

The Bramley and Rudgwick Turnpike Trust

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In the year 1894 William Welch, a master at the Surrey County School (later Cranleigh School) and guardian of the poor of Cranleigh Parish, wrote an article to commemorate the jubilee of the village's long serving rector the Rev John Henry Sapte in which he attempted to impart to his readers a flavour of the village of Cranleigh 50 years previously. To this end he took his readers on an imaginary journey around the village discussing the various sights to be seen in 1846. He began his journey, '... at the obelisk, which was erected in 1796 to commemorate the opening of the turnpike road from Guildford to Horsham,'¹ (fig 1).

Welch's words appear to have reached but a small audience, but were taken up and amplified in 1930 by Samuel Mann in his abbreviated history of the village. In his description of the parish roads he declared that, '... his Highness the Prince Regent, when travelling from Windsor Castle to his pavilion at Brighton, found the district impassable. Consequently the Turnpike Trustees had soon to get to work with the making of a turnpike road from Guildford to Horsham, which was completed in the year 1794 . . . To commemorate the opening of this road, an obelisk was built by Jacob Ellery, the local doctor . . .'² From that time, the story of the turnpike and the obelisk has moved from the realms of supposition to become 'historical fact.'

The road's origins and therefore presumably those of the obelisk are in fact more recent, growing out of a meeting called in Cranleigh in 1817 to consider, '... the expediency of applying to parliament for an act for making a turnpike.'³ That same year a variety of routes between Bramley and Shalford in Surrey, and Rudgwick and Horsham in Sussex were surveyed⁴ with a view to constructing a turnpike road 25ft wide through Cranleigh, which would cut off the dog-leg formed by the junction of a turnpike constructed in 1757 from Dapdune Wharf in Guildford to Newbridge near Billingshurst in Sussex,⁵ and a more recent road built from this at Alfold Crossways to the Black Horse Inn at Horsham in 1809.⁶ The eventual choice of route (the shortest and least expensive) could, it was estimated, be constructed for £4830 18s, to run from Rooks Hill, south of Bramley, to Bucks Green in Rudgwick, a distance of 9 miles 3 furlongs and 26 poles, utilizing the existing road line throughout.⁷

The bill's assent was obtained on the 23 May 1818, granting permission for the construction of a turnpike road, '... from the village of Bramley . . . passing through the parishes of Wonersh, Cranley and Ewhurst to the parish of Rudgwick in Sussex, forming a communication with the road from Brighton to London which would be a great advantage and convenience to the neighbourhood.'⁸ The road would be financed by local subscribers who had already promised some £3850 towards its construction.⁹ These were in the main local farmers and gentlemen who evidently considered that a metalled road would benefit them, in the former case commercially and in the latter socially. Curiously, although the road would be only 9 miles long, its administration was to be divided into 2 districts, the first of which would oversee the road through Bramley and Wonersh while the second would be responsible for the remainder through Cranleigh and Ewhurst.

Construction began on the road and gates (and presumably the collection of tolls) that same year, but as time went by the project ran up against a number of problems. For some reason the trustees of the first division were unable or unwilling to begin construction of the northern section of the road and it seems likely that the 2¼ miles through Bramley and Wonersh were never built, the road effectively beginning at the toll-gate at Gaston near the Cranleigh bounds and continuing through to the second gate in Cranleigh



Fig 1 Cranleigh's obelisk. Gillian, the author's daughter, is 126cm tall, making the obelisk approximately 8 m (26.4 ft) high

common, out through Ellens Green to the Cox Green gate and terminating at the Guildford-Horsham turnpike at Rudgwick. Behind this setback appears to lie a story of insufficient funds, the treasurer of the second division being instructed in May 1822 to bale out the first division with £173 16s 2d, money which the second division could ill afford to lose, and to make over other sums, '... from time to time if such a mode is agreeable ...'¹⁰ It seems though that problems with the funding of the first division should not have been unexpected for prior to the bill's assent Gabriel Ryde, one of the second division trustees, was moved to remark; 'I hope the commissioner will not object to the mode of raising the money in Wonersh.'¹¹

There was also a problem in converting subscribers' promises into hard cash, the clerk writing repeatedly to subscribers in 1820, in particular to John Elmes and John Ellery that their outstanding subscriptions were urgently required and if not forthcoming, measures would be taken which might be 'of an unpleasant nature.'¹² Elmes was a yeoman farmer with 165 acres at High Upfold farm in the west of the parish while Ellery was the village doctor and surgeon, whose house, Broadoak, faced Lucks Green and the later site of the obelisk.

