

Turnpike Roads from Gloucester to Cheltenham and Tewkesbury

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The Minutes of the Cheltenham & Tewkesbury Turnpike Trust, studied at the Gloucestershire Records Office, form the basis of this article about the road (now the A38) from Gloucester via Tewkesbury to the county boundary and the roads used between Gloucester and Cheltenham (now the A40 and B4063). Use was made of the G.R.O.'s collection of historical maps of the county, and its other sources of information as well as the relevant Acts of Parliament. The Cheltenham Road, being more important, had more historical information about it than the Tewkesbury road, which had many route changes, consequently the two roads were treated differently.

In 1756 an Act, which was valid for 21 years, was passed which gave permission for a turnpike trust to be formed to repair and improve the roads leading from Gloucester towards Cheltenham and Tewkesbury. The money for this purpose was put forward by the trustees, who recouped their investment from the tolls charged to the users of the roads.

The materials used for maintaining the roads were Limestone (usually from Chosen Hill) Slag and Bristol or Chepstow stone. Limestone, unfortunately, had the effect of slaking under wear. Slag was damaging to horses' hooves, and also to their riders if they had the misfortune to fall off, so the Bristol and Chepstow stone came into popular use in preference to the other materials. From the trust's accounts it was certainly used in 1787-8, and in 1801 the trustees resolved to place an advertisement in the Gloucester Journal for 500 tons of Bristol or Chepstow stone, required at 5/-d per ton, to be delivered at Gloucester Quay within one month.

The tolls payable depended on the number of horses or other animals travelling on the road. Under the Act of 1778 (which enlarged the term and powers of the previous Act) horses were charged at 1^d each, except when they were drawing a carriage, when they were charged at 3^d. Cattle were charged at 10^d per score, and calves, pigs and sheep at 5^d per score. As on most other turnpike roads, wide wheeled waggons were generally charged less than those with narrow wheels, as the latter tended to cut into the road surface, while the wide wheeled waggons compressed the road and made it firmer. There were also certain exemptions from toll, including the local movement of animals and farm waggons, and waggons carrying road building materials. Under the Act, these materials could be cut from Churchdown Hill or any waste ground by the parish surveyors, providing that they remade any damage done.

The tolls were collected at turnpikes which were originally operated by the trustees themselves, but were later auctioned for periods of three years at a time. The turnpike keeper then lived on the produce of the tolls and paid the trustees the sum for which it had been auctioned, in the form of a quarterly rent.

The Gloucester to Cheltenham road, ran from the end of Gallows Lane (now called Denmark Road) at Wotton, to Staverton Bridge, following the line of the present A40. At Staverton Bridge it turned northwards and followed the line of the present B4063 to its junction with the road from Coombe Hill to Cheltenham, at a place then known as Bedlam. Later on, this route from Staverton was duplicated when an Act of 1809 gave permission for another turnpike trust to construct a more direct road into the town. A further alteration occurred in 1821, when Thomas Holland undertook to build a new road from St. Margaret's Hospital

to the junction at Wotton, for the sum of £570. Previously the road had taken a line behind the Chapel of St. Mary Magdalan, where it formed a hollow way, the course of which can still be seen today.

The Minutes of the meetings of the trustees dated from 1st June 1778, the first meeting after the Act of that year. In 1779 it was recorded that the treasurer of the Cheltenham Road was ordered to pay £10 to James Waite for 2,000 tiles and their haulage to the new turnpike house being built at Wotton, and in 1786 a Mr Cooke was requested to make an estimate for the complete repair of the road between the Blacksmith's shop at Bedlam, and Wotton Post. This was to be laid with a bed of stone from Chosen Hill and covered with such hard materials as were necessary. Another report, just over a week later, declared that the trustees required the sum of £2,000 to be advanced to them at 5% interest to put the road into perfect repair. This was in connection with a road from Cheltenham to Frogmill via Dowdeswell, being built as part of a new route to London to avoid the steep hills at Crickley and Chatcombe.

