

## The Thames River Barge Lock

I own several old barge locks from the 18th and 19th century that were likely found in old wharf houses, or by mudlarkers, or were in the families of lightermen from days long since passed. Most appear to be very crude and are unmarked, making the historical search very challenging, if not downright impossible.

Recently, however, I acquired a barge lock that is still clearly marked with what appears to be “owner, maker, and location”. Needless to say, I was doing the “happy dance” when I acquired it. I LOVE putting these human technology artifacts within context! To me, this increases their personal value.

So, some of you may be asking: “What is a Thames River barge lock?” and “What was it used for?” and “When was it in use?”

Barges were flat-bottomed boats primarily used to transport goods, and livestock, and people from sailing ships and larger “coasters” to and from various wharfs on the Thames River, in London, and various other points along rivers within the United Kingdom. They were used widely from the 17th to early 20th century. Some were oar-powered. Some were sailing barges. Later in the 19th and early 20th century, coal-powered steam and internal combustion power-plants took became the norm. Locks were needed to secure the precious cargo from river thieves who would pilfer cargo, or steal entire barges under the cover of darkness. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes it did not. Regardless, the presence of these barges on the internal waterways was a common sight for a long period, and a sign of commercial progress within the British Empire.

“Laden deep with sugar, with barley, sand or coke, spitties keep on sailin, they were built of English oak. But their day is passing, fewer with each tide, grace old London's river, London may their rare charm abide.”  
- Poem, origin unknown

The lock in question is of iron and brass construction, of the usual shape for English barge locks. It is stamped: “ H. GREY JUNR (Junior/JR.) , RICHARDS MAKER , OLD BARGEHOUSE ST.”

LOCK DIMENSIONS: 4.75” x 3.5” x 1.125”

LOCK WEIGHT: 1.77 lbs ( 0.80 kg )

Old Barge House Street is still in existence in the Southwark borough of the London metropolitan area, west of the Blackfriar’s Bridge and east of Gabriel’s Wharf on the south bank of the Thames River. It is just in from the OXO tower. The area was once home to storage and transfer warehouses, and businesses

related to them. These days, much of the area is being revitalized as an “entertainment district”, but efforts are in place to preserve as much of the historic architecture as possible.

I still have not found “H. Grey Jr.”, or “Richards”... but at least I know an area to begin associating them with.

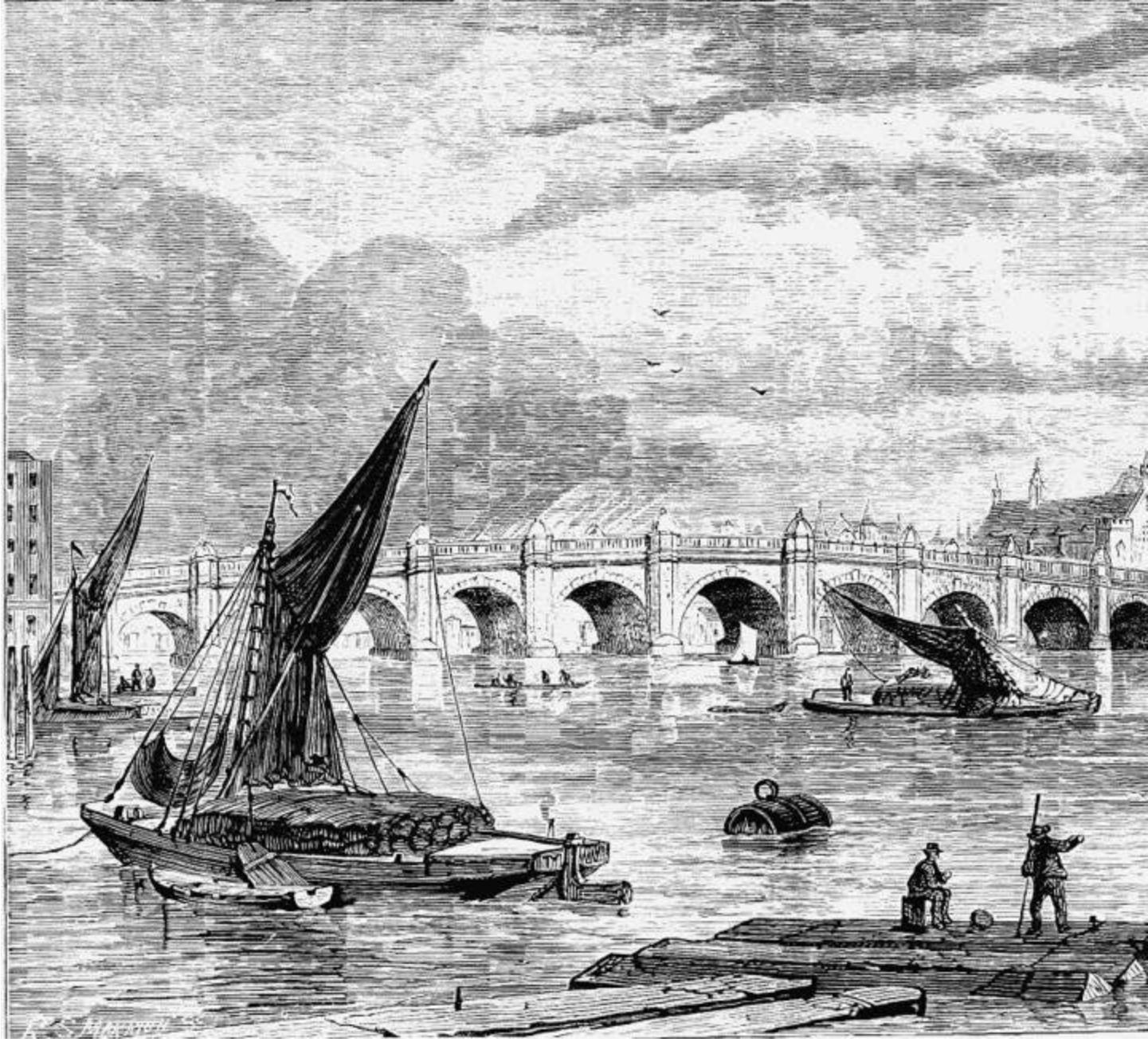
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Michael Stuart ... May 2018

























