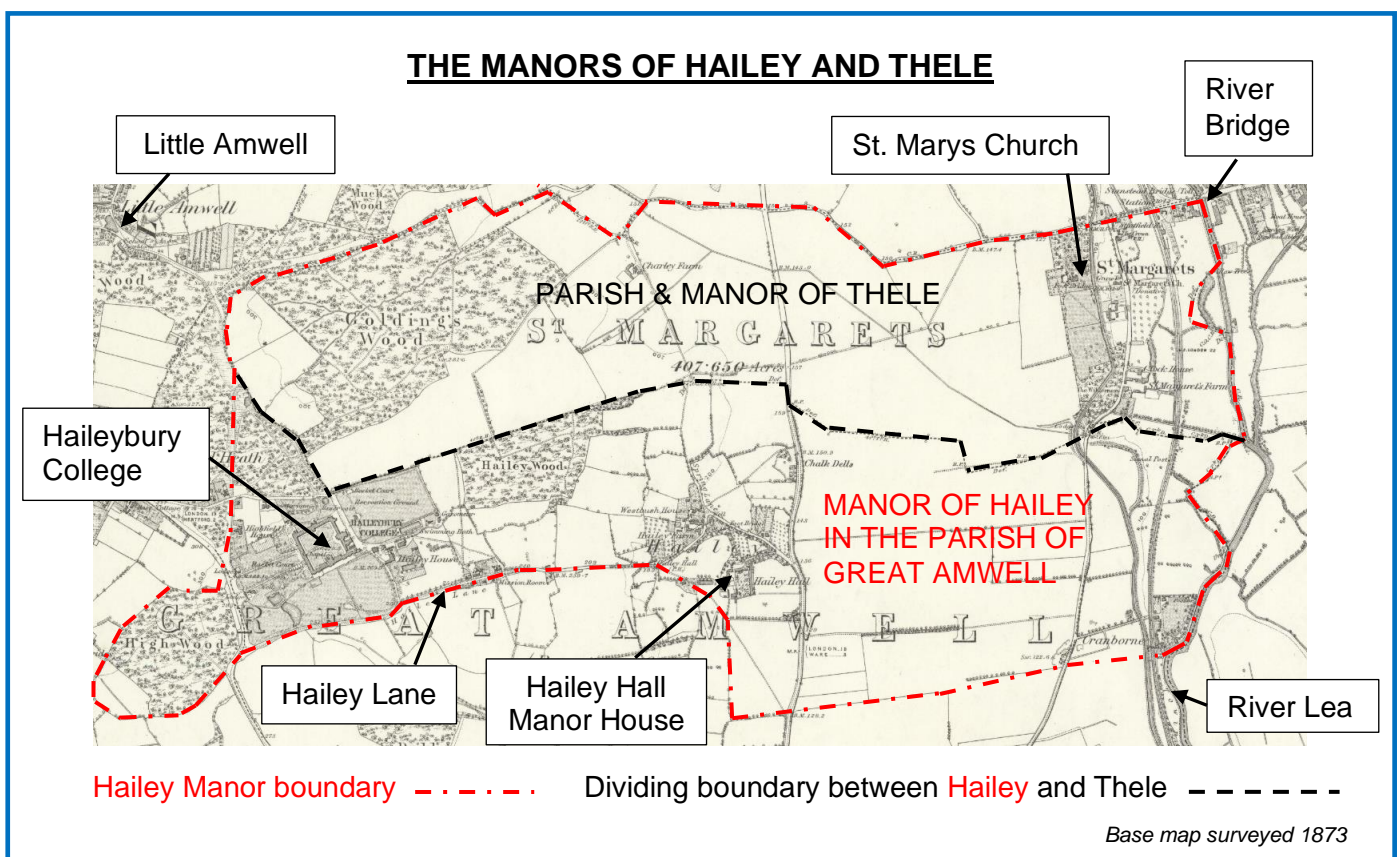


# THE MANOR AND TOLL BRIDGE OF THELE AT STANSTEAD ST. MARGARETS

BY  
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In early historic times Stanstead Abbots and Stanstead St. Margarets were connected by a ford across the River Lea. In around 1100 Roger de Burun Lord of the Manor of Hailey replaced the ford with a wooden bridge. One of the earliest known names for this bridge and certainly an enduring one (*with variants*) was "Pontis de Thele" [*Bridge of Thele / Thele Bridge*] a name that was to have various spellings over the following centuries and several interpretations of its meaning. At the time the bridge was built the Manor of Hailey in Great Amwell included within it all the land that was to be separated off to become the Parish of Thele, known today as Stanstead St. Margarets or just St. Margarets. For such relatively small areas of land both the Manor of Hailey and the Parish and Manor of Thele have complicated early histories which have to some extent caused difficulties for later historians to unravel and make full sense of. This has also been true of the historical distinction between the Bridge at Thele and Stanstead Bridge. This article it is hoped will bring a little more clarity to these matters concerning both the manors of Hailey and Thele as well as the history of the bridge that connects Stanstead Abbots to St Margarets.



