

THE GREAT ROAD TO LONDON FROM TEWKESBURY

by Anthony Dale

In 1721 the inhabitants of Tewkesbury decided to do something about their Great Road to London and attempted to get an Act of Parliament passed to this end but were unsuccessful¹. The Turnpike was to be from Tewkesbury to the top of Stanway Hill at Stumps Cross and what is now known less romantically as the A438 and B4077. Five years later in 1726, their efforts were crowned with success when 'An Act for the Turnpike . . . from Tewkesbury to a place called Coscomb Gate on the top of Stanway Hill in the Great Road to London being 10 miles or thereabouts' was passed and the setting up of a Turnpike Trust and the establishment of tollkeepers, gates and cottages took place.² The 10 mile milestone from Tewkesbury is in fact at Newtown, Toddington crossroads and any tollhouse there has disappeared without trace but there is a 12th milestone at Stumps Cross on the old tollhouse, and as the Act specifically says 'on the top of Stanway Hill' the 'or thereabouts' is correct.

This Act lapsed after 21 years but was revived in 1747³ and again by another Act in 1755.⁴ This latter Act was the main local political issue of the 1754 Local General Election campaign. In 1826 improvements were necessary and yet another Act was passed.⁵ From Stumps Cross at the top of Stanway Hill the road travels up and down over the Cotswolds to Stow-on-the-Wold but this portion was not turnpiked until 1796. The line of the road seems to have changed drastically in this portion and as it travelled where there was good drainage and plenty of stone for repairs turnpiking may have not been necessary. Despite the obvious advantages of turnpikes they were often opposed and in 1734 several men were hanged at Gloucester for destroying turnpikes near Tewkesbury.⁶

Tollhouses

Most of the tollhouses have gone and the few that remain have been altered drastically. The first gate out of Tewkesbury was somewhere in Barton Street slightly to the west of Chance Street and the next at the corner of the lane to Walton Cardiff. Ashchurch and Aston Cross had gates (the latter was known as Isabel's Elm). There are references to a gate at Alderton in 1833 and 1834 but no others until Toddington where the Winchcombe to Evesham road crosses at what is now known as the Black Sheds. The tollhouses here went over 100 years ago when on 24 October 1872 the Trustees of the Tewkesbury Turnpike Trust sold 'The Toddington Tollhouse and Garden' to Lord Sudeley for £55.⁷ The road then goes on to the Stumps Cross Tollgate which does not feature in the sales of tolls in the 1830s and 40s and therefore must have been small or even belonged to the Stow Trust. There are no signs of any tollgates between here and Stow.

The *Tewkesbury Yearly Register* in its autumn numbers each year gave the prices paid at auction for the tolls of the four gates within its jurisdiction and in its October issues from 1831 published the debt outstanding of the original £10,000 mortgage raised to set up the Trust; this was paid off by 1845 and thereafter the Trust made a profit. (See appendix). It did, of course, administer other turnpikes than the London Road.

The auction prices for the London Road indicate that traffic decreased rapidly beyond Aston Cross and that after 1845 investors were only prepared to pay two-thirds of the prices paid in 1840 due to the coming of the Railways.

Alterations and Improvements

Alterations to the line of the road have been and continue to be made but comparison of modern O.S. maps with the reprints of the 1st edition 1" and the map printed by Rudder in 1779 and Patterson's Road Book of 1794 provide clues. Unfortunately neither Ogilvy in his road books nor Atkyns in his State of Gloucestershire show any roads.

The first place of interest after leaving Tewkesbury Town is Walton House and the defunct spa on the right (south) side. A road called Spa Gardens perpetuates this short lived spa and there is now a petrol station near it dispensing quite a different liquid. Walton House itself was at one time the home of the Cartland family and is now a hostel for handicapped adults.

Before the road reaches Ashchurch there is now the M5 with its large roundabout and a railway bridge over the Cheltenham to Birmingham railway which constitutes the first real hazard, being narrow. It was built in 1845 for coaches slower than those using it now, for which it has been widened recently. It is still a blind spot and a bottleneck as it is much used by traffic from the motorway to Evesham and district and by the industrial estate recently built thereabouts. In 1777 a public subscription raised over £300 for the repair of the road at Ashchurch.

Next to the Aston Cross (Isabel's Elm) the crossroads have been widened and at the Teddington Hands crossroads with the Cheltenham to Evesham road, extensive realignment has taken place and a large island was made in 1978 as this was a most dangerous black spot for accidents. The old finger post here was resited but the ancient 'Tibble Stone' was left in place.

We then come to Little Washbourne and all that remains of the village is the church, one farm and the Hobnails Inn. Both this inn and the Frampton Court, a little further on, are shown on the 1st edition 1" O.S. map. From here we pass the turnings to Alderton and Gretton until we arrive at the Black Sheds on the crossroads where the Toddington Tollgate stood, beyond this the road bends to the right and goes through a cutting. It did not always do so nor was the cutting, at one time spanned by a footbridge, always along the line of the road. There is a deed dated 1863⁸ executed between Lord Sudeley and the Tewkesbury Turnpike Trustees entitled "Deed of exchange on the diversion and improvement of a part of the turnpike through Lord Sudeley's Estate at Toddington".

Part of the deed reads "In 1860 Lord Sudeley lately deceased proposed to improve at his own expense the turnpike by straightening it and providing a bridge over the road and over the brook." The bridge that he built over the river Isbourne was known as the Captain's Bridge but this proved too narrow for modern traffic and was widened in 1980. The line of the original road went to the north of the present road and there are some trees behind the lodge to Toddington Manor which may indicate its line and the sharp corners near the school probably brought it back on to the old road.

