

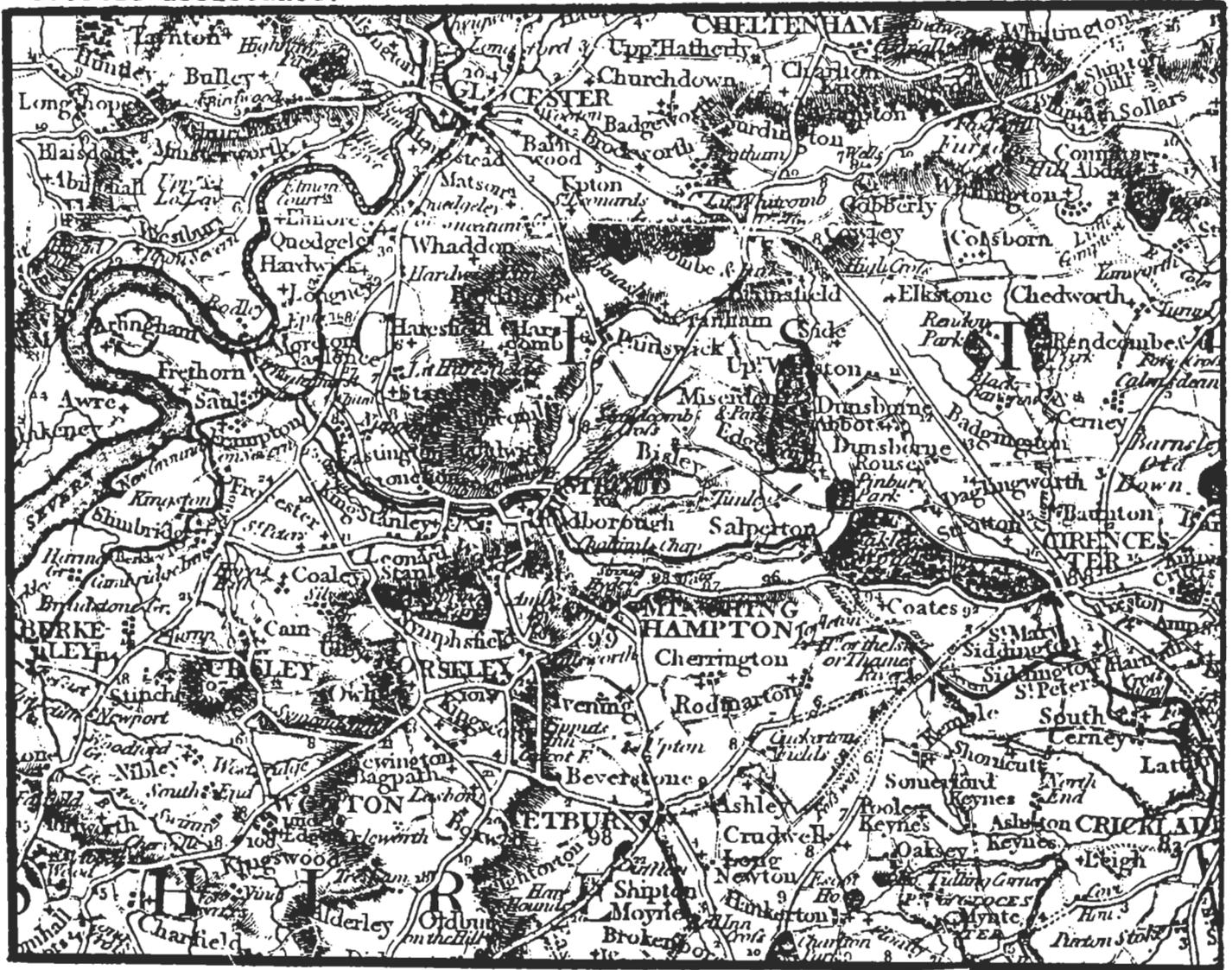
NETWORK

Turnpike Roads in the Stroudwater Area in the Eighteenth Century.

