wall of the bridge shows 1600. So what happened then? The Assizes do not say.

What we have today is a dual width bridge, with a footpath on the extended north side carrying modern utility services beneath.



South side of the bridge in 2023.



View towards the bridge along the Arrow circa 1910. Note the height of the water, due to a weir at Oversley Mill, long since gone.

How the Bridge Evolved #2

The new Oversley Green Bypass was opened on the 12th July 1963 but not before substantial amount of work to Oversley Bridge. The new road had provided an opportunity to reduce the risk of flooding in Alcester by digging a new channel to carry the water from the River Alne directly to the East side of Oversley Bridge. This in turn had created a need to increase the flow under the bridge at that side and so a new wider tunnel was created. The photos below illustrate the before and after and also the work being undertaken.



The bridge during channel widening in the early 1960s, with concrete about to be poured.



Oversley Bridge circa 1910. Note narrow tunnels to left of central arch.

And in 2023 showing the 1960s changes to the left hand tunnel. Also note lower water level caused by collapse of Oversley Mill weir.



Sir Fulke Greville



Sir Fulke Greville, First Baron Brooke, 3rd Oct. 1554 - 30th Sept. 1628

If there is one name linked to Oversley Bridge that peers out of the mist during the 1500s' it is that of Sir Fulke Greville, but not as an individual. There were three of them.

The one that is probably best known in Alcester is that of Sir Fulke Greville, 1st Baron Brooke. (3rd October 1554 - 30th September 1628) Born in Beauchamp Court, Alcester in October 1554 he achieved national prominence as a capable administrator, serving the English Crown under Elizabeth I and James I as treasurer of the Navy, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Commissioner of the Treasury. For his services he was in 1621 made Baron Brooke, peer of the realm and was subsequently granted Warwick Castle in 1604, where he made numerous improvements. As Lord of the Manor and High Bailiff of the Court Leet, in 1618 he provided the sum of £300 for the building of a market hall, now Alcester Town Hall. Prior to that traders and customers would have gathered at a well and market cross which are likely to have occupied the same site. In 1612, the Hundred jury presented Gunnings Bridge at Quarter Sessions as being "in great decaye to the anoyance of the said Towne being a greate markett Towne". Sir Fulke offered to build a "a good Stone Bridge lyklie to enduier to Posterytie" and his offer was accepted by Quarter Sessions in 1613. This of course was not Oversley Bridge but the bridges shared the fate of being poorly maintained and as Lord of the Manor Sir Fulke obviously took his responsibilities to Alcester seriously, as had his grandfather.

The first Sir Fulke Greville, (28th April 1491 - 10th November 1559) also Lord of the Manor was Baron Brookes' grandfather. In 1543 he agreed an annual rent of 20 shillings towards the support of the bridges (both Oversley and Gunnings) with the Priest of St Mary's Chantry, Roger Metcalfe, who appears to have supervised the work.

There was also a "Sir Fulke Greville" in between (1536 – 15th November 1606) although he doesn't feature in the records. But being Lord of the Manor had its responsibilities and the family seems to have had a tradition.