At Domesday and until sometime between 1247 and 1276, the Manor of Hailey included all those lands shown within the red boundary line on the map above. The new Manor and Parish of Thele being separated off by the descendants of Roger de Burun from the Manor of Hailey. The Parish of Thele was formed out of what was effectively waste land in the Parish of Great Amwell. Due to the strict rules at the time concerning the formation of a new parish, the established settled land within Hailey could not be part of the new parish and remained in Great Amwell. It also means that it was unlikely that many people were living in the area of Thele when the new parish was established towards the end of the 1200s. The area of Thele and its bridge[s] had a considerable variety of spellings and variants of their names over time. Stanstede [*Stanstead*] was also to see a notable change in the early 1200s with the addition of Abbatis [*Abbotts*] to give Stanstede Abbatis after the manor was acquired by the Abbey at Waltham.

Despite the range of spellings for the early names for St Margarets and the bridge[s], for simplicity it can be reduced to just two names, Tegule and Thele. The curious thing is that in some early records both these words appear in different records at about the same time but undoubtedly refer to the same approximate location. The Latin word Tegule is interpreted as referring to tiles and many historians have suggested that a bridge may have included tiles in its construction.

The word Thele has had at least three different meanings attributed to it; -

- 1) Thele has been linked to the Greek word Telonium implying a tax at the bridge, which as the bridge at Thele was a toll bridge from its opening this has been seen as a reasonable explanation.
- 2) Thele has been linked with the idea of a wooden bridge from the Anglo-Saxon word Thelu [plank].
- 3) Thele a combination of the words The and Ele to give Theele or Thele, in modern form The Island.

After 1100 the name Pontis de Thele was used for the newly built bridge over the river Lea, with places in Thele close by being recorded as at the bridge of Thele. The name Thele was in early times also used to refer to an island near the bridge at Thele. Between the years 1200 and 1400 both *Pons de Thele* and *Pontem Tegule* appear in documents suggesting there were two bridges in Thele during that time. The Pontem Tegule being built about a century after the toll bridge over the main channel of the Lea. In the late 1200s the name Thele was adopted by descendants of the de Burun family for the naming of their new Parish and Manor. Interestingly the name Thele, in its many guises, continued to be used for many centuries whereas the name Tegule and all its variants went out of use in the early 1400s. This perhaps suggests that the later built bridge was removed after some two hundred years in use.

