

THE BEGINNING OF A TURNPIKE TRUST.

By H. S. TWELLS.

CONVINCED that the work of the Turnpike trustees has received less than justice from nearly all publicists who have dealt with the subject, I submit certain facts to the readers of the *Journal* relating to a road most of us know.

As has been well said, the work of the Trusts falls into three periods: first, a time of growth and experiment, then one of maturity and performance and, lastly, when the coming of the railways had made unprofitable the long distance horse-drawn traffic which the Trusts, and the Trusts alone, had made possible, the years of decadence and stagnation. It is with the first of these periods that I deal.

Roman Britain had roads. The England of Queen Anne had none. The very word road, meaning a means of communication between one place and another, is a comparatively new-comer to our language.

It made its first appearance at the end of the reign of Elizabeth, in 1596, and, I repeat, means of communication, an essential basis for civilised life, were worse in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century than they had been in the fifth.

In the days of the earlier Stuarts wheeled transport was unknown, apparently, in the Peak of Derbyshire and every traveller who ventured into our dreary uplands, and has left any records, rode on horseback and saw not wagons but pack-horses transporting merchandise.

Of these travellers one Edward Brown was the first in time and one of his company, either worse mounted or a more timid horseman than his fellows, in spite of a guide, was lost for many hours while journeying by the main road from Chesterfield to Bakewell.

Our next visitor to throw light on our roads was no less a person than Charles Cotton, of Beresford in the Peak, Esq., and he in the second part of the *Compleat Angler*, published in 1676, began his story by picturing Viator and Piscator riding from Derby to Ashbourne, a little north of Brailsford, complaining of the way: "Good land, I confess, affords a pleasant prospect but, by your leave, Sir, large measures of foul way is not altogether so acceptable," says Viator: to which Piscator, that is Cotton himself, can only answer with a long forgotten proverb: "There is good land where there is foul way" and by mentioning the many "loaden horses," that is pack-horses, that travelled the road.

Twenty years later Celia Fiennes was riding through the Peak, which she described as "perhaps the most desolate, wild and abandoned country in Great Britain."

She asserted "you are forced to have guides to all parts of Derbyshire, and, unless it be a few that act as guides, the common people know not above two or three miles from their home." The lady did not share the modern admiration for bleak grey moorlands which, like the east wind, are good for neither man nor beast. She deplored the absence of trees and hedges, and informed all and sundry that our county roads in general were impossible for coach or wagon.

Defoe, who was sufficiently modern as to describe places he never visited, tells much the same story and, finally, Simpson, writing in 1826, quotes a manuscript dated 1712 which strengthens me in my belief that up to the coming of the Turnpike Trusts wheeled traffic was unknown in the Peak. This quotation runs:

“Derby is also famous for very good ale which the brewers send to London and other parts to good advantage. It is also a thoroughfare, or rather a store house, for lead to which place it is brought on horses from Wirksworth and other smelting mills and from Derby carried in carts and wagons to Wilne Ferry, five miles off, where it is embarked in barges and carried down Trent to Gainsborough and Hull to be shipped for London and other parts.” So wrote our visitors.

There had been all through the middle ages, and up to the reign of Queen Anne, tracks that meandered from village to village and nothing more, and every village was responsible for the roads within the parish. There was no other authority. If the track sufficed for the needs of the parish that was enough for the village vestry.

To squander good money on a road to make travelling easier for strangers, for whose coming and going no one cared a brass farthing, would have seemed criminal lunacy to the village worthies who continued to mismanage parish roads until late in the reign of Victoria, as all of us who tried to cycle on them know full well.