But fundamental to the question of the turnpike's hoped-for prosperity was the problem of geology. The road ran for its entire length over the Weald Clay, a formation that William Cobbett ran into at Ewhurst in 1823 declaring, "Now, mind, this is the real Weald, where the clay is bottomless; where there is no stone of any sort underneath ..."¹³ Since there was nothing to offer a firm foundation upon which to lay the road, ample supplies of stone and gravel were required, not only during its initial construction but throughout its life, and in fact this became a constant drain on the road's meagre finances throughout its short history.¹⁴ While expenditure on other local turnpikes was decreasing between 1834 and 1850 that of the Bramley and Rudgwick road was steadily mounting.¹⁵ The treasurer was moved to complain in 1822 that, '... the expenditure is large ... it seems to me that the carriage of the stones is charged highly.'¹⁶ Regrettably the paucity of stone and gravel in the Weald Clay and the difficulty of transporting it to the road resulted in a high price so that at times the trustees were reduced to laying bundles of faggots on the road in their stead.

The road's finances signally failed to grow for within 3 years of its opening the treasurer was concerned that, '... we seem to be going on badly as there seems no hope of getting out of debt with a reduced toll.'¹⁷ It was perhaps in an attempt to remedy this situation that the trustees planned in late 1825 to extend the line of the road and to construct a branch from Cranleigh common to the Guildford-Newbridge road at Smithbrook but it seems that the idea proved to be 'much more than our funds are able to bear' and was not proceeded with.¹⁸ Traffic through the gates was at best desultory, as a week's traffic at Cox Green gate in May 1831 illustrates:¹⁹

'Sunday — 1 cart 9d
 Monday — 1 horse 2d, 65 cows 1/7, 2 horse teams 2/-, 1 cart 6d
 Tuesday — 6 horses 1/-, 3 horse teams 1/6, 4 carts 2/-, 6 cows 3d
 Wednesday — 4 horses 8d, 2 horse teams 1/-, 2 carts 1/-
 Thursday — 3 horses 6d, 3 horse teams 1/6, 2 gigs 1/-, 9 sheep 2d
 Friday — 3 horses 1/6, 3 carts 1/6
 Saturday — 3 carts 1/6, 2 horse teams 1/-, 5 horses 10d'

These low toll receipts boded ill for the road's finances but the construction of a new turnpike road in 1830 should have improved the road's fortunes. In that year a bill to continue the powers of the Horsham and Guildford Turnpike Trust included a clause granting permission to construct '... a branch or new road ... from a certain place at or near Slaughterford bridge towards Rowhook ... and from thence by Farzon Gate to join the road from Rudgwick to Guildford terminating at or near a place called Ellens Green,'²⁰ fig 2. This road offered a shorter route from the Dorking-Horsham road to