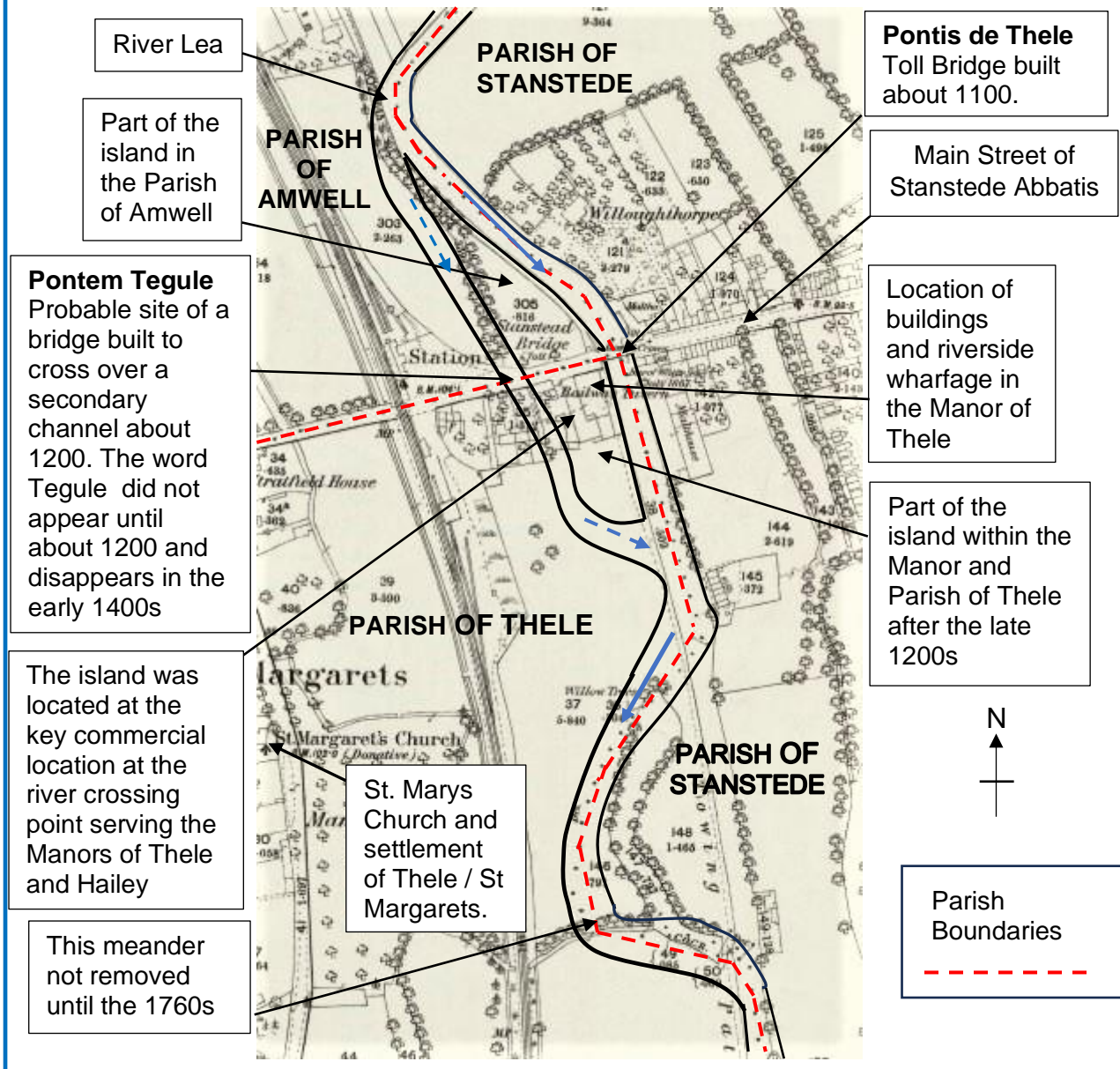
[See Appendix for further details of the range of names and spellings and how they changed over time].

In 1247 before the creation of the Manor of Thele the de Burun family granted a tenement to the Abbey at St Albans in Thele close to the *Pontem Tegule*. The tenement could have been either rented land, building[s] or both. The head of the de Burun family another Roger was named the Lord of the Manor of Hailey in the grant document. This indicates that in 1247 Thele referred to that part of the Manor of Hailey close to the Lea and the bridges. The Manor and Parish of Thele had not yet been formed so all the land to the west of the river Lea was still in the Parish of Great Amwell. It appears that the Manor of Thele was created between 1247 and 1276 by which time the Manor of Thele was part owned by John de Lovetot and his wife Margaret [*nee de Burun*]. In 1281, John and Margaret, now sole owners of Thele and Hailey, were granted a weekly market and annual Fair at Thele. A document of 1296 confirms that John had died by 1294 and Margaret had become the owner of both manors.

The bridge over the river Lea [*Pontis de Thele*], although built by the de Buruns about 1100, was under the overlordship of the crown and was to remain so for many centuries, with the toll from the bridge being collected by the Wardens of the Royal Castle at Hertford. It was the Crown that variously over time granted out the collection of tolls. A mention of the toll and bridge at Thele are recorded as a related piece of evidence during the hearing of a claim made by the Abbey of St Albans in 1299 against the Warden of Hertford Castle. This concerned the tolls at bridges in St Albans and Barnet, which they felt should rightly belong to the Abbey. In a piece of comparative evidence against their claim, it was stated '*that Henry III and his predecessors, then William de Valence Earl of Pembroke, whom Henry had appointed governor of Hertford Castle in 1250, had always taken tolls at the bridge at Thele*'. The tolls at both Ware and Thele bridges were considered for many centuries to be part of the income for the maintenance and repair of Hertford Castle. As such the Wardens / Lessee's of the Royal Castle not only collected the tolls but were also responsible for both the bridges.

