

History of Vauxhall Bridge



1832 map

1844. The Norwich to Yarmouth railway opened. The only access from Vauxhall station to the town was via Cory's Suspension Bridge, a toll bridge. The Norfolk Railway was authorised to lay tracks onto the quays, the first tramway being built under the Yarmouth Extension Act 1847 serving North, Hall and South Quays.

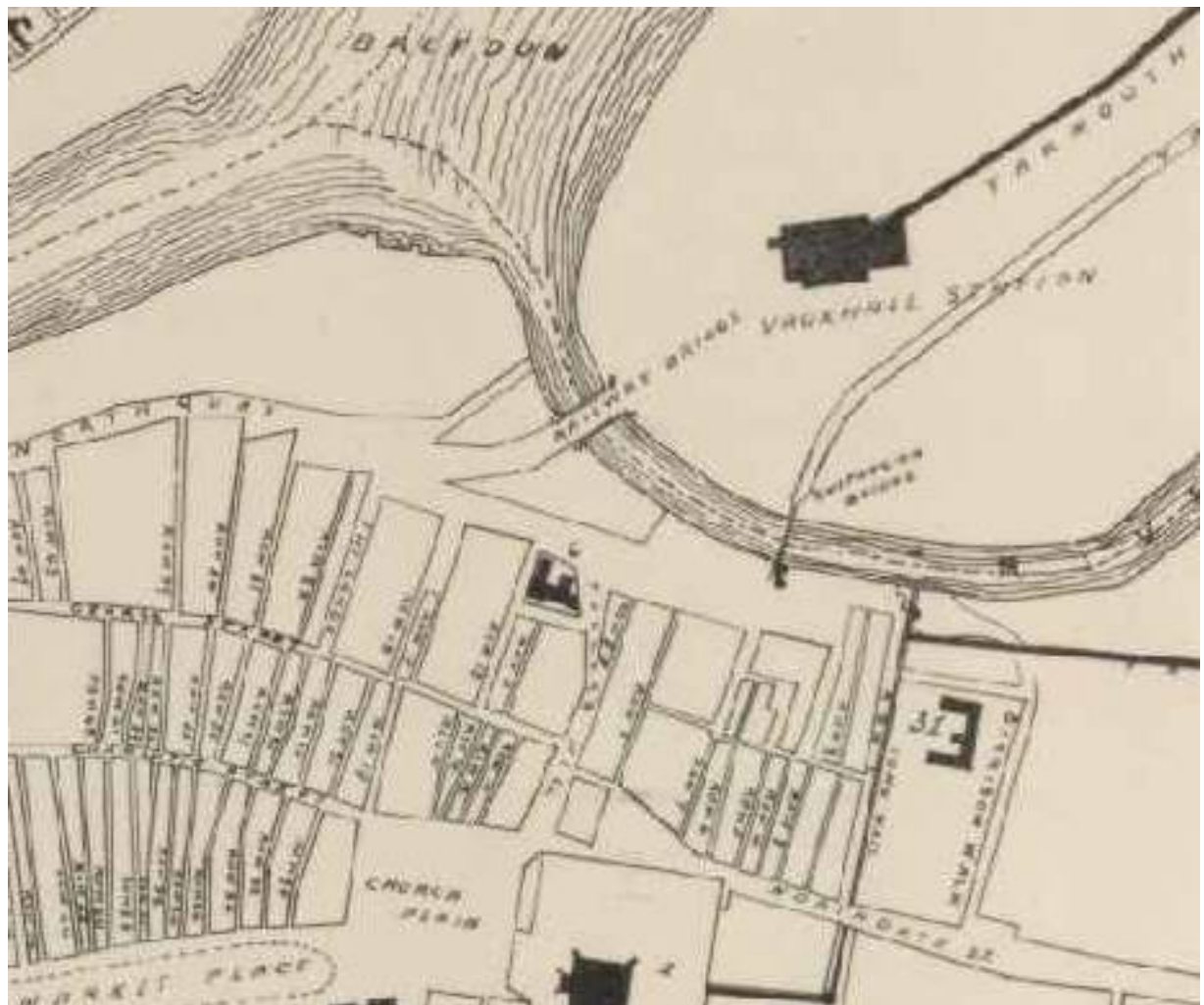
1845. The suspension bridge collapsed.