In the reign of Charles the Second an unsuccessful and merely partial innovation had been tried: a few gates, under the control of the magistracy, being erected where road users were charged a toll. Quite soon the village authorities resumed control of English roads and held it for something like another forty years and then a change began. There was instituted the first of the Turnpike Trusts. Who was the originator of the new system, where it first saw light, no one has recorded as far as I can discover. The work of the Trusts has been forgotten. Their labours have been derided, they have been abused by almost everyone who has written of them of later years, but the incontrovertible fact remains that the early Trusts met with general

acceptance and imitation, and that they, in the course of time and by the process of trial and error, created a net-work of through roads that were the admiration of all Europe, and were the basis on which a later age has built its motor highways.

The method of constituting a Trust was simple. The principle personages of a district, possibly a hundred or more of them, were persuaded to act as trustees, an honorary office, for a certain length of road; a petition was presented to parliament setting forth the "foundrous" condition of the existing road, an Act was obtained empowering the trustees to erect toll bars and to refuse passage to all, save foot passengers, who declined to pay the fixed charges made for the purpose of maintaining and improving the highway. These Acts were only granted for 21 years and had then to be renewed.

A clerk, generally a solicitor, and one or more surveyors, whom I am afraid were frequently not deserving of higher pay than the pittance they received, constituted the staff, while if the trustees were entitled to demand the statutory labour that the parishes had been compelled to furnish time out of mind yet their principal income came to the Trusts from the tolls paid by the long distance traffic. It is not too much to say that the Trusts alone were the sole creators of that traffic. A hundred thousand miles, possibly, of highways remained under parish management, while Macaulay would place the mileage of turnpike roads at thirty thousand, and the far more trustworthy Beatrice and Sidney Webb reduce that figure to twenty-three thousand.

It is not difficult to distinguish, even to-day, between what was once upon a time a parish from a turnpike road. The former still meanders on with no end in view save the next village.

The curious may see what I mean if they will explore

the tangle of roads round Bradley or Roston, while anyone looking towards Ashbourne from the top of the first rise past the Travellers' Rest in Derby will see stretching away in front of him a road planned, built with intention, that proclaims its purpose of carrying the traveller to Manchester, Lancaster, Scotland if he desires. This stretch was part of the Loughborough, Derby, Ashbourne and Hurdlow House, Turnpike Road, a link in what became the "Great Road" from London to Manchester. The road to-day from Derby to Ashbourne is definitely, unmistakably, the creation of that Trust.

Before their coming this road rambled on from village to village. To-day Osmaston and Shirley, to name two villages only, are not touched as the road drives on to form a part of a great national highway and not a mere parochial track.

As Liverpool grew on the importation of cotton, so grew Lancashire, so grew Manchester, and so developed the turnpike road that linked that city with London, and so grew what Mr. Drewy's *Derby Mercury* described as the "Great Road."

For the history of local Turnpike Trusts there is, unluckily, little material. The minute books of the Trusts, unlike those of many Leicestershire Trusts, have disappeared. The local historians either omit all mention of Derbyshire roads, as the Victorian County History does, or are untrustworthy like Glover, Lysons and Cox, while writers who have attempted to cover a wider area, such as Pratt and Devereux, are below the standard of the local men. Let me give an example of what I mean. The last-named writer, Devereux, places Newark between Wigan and Preston, one of his many "howlers," while Doctor Cox provides so amusing a story that I do not think my readers should be denied the pleasure of seeing how our local history has been reconstructed.

In the doctor's valuable "*Three Centuries of Derbyshire Annals*," one reads how the road from Derby to the north went over the Chevin, and that the coach, which changed horses at an inn just below the summit, was robbed while that change was being carried out. The doctor assures us that the three highwaymen concerned were duly hanged and then suspended in chains near the scene of their offence until the three tar-steeped bodies were set on fire.

The story is quite a good one but I am not over credulous, and as I read I noted that the supposed date was vague: it being given as about the middle of the eighteenth century. This, of course, is more definite than the customary opening of a fairy story—"Once upon a time"—but not by so much.