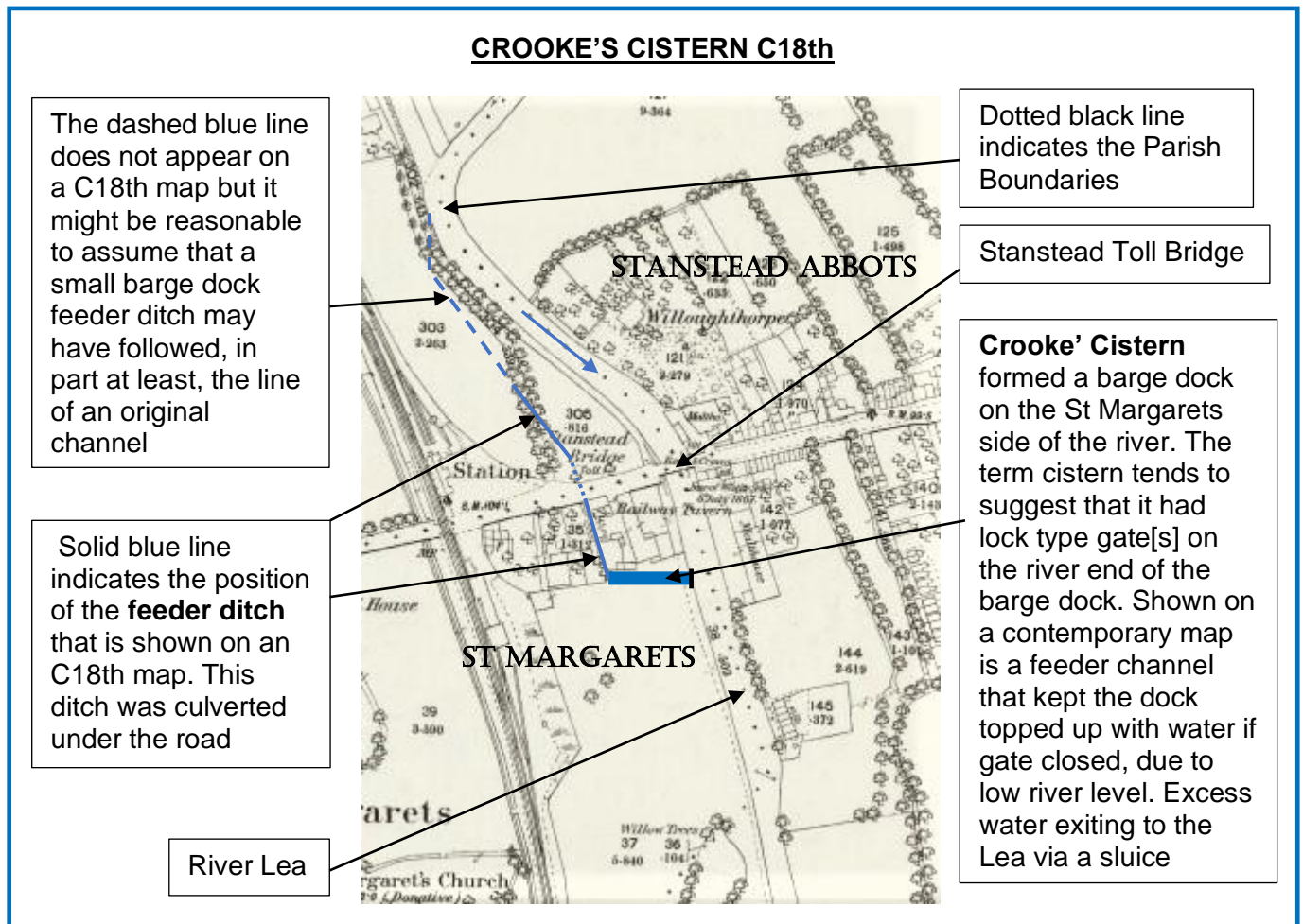
In the 1300s references are made in the Amwell Manorial Rolls to Thele written as Ele [Island] and seem to be referring to an Island near Thele Bridge. Islands like this were a common feature of the river Lea until their removal in later centuries to aid navigation. The entries in the Amwell Rolls are as one might expect about land that is in the Parish of Amwell. However, mention has been made earlier of land on this island that were part of the new Parish of Thele. This division of the island would have occurred when the new Parish of Thele was created out of land previously in the Parish of Amwell. The Amwell Manorial Rolls do suggest an Island called Thele existed by a bridge known as the Pontis de Thele, which we know today as Stanstead Bridge. It is noteworthy that in the 1200s the settlement at St. Margarets was sometimes referred to as the *Villa de Pontis Tegule* as well as *Villa de Pontis de Thele*, this persisting until the creation of the Manor of Thele later that century. Also of interest is that in the 1100s Stanstead and the Toll Bridge were referred to as the "Manurium de Stanstede et Pontis de Thele" or "Villa de Stanstede et Pontis de Thele" that is the "Manor or Town of Stanstead and Thele Bridge. The use of the name Stanstead Bridge first appears in the 1600s when references to the bridge at Thele disappear from the records.