Christopher Cox

Introduction

The sixteenth century saw two great reforms in local administration, which lasted for nearly three centuries. One was for the maintenance of the parish poor, with two overseers being annually elected; the other was for the upkeep of the roads in the parish, two highway surveyors being likewise chosen. [1] Each parish was responsible for its own poor and its own roads, and the cost was borne by the parish with no outside assistance.



from Cary's 'Mail & Mail Coach Routes' 1816.

By the end of the eighteenth century the burden of the parish poor rate had become intolerably heavy for many parishes, hence the great Poor Law Reform of 1834. [2] As for roads, traffic on through routes had broken road surfaces beyond the capacity of many parishes to repair, in some cases before the end of the seventeenth century. The solution to this latter problem was sought by charging tolls on the road user. 'Ordinary' parish roads, of course, still continued.

The first turnpike Act was in 1663; the earliest in Gloucestershire in 1697, for the road (through more than one parish) from the city to the tops of Birdlip and Crickley hills; the one was for the route to Cirencester and beyond, the other led to Oxford. [3]

This short paper will look at the turnpike system in the Stroudwater area, that is the hills and valleys of the river Frome, which on breaching the Cotswold scarp between Stroud and Stonehouse flows across the Vale to the Severn at Framilode.

'Old' Turnpikes.

Fig 1 shows many roads put under toll, mainly in the late 1720s and the 1740s-1750s. In the earlier period there developed a spider's web of radial roads into Gloucester and other larger market centres. [4] In later years the emphasis was on the long-distance routes over the Cotswolds with convergences at such towns as Tetbury and Cirencester.

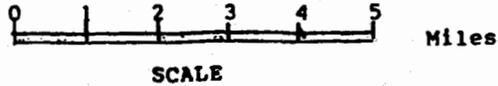
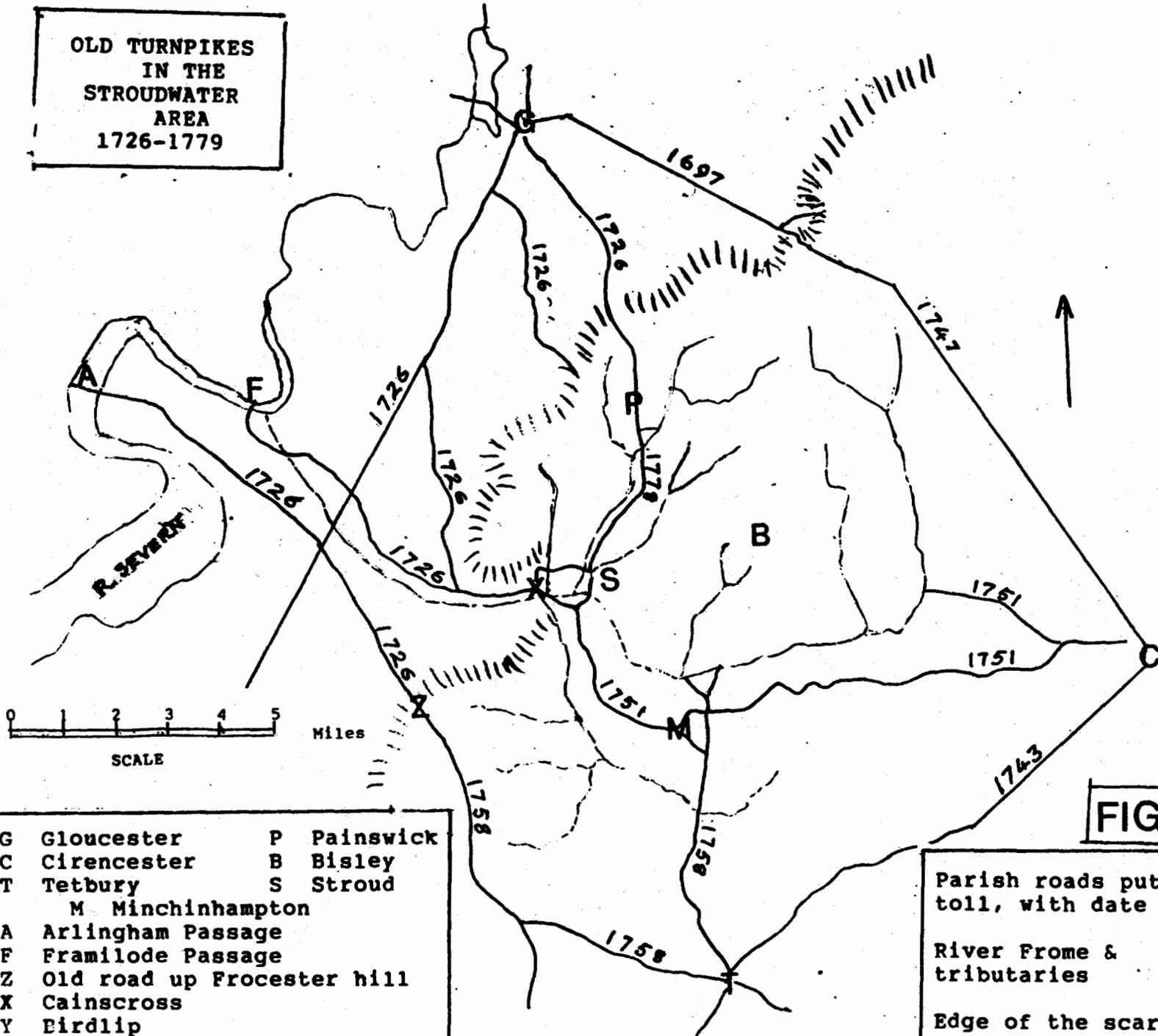
In 1726 the road south from Gloucester was put under toll as far as Stone, where it met the road north from Bristol also turnpiked at about this time. [5] But included in the 1726 Act was a different group - cross-roads from the Severn to the hills, that is to such towns as Stroud, Dursley, Wotton-under-Edge and Sodbury, at the foot of the scarp.