I wondered what was the doctor's authority for saying the north road went over the Chevin (Lysons selects Atlow Wynn), and I was puzzled by the statement that the coach was robbed at the inn door while horses were being changed and the staff of the inn and the customers, too, in all probability, were there to identify the thieves. I was so little impressed that I worked out the number of malefactors hung at Derby between 1732 and 1780, a sufficient margin to cover the period "about the middle of the eighteenth century," and I found the number of executions was twenty-one and no more; that there was no mention of any coach being robbed on the Chevin, and that at no time were three evil doers banished from this world at one and the same time.

Glover inspires no more faith than the doctor when one examines his statements and checks them by those dreary but essential documents—the local Turnpike Acts. He assures us "The first Turnpike Act that had reference to Derbyshire was for repairing and improving the road from over the Trent at Shardlow through Derby to Brassington. The reason alleged for this

first Derbyshire turnpike road terminating at so small and obscure a town as Brassington was that the traveller towards the north, by means of this improved road, having been helped over the low and deep lands of the county might proceed over the rocky districts to Buxton, Tideswell and Castleton without further assistance."

Dr. Cox quotes this passage in full, and whatever one may think of Glover's reasoning his statements are not accurate.

One is forced to rely on the Acts of Parliament for one's facts, and the Brassington turnpike was not the earliest of our Derbyshire roads to be administered by a Trust. Its Act is dated 1738, and in 1725 Parliament had sanctioned the creation of a Trust "to amend the dangerous, narrow and at times impassible road" from Buxton through Chapel-en-le-Frith to Manchester, and six years later had approved of an increase of tolls because, as was stated in the amending Act, "Whereas the manner of carriage over the said roads was usually by horses, by the great amendment and widening of the said roads is of late changed into wheel carriage whereby the said tolls have been greatly diminished" Comment is hardly necessary.

There is here one more mention of the pack-horse and a clear and definite statement that the advent of the turnpike road had meant the supersession of the "beast of burden" by the wagon—that the baggage horse of the Parliamentary armies was being replaced by the baggage wagon.

That Glover was wrong when he wrote that the Brassington turnpike was the first of the kind in Derbyshire is not a matter of great importance. He was guilty of one sin of omission, however, which has led to no end of mistaken views. The road, the turnpike road, came up from London to Northampton, to Leicester, to Loughborough, and then by a single

Act of Parliament was carried over the Trent to Derby and from there went on towards the north in two distinct and separate branches. The more important of the two went by Brailsford and Ashbourne to Hurdlow House, to which point the Buxton and Manchester road was extended to link the two systems. The less profitable branch went from Derby to Brassington until the trustees, tired of paying out good money for the maintenance of a road which was an annual charge upon their revenue, obtained leave from Parliament to disassociate themselves from a stretch of road which descended once more to the rank of a parish road. Glover most unfortunately omits all mention of the Derby-Ashbourne and Hurdlow Road in connection with the Act of 1738, and I trust, owing to the need for compression, my readers will accept my statement, arrived at after a most careful study of all the documents, that at no time did any turnpike road connect Derby and Ashbourne save through Brailsford, and that the only turnpike that ever touched Bradley ran east and west from Ashbourne to Openwoodgate over Belper Bridge and not north and south.

The Act of 1738 had one clause which ordered that the tolls collected on the road from Loughborough to Wilne Ferry should be spent on this Leicestershire section, and the same held good over the Shardlow-Derby-Brassington length and the Derby-Ashbourne and Hurdlow portion. Herein lay a possible cause of division. Later separate Acts of Parliament were being promoted at one and the same time by the Trustees of the Brassington and the Hurdlow portions of what had been one united Trust.

The second Act affecting the Hurdlow Road came in 1744, and, beyond sanctioning increased tolls as the trustees had already spent considerable sums of money on the road, is of no great interest. For a time all that concerns this thoroughfare must be gleaned from the columns of the *Derby Mercury*.