**A POSSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ISLAND OF THELE**



The above map shows a feasible re-creation of the Island at Thele based on the limited historical information available. A key feature is a second bridge crossing the subsidiary channel which explains why both Pons de Thele and Pontem Tegule, both with variants, appear in C12th to C14th documents. As the toll bridge was known as the Pons de Thele the smaller bridge over the secondary channel would have been the Pontem Tegule. The Island was at some time removed and this is likely to have been part of a scheme to improve the navigation on the Lea. Bills passed in 1424 and 1430 in the reign of Henry IV focused firstly on the removal of impediments to navigation and to deepening the channel and the second Bill to ensure the navigation was maintained. As the name Pontem Tegule and its variants go out of use in the early 1400s, with the use of Pons de Thele continuing, the 1424 river changes are the most likely time for the island's removal. It may have been thought sensible, when the Island was removed, to reduce the secondary channel in width and depth with a fixed head weir at its upper end. This would have diverted excess river water away from passing under Thele Bridge thus reducing the risk of fast flowing water undermining the bridge foundations. A channel reduced to a small diversionary ditch could then have been culverted under the road, allowing the removal of the second bridge. In 1571 an ambitious navigation scheme was implemented that involved significant local changes to the river including re-routing part of the navigation channel near Easneye, upstream of Stanstead Abbots. The clearance under Thele Bridge is known to have been increased from 2 feet to at least 4 feet, by raising the bridge deck. A determined effort was made in the 1570s to remove the remaining Islands in the Lea so it is likely any residual second channel, if still existing, was removed at that time.

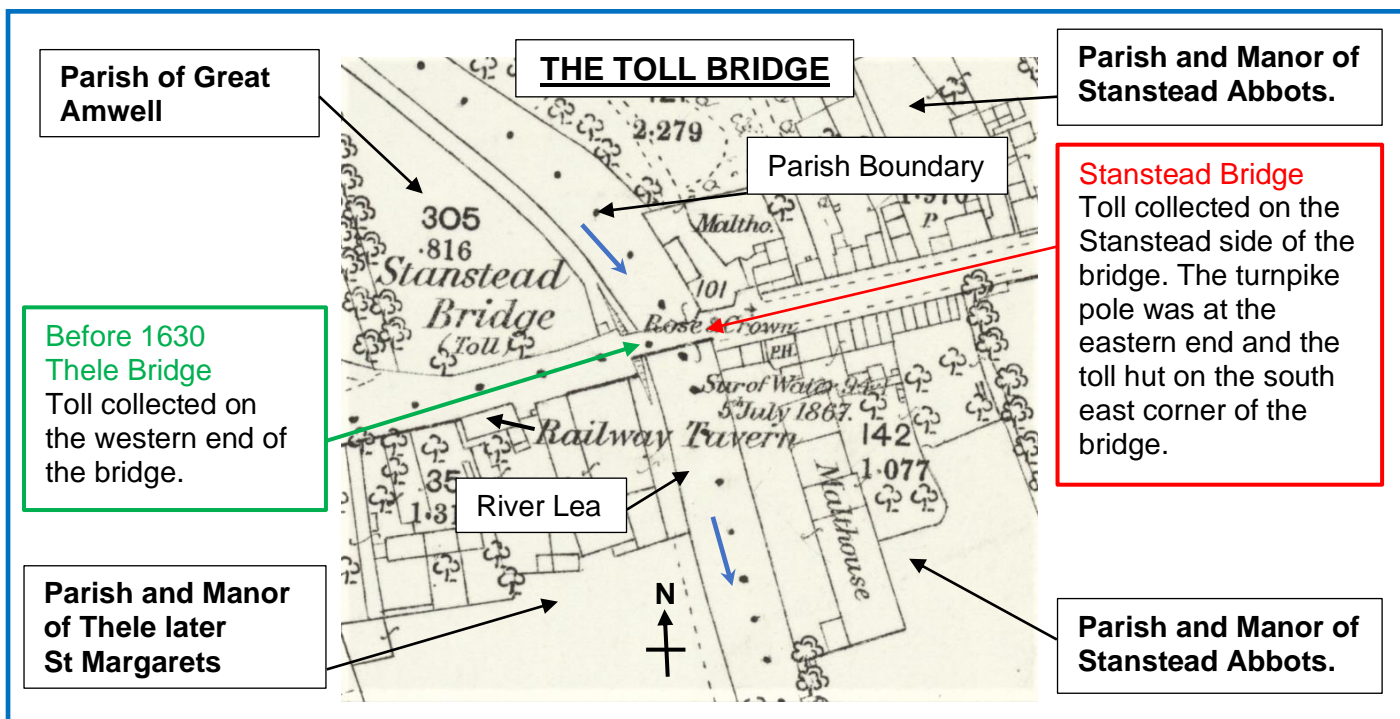
The Lord of The Manor of St. Margarets Theale between 1701 and 1707 was Japhet Crook who constructed a barge dock just downstream of the Toll Bridge. Interestingly, in doing so he may have been making use of a feeder ditch formed out of the remains of the diversionary ditch suggested above.



