

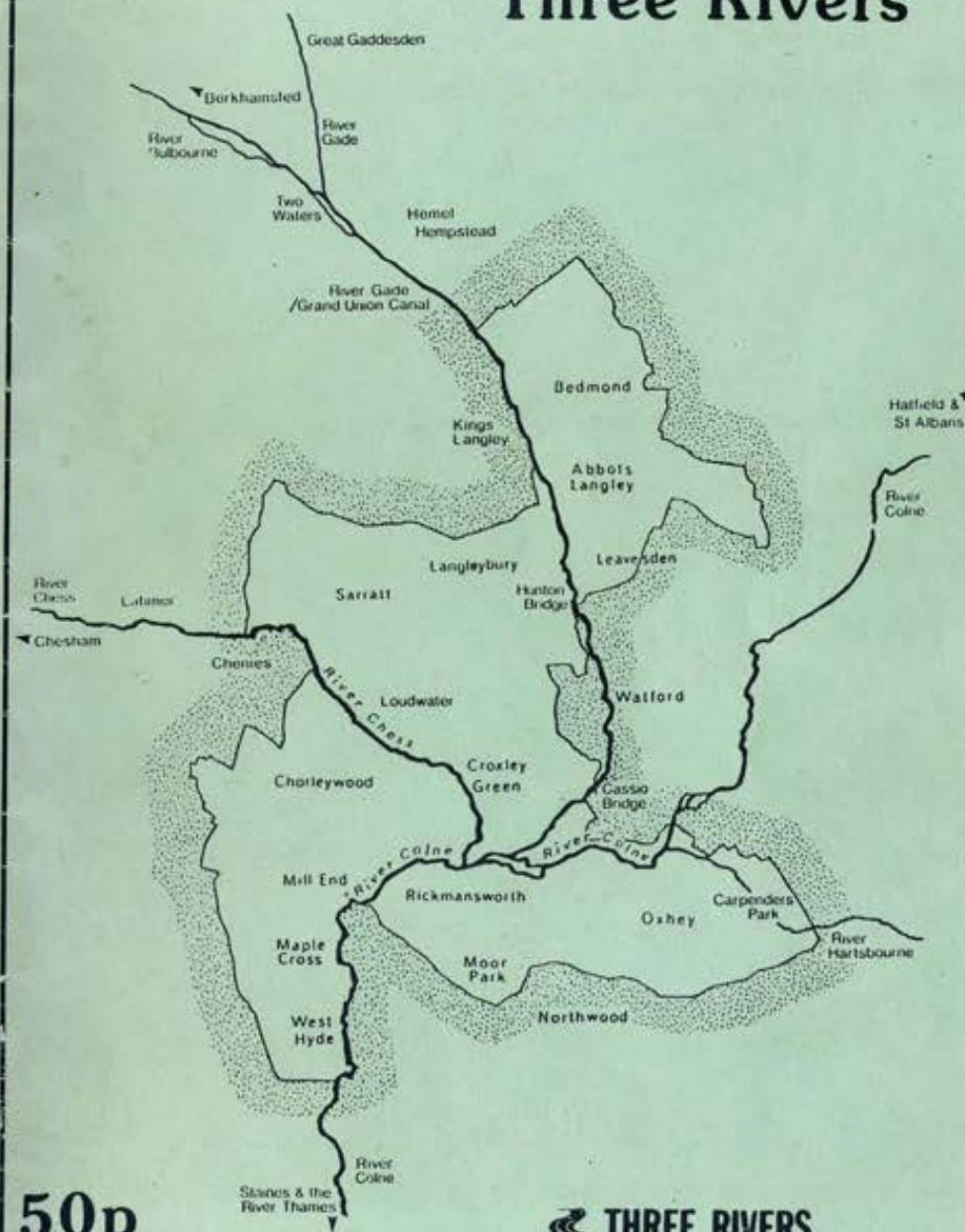


Salter's Bridge and Cut -
Batchworth Locks

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THE THREE RIVERS through Three Rivers



50p

INTRODUCTION

When local government was reorganised in 1974, the Three Rivers District was created from the previous authorities of Watford Rural District, Rickmansworth Urban District and Chorleywood Urban District. The new district was named after the three main rivers in the area - the Chess, the Gade and the Colne. The design of the council's logo echoes these three rivers.

The rivers of our district came into existence in their present form, after the last Ice Age. Before that time the much larger River Thames flowed north-eastwards along our valley, entering the North Sea around the Wash.

When the ice retreated the River Colne and its tributaries, the Gade and the Chess eventually used our valley to flow south-westwards to the Thames.