In 1753 there appeared in that paper the notice of a sale of the manor of Broadlow Ash, with several farms of the value annually of 384l., within two miles of Ashbourne and "upon the turnpike road from Ashbourne to Buxton." The vendors were anxious that everyone should know of this advantage. To be near a railway station or a 'bus route, close to fishing or golf, to have company's water, and so forth, are all reckoned worthy of mention in a modern sale bill.

In the eighteenth century to be near a turnpike road was a like asset. To tell the truth, when Sandybrook House was up for sale a few years later than this, the fact that the "great Manchester Road could be seen from its windows" was thought worthy of mention though that highway was quite a quarter of a mile distant from the house.

The Broadlow Ash advertisements, by the way, show us that the line of road leaving Ashbourne for the north still ran down to Mapleton over the L. & N.W. railway's tunnel and up to Thorpe before climbing to nearly twelve hundred feet by Bostern and Hanson for Broadlow Ash was and is in Thorpe as it was when Milward, the county Member, lived there and recorded in his diary how much he regretted that the parsimony of Parliament had compelled His Majesty, King Charles the Second, to pay between £600,000 and £700,000 towards the cost of the Navy out of his own pocket, a fact ignored by Whig propagandists posing as historians.

As the years pass the *Mercury* lets us see that the Trustees steadily improved the road under their care. I quote one advertisement from that newspaper's columns: "Whereas a carriage bridge is intended to be built over Brailsford brook upon the Turnpike Road between Derby and Ashbourne, therefore whoever hath a mind to apply for the building thereof may attend the Trustees of the said Road with a plan and estimates at a meeting to be held at the Blackmore's Head in

Ashbourne on Saturday, Feb. the second, when the Trustees will treat with them concerning the same, and whoever shall present an estimate are desired to make a distinction as to the difference of expense between brick and stone as both of these materials lie very contiguous to the said brook." This was in 1771, and two years later one reads of turnpike securities for sale, of the need of a fresh investor as the trustees had had to pay off a sum of £2,400, and of the sale of one "of the most Capital and best accustomed Inns in England known by the sign of the 'George' in Derby through which town there are eight Turnpike Roads leading to the other principal towns." My readers shall have the names of the towns a little later, but that there should have been eight such roads, most of them dating back a mere dozen years, is proof of the great popularity of the new method of road control by Turnpike Trusts and of the central situation of Derby that made its growth inevitable long before Stephenson and Stephenson's "Rocket" were dreamt of.

The *Mercury* of September 13th, 1776, gives us news. An application was to be made to Parliament for an extension of the then expiring Acts. That was a formality, even if an expensive one, but we are given a list of the parishes through which the road from Derby to Hurdlow ran.

After St. Werburghs they were Markeaton, Mackworth, Kirk Langley, Brailsford, Shirley, Ashbourne, Mapleton, Thorpe, Tissington, Alsop-en-le-Dale and Hartington, but this list is not all the news. The trustees desired powers to divert part of the road between Ashbourne and the New Inn Gate, or such other way as was thought expedient.

This diversion was one of the most important improvements that the Trust carried out. The Mapleton-Thorpe-Hanson line was abandoned and the much easier one by Sandybrook, Fenny Bentley and

Tissington Hill with its easy, well engineered climb substituted. The new stretch of road joined the old at the Toll Bar Cottage standing, still standing, a little short of New Inns, and was some four miles in length. The thanks of road users ever since have been due to those trustees who planned and paid for this amendment of the highway, and every one who has given any time to the study of eighteenth century roads will know that such an improvement could only have been carried out by a Turnpike Trust. The only other authority, the Village Vestries, were, and always remained, quite incapable of rendering such service to the public.