1847. A permanent replacement was provided. Around this time the Norfolk Railway is thought to have provided its own temporary wooden bridge over the Bure. Although Cory's new bridge was of a totally different design, it continued to be known as "The Suspension Bridge".

1848/1852. The Vauxhall Bridge was built, constructed chiefly in iron, being "33 yards long by 12 yards wide". The bridge was a Fairbairn-type box girder (the structure being at body level as you walk across the footbridge). Sir

William Fairbairn was one of the three people (with Robert Stephenson and Eaton Hodgkinson) responsible for the design of the Britannia bridge over the Menai Straits. His work led to the introduction of the box girder for railway bridges.

A railway company plan of December 1851 shows a double track on Vauxhall Bridge, one track denoted as – “old road now opened up to allow access of passenger traffic.” Vauxhall bridge was equipped with “separate passages for rail and carriage”. Rail vehicles, comprising wagons drawn by horses, had access to the quays to the south of the town. Horse power remained in use until 1884.



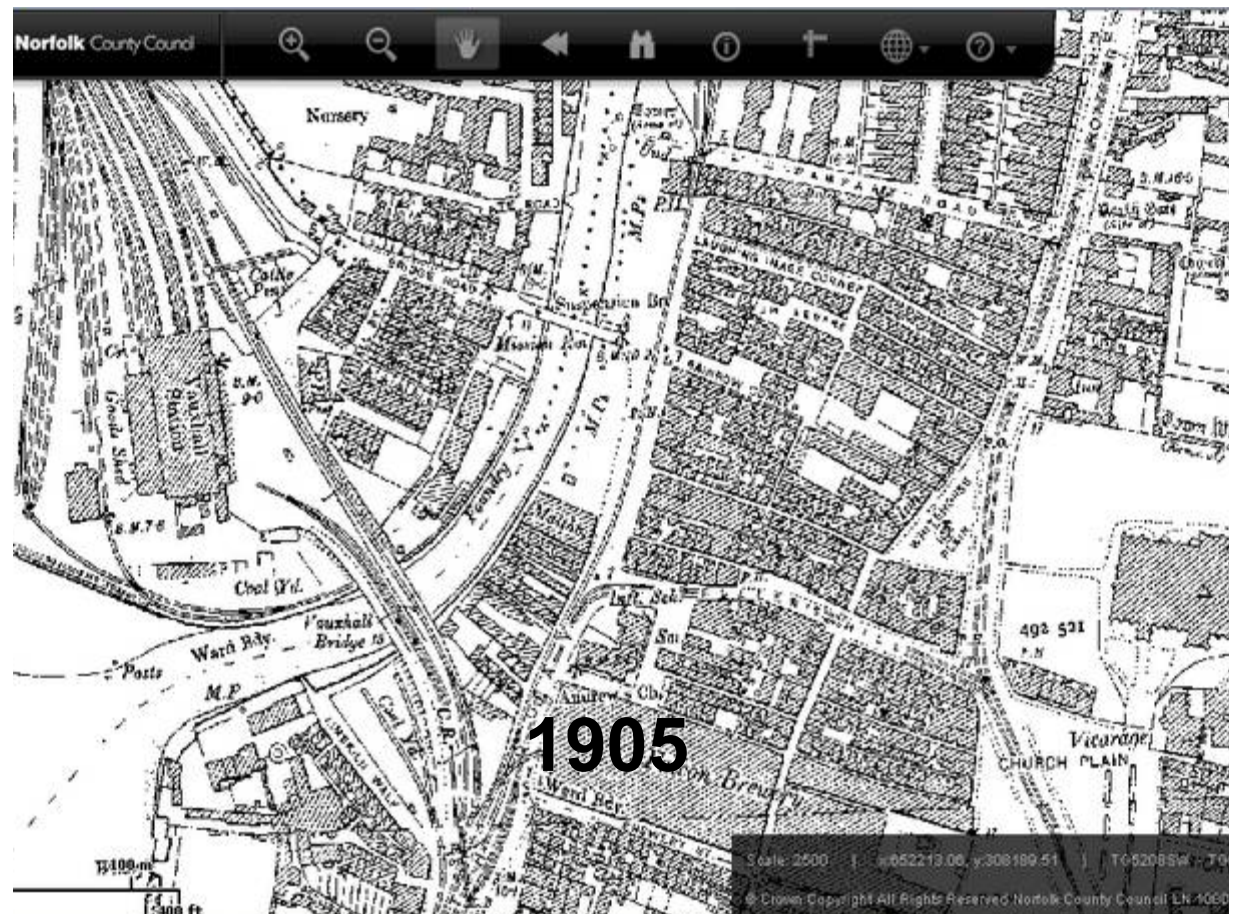
181882 map

1886/7. More traffic had led to increasing pressure for locomotive haulage, not least from the Borough authorities. Great Eastern Railways (GER) was granted an application in 1884 to use steam locomotives “similar to those employed on the Wisbech Tramway” subject to the bridge being strengthened, as the main wrought-iron girders were not capable of supporting the additional load. Consequently, lattice arches were added above the box girders, with vertical iron rods to support the girders from the arches, A separate lattice girder span for pedestrians was also added to the south side. The design and erection of the new structure would have been

very innovative and challenging at the time. Locomotives were put to work when GER altered their sidings on the North Quay to provide approaches to the new bridge to Vauxhall station for foot passenger,s and opened the bridge for railway traffic for the fishing season.

1902. As part of the municipal tramway system, track was laid over the bridge to provide a route terminating in the station yard.

1909. Increased traffic led to repairs being carried out, with a financial contribution from the Council.



191905 map

1920. Tolls on the Suspension Bridge were abolished, following contributions from both the Council and GER.

1928. Tram services across Vauxhall bridge into the station ceased.

1929. Extensive repairs, involving the replacement of about 5000 rivets, were carried out.

1930. The condition of suspension bridge led to a Council proposal to take over Vauxhall Bridge and make it the main route into the town from Acle New Road. In July, the Corporation took over maintenance of road approaches and