Crook's Cistern was still in existence in 1782 [*William Cowper estate map*] but seems to have gone by the tithe map survey of 1838. Perhaps of some significance is a dip in the main road, where the secondary channel may have been, historically saw a pool of standing water form. This occurring briefly after heavy rain due to the raised water table filling the drainage pipes under the road. Crook's Cistern was located about where the steps up from the towpath leads to the Riverside Gardens today. The land level for the Riverside Gardens having been raised considerably as part of the mid 1970s flood relief scheme.

Returning to Margaret de Lovetot in the late C13th, when we find that by 1294 her husband John had died and Margaret held the Manors of Hailey and Thele in her own right. This is when the idea of "Dame Margaret's Manor of Thele" is likely to have first come into common spoken use, if not in the written form. By 1307 she had married again to William de Goldington [*later Sir William*], who then became the Lord of the Manor. In 1316 William and Margaret formed a College of Priests at their church of St Marys at Thele. The population of the parish being so small and poor an alternative method of funding their church had become desirable. This College was made up of just a Warden and four Chaplains. They said daily prayers for those souls departed who had made a grant to the College in life, for prayers to be said to limit their time in purgatory. It is believed that the Chantry Chapel built for the purpose of chanting these prayers was dedicated to St Margaret in honour of Lady Margaret Goldington (*Lovetot*) (*de Burun*). It is about 1400 when we first find written references to the church as Ecclesia St. Margarete de Theyle along with Margaret Thele referring to the manor. Later in the 1500s Thele first begins to be referred to as Stanstede St. Margarets. In more modern times the word Thele has faded from use and the Parish name is either Stanstead St. Margarets or just simply St. Margarets. Thus, the last person born locally into the de Burun family to inherit both manors and for a time the Lady of the Manor in her own right is still remembered today in the name of the parish and the settlement. The church at St. Margarets still remains dedicated to St Mary although many people refer to it today as St. Margarets church.

In the 1620s developments at Hertford castle led to a significant change at the toll bridge over the river linking Stanstede Thele and Stansted Abbots. The Castle had been with the Crown for centuries albeit frequently leased out but was sold to the Salisbury family in 1627. Then on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1628 King Charles I by Letters Patent formally transferred Hertford Castle and nearly all of its other properties and incomes to Sir William Cecil the Second Earl of Salisbury. This transfer of ownership included the river bridges at Thele and Ware along with the rights to the toll money. Following the completion of the legal work for the transfer of ownership and the permissions to charge a toll, Stanstead Bridge was fully transferred to Sir William in 1630. After this the bridge was known as Stanstead Bridge rather than the bridge at Stanstead Thele / St Margarets. The toll booth and turnpike pole were located on the bridge itself which was of course the Salisbury family's property. The toll was collected on that half of the bridge within the parish of Stanstead. Of interest is that after the change of name to Stanstead Toll Bridge the road, we now call Stanstead Abbots High Street became for a time known as Toll Bridge Street.



An early C20th view of the river bridge looking upstream. The two cottages near the bridge were part of a group of buildings including the Rose and Crown public house [on the other side of the archway] and the riverside maltsheds all owned by the maltster. Mr William Kitt's passenger boats are seen moored alongside Stanstead Wharf awaiting warm summer days for excursions along the river.

In 1843 when the Hertford branch line railway was built there arose a dispute at Ware, concerning the diversion of the Cheshunt Turnpike Road along viaduct road, in order to avoid a level crossing over the turnpike. In the end, due to practical considerations, the railway was forced to purchase and rebuild Ware toll bridge at their own expense. After much haggling the Marquess of Salisbury accepted the payment of £4,500 for both Ware and Stanstead bridges. The Marquess remarkably managed to retain the ownership of the toll money collected at both bridges. A very good deal indeed as Ware bridge was described as neglected and dilapidated with Stanstead Bridge needing replacing just 40 years later.