River Chess - Glen Chess, Loudwater

RIVER CHESS

The first of our rivers, the River Chess, rises at Chesham and flows down through Sarratt Bottom, Chorleywood, Loudwater and Scotsbridge to Batchworth. The name Chess is a back formation of Chesham from when the river was known as the Chesham Stream. In earlier times it was called the Isen when Chenies was called Isenhampstead Chenies, and it has also been known as Cheyney's River and Sarratt Stream. In the middle ages it was known as the Pichelesbourne (the Mouse Hawk Stream). It was mentioned in a charter granted to Rickmansworth in 1381, at the time of the peasants' revolt, (a charter that was rescinded three days later). Before the dissolution of the monasteries, the Abbey of St Albans owned all rights in the river.

A number of footpaths run alongside the river and some of them around the River Chess have been linked together to make a Chess Valley Walk. The route is waymarked and a descriptive leaflet about this has been published by the Countryside Management Service.

The River Chess effectively enters our district at the foot of Mount Wood on the county boundary with Buckinghamshire. A footbridge here connects a footpath from the village of Chenies, on the far side of Mount Wood, with Sarratt Bottom. The River Chess is famous both for its fine fishing and for its watercress and the beds near the footbridge were founded around 1895 by the grandfather of the present occupier. The watercress flourishes because the Chess is a swiftly flowing stream with good gravel beds.

From the watercress beds, the river meanders to Sarratt Bottom which is in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is also a site of special scientific interest, famous for its flora and fauna. The river then continues past cottages with such delightful names as Cakebread Cottage and Sarratt Bottom Cottages. These are built higher up the valley above the flood plain which is particularly wide here with many minor watercourses which are usually dry in summer. The Chess is occasionally crossed by footbridges which are well used by walkers. From the footbridge nearest

to Sarratt Bottom Cottages, the track climbs the valley side to the manor house of Goldingtons. The manor is of medieval origin although the site is said to have been inhabited in Roman times when wine growing took place on the terraced hillside here. Alongside Goldingtons is the Sarratt Parish Church of Holy Cross. This flint church is partly Norman and has a north transept measuring 15ft square. This makes it one of the smallest in England and the church is renowned for its saddle-back roof. The village green area of Sarratt is a conservation area.

The river continues towards Sarratt Mill through lush grasslands. Such is the quality of local meadows that hay was cut twice or three times a year to supply feed for the horse traffic of London.

At Sarratt Mill the river makes a sharp right-hand turn under sluice gates. Originally the main course of the river went straight on here and flowed under the former mill buildings. Before 1740 Sarratt Mill was a corn mill but in that year it was converted into a paper mill. This flourished for over 100 years but in 1882 the property was bought by the Duke of Bedford to add to the Chenies estate and the mill house and the chimney were dismantled brick by brick and used to build local cottages. Sarratt Mill was a favourite hideaway of the wife of the 14th Duke of Bedford, who was known as the Flying Duchess when she took up flying at the age of sixty-one. Apparently she used to land her Gypsy Moth plane on Sarratt Moor when visiting the mill. The Duchess was an enthusiastic fisherman and used Sarratt Mill as her fishing lodge.

From the mill, the river flows under Sarratt Mill Bridge carrying the roadway from Chorleywood down Northhill and then up the valley-side to Sarratt. This is a very popular parking place for Chess Valley walkers as there are two round walks leading off from here.

Before 1778 the roadway to Sarratt went immediately in front of the mill buildings and up the hill to Goldingtons, on what is now the footpath beside Park Cottages. William Parry, who then lived at Goldingtons, didn't like the main

road passing his front door so he diverted it to where it is today. This is why it is called New Road.

To the rear of Northhill Cottage, adjoining the bridge is Northhill waterworks, built in 1939. The present day river re-joins the original water course at this point.

On the southern side of the river is Chorleywood House estate whose grounds are open to the general public. The footpath stile into the estate has a wooden plank which can be raised to let a dog go through.

Chorleywood House was purchased by the Bedford family in the early 1890s as a Dower House for the widow of the Twelfth Duke of Bedford. The dowager came to live there with her daughter Lady Ela Russell and it was they who decided to rebuild Chorleywood House. Lady Ela lived at Chorleywood House for nearly fifty years and was a great benefactor to Chorleywood.

On the northern bank of the river is Fisheries Cottage which was probably built by J B Papworth who landscaped the grounds of Chorleywood House for John Barnes in the early part of the nineteenth century.

Fisheries Cottage was leased by the Dulantys for a time and they kept peacocks there. The cottage burnt down in the 1970s but has been rebuilt to its original design.