The 'local' road here was the Stroud Turnpike, starting from Framilode Passage, crossing the A38 at the Whitminster Inn, then passing through Westend to Stonehouse and Ebley for Cainscross from where it took the present Stratford Road past Paganhill to Badbrook at the lowest point of the town of Stroud. [6] Though put under toll it was still a set of linked parish roads, with gates at the Whitminster Inn, Cainscross (scene of a riot in 1734) and at the junction with Wick Street near Beeches Green. [7]

Figure 1 also shows other parish roads put under toll before 1780. Such roads of course continued beyond the end of turnpike authority, as for example the ancient route from Cirencester along the northern edge of the Park, crossing the Frome at what was then called The Gulph, and skirting Bisley (where it crossed the road from Tetbury to Birdlip), thence crossing the Slad valley to reach Painswick. [8] Likewise the road north from Tetbury was turnpiked only as far as Chalford Bottom, [9]

**OLD TURNPIKES
IN THE
STROUDWATER
AREA
1726-1779**

16



G	Gloucester	P	Painswick
C	Cirencester	B	Bisley
T	Tetbury	S	Stroud
	M	Minchinhampton	
A	Arlingham Passage		
F	Framilode Passage		
Z	Old road up Frocester hill		
X	Cainscross		
Y	Eirdlip		

FIG I

Parish roads put under toll, with date of Act

River Frome & tributaries

Edge of the scarp

and the road from Gloucester to Painswick only as far as 'The Camps', the Iron Age hillfort above Painswick. [10]

The sister road to the Stroud Turnpike left Severnside at the Newnham/Arlingham Passage and breasted the scarp by a now-disused track up Frocester Hill to emerge by the top gates of Woodchester Park close to the Coaley Peak Country Park.[11] From here the route led on to Bath and to Tetbury, but was not turnpiked for another thirty years.[12]

The 1726 Act was so vague as to which roads were in fact put under toll that later Acts had to be passed to provide more precise information. Hence the differences in date between some given here and those in the map in the GRO Signal pamphlet on Turnpikes. Wick Street from Painswick to Stroud was not officially put under toll until 1778, while the road from Gloucester to (eventually) Stroud climbed the scarp slope from Brookthorpe by a now-disused hollow-way to emerge at the north end of Huddingknoll Common near Podgwell Barn.[13]

'New' Turnpike.