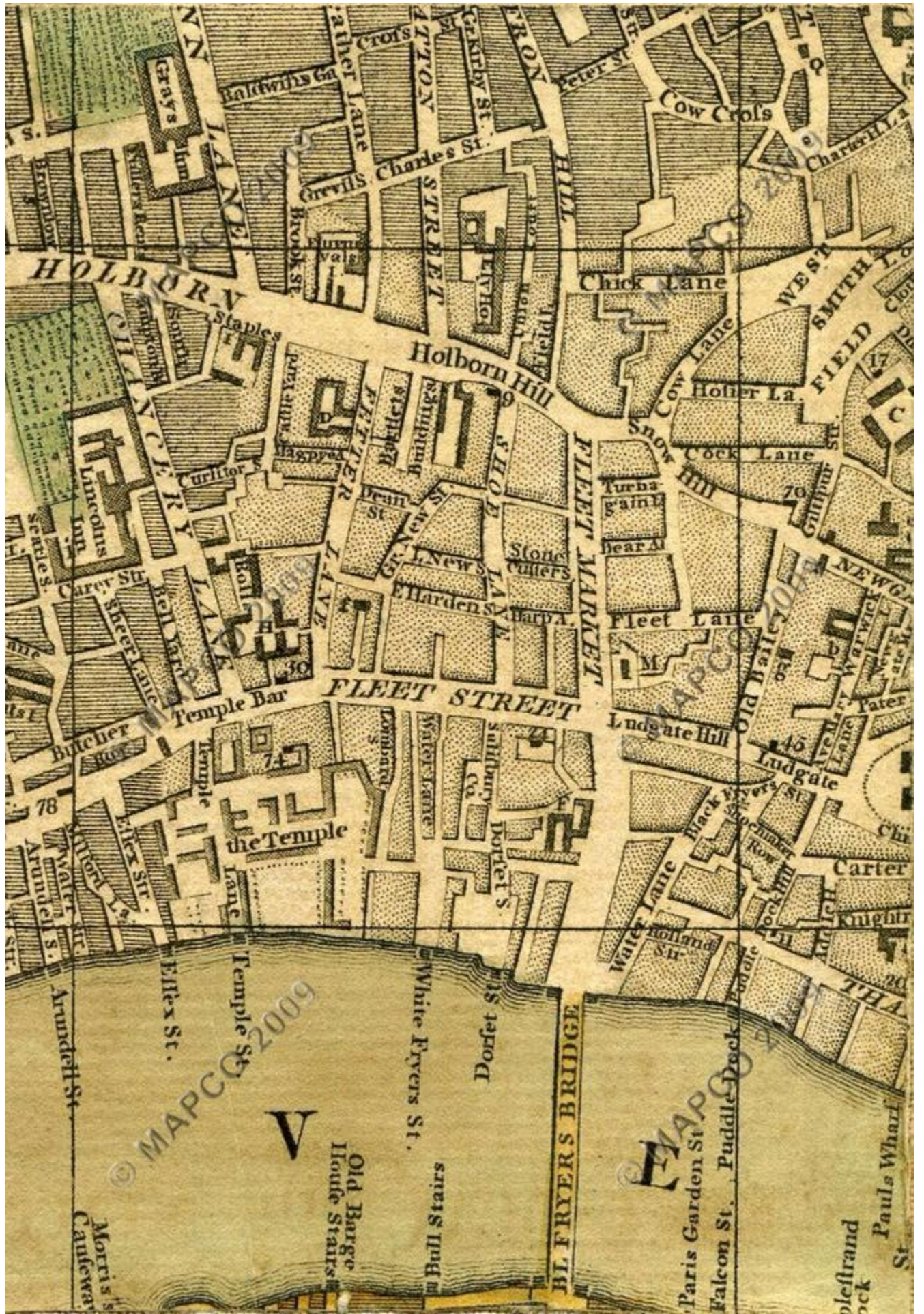




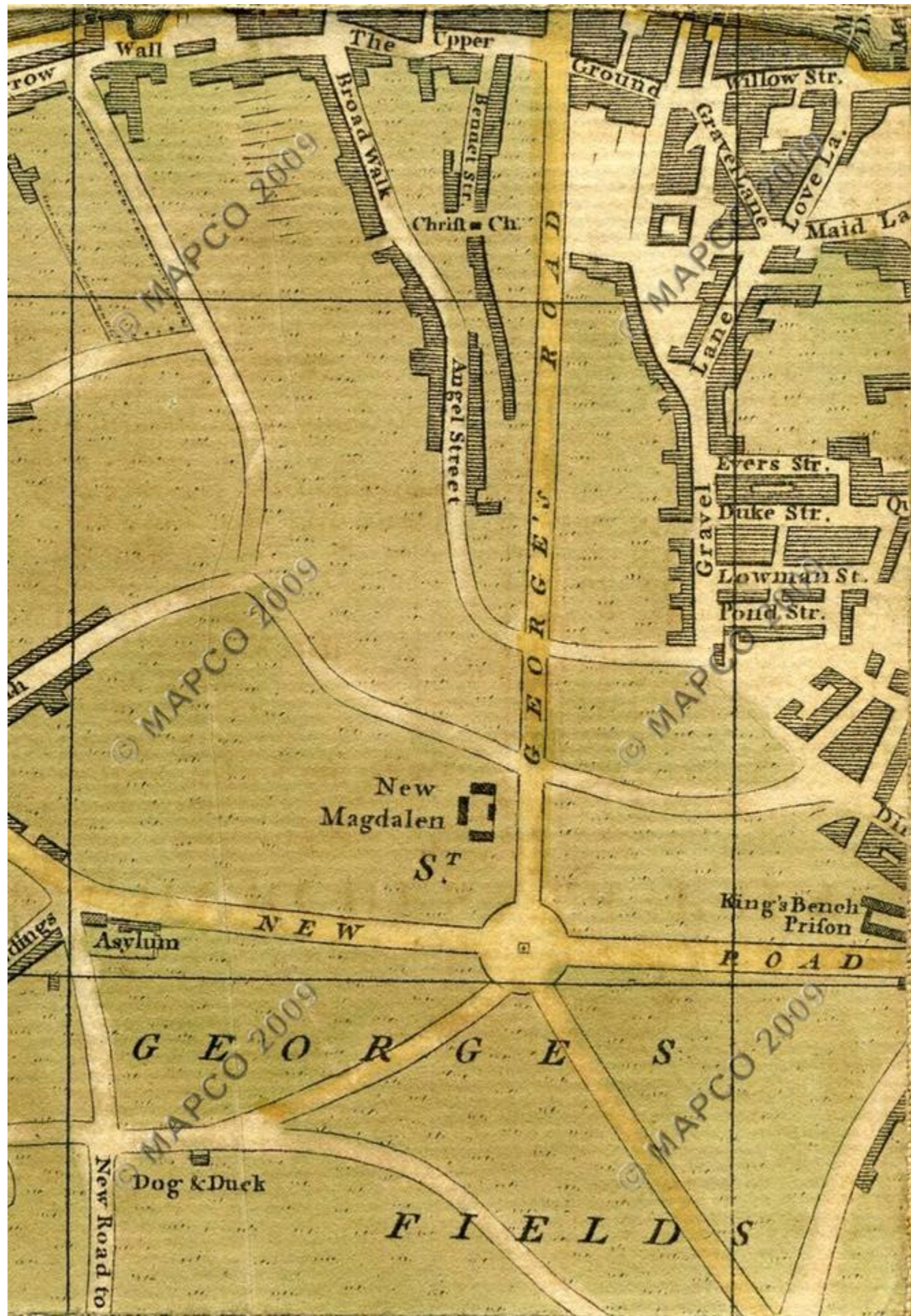