From the bridge across to Fisheries Cottage is a small leat or cut taking water to a small brick building. The water turns a wheel which works a pump set over a well which used to provide the water for Chorleywood House. The main wheel is cast iron, ten feet in diameter and two feet wide and has thirty-six paddle blades. The date on the wheel is around 1880 and if this is the date it was put in, it was when Howard Gilliatt had Chorleywood House. The wheel at one RPM drives a three cylinder pump.

The River Chess now passes through pasture land and under the M25 and Solesbridge Lane and on to Soles Mill. During the hurricane of 1987, a tree was uprooted near here, and

subsequent excavations designed to make larger trout lakes led to the discovery of the site of a Roman bridge and a possible Roman Villa settlement. It has been known for some time that Roman remains were to be found in the Solesbridge area, as several people have made small finds in the vicinity.

The earliest record of the mill is in the overseer's accounts dated 23 September 1746 when the tenant was George Andrews who pioneered paper making in this area. From records we also know that the mill was then bought by Lewis Nunn in 1817 with some five owners in the interim who reconstructed Solesbridge around 1824 and sold it in turn to George Austin. When Austin took over the mill it had four beating engines, with water being the principle source of power. He employed 35 workers - 18 men, 14 women and 3 boys. The men worked a 6 day week of 12 hours per day, taking their meals at their work. The women worked from 8am until 5pm and the boys earned 4/- per week.

In 1888 George Austin went bankrupt and the mill shut down and was never re-opened.

A trout farm was established at the mill as early as 1926 trading as the Chess River Trout Farm, which later became the Trout and Fancy Fish Farm. In the 1980s the Highlands Water Gardens moved here from The Highlands and it is now the Solesbridge Mill Water Gardens.

From Soles Mill the river flows under Troutstream Way in the exclusive Loudwater estate. The line of Troutstream Way was one of the carriageways to Loudwater House when it was a private estate. In the grounds of the house the River Chess feeds an ornamental lake designed during the tenancy of Panmure Gordon, an eccentric stockbroker who entertained the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) at Loudwater House.

The Chess now approaches Loudwater Mill which in its time was a corn mill, a fulling mill and a paper mill. In 1846 Herbert Ingram bought the mill to provide a supply of paper for his Illustrated London News, originally intended to be a weekly chronicle of crime. Ingram gave it a more general



River Chess -
Former Scotsbridge Mill, Rickmanmsworth



River Chess -
Chess Basin Lifting Bridge, Rickmansworth



River Chess (Salter's Cut) joining River Colne
below Batchworth Locks



River Colne - Hamper Mill

flavour by publishing Bow Street Police reports, illustrating them with woodcuts. This journal of London Life started in 1942 and will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 1992.

Herbert Ingram was MP for Boston in Lincolnshire, his home town. In 1860 Herbert Ingram and his son drowned in a boating collision in Canada and subsequently the mill was sold to William MacMurray of the Royal Paper Mills at Wandsworth. The mill continued to be successful for the next 25 years but then by an unfortunate accident at Loudwater Mill, chlorine entered the River Chess and the subsequent prosecution led to the mill's closure.

Herbert Ingram built his house called Glen Chess, beside the mill at Loudwater for himself and his family to live in. Earlier this century the gardens of Glen Chess were occasionally opened to the public who could enjoy the weirs and lake in the extensive pleasure grounds. In 1890 most of the Loudwater Mill buildings were destroyed but the wheel continued to pump water to Glen Chess until 1956 when the remaining mill buildings became a private house.

Across the road from Glen Chess the footpath goes through the grounds of Rickmansworth Masonic School. Traditionally the people of Rickmansworth had rights of way through Rickmansworth Park and when it was bought by the Masons in 1927, Albert Freeman, Surveyor for Rickmansworth UDC negotiated a gift of land to the people of Rickmansworth, in lieu of their rights. The two sides also agreed to re-align some of the footpaths which nowadays form part of the Chess Valley Walk.

From Glen Chess and Loudwater Mill and the two bridges of Loudwater Lane, the two streams of the river merge to flow past Loudwater Farm and then pass what used to be a large private garden, called appropriately the Fishery Gardens. This garden is clearly visible on the 1872 Ordnance Survey Map and was in its heyday when John Arden and his daughter Mrs Birch owned Rickmansworth Park House. It lasted until at least 1927 and had a summerhouse, shady walks laid out in a pattern and was surrounded by water. All that now remains are trees and a notice saying "Keep Out."