Some idea of the road conditions prevailing at that time can be gained from William Marshall's Rural Economy of Gloucestershire. In it he writes :

'The roads of the vale are shamefully kept. The Parish roads mostly lie in their natural flat state, with the ditches on either side of them full of water to the brim. The toll roads are raised (generally much too high) but even on the sides of these I have seen full ditches. It would, in principle, be equally wise to set a sugar loaf in water, by way of preserving it, as to suffer water to stand on the sides of roads, whose foundations are of an earthly nature.

For so long as they remain in immediate contact with water, they never can acquire the requisite degree of firmness. The foundation is ever a quagmire; and the super-structure, if not made unnecessarily strong; is always liable to be pressed into it. Hence the deep ditch-like ruts which are commonly seen in roads of this description. The road between Gloucester and Cheltenham (now become one of the most public roads in the island) is scarcely fit for the meanest of their Majesties' subjects to travel on, and pay for; and is much less suitable for their Majesties themselves, and their amiable family, to trust their own persons upon.'

William Marshall's book was published in 1789, the year after the visit of George III to Cheltenham. Following this famous event, the subsequent growth of the town into a fashionable resort gave the road greater importance, although the condition of the road could not have improved much, for in 1809 the Postmaster General temporarily withdrew the mail coaches from this route, and in 1811, in a letter to the trustees of the new road between Staverton and Cheltenham, he threatened to do it again or to take legal action to enforce the road's repair. In 1817, however, there is evidence of some progress being made, as it is recorded in the minute book that all bridges drains and water-courses on the road between Gloucester and Bedlam were to be surveyed and that the Justices of the Peace were to be consulted on the ruinous state of the bridges at Wotton, Elmbridge, Brickington (now Brickhampton), Staverton and Uckington. The following year the trustees accepted a tender of £397 for rebuilding the bridge at Brickhampton. This was to be made with three arches to correspond with the bridge carrying the newly completed Gloucester and Cheltenham horse Railway. In 1826 also, improvements were planned, as it was stated that the sum of £2,000 was

required for widening and altering the road in various places, widening the bridges and making a footpath.

In 1787 the trustees ordered a weighing engine to be erected near the turnpike house at Wotton. This was allowed under an Act of 1741, so that all waggons carrying an over-weight load could be charged extra. A difficulty arose over this in 1808 when it was reported that carriages carrying timber had wheels so far apart that they could not be weighed.

In 1793 a lamp was provided at the turnpike and an allowance of 18s. per year for oil was made to the keeper, and eighteen months later an order was made that he should be paid 13s. per week to compensate for the fact that the mail coach, which had started running that year, did not have to pay any toll.

A problem occurred in 1800 over the leasing of the tolls. The new turnpike keeper, George Boyce of Churchdown, was unable to pay his rent and after several threats of legal action, he and his surety resigned from their contract, owing £155. 9s. 0d. After this the turnpike was only let for one year at a time with three months rent paid in advance. The Tewkesbury road soon followed suit.

A proposal was made in 1808 to construct a new and more direct road from Staverton Bridge to Cheltenham. A committee was set up to study the plans and after it had reported, a vote was taken which resulted in the scheme being rejected. It was then taken up by another trust, who had an Act granted to them in 1809, and the road was built some time after the completion of the horse railway in 1811, although the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Trust continued to administer the old road to Bedlam. Their area of responsibility was slightly enlarged, however, in 1811, when took over part of the road through Wotton.

There is evidence of people avoiding toll gates, in 1821, when the trustees ordered a chain to be set across Pound Lane leading out of the Cheltenham road into the Cirencester road, and again in 1834, when the toll bar that had been erected at Bedlam the year before, was removed to a position on the Gloucester side of a lane leading into the turnpike road.

In 1822, due to the realignment of the approach into Gloucester of both the Tewkesbury and the Cheltenham roads, the sites of the turnpike and weighing machines were to be changed. The new position as Kingsholm was to be at or near the pound and that at Wotton was to be near the foot of the hill. The trustees accepted a tender of £168 from a Mr. Hutchinson to erect two new double weighing machines, and one of £409 from John Baylis for building the new machine houses, turnpike houses and turnpike gates.