We next come to the Toddington roundabout where the A438 ends and the B4077 begins and the A46 crosses them. There is then another narrow railway bridge, newer than the Ashchurch one, as it is not shown on the 1st edition O.S. Soon after this there is Stanway on the left or north side, with its house, barn and church. At the crossroads of the Stanway to Didbrook road there is a War Memorial with lettering by Eric Gill, at what is locally known as The Cockpit. The road from Stanway to Didbrook may have been further to the east originally along the line of the Cotswold Way which crosses near Stanway Post Office, and before we come to the collection of houses and farms known as Hill Stanway. We have now arrived at the Cotswold Escarpment and Stanway Hill, at the bottom of which is Stanway Old Hill, a footpath, going straight over the

hill very steeply and is most likely the line of the old drove road from Tewkesbury to Stow-on-the-Wold used by cattle drovers on their way to London. From Hill Stanway at 104m above sea level to the top at 260m the road more than doubles its height and it was necessary for the growing wheeled traffic of the 17th century to take the easier gradient of the Coscomb Inlier. At the top at Stumps Cross and the old Salt Way of Campden Lane is the last tollhouse in the Tewkesbury Trust. From internal evidence in the 1826 Act it would seem that the Stow Turnpike met the Tewkesbury Turnpike area.

A real high road

The road from here travels through high Cotswold country. First the great Coscomb Quarry which has and still does provide excellent building stone to those who can afford it and then on downhill to the hamlet of Ford. In medieval times there was a mill here on the river Windrush which rises a mile or so to the north and is a very different stream from its appearance at Bourton-on-the-Water, Burford or Witney. In earlier times it must have been much bigger. There was a Chapel of Ease but by 1712 it had been made into an alehouse and later put to other uses and is now unidentifiable. The Plough Inn is very old and was there in the days of the Chapel and must have been a welcome sight to travellers over the bleak and windy wolds.

All along the road are old quarries, some very small which may well have been used for road metal but others, such as that at Fiddler's Green, where the Temple Guiting road joins, are quite extensive and are still worked.

From here the road rises again to nearly 300m above sea level where it crosses Buckle Street, another very ancient pre-Roman track now a road, and then downhill to Rook's Pool and the Hinckwick road. This Pool, though small and even drying out in hot summers, is very old and is considered to have been there for up to 1,000 years. Near it are a number of barrows.

From here Rudder's *History* and Paterson's *Roadbook* both show the road travelling to the north of the present road and going to the north of Condicote and Upper Swell. It may have joined the Broadway to Stow road somewhere near or even followed an old track from Rook's Pool barrows to Eubury Camp and the henge monument close to Condicote or even the old drove road from Stanway Old Hill.

However, the present road follows an almost straight line, with only one farm on it near Condicote Lane (a Roman Road) until it reaches Upper Swell and the very narrow bridge over the river Dikler, then up the hill to join the Broadway to Stow road a few metres short of the Fosse Way.

Prices paid at auction for Tolls on Tewkesbury to Stumps Cross Turnpike 1830-1849

Tollhouses	1830	1831	1832	1833	1834	1835	1836	1837	1838	1839
Ashchurch & Aston	£575	£585	£442	£475	£470	£535	£555	£550	£645	£590
Toddington	£212	£218	£216	-	-	£182	£190	£174	£184	£198
Toddington & Alderton	-	-	-	-	-	£215	£172	-	-	-

Tollhouses	1840	1841	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849
Ashchurch & Aston	£505	£665	£580	£635	£635	£454	£364	£384	£378	£374
Toddington	£198	£204	£228	£236	£241	£188	£142	£142	£138	£168
Toddington & Alderton	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

References

General
V.C.H. Gloucestershire Vols VI & VIII
Atkins – *Past and Present State of Gloucestershire*
Rudder – *History of Gloucestershire*
Paterson – *Road Book 1794*
1" O.S. Map 1st Ed. reprint David & Charles 1969
Tewkesbury Yearly Register 1830 – 1849

Particular
1 V.C.H. Glos. Vol. VIII p 116
2 12 Geo 1 c18 G.R.O. RF 302-23
3 20 Geo 2
4 29 Geo 2 c51
5 7 Geo 4 c78
6 Bennett *History of Tewkesbury* p 278, 1830
7 GRO D2311/T29
8 GRO D2311/T28

Extracts from *Tewkesbury Yearly Register*
Debt/Profit of Tewkesbury Turnpike Trust from October Issues. The Trust was responsible for all turnpikes, not only the London Road.

Year	£	Year	£
1826	Mortgage for £10,000 raised		
1831	5262. 8. 4.	1841	2335.18. 5.
1832	4347. 7. 1.	1842	1760. 0. 3.
1833	4280.17. 3.	1843	1173.18. 5.
1834	N/A	1844	500. 0. 0.
1835	4675. 7. 8.		
1836	4546.13. 9.	1845	757.18. 9.
1837	4559. 0. 5.	1846	993.11. 0.
1838	3881. 0. 2.	1847	731. 5. 6.
1839	3395.16. 1.	1848	695.12. 5.
1840	3292. 9. 5.	1849	656. 9. 2.

} Profit

N.B.
1831 There was a note £1308.8.1 paid off in the last year
1835 £300.13.7 spent on land £781.9.1. on improvements
1836 £1653.8.3. spent on improvements, £730.1.0. subscribed to improve Old Avon Bridge.
1843 Receipts much reduced by opening of B'ham to Glos. Rly.
1845 to 1849 are profits earned.