Near Fishery Gardens, on the Croxley side of the river, there used to be the Parish Pest House. This was an isolated house used by the parish for those inflicted with smallpox. They were sent to the pest house to prevent further contagion in the community. From 1770 the Rickmansworth Parish Vestry rented this pest house for five guineas a year. Originally it was two tenements called Sweetmans. A Joseph Weedon and his wife were appointed to look after the house in 1771, once their daughter had been inoculated from smallpox. They lived there rent free unless somebody was sent there with the smallpox, in which case Mrs Weedon received 5/- a week for nursing them.

A little further downstream is the next crossing point of the River Chess which is a focal point of many footpaths from the Croxley area. There were several watercress beds from here downstream to Scotsbridge Mill whereas on the Rickmansworth side the attractive river walk continues down to the Scotsbridge Mill, now a Beefeater restaurant.

The mill at Scotsbridge was a fulling mill between 1692 and 1755 and it became a paper mill in 1757 when it was owned by Thomas Childs. John Bovington of Croxley Hall Farm also owned it for a time but he did not pay his rates, so he was sued by the Parish Vestry. Later in the nineteenth century Herbert Ingram bought this mill and it passed with Loudwater Mill to William MacMurray. It closed down in 1881 and its machinery was moved to the Loudwater Mill.

In this century the Scotsbridge Mill has been used by the Automatic Photographic Company for making Edwardian postcards of actresses and later for making photographic and dyeline paper. From 1927 the mill was used by the Metro Goldwyn Mayer film company for making cellulose acetate for non-inflammable films and then at the beginning of the Second World War, MGM moved their film distribution unit here. The last occupier before the Beefeater came was the Cygnet Press, set up by former MGM employees.

Leaving the Scotsbridge Mill, the river flows under Scots Hill and through the grounds of Scotsbridge House which was a private house until 1953 when it became the home of the

British Friesian Society, now the Holstein Friesian Society of Great Britain.

The best view of the river in the Scotsbridge House grounds is from a London-bound train on the Metropolitan Line whose bridge the river flows under, immediately prior to the bridge of Caravan Lane, the footpath from Rickmansworth High Street to Croxley Hall Farm. The Chess now flows between the playing fields of St Joan of Arc School. These fields were once water meadows but have now had their level raised several feet to provide a more substantial surface for the playing fields.

A little further south the Chess meets what used to be the combined waters of the Colne and the Gade before they were diverted firstly to serve Batchworth Mill and then to provide water for the Grand Union Canal. Nowadays however the Chess continues on towards Batchworth passing the gasometers and Town Wharf on the Rickmansworth side. Downstream from here the river has been widened and deepened to enable boats to reach Town Wharf after coming through the side lock at Batchworth. The wharf, which was opened in 1805, was constructed by Stephen Salter as was the side lock at Batchworth and Salter's cut, to help Salter's Brewery to deliver their casks of beer down the canal to Uxbridge. The entrance to Town Wharf has now been staunched off and has a tree growing out of it. Just before Town Wharf are the gasworks which began life as the Rickmansworth Gas Company in 1852 with a capital of £2,000. It was built adjoining the canalised river so that its coal could be delivered by boat, hence this stretch of canal is sometimes called Gasworks Arm. The gas company was taken over by Rickmansworth UD Council in 1904 and was transferred to Watford Gas Company in 1934 for over £25,000.

The river next flows under a bridge which carried the Watford and Rickmansworth railway into Church Street station. This railway was opened in 1892 and provided a popular communication with Watford. It was known locally as Lord Ebury's line since it was through his efforts that the line was built. However it closed to passengers in 1952 having been superseded by buses and its route now provides a footpath from Church Street to Common Moor.

To the south of Church Street station the railway company constructed a wharf and basin, on the canalised River Chess. It was popular for transshipping watercress and the Bell Asbestos Works at Harefield used to send its products on a two barge shuttle up the canal to the transhipment wharf where a steam crane transferred them to a goods train. It is now a popular mooring place for houseboats and is called Chess Basin.

On the other side of the river immediately below the railway bridge is the overgrown entrance to a former lock which is now more usually full of cabbages. This lock was constructed around 1911 to provide Sabey's Gravel Company with access to the river from their dredging operation in what is now Sabey's pool. Access across the canal is by a picturesque lifting bridge. The towpath from this lifting bridge takes you round the woodyard to the weir adjacent to the side lock at Batchworth. The weir has recently been rebuilt by the National Rivers Authority as part of their flood prevention policy and includes a salmon leap.

From the weir the river flows under Salter's Bridge, the first of the three bridges at Batchworth from the Rickmansworth side. It was built by Samuel Salter when he made the River Chess navigable. The cut downstream from the weir was constructed to take water from the River Chess down to the River Colne as only a certain amount would flow through the lock. On the other side of this bridge is the Batchworth Sea Scouts' headquarters who use this stretch of water for their slalom practice.