In 1824 the machine house at Wotton was let separately for a year to George Newmarch for £50, and the following year the machine houses at both Kingsholm and Wotton were let for £40, but in 1826 there was a representation made to the trustees that the produce of the weighing machines alone was not enough to meet their expenses, so it was resolved that from January 1827 both machines were to be let to the Gloucester and Cheltenham Railway Company who undertook to look after and manage them at their own expense and to send an annual account of the penalties they received and pay such penalties into the funds of the trust. This arrangement continued until 1834. Incidentally, George Newmarch was associated with the Gloucester and Cheltenham Railway and in 1811, his brother Charles was clerk both to this Company and to the trustees of the new road.

The first half of the 19th century saw the development of the steam carriage and the establishment of a number of public services throughout the country. Gloucester was no exception. In 1831 Sir Charles Dance opened a service between Gloucester and Cheltenham, using

a carriage designed by the Cornish engineer Goldsowrthy Gurney. An article published in the Worcester Herald of 3rd March, 1831 read :

'The steam carriage commenced running between Cheltenham and Gloucester on Monday last and has since continued to perform the journey regularly, starting punctually from the Commissioner's Yard, Cheltenham at 10 and 2 o'clock, and leaving the Spread Eagle, Gloucester at 12 and 4. The carriage contains altogether twelve persons and has been filled with passengers, including a great many ladies. All the passengers who have travelled by it seem much pleased and agree that the motion is remarkably smooth, regular and agreeable. It runs the distance in about fifty minutes, and we are happy to add that no accident has occurred of any description.'

The enterprise was begun on 21st February and although apparently quite a success, the turnpike trustees took violent exception to it, probably fearing that it would drive away the horse-drawn traffic and would damage the road surface, due to its weight. In the minutes of their meeting held on 25th June 1831, they declared that the carriage was a public nuisance and they resolved that if the service had not ceased by 6th August, they would commence a legal action against the operators. On the 22nd June, however, the vehicle encountered a large quantity of loose stones and rocks strewn over the road near Staverton Bridge, apparently placed there by the trustees, and on its third journey the rear axle was broken. This appeared to be the finish of the service, for in a report made to the trustees on 6th August it was stated that it had been discontinued.

As far as administration was concerned the Gloucester to Tewkesbury road was divided into two parts. From Gloucester to Norton Mill (S0866249), the road was administered by the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Trust, and north of Norton Mill the road came under the

Tewkesbury Trust. In 1807 there was a difference in the actual road level where the trust met at Norton. The Cheltenham & Tewkesbury Trust had to send a proposal to the Tewkesbury Trust to rectify the situation. At the time of the first Tewkesbury Trust Act in 1756, the two usual routes to Tewkesbury from Gloucester, were a lower road via Sandhurst, Wainlode and Lower Lode, and the road via Norton, Coombe Hill and Deerhurst Walton. Probably due to the riverside route's vulnerability to flooding, the second route became more important. The route was not included in the Tewkesbury Trust's 1818 Act, and Bryant's map of 1824 shows that the lower road had by then been abandoned as a route to Tewkesbury. This lower road was originally turnpiked in 1726 and the other route was turnpiked in 1764, north of Norton Mill.

Before 1823, when Worcester Street was built (at a cost of £1140). the road from Gloucester to Tewkesbury was via Hare Lane and then to Kingsholm, where the lower road branched off (Sandhurst Lane). Apart from the realignments at Leigh and Norton mentioned below, the high road from Kingsholm to Coombe Hill took the same route in 1777 as it does today. In 1836 there was a realignment at Norton. This straightened out an angular route across low ground which can still be traced (S0861243) to the east of Norton Church. Just after the road crossed the River Chelt and the Leigh Brook, it went slightly north of the present route, until it met the Leigh Church Road (S0873257) and turned right to meet the present route (which was in use by 1815). In the middle 1920's the old road was by-passed at two places in Norton, (S0858240 & S0865247).