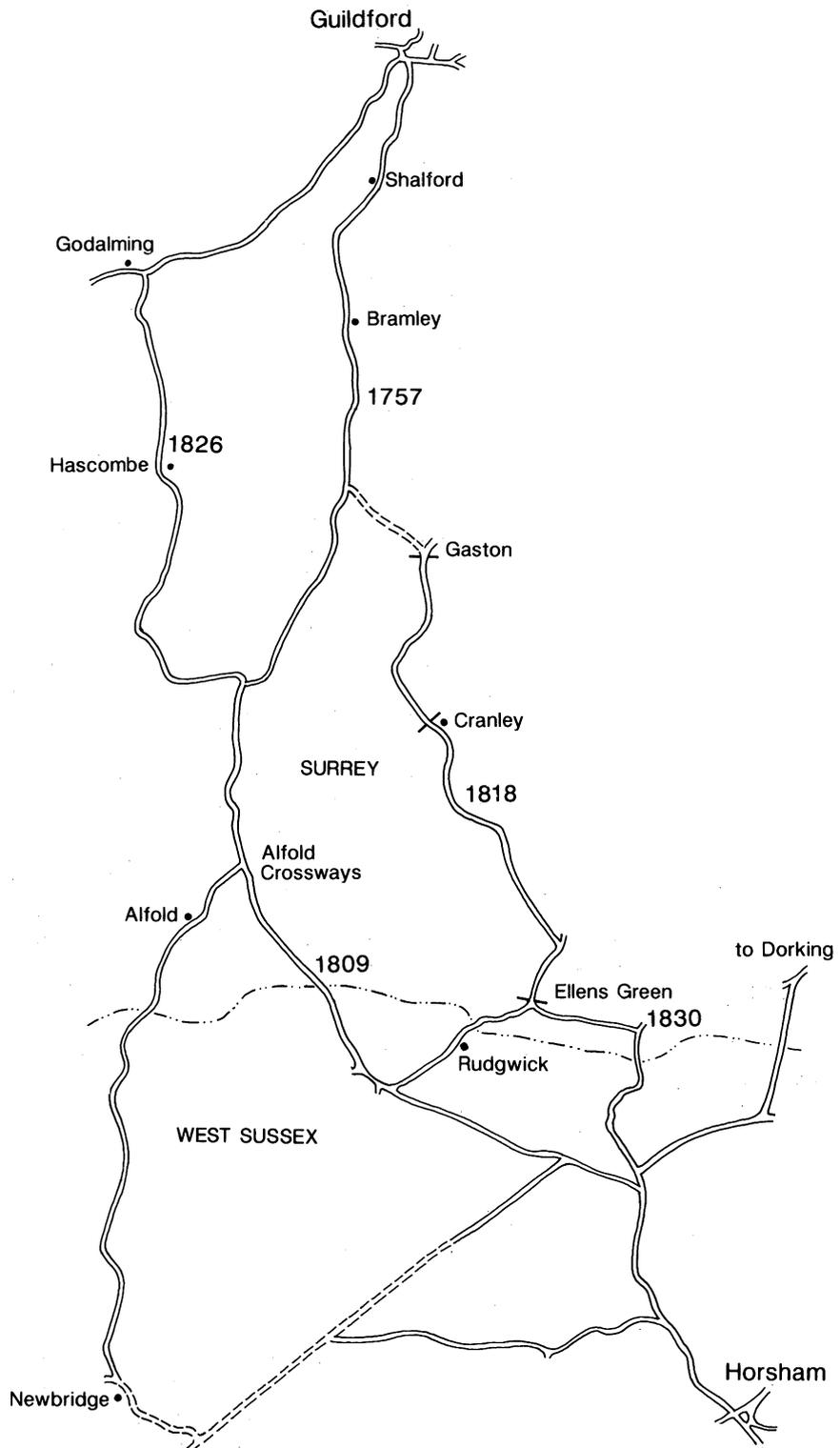


Fig 2 Turnpike roads in SW Surrey and W Sussex, 1850

Tolls v Expenditure

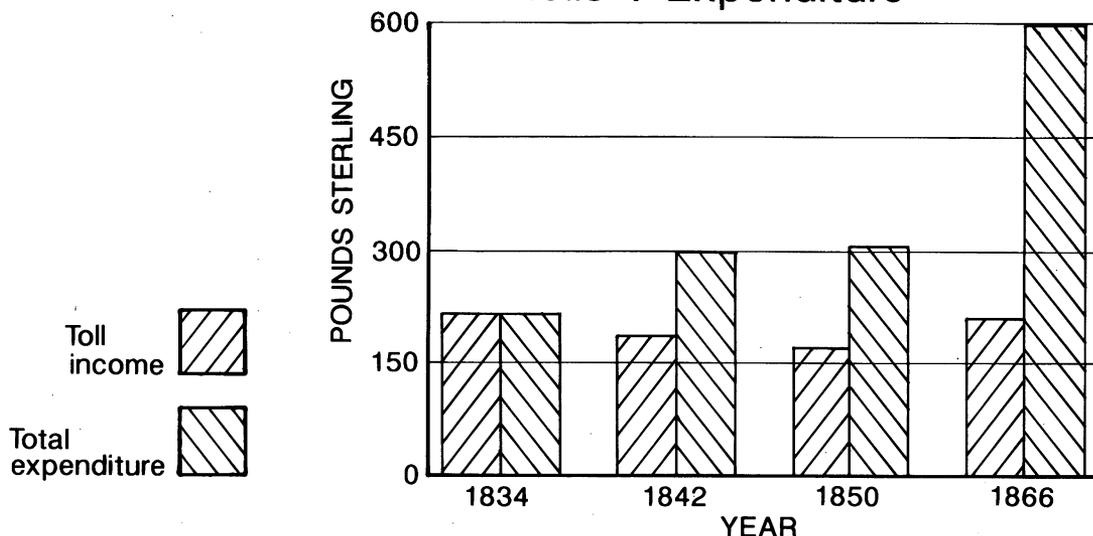


Table 1 Toll income v total expenditure: Bramley and Rudgwick Turnpike

Guildford (by utilizing the Bramley and Rudgwick road) and must have been good news for the latter road, but the lack of toll receipts from the period prior to the new road's construction makes accurate assessment impossible.