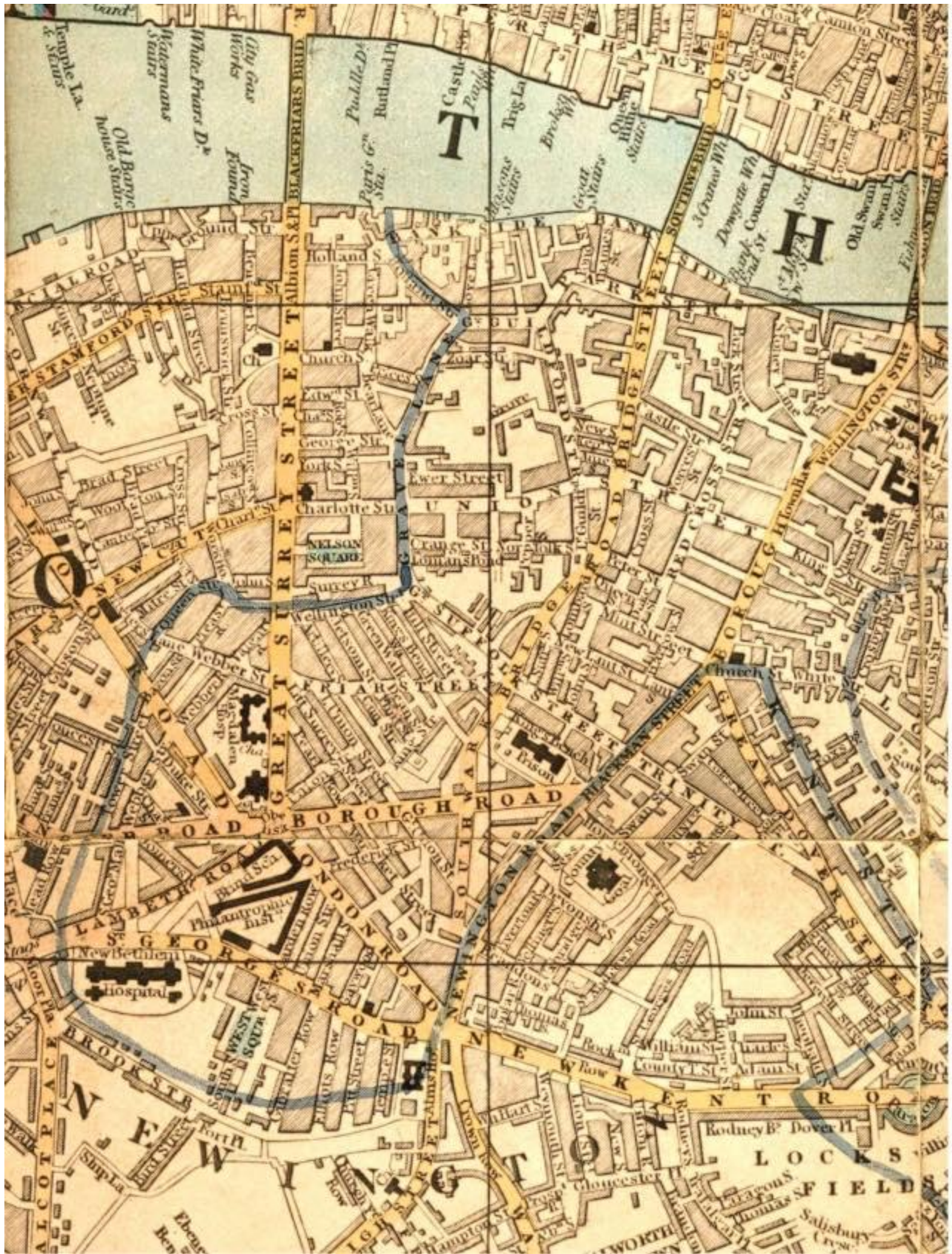


















### Blackfriars Railway Bridge WHERE THAMES SMOOTH WATERS GLIDE

