

HISTORY OF RIVERTON BRIDGE

By Lester Durbin

As major repairs are due to start shortly on the bridge, we felt a brief history would be both topical and instructive.

So near and yet so far, or so the far bank of the Canning River must have seemed to the few early residents of rural Wilson and Riverton prior to 1910. There were crossings of the river at Nicholson Road and Canning Highway of course but quite a detour if you wished to conduct business with Perth. Both suburbs were dedicated to farming and in no way could be identified with their present residential character. Riverton in particular had few residents prior to the 1940s.

In 1908, market gardeners, Fred Riley and Jack Metcalfe had a pressing need to access Perth markets to sell their produce grown in the area of Riley Road, Riverton and named after the Riley family. Prior to this time, they crossed the river close to the present bridge site with their wagon loaded onto a punt. Due to the efforts of Fred Riley, who donated both his time and money on the enterprise, the bridge was commenced in December 1910, built of locally felled timber and

completed in early 1911. It became known as the Watts Road Bridge, although there was no road access on either side other than a sandy track. The central arches were raised high enough to enable barges to pass under even at high water, there being some commercial river traffic from enterprises upstream. Watts Road was named after the pioneer family of George Stedman Watts who came to the Swan Colony in 1830 and settled in the locality.

In 1912, it was proposed to rename the bridge the Fred Riley Bridge in appreciation of his efforts but with a modesty not often found nowadays, Fred rejected the accolade and in 1916 requested that it be named the Riverton Bridge as it has remained, although such was the regard with which he was held, locals referred to it as the Riley Bridge for years afterwards and it can be found so named on several early maps and documents. Fred Riley died in 1948 after a long and active life in the district and was very generous with his recollections of 'the early days' much of which was documented for future generations.

By the 1930s the bridge was falling into disrepair and only used on a 'use at your own risk' basis, a situation that continued until 1954 when the bridge was replaced by the present structure sited slightly upstream. Parts of the original bridge were retained as a swimming jetty but this became a hazard to bathers and was demolished in 1980. By the 1970s although much of Leach Highway was in existence, all traffic crossing the Canning River at Wilson still had to pass over the wooden bridge and it formed a major bottleneck which was both a traffic hazard and a source of frustration - *plus ca change!* The Shelley Bridge was built in 1978 from concrete modules cast on site and became the main crossing of the Canning River in our suburb thus taking the heavy traffic off the old wooden bridge.

For many Wilson residents, the Riverton Bridge is our major route into and out of our suburb and with the repairs and improvements due to commence in the New Year, it will remain so for many decades to come.

Acknowledgments:

Canning River Regional Park Historical Survey by Department of Planning & Urban Development (October 1991)

WILSON WETLANDS UPDATE

By Russell Gorton

Over 6000 plants have been planted this year with the help of many volunteers.

On behalf of the Wilson Wetlands Action Group (WWAG) Committee, I would like to thank the teachers, students and parents of all the local schools that participated in the planting program this year, and the many volunteers who offered their time to participate in the ongoing wetland restoration projects in the Wilson Wetlands.

Special thanks to the City of Canning Council and its staff and to the Dept of Conservation and Land Management, Regional Parks team for their continued support this year. WWAG look forward to working with the community and stakeholders again next year to further improve biological diversity and ensure the protection and enhancement of this conservation area for future generations.

[Excellent community effort] [Editor]



Come and help the Wetlands
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