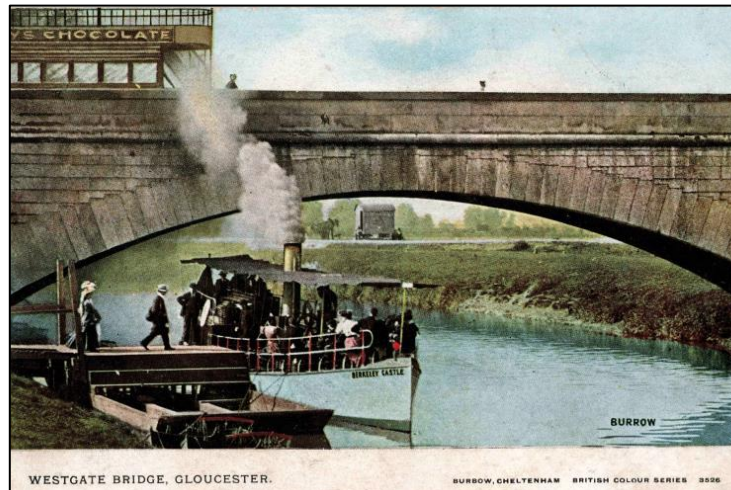


Steam Boat Service from Westgate Bridge, Gloucester to Lower Lode, Tewkesbury

By Mike Smith

The postcard that inspired me to write this article shows the steam passenger vessel “Berkeley Castle” moored at Gloucester’s Westgate Bridge landing stage prior to heading north along the River Severn, probably to Lower Lode, Tewkesbury. One of Gloucester’s electric trams is on the bridge and Alney Island can be seen through the arch on the other side of the river.



It is a typical Edwardian post-card that has been coloured by an artist working from a photograph and its postmark is dated June or July 1909. Unfortunately, as is so often the case with postcards from this era, the artist has “enhanced” the original photograph, so what you see is not necessarily what was originally there. In this example, the artist has “enhanced” the tram.

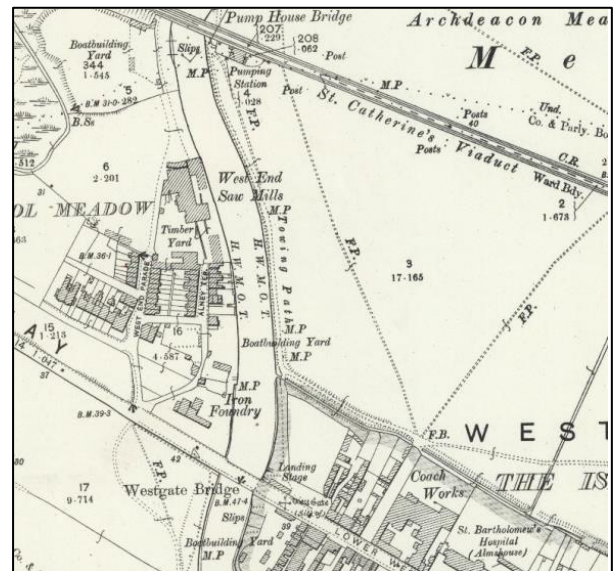
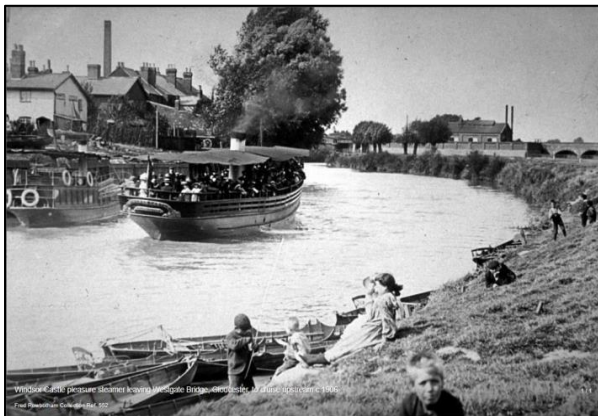
Gloucester’s tramway system was originally operated by horses and built to a gauge of 4 feet. On 9th November 1903, work began on electrifying Gloucester’s trams and converting the track gauge from 4 feet to 3 feet 6 inches. This work was completed on 17th March 1904. The official opening took place on 7th May 1904 with 20 open-top trams built by Brush of Loughborough. Ten more trams were delivered by Brush later in 1904, resulting in a fleet of 30 double deck, open top, four wheelers. All 30 looked similar, even though there were differences between the first 20 and the final batch of 10. They had four windows on each side and the photograph shows an unidentified example heading along Northgate Street on a service for Elmbridge Road. An excellent short history of Gloucester trams and some early buses entitled “Gloucester Corporation Transport, 1902-1936” is available on line and can be found at: <http://www.lthlibrary.org.uk/library/PDF-025-2.pdf>.