By 1852 the Secretary of State responsible for overseeing the administration of the turnpike trusts had concluded that their heyday was well and truly over, eclipsed by the efficiency and reliability of the emerging railway network which had hit toll receipts hard, to the extent that '... the [turnpike] trustees have been compelled, in numerous instances either to abandon the repair of the roads to the parishes, or to discontinue the payment of interest of the debt.'²¹

Not that the Bramley and Rudgwick road had ever been profitable. Any chance of that had been strangled at birth for only £3500 of the estimated requirement of £4830 was ever acquired. From 1834 toll income apparently never matched, let alone exceeded, total expenditure, the trust relying substantially on the parish highway rate to remain solvent. The returns of the trust accounts spell out the stark difficulties that had to be faced (table 1). In 1834 expenditure exceeded toll income by just 1% but by 1842 this gap had leapt to 67%. Within 8 years expenditure had outstripped toll receipts by 83% and by 1866, after the opening of the railway the gap was a massive 202%. Of the £3500 borrowed in 1818 to finance the road, not a penny was ever repaid, the Secretary of State calculating in 1852 that on current toll receipts it would take 49 years and 10 months to pay off the trust's debts which, including unpaid interest at 5% per annum, totalled £8156 13s 4d in 1850.²²

The road's *coup de grâce* came in October 1865 with the opening of the Horsham and Guildford railway line as part of the network of the London Brighton and South Coast Railway Company, for it effectively paralleled the route of the turnpike. The trust limped on into 1866²³ and was apparently still collecting tolls in 1871, for the census of that year records William Stemp as 'agricultural labourer and toll collector' living in the toll-gate house in Cranleigh common, but from that date the road apparently vanishes from the documentary record.²⁴ By 1888 responsibility for maintenance of the highways had passed to the new County Councils while the turnpike trusts had passed into history.

As for Cranleigh's obelisk, that still stands. Its base is constructed of paludina limestone blocks (locally known as winkle stone), which occurs as isolated strata within the local

Weald Clay bed. Above this the column is built up in sandstone blocks while its gently tapering top is of rendered brickwork. About its girth are cast-iron plates indicating the mileage to various destinations. In an article in *Hones Year-Book* of 1864, an anonymous author reported a visit he had paid to Cranleigh in 1831 wherein the obelisk was described as ‘. . . a white square column surmounted by a pineapple [which] performs the part of a direction post.’ Today while its fruity embellishment is long gone, its classical proportions are still evident. Just who was responsible for its erection remains a mystery. Although it stands on the manorial waste, no mention of its erection occurs in the court rolls of Shere Vachery and Cranley manor, neither is there any note of its origin in the vestry minutes except as a passing reference in 1841.²⁵ Its position opposite the house of John Ellery may suggest its patron; certainly Ellery was a subscriber and a contractor for the turnpike road and took an active interest in the trust’s affairs, but no documentary evidence is known to substantiate his being responsible for its commission. All that can be said at present is that the obelisk was erected at some time between 1818 and 1831 by an unknown benefactor.

NOTES

- 1 Welch, W, 1906 *Cranley in 1846*, 3. First appeared in *Cranleigh Parish Magazine*, 1896
- 2 Mann, S, 1930 *Cranley in ye olden days and Cranleigh today*, 22
- 3 SRO 568/2/1: account from Messrs Smallpiece and Shebbeare, Solicitors
- 4 SRO 568/2/17-23
- 5 Turnpike Trusts, *County Report of the Secretary of State*, no 2 Surrey, 1852 and Manning, O & Bray, W 1804 *History of Surrey*, vol 3 appendix, lii
- 6 49 Geo III, Cap vi
- 7 SRO 568/2/20
- 8 58 Geo III, Cap lxix
- 9 GMR 111/9/18; SRO 568/2/26/(1)
- 10 GMR 80/17: Letter Book of the Bramley and Rudgwick Turnpike Trust
- 11 GMR 111/9/18. The complete lack of minutes or accounts for the first division does not help attempts to illuminate its problems.
- 12 GMR 80/17
- 13 Cobbett, W, 1975 *Rural rides*, (Reprint, London) 152
- 14 SRO 568/2/2, 4-6, 9: various bills for stone
- 15 Turnpike Trusts, *County Report of the Secretary of State*, no 2 Surrey, 1852 and no 3 Sussex, 1852
- 16 GMR 80/17
- 17 *ibid*
- 18 *ibid*
- 19 SRO 568/2/26/(6). Although the gate is referred to in the trust’s literature as being at Cox Green, it was in fact situated in the present day hamlet of Ellens Green.
- 20 2 Geo IV, Cap vi
- 21 Turnpike Trusts, *County Report of the Secretary of State*, no 2 Surrey, 1852
- 22 *ibid*
- 23 SRO P38/4/17. The terms of the original act had expired in 1840 but tolls were evidently still being collected.
- 24 Census Returns Surrey 1871, Cranleigh Parish
- 25 SRO P58/1/2: note from parish vestry minute book regarding the possible adoption of a small piece of road by the parish, contiguous to the obelisk