But between 1800 and 1825 the road system in the Stroudwater area was radically altered with a complete set of 'new' roads: there was a precursor in 1780, the Nailsworth Trust, whose example however was not followed for twenty years. Map 2, despite its inadequacies of scale and minimal indication of relief, show that these 'new' roads were 'valley' roads, running on or near the valley bottoms, where previously there had been no lateral roads, finally climbing up to the ridge tops by well-graded sweeping curves to join the older plateau routes.

The two clearest examples are: the Nailsworth road from Dudbridge to Tiltups End, and the road from Stroud to Chalford, then up Cowcombe hill. The former opened up a new route to Bath; the latter joined the 'Great' road to Cirencester and places east. Previously, roads had ascended/descended the ridge-ends or scarp face by un-deviating 'vertical' hill-side tracks, as may be seen in the existing road up Rodborough Hill, or the abandoned Nailsworth 'Ladder'. The exception is the old zig-zag route up Frocester hill, but this is thought to be of Roman alignment.[15]

The Nailsworth and Chalford roads also clearly served the mills as well as forming part of a long-distance route. The former is now part of the A46, the latter of the A419.

Other new roads placed less emphasis on the mills. That from Stroud through Painswick to Cheltenham seems to have been designed more as an improvement on the route from Cheltenham to Bath, the existing road being that from Leckhampton on to Birdlip and round the rim of the scarp to Painswick, [16] while

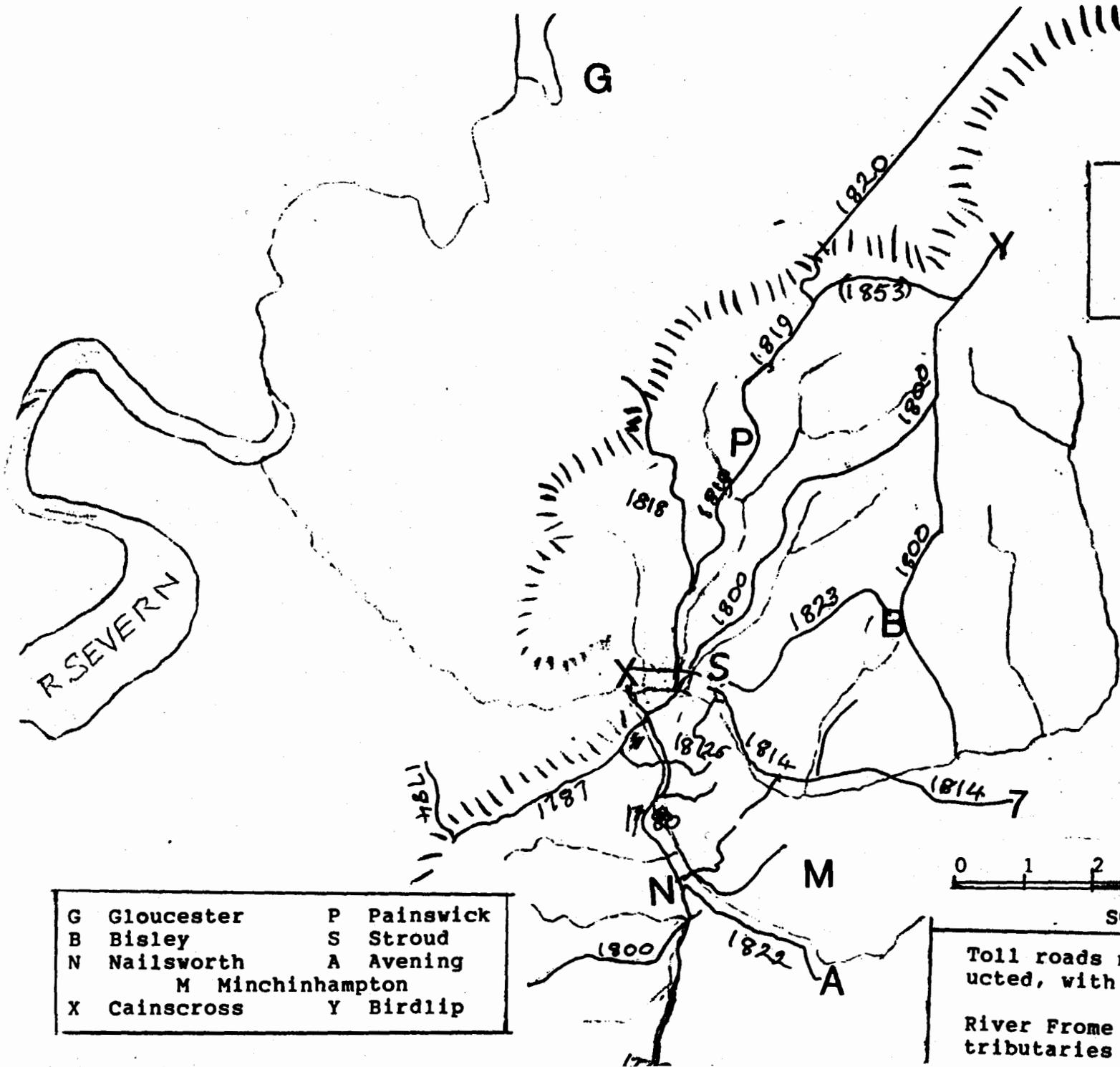
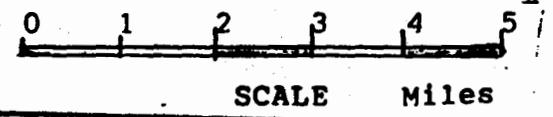