Another advertisement repeats the bulk of this information and gives a list of the parishes from Loughborough northward. That line ran Dishley, Knight Thorp, Thorp Acre, Garenden, Hathern, Long Whatton, Kegworth, Lockington, Hemington and Castle Donington, all in Leicestershire, and Wilne, Shardlow, Aston, Thulston, Elvaston, Alvaston, Boulton, Osmaston, Litchurch, St. Peters and St. Werburghs in the county and town of Derby. The Brassington road ran on through All Saints', St. Michael's, St. Alkmund's, Marton (known to-day as Markeaton), Quarn(don), Kedleston, Weston, Mugginton, Turnditch, Hulland, and Hognaston. Powers were also sought at this time to make a turnpike road from Brassington through Hartington and Monyash to Hurdlow House.

I have been unable to find any trace of the making of a turnpike road along this suggested extension. It may have been carried out but, in the absence of any evidence of its existence, I believe the proposal fell through. How far the division of the one original Trust from Loughborough northward had gone by this date no one can say. The Leicestershire section had a separate set of books which were eventually handed over by a man I was at school with to a superseding authority and by them lost.

The offices of the Hurdlow branch were by now established in Ashbourne, but for the purpose of obtaining a fresh Act the representatives of all three sections had to meet at the "King's Head" in Derby. The meeting was called by John Heath, a name without meaning to the modern Derbyian but a man whose failure was something like a disaster to his town.

The great improvement north of Ashbourne through Sandybrook and Fenny Bentley was not alone. The Derby-Hurdlow Trust had had their tolls cut into by the coming of a new Trust competing for the Manchester traffic. They enjoyed a monopoly from Derby to Ashbourne, but once over Compton Bridge, at the top of Dig Street, the road turned right and left at right angles, outside the house in which I was born, as it does to-day.

To the right the road to Hurdlow was still the care of the older Trust, but to the left the road to the church gates went on to Hanging Bridge, up the hill, where a fearsome, breakneck cliff track was replaced by a finely engineered road, and on to Leek and Manchester was the preserve of a separate Trust that came into existence in 1760: the same year as many others.

As I think of what the Hurdlow turnpike trustees did for their district I do not repine that they have no monument or that they are forgotten. The hill down into Ashbourne, the New Road as it will always be to me, is a sufficient memorial for them, and if there is a doubter among my readers let him go to Ashbourne and compare the New Road with what it replaced, the Old Hill.

Tradition had it that the new road was made by French prisoners-of-war. When I found the date, 1783, I knew tradition was wrong for England was enjoying in 1783 a breathing space after the war when Holland, France and Spain procured self government for the thirteen States of America; actuated

more by envious dislike of England than by any sympathy with rebels.

The records show us that the trustees met in Ashbourne at the house of Francis Cutts, known by the sign of the Green Man, and there agreed to confer a boon on travellers. It was March when this new road was planned, and within three weeks the Clerk to the Trustees, Francis Berresford, was advertising for someone to make the new road, measuring 1,480 yards. The work was completed and I would point out to critics of the Trusts that the completion was a generation earlier than the advent of Telford or Macadam. By this date the separation of the Trusts dealing with the Hurdlow Road as distinct from the Brassington section had gone so far that W. Edwards, of Derby, and Francis Berresford, of Ashbourne, as clerks of the two interests, had separate advertisements in the same issue of the *Mercury*. This was in 1785, and two years later the Hurdlow trustees had need of all their tact.

That certain roads within the borough of Derby should be controlled by a Turnpike Trust who met at Ashbourne and whose clerk was an Ashbourne man, was a source of annoyance to more than one fervid Derbeian (and an amusement to me a hundred and fifty years later). From Goal Bridge, near the present Royal Hotel corner to the foot of Green Lane, along Brook Side as it was known, a new road had to be built. The advertisements had to be signed by Francis Berresford, of Ashbourne, but he, tactfully, asked for all estimates to be sent to Mr. Leaper, the Town Clerk of Derby, and, though it was within the powers of the Trust to carry out the needful work, they wisely delegated their authority.