The river continues to flow parallel to the canal under a wooden bridge connecting the canal towpath which runs alongside, to the footpath walk along Riverside Drive. The River Chess ends its journey at this point as it flows into the River Colne.

RIVER GADE

The River Gade rises across the county border in Bedfordshire and flows parallel with the Dagnall Road past Great Gaddesden down to Hemel Hempstead and then to Kings Langley and Watford. The river takes its name from the village of Great Gaddesden. Both river and village were called Gateseye in Saxon times. The River Gade has a chalk bed and many watercress beds, especially in its upper reaches. To the north of Hemel Hempstead the bridge over the Gade gives its name to the park. South of Hemel at Two Waters the River Gade is joined by the River Bulbourne.

From Frogmore swing bridge near Two Waters the Grand Union Canal mostly follows the course of the River Gade.

Originally the canal was built to the east of the river but there was always trouble with the water supply to mills, so in 1818 John Dickinson suggested that the canal should be diverted along the river course. Opposite the Ovaltine factory at Abbots Langley the river leaves the canal for a short distance, rejoining below Home Park Lock. The canal builders used the river in this way to avoid having to build overflow weirs.

The River Gade also leaves the canal at Hunton Bridge village to feed the former mill there which dates from at least 1391. The river rejoins the canal below Hunton Bridge locks and together they flow under the M25 spur and so towards The Grove estate.

There has been a mill at The Grove since the 13th century and in the 17th century there were two watermills standing under one roof according to the Victoria County History of Hertfordshire. The present mill building dates from 1875 and has now been converted into flats but some of the original mill machinery is on display on the nearby canal bank. If you peer over the bridge at Grove Mill you can see the mill stream and all that remains of the site of the mill wheel.

The river now passes through Cassiobury Park in the neighbouring borough of Watford and re-enters the Three Rivers district above Cassio Bridge, near the railway bridge of the Metropolitan branch line to Watford which was opened in 1925.

Cassio Bridge is an important crossing point of the River Gade although it doesn't look so today. There was a bridge here as early as 1433 and before that there may well have been a ford although possibly the crossing was further upstream nearer Cassio Mill. In the early 1970s the bridges over the river and canal at Cassio Bridge were made dual carriageway and Halfway House, a former pub, was rebuilt as a private house. The railway bridge in the distance carries the British Rail branch from Watford Junction to Croxley Green Station and was opened on 15 June 1912 and operated under the auspices of the LNWR.

After Cassio Bridge the river flows alongside and on the same level as the Grand Union Canal, divided only by small islands.

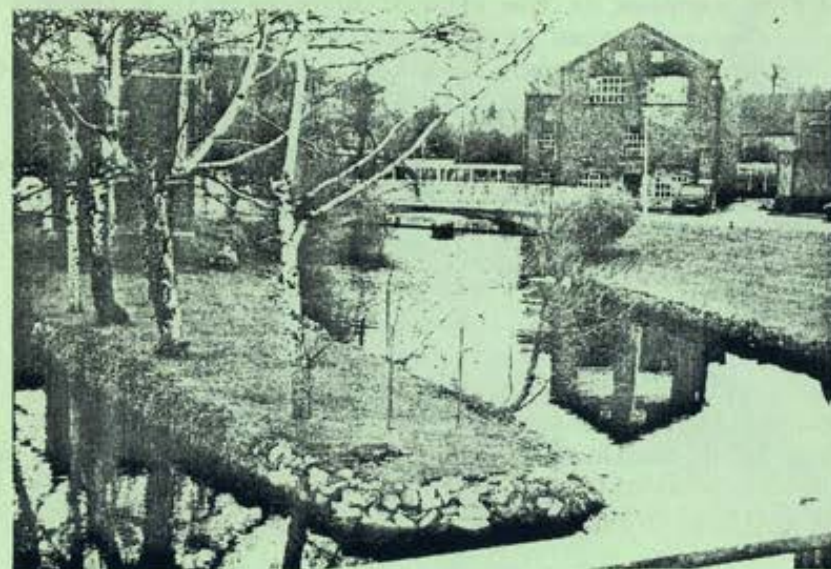
The River Gade now reaches the site of Croxley Mill built by John Dickinson who required a private Act of Parliament to do so because he was building on Common Land and would thus interfere with common rights. The land was purchased from Gonville and Caius College, the Lord of the Manor of Croxley, in 1826 and Croxley Mill went into production in 1830. Up to the 1870s the River Gade provided the water power for the pumps and beaters and for the No 1 paper making machine at Croxley Mill. However, steam power slowly took over with deliveries of coal coming by canal and paper also being transported the same way. To provide a frontage to the canal, the mill premises were extended across the River Gade, effectively culverting it.