FIG 2

**NEW TURNPIKES
IN THE
STROUDWATER
AREA
1800-1825**

G	Gloucester	P	Painswick
B	Bisley	S	Stroud
N	Nailsworth	A	Avening
	M	M	Minchinhampton
X	Cainscross	Y	Birdlip



Toll roads newly constructed, with date of Act

River Frome & tributaries

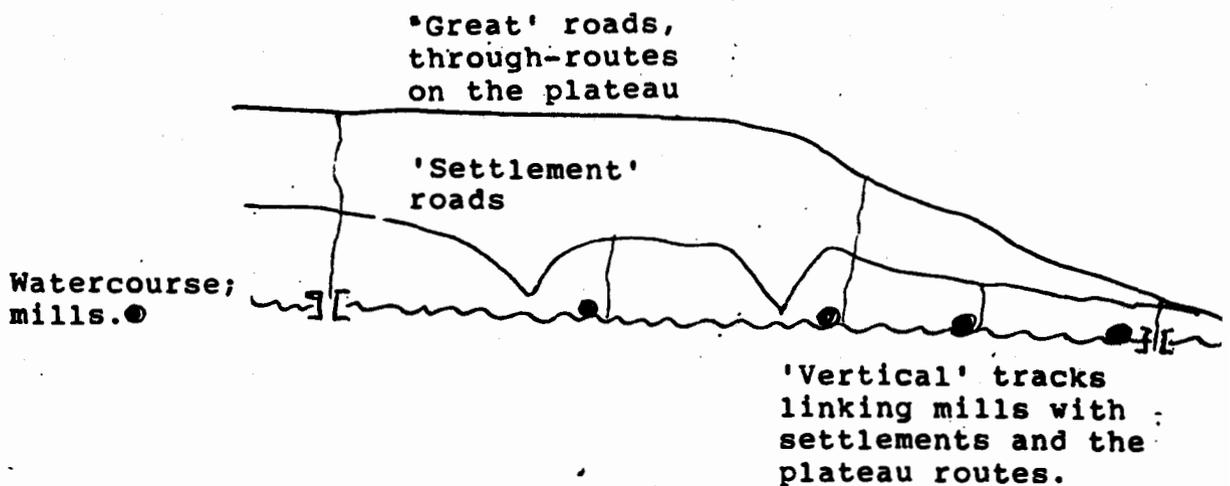
the new Slad valley road of 1800, which it supplanted, had been expressly built for the same purpose. [17] The latter Act also included the first public road across the foot of Rodborough hill, from Wallbridge to Lightpill, whereas the Nailsworth turnpike had begun at Dudbridge and had no direct link with Stroud.[18]

Three-tiered System.