In 1873 while the wooden bridge at Stanstead was being replaced by an iron one a matter was raised at a Hertfordshire Highways Board meeting. The following is a record of the issue concerning Stanstead Bridge as reported in the Hertford Mercury newspaper of the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1873.

*“Mr Garratt directed the notice of the Board to the erection of a toll house near St Margarets Bridge. He wished to know whether by the erection the rights of the Board were being encroached upon. The Toll House formerly stood in Stanstead Parish, but now it is being erected in St Margarets. The Surveyor was instructed to look into the boundary and ascertain whether there was an encroachment or not.”*

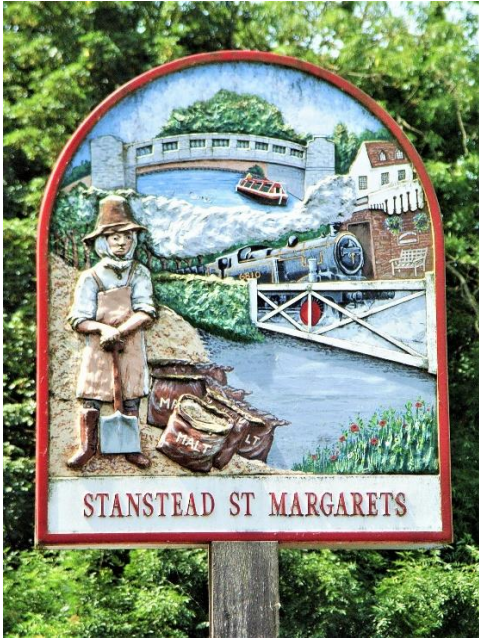
This was a diplomatically worded point and was really questioning the legal right to collect a toll other than as specified in the grant for toll collection as issued to the Salisbury family. The boundary mentioned referred to the property line between the bridge and the highway. The toll could only be levied on the bridge itself within that half of it in the Parish of Stanstead Abbots. Collecting the toll on the approaches to the bridge on the St Margarets / Amwell side would have been illegal as well as an encroachment on the highway. No subsequent details were published but it is known that once the new iron bridge was opened the toll continued to be collected at the Stanstead Abbots end of the bridge.



*A postcard view from the old iron bridge at Stanstead looking along the High Street, posted in 1906. The last turnpike pole had stood close to the brick pillar to the right at the end of the ironwork parapet. With the previous bridge a toll hut stood to the right-hand end of the bridge narrowing the roadway. The turnpike pole blocked the roadway between the far end of the hut and the north side of the bridge.*

In the 900 years or so a bridge has existed here it must have been replaced on quite a few occasions. One that was recorded was in the 1600s when old waterlogged timbers were found buried in the river bed. They were attributed at the time to being remains of Viking ships from the 894-5 incursion of the Danes up the Lea. However, there was no actual proof that they were in fact remnants of the Viking ships captured by King Alfred in 895. The iron bridge was built in 1873 and saw the toll removed in 1887. The iron bridge lasted only 52 years before being replaced by Hertfordshire County Council with a stronger concrete bridge in 1925. A well weathered plaque on the bridge still testifies to this fact today.

## STANSTEAD ABBOTS BRIDGE



### Village Sign

Stanstead St. Margarets has this fine village sign erected at the junction of Station Road and the Hoddesdon Road. It indicates the relatively recent revival of the use of Stanstead St. Margarets instead of simply St. Margarets

The historically important river Lea, the bridge and barges feature prominently at the top of the sign. At the bottom a maltings worker stands beside his malt sacks and is holding the characteristic wooden malt shovel.

The railway with its level crossing which arrived in 1843 is featured prominently in the centre of the colourful graphics.



An early 1900s view of the 1873 iron bridge over the river. The brick arch on the left of the view was likely built to limit the length and hence the cost of the iron girders used.



A view from the historic wharf on the Stanstead side of the river looking upstream towards the 1925 bridge. It shows how the towpath dips down towards the water level as it passes under the bridge to allow adequate headroom.



### Commemorative Plaque on the Bridge

This plaque is on the end pillar at the SW corner of the bridge facing the roadway. It states that;

“THIS BRIDGE WAS RECONSTRUCTED  
BY THE HERTS COUNTY COUNCIL  
IN THE YEAR 1925”

The incised text has become somewhat worn due to exposure to the weather.