the footpath over bridge. At the end of 1930 a weight restriction was imposed on the suspension bridge, and in 1934 all vehicular traffic over the suspension bridge was prohibited. The only alternative route for traffic was now via Vauxhall bridge which still had only one “passage” for road traffic.

Following the Depression of the late 20s/early 30s, the Government, encouraged by the success of the USA “New Deal” initiative, encouraged local councils to submit Capital Works Projects to central government for grant aid. This led the Borough to submit a proposal to government for a new road bridge in February 1935; further details were requested, provided in early 1937, followed by a revised scheme in November 1938.

1939. In April the suspension bridge was further restricted to invalid carriages, bicycles, wheelbarrows and handcarts. Shortly after this, attention turned to other matters with the build up to World War II and, much like the whole nation, Vauxhall Bridge was expected to “carry on”.

1942 In December the suspension bridge was referred to as “disused” and in January 1945 it was banned to all vehicles, leading to a suggestion in the following month that it be replaced by the Callender-Hamilton emergency bridge which had been kept available in case Yarmouth’s Haven bridge next to the Town Hall was destroyed by enemy bombing.



1946 Aerial photo

1950 Much concern arose over the state of Vauxhall Bridge, which had been carrying all A47 traffic for five years, and much of it since the early 1930s. Minimum repairs were carried out pending opening of the new A47 Callender-Hamilton bridge in January 1953, whereupon Vauxhall Bridge was closed to all vehicular traffic; it continued to carry rail traffic over the northern side span, which had, of course, never been available to road vehicles.

1959. The M&GN line closed. A newspaper article quoted the Vauxhall stationmaster as saying that work would be required on the bridge for the increased traffic of the coming Summer, as it had been closed for about seven years due to its poor condition. Following closure of the M&GN line into Yarmouth Beach in February, action was needed to cater for all the additional holidaymakers who would be using Vauxhall station that summer. The former road side of the bridge had, apparently, now deteriorated to the extent that it remained unusable; a timber surface was laid on the rail only side to carry road vehicles as well as ongoing rail traffic to the quay tramway.

1972. The A47 road bridge was built in its present position.

1975. Rail traffic over the tramway ceased and the bridge was subsequently closed to all traffic.



1985 photo