The nearby waterfall was constructed to take excess water from the river and thus help maintain a steady flow of water power to the machinery of Croxley Mill. The river was diverted around the outskirts of Croxley Mill re-joining the mill stream by Common Moor lock. Croxley Mill closed in the early 1980s and the site is now a business park, named the Croxley Centre.

The River Gade now forms the northern boundary of Common Moor. The hundred acres of the moor belongs to the people of Croxley having been given to them in grateful thanks for their help when a fire engulfed the Manor of the Moor. Today, Common Moor is one of the most important botanical sites in the county because of its mixture of sandy and chalky soils which permit a variety of plants to exist. It is designated a site of special scientific interest for its flora and fauna.

There is a small bridge over the river a little further downstream which would appear to be an accommodation bridge for boats moored on the canal. It is little more than a couple of old iron rails and a mix of cement.

At the Rickmansworth end of Common Moor the river goes under the main line of the Metropolitan Railway. Before the canal came the River Gade joined the River Colne about here but the rivers were re-aligned in the 1790s. Nowadays the River Gade flows into the canal below Lot Mead lock and as part of the canal, goes under the bridge of the former Watford to Rickmansworth railway and down to Batchworth.



River Colne - Rickmansworth Water Co, Batchworth

RIVER COLNE

The River Colne rises from springs near the town of Hatfield in Hertfordshire and flows south-westwards through London Colney to Watford. The river is fairly wide and shallow and prone to flooding. In the past, farmers have reaped the benefit of such flooding and even encouraged it, since water being warmer than land in winter, helps to stimulate the early growth of grass which can then be used for feeding cattle. However, present day drainage schemes have reduced the likelihood of flooding. The river bed is gravel as is much of the flood plain, hence the profusion of gravel pits along the valley of the Colne. The water meadows of the Colne are of great interest to naturalists and although the water in the Colne is of poor quality, small fish are still to be found though not the trout of one hundred years ago.

From Watford the River Colne flows through Oxhey Park, near Bushey Arches. The river used to form the boundary between Watford and Oxhey but now the borough of Watford extends over Oxhey village although South Oxhey and Carpenders Park are still within the Three Rivers district.

Further downstream is the site of Rookery Mill which was built by Thomas Deacon of Wiggenshall around 1770. Fifty years later it had become a silk mill owned by Thomas Rock Shute who also had a silk mill in Rickmansworth High Street. Later the site became the Watford Steam Laundry and later still a piano factory. Near here the Colne is joined by the Hartsbourne stream which rises in the area of the Hartsbourne Golf Club and flows beneath the Carpenders Park railway station and then parallel with Prestwick Road.

The Colne river flows on between the fields of Oxhey Hall Farm on the left and Brightwell's Farm on the right. Both these farms date from medieval times and were part of knights' fees in the 1200s. The site of Oxhey Hall has recently been declared a national monument because the moat surrounding the hall is considered to be of high archaeological importance.



River Colne - Maple Lodge Basin



River Gade - Below Hunton Bridge Locks



River Gade - Grove Mill



River Gade - Common Moor

The steel bridge at Brightwell's Farm carried a 2ft gauge light railway which ran from a siding of the Watford to Rickmansworth railway to Eastbury pumping station in Hampermill Lane. The railway was constructed in 1932 to carry coal and salt from the main line by means of hopper wagons. The rails of the light railway were set at a lower level than the main line to allow easy transfer for the coal.

The River Colne now approaches Hampermill. This mill is probably the Oxhey Mill of the Domesday Book and it stayed as a grain mill until the middle of the 18th century. In the 1500s it was known as Souches Mill when it was owned or leased by George Zowche. In the 1700s it was acquired by William Lepard who conducted experiments with paper making. The mill closed in 1872 when Joseph Smith, the eccentric owner of that date, locked the building one day and simply left it. After World War I the mill was converted to a private residence.

From Hampermill the River Colne flows northwards between large gravel pits, one of which is used by the nearby Merchant Taylors School for their sailing club. The school came to Sandy Lodge Farm in 1933 because there was little room for expansion at their London premises in Charterhouse Square. From the school the river flows past Tolpits House in Tolpits Lane where there was a mill in the middle ages and through the arches of the Metropolitan Main Line.