During the eighteenth century a three-tiered system of communication developed in the Stroudwater area. The 'Great' roads followed the plateau or ridges as long-distance routes. Local roads connected settlement with settlement along the hillsides, usually just above the spring line but descending to near valley floor where tributary streams had cut steep-sided combs. 'Vertical' tracks led up from these local roads to the through-routes, and down to the mills on the streams. Examples are clear in the hillside roads, from Dudbridge through the Woodchesters to Nailsworth, or on the remaining stretches of the old parish road to Chalford.[19] Good examples of links with the mills may be seen along the Painswick valley, while abandoned 'vertical' tracks include that from Bowbridge past The Bannuts to Rodborough Common, or from Ham Mill upwards, as also the now-vanished Castle Pitch from Lower Street in Stroud down to the site of Capel's mill by the railway viaduct.[20]

FIG 3

Diagram to show pattern of communications in the first half of the 18th century in the Stroudwater area.



Why 1800-1825?

Except for the early Nailsworth Trust of 1780, the new valley roads of the Stroud area were all built between 1800 and 1825.[21] There is a fair coincidence during this quarter century with the change from a cottage-based industry to a factory system, while the period of the twenty-year long French wars brought trade and increased output - and the expectation of continuing prosperity.[22]

It seems probable that the shift of manufacturing processes from cottages to mills meant that the clothiers had now to bear the full cost of transport, whereas previously the out-workers had fetched their raw materials, and carried back their finished work to the clothiers' establishments. Thus there was now an inducement for the masters to have improved communications to and from their mills, and easier roads uphill to the plateau routes for their markets. Wartime profits provided capital and expectations sought credit, hence the quarter-century of new road construction, not to mention the extraordinary outburst of mill extensions or building.[23] But by 1825 there was little scope for new roads, and too that year a year of great financial difficulty. After this, there was little significant change in the local road pattern....until the middle of the twentieth century.

But there was one enormous change in the method of transport.

The Iron Horse.

The railway came down the main valley of the Frome in the mid-1840s.[24] It is often thought that the advent of the locomotive railway brought about the immediate and complete collapse of the turnpike system. This is true only of the long-distance main road services, including coaching firms, as on the London-Holyhead road. Here inns went out of business and stage-coaching firms vanished almost overnight. But railway stations still had to be supplied with goods, and goods off-loaded and despatched.[25] Thus some shorter turnpikes did well, as for example that part of the Berkeley-Frocester-Cainscross District of Roads that served, for example, Stonehouse Station;[26] but trusts in direct competition for traffic with railways fared badly, as did that of the Chalford road. But in any case turnpike trusts had been in very great financial difficulties well before railways were built, and numerous Parliamentary enquiries had tried to find solutions to the enormous problem of debt. [27] None such were found acceptable, though the cold winds of economic reality eventually compelled the trusts to face facts. It was not until the mid 1870s that the trusts in the Stroud area were finally dispiked. It should not be forgotten, however, that parish roads, maintained out of parish rates, existed alongside the turnpike system, and the two systems were very much mingled.

One local thinker, David Ricardo the younger of Gatcombe Park, tried in the early 1850s to rationalise the confused and unsatisfactory mixture of turnpike and parish roads. His scheme seems eminently reasonable, but the idea of amalgamating the two types of road-systems under one combined highway rate met with determined and vociferous (and successful) opposition from retailers, labourers, land-owners and the trusts themselves, in protests as vehement and venomous as those against the 1989 Poll tax.[28] Here was an interesting example of local democracy at work: Ricardo had to abandon his Stroud Roads bill in 1854. But ironically very shortly afterwards, Parliament introduced many of Ricardo's proposals (taken as many of them were from previous enquiries), though it was to be many years before a more-or-less permanent solution was hammered out for the maintenance of roads.[29]

The Horseless Carriage.

Before 1800 the town of Stroud was off-centre; if any place qualified as a node of communications it would have been Cainscross. In the 1770s Samuel rudder had this to say:

"within the parish there is a market-town of the same name, situated on the ridge of a declivity, near the confluence of the river From and the Slade-water... but there is not much travelling through it, because of the steep hills that encompass it almost on every side except to the westward." [30]

The new roads from the bottoms to the level top of the plateau had gradients more suitable for coaches and waggons than the former 'vertical' tracks; and today the motor car ignores all but the steepest slopes. Changes brought about by the motor car need not be discussed here, though we may just note the widening of roads, the straightening of bends, the newer methods of surfacing roads and of course the constant, unremitting (and increasing) demand for more and bigger thoroughfares.