The Mayor of Derby, Henry Flint, who deserves remembering if ever a Mayor of Derby did, warned all intending subscribers to the New Goal Bridge, in the

Corn Market, to attend a meeting at the Town Hall to appoint a committee for the proper management of the work. Three months later the Mayor laid the foundation stone of the new bridge. The work was completed and if I know anything of the times there was a dinner to celebrate the occasion. This I suggest, but do not assert as for once my card index relating to eighteenth century life in Derby has failed to supply me with what I sought.

The roads were mending steadily. Journeys were, by now, taking less time. The number of coaches was increasing, but evidence even in 1791 of the valuable work the Trusts were doing is not superabundant, and for that reason what Hutton wrote, in that year, is all the more welcome. Writing of Derby, he says: "No circumstance regarding a town is of more consequence than the roads that surround it. This is the capital trait which marks the degree of improvement to which a people have arrived.

"Eight roads proceed from Derby to the adjacent places; all turnpiked.

"To Nottingham, 16 miles; to Mansfield, 22 miles; Wirksworth, 13 miles; Ashbourne, 13 miles; Uttoxeter, 19 miles; Burton, 11 miles; Ashby-de-la-Zouch, 14 miles; Loughborough, 17 miles. These are excellent save to Ashby-de-la-Zouch and are used with pleasure.

"But I knew them when the best was incommodious even in summer and scarcely passible in winter. The bemired traveller found them as nature left them, but now art has improved upon nature for his benefit. It is not possible to open a navigable river or complete a public road, but places to which they point must improve. Derby has experienced the utility of both which have brought riches and increase. These roads have one defect: their constructors not being obliged to walk on foot forgot those who were, by neglecting the causeway."

Hutton has praise for seven of Derby's turnpikes;

when his history reached a second edition the eighth was no longer excluded from his commendation. The improvements brought about by the Turnpike Trusts were very great in the eyes of Hutton and his contemporaries, but they were only comparative and far from final.

The Derbyshire magistrates at the end of the eighteenth century, where I must leave the subject, were still making a difference in the price to be paid for the carrying of goods from London to Derby according to the season as they had done every year from the days of William and Mary. Sir William FitzHerbert and his fellows agreeing that six shillings a hundredweight should be the summer price and seven and six the winter, from Michaelmas to Lady Day.

The whole of the great coaching business was being gradually built up on the turnpike roads only, of course, to be destroyed, superseded, by the railway train.

The preference shown for the turnpike road over its one alternative, the parish road, was universal, comprehensible, natural, but in Hutton's day the improvements that the Trusts had brought about were only a beginning. The Trusts that connected important centres were to go from strength to strength, and over the London and Manchester road the horse-drawn Telegraph was to cover the 187 miles in 18 hours and 17 minutes inclusive of the breaks for two meals. Naturally, all roads could not, by reason of their limited receipts, reach such a perfected surface and local patriotism, undue optimism, undoubtedly led to certain roads being turned over to the management of Turnpike Trusts that were never worthy of ranking save as parish roads.

Two such local roads come to mind: one from Cheadle over the dreary stretch of Calton Moor, through Blore to link with the Ashbourne, Hurdlow House road at Thorpe, and the other from Ashbourne, over Whatstand-

well Bridge to Okerthorpe. These weaker units among the Turnpike Trusts were to have their parallels, in due course, among the canals and railway lines.

The Trusts in the beginning were handicapped by the lack of competent road builders. They, in truth, started from scratch. No one knew how the job of making a road should be tackled. They were hindered by a series of parliamentary enactments that were incredibly silly, that for a century endeavoured to make the traffic conform to the road rather than create roads to fit the traffic. I must close!

Government by elected bodies has been and is fashionable in England and has received the support of many writers. To that fashion the Turnpike Trusts were an exception. To it Beatrice and Sidney Webb conformed, and yet in their great work, *The Story of the King's Highway*, writing of the superiority of English roads over those of all other countries, they attribute that superiority to the work of the Turnpike Trusts.

Their words are: "The Turnpike Trust and its toll was, in short, the only way" this superiority could have been achieved.