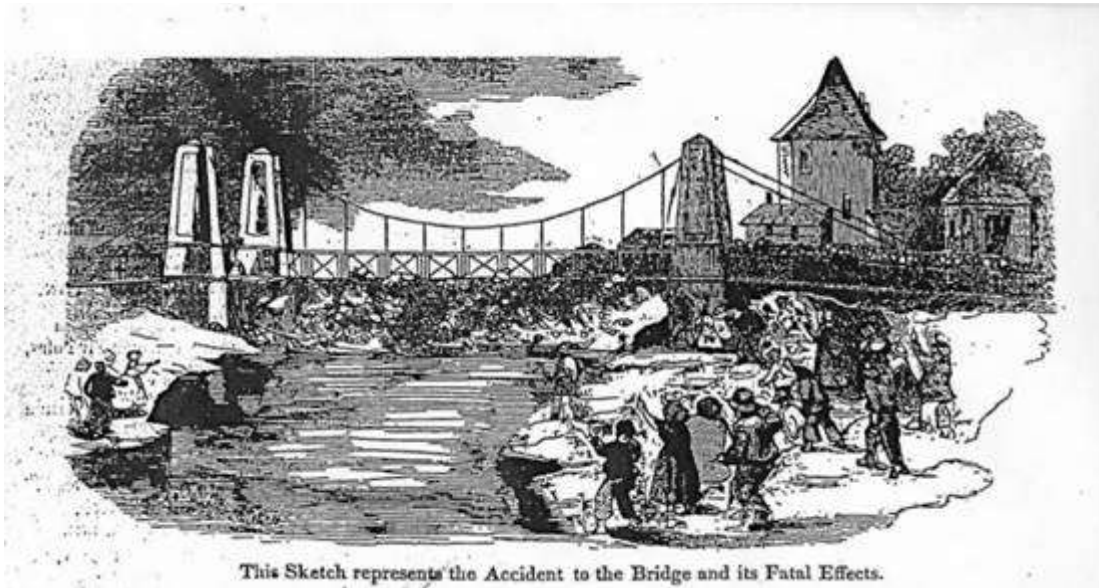


## A Dreadful Accident

Article in Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette 10 May 1845



A great Disaster last Friday evening as stated in a second edition of this paper, the most intense excitement was created in the city by a report, that an appalling accident had occurred in Yarmouth; the Suspension bridge over the river Bure having broken down, when covered with a dense crowd of people, assembled to witness the feat of Nelson, the celebrated clown who had announced his intention of sailing, that afternoon, in a tub drawn by four geese, from the bridge on the quay to the Suspension Bridge. Our Reporter instantly proceeded to the scene of the disaster, and found the very worst of apprehensions realised; a calamity having occurred almost unparalleled in this country and involving the loss, as it now appears, of about EIGHTY lives.- The Suspension Bridge near the Vauxhall gardens forming the entrance to the town from the railway terminus and the new Acle road, was the scene of this awful occurrence, which has brought deep distress upon a great part of the population of the town. The particulars, as they reached us from our Reporter, were stated in four successive editions of last week's paper but we shall now endeavour to give a more complete narrative.

The clown started upon his exhibition, which though one of a ludicrously absurd description, was, (if on that account alone) well-calculated to attract a number of persons to witness it at five o'clock from the old drawbridge and proceeded rapidly with the tide along the Quay. When near the Bure, the current drifted him towards Braydon, whence he was towed back. In the meantime, the multitude had increased and every place was filled with spectators. The crowd, eager to see the clown and his feathered team, followed him along the Quay, and a large number of persons, chiefly women and children, at quarter past five o'clock, ran onwards to the Suspension Bridge, where the best view might be had of Nelson when coming up the river. Our readers will be aware that this bridge was the one which was the subject of so much litigation between Mr Cory and the railway company. Subsequently to the dispute between the parties, the bridge, being the principal medium of traffic between the town and the terminus, had been widened to the extent of four feet for foot passengers. The people who now crowded it, concentrated themselves as much as possible in the centre, though the width of it from pillar to pillar was not less than eighty feet. The strain on the bridge was so great that in a few minutes its usual curve became a flat level, the suspending chains snapped, the whole of one side gave way and were hurled in a mass- men women and children – into the water. There arose a dreadful cry: a loud unearthly shriek, and in a instant, those who were

a moment earlier full of 'lusty life', with hearts beating in joyous excitement were launched into eternity.

It appeared that the greater number of people on the bridge before the accident, were of the working class, that being the class of persons the spectacle was most likely to attract. At least two thirds of those thrown into the water were women and children, and many of the latter had been sitting on the bridge with their legs through the rails and were consequently, fixed underneath it when they fell.