Continuing downstream the river flows under the bridge at the meeting of Moor Lane and Tolpits Lane. The bridge is part of the road which Cardinal Wolsey had constructed when he was living at the Manor of the Moor in the 1520s. The previous roadway went directly in front of Cardinal Wolsey's extension of the Moor House and the new road meant that Wolsey could make his estate more secluded. From the time it was built it was always to be a road that needed repair as it crossed several streams as well as the river. When the Hertfordshire County Council took over and rebuilt the bridge in the 1930s, the pillars of the former bridge were repositioned at the entrance to Basing House, the offices in Rickmansworth Council days, at the instigation of Albert Freeman, the Council's surveyor.

Once under the Moor Lane bridge the River Colne flows on to join the Grand Union Canal and as part of the canal flows down to Batchworth. In earlier times the River Colne, having picked up the River Gade, went up to Croxley Hall Farm and then came down to Batchworth.

At Croxley Hall Farm water from the river was used for watercress beds which flourished here under the Sansom family. Mr C H Sansom was a founder member of the Hertfordshire Watercress Growers Association which eventually became a national body. This peaceful stretch of water maintains a through-flow from the watercress beds to Batchworth.

At Batchworth the River Colne leaves the canal by means of a weir, just above Batchworth lock and joins a tributary of the River Chess which is channelled under the canal lock chamber. Alongside the lock at Batchworth is Batchworth Mill, now occupied by the Water Company. The earliest mill at Batchworth was on the northern side of the mill stream at Batchworth but the first one for making paper was set across the water, presumably to channel as much water power as possible. In 1778 Mr Strutt took over the Batchworth Mill and turned it into a hair and cotton manufactory but by 1818 John Dickinson had bought it and it was a paper mill once more. It was John Dickinson who rebuilt the mill nearer to the London Road, constructing two short arms off the canal, one above Batchworth lock and one below the lock.

Dickinson's gave up Batchworth Mills in 1877 and it was subsequently taken over by the Spindle Company who spun silk there. At the beginning of this century it was bought by the Rickmansworth and Uxbridge Valley Water Company who constructed a pumping station here.

From the Water Company premises the river flows under Batchworth Bridge. This is the first bridge on the Batchworth side and the only one which can truly lay claim to the name. In earlier times there was a ford here with a wooden footbridge alongside. The frequent repair of this bridge was the responsibility of the Lord of the Manor of Rickmansworth and obviously by 1783 it had become a wider bridge capable of carrying the drays from Mr Salter's

brewery, because Henry Fotherley Whitfield complained of their traffic causing the decay of the bridge. Two years later the ford just above the bridge was washed away and the bridge itself damaged during heavy flooding of the Colne and the bridge had to be rebuilt yet again. William Dimes, a later Lord of the Manor, rebuilt the bridge in iron in 1833 at a cost of £1,000 but it was money well spent as it lasted well over a hundred years. William Dimes didn't have to pay all the money as he claimed contributions from all occupiers of the former demesne lands of Rickmansworth. The present bridge was built by Hertfordshire County Council in 1934 and widened in 1978.

Once under the bridge the Colne flows past the White Bear public house to rejoin the canal a short distance below the lock. The island thus formed, Batchworth Island, now has Trinity Court built upon it. Before the canal came the island was part of the Bury estate. The river then flows across the canal and beneath the cast iron bridge which carries the canal towpath. The River Chess joins the River Colne at this point. The River Colne now flows alongside the lakes of the Aquadrome and together they form part of the Colne Valley Regional Park which was created in 1972. The waters then flow over Bury Weir or Bury Flake as it used to be called when fish were trapped here. Below the weir the Bury Stream and further on the Town Ditch, both join the River Colne. Both these streams are diversions of the River Chess. The Bury Stream used to flow under the lower part of Church Street which up to the 1851 census was known as The Causeway, and then past The Bury to join the Colne.

Historically, the area between the Town Ditch and the Rivers Chess and Colne denoted the tithe free lands of Rickmansworth. In the 13th century it was decreed that lands which had been in constant ownership of religious bodies since before the conquest, should be exempt from tithes. Although the Abbey of St Albans was Lord of all the Manor of Rickmansworth, this was the only portion of land it actually owned at that time. The Town Ditch may have stretched from Fortune Common in earlier times and included the watery area behind The Elms but today it starts at Town

wharf. The ditch runs between the houses of Talbot Road and the backs of offices in the High Street and then goes under Dickins' car park to Vicarage Bridge in Church Street.

On the other side of Church Street, Barclays Bank have built offices adjacent to the Town Ditch on the site of Marble Arch Cottages. The ditch then flows through the vicarage garden and to Bury Lane, where it used to flow across the road. This used to be the Watersplash until it was culverted in 1963. Bury Lane was a private right of way from the High Street to The Bury until the early 18th century. The permission for the roadway to become a public right of way included a condition that the parishoners built and maintained a footbridge over the stream. Further along the Town Ditch was the Rickmansworth swimming baths which was opened in 1909. These baths were fed by a natural spring and water from the Town Ditch. On the other side of the ditch in Goral Mead was Horton's soap factory.