JUGGERNAUT

Nowadays virtually nothing shall stand in the way of the motor car. Just one local example may suffice.

To offset increasing congestion and delay on the roads from the west into Stroud, a new by-pass is to be constructed using the abandoned track of the former Midland Railway branch-line from near Ryeford (east of Stonehouse) up to the lower end of Stroud. this will demolish an ancient bridge, perhaps the oldest in these parts, recorded in the late twelfth century and

16½	Inchbrook	24½
15½	Woodchester	26
	to Dursley 7½ m.	
14½	* Rodborough	27
	To Minchin Hampton } 3½ m.	
	To Cirencester 13½ m. }	
	to Berkeley 1½ m.	
	to Gloucester, by Cain's Cross, 12 m.	
	Cross the river Stroud, and the Thames and Severn canal.	
13½	* STROUD	28
	to Gloucester, by Painswick, 9½ m., by Whaddon, 9 m.	
	Bath to * GLOUCESTER	
	37 m.	
	To Cirencester 12½ m.	
11½	To Painswick Slad	29½
7½	Division of the Road	34

so likely to be older.[31] This bridge carried the track from the eastern parts of the county to the vale of the Severn and also the route along the rim of the scarp from south to north, over the river Frome. It has, at the time of writing, but a short life left.

It is surely to be much regretted that the ruthlessness of present traffic should so obliterate the evidence of traffic of the past.

Notes to Figures.

Figure 1 (a) three long-distance routes define 18th century communications in the Stroudwater area: Cirencester to Gloucester, Cirencester to Tetbury and west to the Old Bath Road from Frocester Hill and the road from Gloucester south to Stone and Bristol.

(b) The road north from Tetbury was turnpiked only as far as Chalford Bottom, probably as a market link with that area of cloth manufacture.

(c) Not all the 1726 roads were mended at once; there seems to have been little or no available money to repair, for example, the road through Tuffley to the top of the scarp above Brookthorpe.

(d) Note the roads from the Severn to the Hills.

(e) Stroud was off-centre.

Figure 2 (a) The new turnpike roads are 'valley' roads.

(b) Note the very late date for an Act for the old scarp rim route to Birdlip for Cheltenham. Baker's 1819/20 map for the new road shows this road emerging at Leckhampton and the Preliminary Drawings for the OS 1st edition depict milestones from The Castles on the road from Painswick to Gloucester along this old route.

(c) The new road to Cheltenham after descending from the scarp is dead straight: it is not Roman!

(d) Stroud has become a route centre.

Figure 3 Before enclosure, roads over the plateau were 'rights of way', rather than defined in width.

References:

- 1 After several exploratory Acts, the definitive law was in 43/44 E 1, c.2 of 1601.
- 2 Poor Law Amendment Act 4/5 W iv c.76, 1834.
- 3 9 W iii c.18, 1697.
- 4 Atlas of Industrializing Britain, ed. Langton J & Morris R.J, Methuen 1986, pp 80-81.
Also Pawson E., Transport & Economy, the turnpike roads of eighteenth century Britain, Academic Press, 1977.
- 5 12 G i c.24, 1726/6.
- 6 Cox C, "Milestones of the Stroud district", Trans BGAS 83 1964.
- 7 Glos. Notes & Queries iv, 1842, 493.
- 8 25 G ii c.13, 1751/2, and Preliminary Drawings for OS 1 in 1st edition, dating between 1811 and 1816.
- 9 31 G ii c.65, 1758.
- 10 19 G ii c.18 of 1746. A later Act gave two alternative routes from Painswick to Stroud: the familiar Wick Street along the left flank of the valley above the spring line, and a road along the crest of Wickridge hill, probably in fact seldom used.
- 11 The tourist information office at the Country Park is the altered remains of a former toll house: 19 G iii c.118 of 1779 refers to the 'house lately used as a Toll Gate (which) stands at the Top of Frocester Hill.' The present road up that hill dates from the early 1780s.