It can be easily imagined that a mass of people thus precipitated into water, five feet deep, would have but a small chance of saving themselves; and but for the prompt assistance which was afforded, few, very few, would have escaped. Boats and wherries were immediately in motion and from 20 to 30 with gallant crews, were soon among the drowning people, picking them up with wonderful rapidity. Many were put on the shore in their wet clothes who went directly home, and no account was taken of the number thus saved. Whilst the boatmen were so worthily employed, the scene on the river and on the banks on each side was of the most fearful and appalling nature. In the former, was the strong man, in his agony, grappling with death.- the mother striving to save her child- the children holding up their tiny hands, as if imploring succour; on the latter were an anxious multitude- parents, brothers, sisters, friends- with frenzied voice and gesture, enquiring for those they loved and who they feared were immersed in the engulfing flood. Those who witnessed this awful spectacle describe it as the most heart-rending kind and one never to be forgotten. Even the boatmen, at one period, seemed paralysed and unnerved at the extent of the work before them, and hardly knew which way to turn. They, however, soon recovered their presence of mind, and with native gallantry, and characteristic zeal, pursued their task to succour and to save. Two men, named Smith and Creak, at the risk of their lives went into the water and saved several persons by swimming with them to shore. And Thomas, the well-known beachman, was foremost in his zealous efforts to rescue his fellow creatures from a watery grave.

There were some hairbreadth escapes. One man, thrown from the bridge, caught hold of the ironwork, and clung to it for some time with a woman who clutched his ankles. The man encouraged her to hold tight and she was saved. This gallant fellow refused to get into a boat urging the boatmen to pick up those who were floating about in the water. He fell into the stream and a rope being thrown was the means of bringing him ashore. A poor woman who with her child was thrown from the bridge, supported her infant by holding its clothes with her teeth, and thus had her hands at liberty, she providentially got clear from the sinking bodies and reached land in safety.

Always ready to give their aid in cases of casualty, the medical men were quickly on the spot, and they recommended the most judicious methods to be pursued with the bodies rescued from the waves, affording themselves most valuable active assistance as well as advice. Mr Lacon, sent his men with barrels of hot water for baths . Mr Breese? threw open his baths for the use of those who were saved; and many publicans sent bottles to hold hot water, to promote the restoration of persons taken to various houses. Mr FN Palmer, the surgeon was one of those rescued. Thus saved, he was taken into a boat in an exhausted state, but proper attention having been paid to him, he was restored and after ten o'clock considered out of immediate danger.

Many of the bodies, as soon as they were taken out of the water were conveyed to the Vauxhall gardens, where every attention was paid to them by the new proprietor Mr Franklin and family. Through their kindness and attention, thirty persons were accommodated with beds and with cordials, and restored of sensation and life. This humanity was most praiseworthy, as it was shown to those whose gratitude can be the only recompense in their powers to offer such timely and generous acts of beneficence.

Notwithstanding the indefatigable and untiring efforts of the boatmen, which were beyond all praise and reward, very many could not be saved, and the melancholy part of their work remained, to bring

up the dead bodies. All the usual means of finding them by drags and creepers were put in requisition, and a great many soon extricated. Young men and women were drawn out, who, only a few minutes before in the pride of youth were now ghastly livid corpses. The bodies of children, however, formed the larger proportion. Before eight o'clock 53 bodies had been found, which were conveyed to the Norwich Arms public house near the bridge. Others were taken to the Lord Collinwood, the White Swan, and other houses, where people went in crowds in order to identify their relatives, and as may be supposed, those who discovered among the dead the objects of their search, were deeply affected.

As before nine o'clock, the tide became very high, nets were thrown across the stream by direction of Mr Hammond and Mr Davie, to prevent bodies from being drifted away. The boatmen, too, continued their labours and before eleven o'clock 73 bodies had been found among them that of a woman who had an infant in her arms and in one hand a little girl three or four years old. She had kept hold of both even in death, and her grasp was so tight that the bodies were not easily separated. Many children were found with their heads fast in the railing of the bridge, and were extricated with difficulty, some with broken arms and legs.

Many bodies were supposed to be under the bridge, but these could not be got at until the broken part of the structure was raised. The boatmen continued, however, to drag the river all night, and occasionally threw up another body to the surface. Whilst they were pursuing their labours, many an anxious query was addressed to them and the stillness of the night was broken in upon by parents mourning for their children "because they were not", and by anxious relatives seeking those they loved in the ranks of the dead. They had sought and obtained leave from the Coroner to remove the bodies, as they were identified; a measure of humanity, but which entailed the jury the necessity of viewing the bodies at the different houses.

At a late hour, the Haven and Pier Commissioners assembled in Mr Cory's office, but the proceedings were brief and strictly private; we are not, therefore, able to give any particulars respecting them.

At Norwich, the excitement was very little inferior to that which prevailed in Yarmouth. Crowds of persons flocked to the railway terminus, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the trains and the passengers were besieged with questions as to the nature and extent of the calamity, the number of sufferers, etc. The replies served, rather to stimulate than to satiate the curiosity and the interest was increased rather than diminished by the accounts, meagre and unsatisfactory as they were, which were given of the dreadful occurrence. Many residents had friends visiting, or on business in Yarmouth; others had children at school there, and to relieve their anxiety, that beautiful invention, the Electric Telegraph was put in requisition. One of the first enquiries was as to the boys at the Proprietary School, amongst whom are some Norwich young gentlemen. Intense interest was felt till the response arrived, and when in a few minutes almost with the swiftness of thought- the cheering words "All safe" were telegraphed, a thrill of delight appeared to pervade those present; who shared in the anxiety of the enquirers, and waited with breathless suspense till their doubts and fears were removed.



The above Sketch represents the rescue of persons out of the water, as described by the witnesses at the Inquest.