Returning to the River Colne, downstream of the Bury Weir is the bridge connecting the Ebury Recreation Ground and the Aquadrome. The land for the recreation ground was given to the town of Rickmansworth by Lord Ebury in 1911. At the opening ceremony Lady Ebury planted one of the trees which form the avenues to the gateways. The recreation ground was decimated when Riverside Drive was built in 1968.

The River Colne now continues along the backs of houses in Uxbridge Road and past the convent and the new surgeries called appropriately Gade House and Colne House. The veterinary practice has taken the name of Chess. Here the river divides, forming Dr Rope's island.

The right-hand stream goes on to the mill at End Mill. Keeping with the mainstream which forms the northern boundary of the Aquadrome, there is now a footpath running alongside the river which has been constructed by the council as part of the Aquadrome improvement plan. This has been welcomed by walkers and fishermen as previously there were overgrown watercress beds here which it was easy to fall into.

The river now passes beneath a tubular steel bridge which has recently been reinstated to carry the footpath across to Stockers Farm. The entrance to Stockers Lake Nature Reserve is here and is managed by the Herts and Middx Trust for Nature Conservation. The 93 acres of Stockers Lake are a haven for bird life and in order to protect the birds from too many humans, a permit is required before entering the reserve. Stockers Lake is actually owned by the Rickmansworth and Uxbridge Valley Water Company.

One of the footpaths in the nature reserve follows the river to the point where the county boundary crosses the River Colne. This is marked by a coal post, albeit a somewhat rusty and overgrown one. Coal posts were put on the Middlesex county boundary denoting the point at which coal tax was payable wherever the boundary was crossed by a road, railway or waterway. Presumably there was a pathway across here before Stockers Lake was created by gravel workings.

From the coal post boundary the river is in Middlesex and flows on over a very attractive weir and under Springwell Lane to run into the Grand Union Canal near Springwell Lock.

Returning to Dr Rope's island, the stream to the mill at Mill End flows under this bridge and keeps parallel with the Uxbridge Road until it reaches the site of the mill. Little remains today of the mill although one can still see the site of the wheel. There was certainly a mill at Mill End at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries and probably for a hundred and fifty years before. From 1757-1888 the mill was producing paper under various owners, the last of which was George Austin of Soles Mill who became bankrupt so both mills were closed. In 1890 the Mill End Paper Company was formed owned by Albert Wells of the nearby Mill End Tannery and his manager was the bankrupted George Austin. The mill produced mainly blotters but it was not a success and it was put up for sale in 1905. It was acquired by P Clutterbuck and demolished.

The mill stream flows on until it reaches Drayton Ford. It was a true ford until 1912 but then it was bridged. In fact there are two bridges with an island in between. From here

the River Colne becomes the county boundary between Hertfordshire and Middlesex, marked with a coal post.

From Drayton Ford the river flows south-westwards beside the Maple Lodge sewage works. This was another brainchild of Albert Freeman and it opened in 1951. At Maple Lodge there is now a nature reserve of 40 acres of water and land which has been run by the Maple Lodge Conservation Society since 1982. This branch of the River Colne was widened here to form the Maple Lodge Basin or as it is commonly referred to, the Smelly Hole, so that coal could be delivered to the works and sludge could be removed.

From this basin the River Colne flows directly into the canal under a towpath bridge, built high to allow the passage of boats.

With both branches of the River Colne now in the canal, they flow downstream as far as a white wooden bridge where the River Colne leaves the canal to flow past cottages, which are part of Hillingdon Coppermill Conservation Area and then on to The Fisheries public house. Near Fisheries Bridge, the River Colne used to flow across the line of the canal and the boundary of Hertfordshire and Three Rivers still follows the Colne's original route. Now the river has been diverted to flow north of The Fisheries public house.

A little further downstream, the diverted River Colne crosses the Troy Arm of the canal, near Troy Lake, where the Rickmansworth Sailing Club has its headquarters. The narrow boat Albert, flagship of the Ovaltine fleet, was reconstructed on the bank of the Troy Cut and it is now moored at Batchworth Lock, as a floating restaurant.

At Horseshoe Falls, a little further downstream, the old and the new courses of the River Colne meet to flow out of the district of Three Rivers and the county of Hertford and flows southwards to eventually join with the River Thames.

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River Colne -
Remains of Mill at Mill End