Wally’s Bridge blessing.

Canon Harry Edwards

When I was seventeen I fell through this bridge into the water. I was dreaming of skylarks or perhaps about falling in love, and hadn’t noticed that after a recent local high tide, a number of planks were missing. So eyes fixed heavenward, I fell through, and found myself suddenly under water.

Douglas Bloomfield, then Chairman of the Parish Council and the local reporter of the Halesworth Times (and incidentally my mother’s gardener) wrote an arresting article for the newspaper (whose newsworthy stories were often very limited), entitled *‘ Youth in dramatic struggle for Survival’*. (I still have the cutting.) In reality, far from being in danger of being swept out to sea, I merely climbed out on the other side of the bank.

Walking home to Ferry House, dripping wet, and it being November, I was met by Bob the Ferryman walking down the road. ‘Morning Harry’ he said, without any enquiry as to my parlous state and dripping clothes, and he continued on his way. Such is the way of Walberswick.

I well remember one summer’s Evening when Wally & Mick Taylor laid a net across the creek, adjacent to the bridge. They had spotted large mullet fish languidly swimming up the river. The net set, Wally asked Mick to go the Bell and order a couple of pints, and they agreed to return and check the nets later.

Wally lingered on, as the night was falling, to see if any fish had found themselves caught in the net, only to see someone from East Point making his way to the bridge, clutching a full and almost overflowing Elsan. (In those days the residents of the Huts, prior to proper sanitation, emptied the contents of Elsans, chemical toilets, on a regular basis in to the creek.) The problem on that particular evening was that the tide was coming IN, and the contents of the Elsan, (human excreta and toilet paper) were caught highly effectively by and in the net Wally and Mick had set. By this time it was almost dark.

Wally saw that the net had bowed and had been lowered in the water by its ‘catch’ and hurried to the Bell to announce to Mick Taylor – breathlessly – that they had achieved the most amazing catch. Mick left his pint, running to the bridge, where he leant over in the dark and pulled in the net, hand over hand, in great excitement.

He soon realized that something was amiss, and when he raised his soiled fingers to his nose understood what had happened. ‘You……………’ he exclaimed…and so the legend of that exploit was born. Wally would have told that story, if he were here, in his own inimical way, and with a few more expletives no doubt thrown in.