You can see the tram on the postcard as “enhanced” by the artist looks very different to the one photographed in Norgate Street. Gloucester’s electric trams were painted crimson lake and cream until 1915 - they must have looked very smart. The tram route to Westgate Bridge terminated just across the bridge on Alney Island and was an extension to the existing system, built during the time when conversion from horse to electric power was taking place.



The bridge shown on the postcard was the second Westgate Bridge. It was built in 1809 and replaced the original 12th century bridge. The 1809 bridge was replaced in 1974 then replaced again with the present Westgate Bridge in 1999, so the first bridge lasted 600 years or more, the second 165 years, and the third only 25 years. We must be due for another one.

Now let's look at the boat. "Berkeley Castle" was one of two steam passenger boats operated by Samuel Priday. The "Gloucester Directory" for 1906-1907 contains the entry "S. R. Priday, Westgate Bridge. Pleasure Boats" and Kelly's Directory for 1906 lists an S. Priday of Westgate Bridge and describes him as a "Boat Builder", so presumably Samuel Priday was both a builder and operator of boats on the River Severn.



The other passenger steam vessel operated by Samuel Priday was the "Windsor Castle", shown in the photograph leaving Westgate Bridge landing stage and heading north c1906. The map is an extract from the second edition 25inch Ordnance Survey Map, dated some time between 1894 and 1903. The trams hadn't reached Westgate Bridge by 1903, but the map allows us to identify many of the buildings in the photograph. St Catherine's Viaduct on the Great Western Railway's line to South Wales can be seen, as can the pumping station on the banks of the river, south of the viaduct. West End Saw Mills' chimney stands behind the buildings on Alney Terrace and we can see boats moored alongside the boatyard, although the boatyard itself is not visible. This photograph is from the late Fred Rowbotham's collection. That collection of photographs has been scanned by Dr Ray Wilson and I am

very grateful to him for allowing me to use it in this article. The Fred Rowbotham photographic collection can be viewed online by using the following link: <https://coaley.net/rowbotham/>.

Jill Voyce included a photograph of one of Samuel Priday's passenger steam vessels in her book entitled "Gloucester in Old Photographs", published by Alan Sutton in 1985. In the caption to that photograph, she tells us the "Windsor Castle" and "Berkeley Castle" ran a daily service from Westgate Bridge to Lower Lode, Tewkesbury at 9am and 3pm for a return fare of 1s 6d (7½ pence), but I have yet to find any supporting evidence for that statement.

Bathurst's boatyard in Tewkesbury also operated two steam passenger vessels on the River Severn, "River Queen" and "River King". A book entitled "A Postcard from the Severn" by Jan Dobrzynski and Keith Turner includes a photograph of "River Queen" arriving at Westgate Bridge from the north during the Edwardian era, so Samuel Priday had some competition on the Gloucester to Tewkesbury run.

It's amazing what research into one old postcard can reveal, but there's so much more to learn. Who built "Windsor Castle" and "Berkeley Castle" and when? What happened to them? Did they have Sisson's engines? Did they operate private charters as well as public trips? Was Samuel Priday related to the Priday of Priday, Metford and Co. Ltd, owners of the corn mill in Gloucester Docks?

If anyone can add anything to what I have written in this article, please let me know.