- 12 31 G ii c.65 of 1758.
- 13 Isaac Taylor's map of Gloucestershire, 1771, is reproduced (reduced in scale) by the BGAS in 1961.
- 14 See Cox C, "Building the Nailsworth Turnpike", GSIA for 1979. Bryant's map of 1824 gives a fairly complete [?] of the system in the early 1820s, with several toll bars indicated.
- 15 Margary I.G. Roman Roads in Britain (Phoenix, 1955) gives the zigzag track up Frocester Hill as Roman. See also Keys A.E., "A History of Eastington", Stroud News & Journal, 1953 and 1964.
- 16 59 G ii c.42, 1819, and 1 G iv c.16, 1820.
- 17 39/40 G iii c.43, 1800/01.
- 18 According to the Victoria County History of Gloucestershire volume 11, a temporary link was constructed across the foot of Rodborough hill between the Nailsworth turnpike and the branch of the Cirencester Turnpike leading to Wallbridge on the occasion of the the visit of George III in 1788.
- 19 Some residents of Stroud may remember that Bowbridge Lane continued over the present road to Chalford (the 1814/15) turnpike before turning up slope along what is now the road to Gunhouse.
- 20 Among the many road alterations is a by-pass from Wallbridge to the London Road east of Stroud over the sites of Capel's mill, and incidentally completely blocking the Thames & Severn Canal at that point.
- 21 For a fairly full account of the turnpike roads round Stroud (but not, alas, without numerous errors) see Cox C, The development & decline of the turnpike system...1725-1875, copies of which are in the Gloucester Records Office and also in the Public Library, Local History section.
- 22 Mann, J de la, The Cloth Industry in the West of England from 1640 to 1880, Ox. Clar. 1971.
- 23 See Walrond L.F.W. The Wool Trade in the Cotswolds, a New Study, ed C. & A.M. Hadfield, David & Charles, 1973. Also The Mills of Gloucestershire, by Mills S.J & Reimer P, Barracuda Books 1989.
- 24 VCH Glos 11, 103, A Sutton has published several books on local railways etc, notably the old photo books by S.J. Gardiner & L.C. Padin.

- 25 Jackman W.T., The Development of Transportation in Modern England. OUP 1916/1964.
- 26 For remarks on the Cainscross section of the Berkeley Roads group, see G Coll J.F. 9.193 and 9.82 etc.
- 27 British Parliamentary Papers, Journal of the House of Commons, have reports of several enquiries on the problem of turnpikes, notably in BPP 1840, xxvii and 1954-55, xlv. Some county abstracts are also in the GRO.
- 28 A full account of the Stroud roads bill affair appeared in the Stroud Free Press & Trade Reporter for the West of England Clothing Districts in 1853 and 1854 (now with Stroud News & Journal). See also Cox C., Ricardo & Rebecca at Stroud in the Glos Local History bulletin 44 for 1981. Figures for the income and revenue of the local turnpikes, and also the rates and expenditure on local parish roads, were given for the year ending 25 March 1851 by Ricardo in the Stroud Free Press, in his campaign.
- 29 While Ricardo's Bill collapsed, partly because bond holders did not wish to lose their interest, we may note that almost immediately afterwards Robert Clark Paul, Junior, clerk to the Tetbury-Minchinhampton-Bisley road sent out a letter containing this passage...

'I am also to inform you that 'under 14/15 V c.38, the rate of interest would be reduced to 2%, and that bond holders 'will certainly be giving up nothing that you have any chance of ever receiving.'

G Coll JF 9.74.

- 30 Rudder S, A New History of Gloucestershire, 1779, A Sutton reprint 1977.
- 31 The Victoria County History (Volume II) says (p219) that a bridge was recorded here in the late twelfth century: it is therefore likely to have been even older. It was seriously damaged by a flood in 1750 and rebuilt at the expense of the three parishes meeting at this spot - Stonehouse, Stroud and Rodborough (the county later paid for the rebuilding).

The illustration at the end of the text is from Paterson's Roads by Edward Mogg, 1826 edition, p 361. The Stroud News & Journal published a photo of the bridge in the issue of 30 August 1990.