At Coombe Hill, before 1815, the road turned left down the road leading to the canal, and after about a hundred yards turned right to rejoin the recently improved present road by Walton Grange Farm (S0890273). At one time, certainly before 1777, the road south

of Coombe Hill went below the ridge on which the present road runs, past Evington House (S0885270).

Before 1794 the road turned west into Deerhurst Walton, and then turned north into the minor road running parallel to the present road. After it crossed what is now the B4213, the Haw Bridge road, it met the present route at the summit of Salter's Hill (S0892293). From here the course of the old road was much as it is today, although possibly it went through Southwick at some time, to rejoin the present route near Holm Hospital, but by 1824 the road was certainly on its present alignment. In 1777 the road went past the west side of the Gupshill Inn, south of Tewkesbury, although by 1824 the road had been re-routed to the east of the Inn. The old route behind the Inn still exists and can be easily seen.

North of Tewkesbury the road crosses the Avon via King John's Bridge to the junction with the road to the Mythe Bridge. A turnpike is marked (S0891337) just below this junction on Bryant's map of 1826. As far as Shuthonger, the route in 1777 is as it is today except that the gradient of the Mythe Hill was improved in 1825. By 1801 the road from Shuthonger was as it is today, but in 1781 the route was via the lane past Twynning Church to Twynning Green (S0896369), where it turned left and headed north-west to Brockeridge Common. This road still exists as a minor road, and can be seen joining the Motorway complex at the southern roundabout (S0890373). The limit of the Tewkesbury Trust was at Ryall, where there was a turnpike in 1830 (S0868405).

The turnpike house at the south end of Tewkesbury was at Holm. In 1830 it was at the Lower Lode Lane junction (S0888322) but by 1839 had been moved to its present site opposite Holm Hospital (S0889320).

Latch pikes (minor turnpikes) were erected at various times at Longford Lane, Gloucester, and at Tredington near the Odessa Inn. The original turnpike at the Gloucester end had a weighing machine installed in 1791, which was replaced in 1800. This was erected by William Jarrett who was paid £35, on condition that he kept it in repair for seven years. The new turnpike (S0835196) built in 1822, was a few hundred yards north of the old one, and can be seen today.

Other visible remains of the turnpike roads are the milestones. Four had survived from the Cheltenham & Tewkesbury Trust, the first at Longford had lost its plate. This milestone has however disappeared in recent road improvements. The other three have plates, these are at Twigworth (S0850225), and at Norton, (S0856239 & S0865248). These milestones were erected in 1789. On the later road between Staverton Bridge and Cheltenham, now the A40, three milestones survive: Benhall (S0923219), Golden Valley (S0908219 & S0893224), the last mentioned retaining its plate. Tewkesbury Trust milestones can be seen at the Mythe Hill (S0890341) and one (with a plate) at Stratford (S0883386).

The tolls charged by the Cheltenham & Tewkesbury Trust and the Tewkesbury Trust seem to have been about the same.

In 1818 the Tewkesbury Trust charged the following tolls:

For every horse, mule etc. drawing a carriage	6 ^d
For every horse, mule etc. not drawing	2 ^d
Droves of oxen, cows or neat cattle	10 ^d per score.
Droves of calves, hogs, sheep or lambs	5 ^d per score.

On Sundays the charge was increased by half. (The Kingsholm pike at Gloucester charged double). The tolls at the Kingsholm pike were the same as those for the Cheltenham road.

An indication of the relative volume of traffic on the two roads administered by the Cheltenham & Tewkesbury Trust is given by an entry in the minute book in November 1825, when it was resolved that any surplus money arising on the Cheltenham road would be applied to the repair of the Tewkesbury road. A study of the rents paid per annum on the two turnpikes also show how the Cheltenham road gained in importance over the Tewkesbury road.

	<u>Tewkesbury Road</u>	<u>Cheltenham road</u>
1778	£154	£162
1791	£284	£340
1804	£492	£370
1810	£635	£566
1825	£865	£1,590
1833	£815	£1,325
1834/36	£775	£1,385

No record of the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Trust's minutes exists after 1842, but presumably the trust continued in operation until their duties were taken over by local government in 1871.