*A view looking downstream from the bridge with to the left Stanstead riverside maltings and wharf. On the St Margarets side the Riverside Gardens once the site of a granary, maltings and a barge dock. [The gap in the towpath back wall marks the historic position of Crook's cistern.]*



*A 2011 view of the bridge showing the river being enjoyed by humans and ducks alike. The bridge provides a headroom clearance of nine feet six inches during normal river conditions.*

In the last 900 years the word Thele having endured for centuries has all but disappeared from use in St Margarets. However, Lady Margaret Goldington lives on in the name of Stanstead St. Margarets and St. Margarets. Perhaps surprisingly Stanstead Abbots has retained its reference to the Abbot of Waltham Abbey nearly 500 years after he relinquished his ownership of the manor on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1531. It is an interesting thought to ponder that a bridge has spanned the river here for a little over 920 years and it is only during the last 136 years that a toll has not been payable to pass over it.





**NAME CHANGES AND A SELECTION OF SPELLING VARIANTS**

THELE	[ <i>Tegule</i> ] BRIDGES [Thele]	STANSTEDE
1100s Thele [ <i>Part of the Manor of Hailey</i> ]	Toll Bridge at Thele built about 1100 and passes to the Crown	Manerium de Stanstede et Pontis de Thele
	Pontis de Thele Pons de Thele	Villa de Stanstede et Pontis de Thele
1200s Villa Pontis <i>Tegule</i> 1214 Villa Pontem de Thele	Pontis <i>Tegule</i> and variants first appear just after 1200 <i>Ponte de Tegule</i> 1200/1248/1255 <i>Pontem Tegule</i> 1248 & 1253	Abbey at Waltham acquires Stanstead by c1200
[Church of St Mary the Virgin In the Manor of Hailey] Villa de Pontis <i>Tegule</i> 1255 Villa de Pontis Thele 1260s By 1270s Manor of Thele created 1281 Market and Fair granted Manerium de Thele Manerium de Theele	Pontems de Tyulle 1248 Pontem de Thele 1252 Pontis de Thele 1255 <i>Pontegula</i> 1255 Pontis de Thele 1269 <i>Pont de Tegula</i> 1275 Pontems de Theele 1278 Pontem de Thele 1290s	Early 1200s sees 1 <sup>st</sup> references to Stanstede <u>Abbatis</u>
1300s 1316 Chantry Chapel dedication to <u>St Margaret in St Marys Church</u> [ <i>First found reference</i> ] Villa de Tiele Villa de Thele or Theele Manerium de Thele or Theele Thele, Theele or Tiele	<i>Pons Tegule</i> <i>Pontems Tegula</i> Pontems de Thele Pons de Thele	Stanstede Abbatis    Stansteede Abbatis
1400s Ecclesia St. Margarete de Theyle c1400 <u>Margarett</u> Thele or Theele <u>[Margarett appears but no reference to Saint in place name]</u>	Island and second bridge probably removed about 1425 Pons de Thele Pons de Theele	Stanstede Abbatis
1500s <i>Switch to English in mid 1530s</i> Margarthele 1535 Stanstede Theele or Thele 1540 Stansted Thele <u>Stansted St Margarete 1559</u> [ <i>Early use</i> ] <u>Seynt Margarett</u> Theyle c1560 [ <u>St. Margaret for place name</u> ] Stanstede Theyle 1560 Saint Mary Theale [ <i>The church</i> ]	<i>Stanstead passes to the Crown in 1531</i> Pons de Theele Pons de Theyle Pons de Theale Bridge at Thele <i>Stanstead passes into private hands 1577</i> Thele Bridge/ Bridge at Thele	Stanstede Abbatis  Stansted Abbots Stanstead Abbots
1600s Stansted Theale Stansted Thele Stansted St Margarete	Toll Bridge at Thele <i>Thele Toll Bridge alienated from the Crown 1628</i> <i>Stanstead Toll Bridge [Granted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Salisbury]</i>	Stansted or Stanstead Abbots
1700s Stansted (Thele or St Margarete) Stanthele and Stansted Theale	Stanstead Toll Bridge Stanstead Bridge	Stanstead Abbots [ <i>Early use</i> ] Stanstead Abbots [ <i>continues in use</i> ]
1800s Stansted St. Margarets [ <i>in general use</i> ] St. Margarets [ <i>in use</i> ] Stanstead St. Margarets	Iron Bridge built 1873 Bridge Toll removed 1887	Stanstead Abbots Stanstead Abbots [ <i>in limited use</i> ]
1900s St. Margarets [ <i>in general use</i> ] <i>Church remains as St. Marys</i> Stanstead St. Margarets [ <i>has a revival of use</i> ]	<i>Current Bridge opened 1925</i> Stanstead Bridge	Stanstead Abbots [ <i>use in decline</i> ] Stanstead Abbots [ <i>use rising</i> ]