

Dover's Turnpike Roads 21

The Romans were great road builders, constructing scores of

miles of fine carriageways, the foundations of many of which are still the basis of many of our modern roads, yet until the 18th century little real highway construction was done.

From medieval times onwards roads were little more than rough tracks leading from one village to the next and to the nearby town. All maintenance was the responsibility of each individual parish and usually involved little more than the dumping of a few cart loads of gravel to the worst places from time to time. Such through traffic as there was had to make the best of a bad job, frequently making detours round specially dangerous places, and this habit was the cause of many of the bends and kinks still to be seen on our present roads. They were usually thick in cloying mud in winter and in suffocating dust in summer. Turnpikes

were introduced by Parliament in the latter part of the 17th century, when permission was given to wealthy land owners or groups of financiers to enclose lengths of road with gates, bring them up to a reasonable standard and then charge traffic to use them. It was, in effect transferring the maintenance of the roads from the individual parishes to the users of them.

Such stretches of road were called

by Ivan Green

turnpikes, the word turnpike referring to the pike or shaft in the hinge

of the enclosing gates at each end of the maintained length. Dover, the principal port for the continent was connected to London by turnpikes for almost its entire length by 1753, only the small length between Barham Downs and Canterbury not being so treated.

Dover's principal turnpike, leading from the town to London, started at the junction of London Road and Bridge Street. This was called Paul's Corner, and the building at the corner there,



The junction of London Road and Bridge Street called Paul's Corner. This was the first gate on the Dover-Canterbury-London turnpike which started here. The building on the extreme right was built on land first used for the storage of ballast and other materials for the construction of the road. Later, it was cleared and the present shop was built.

opposite to the Eagle, was erected on the old builder's yard where stone, ballast and other materials for the use of the men working on the road, as far as Buckland Bridge, were stored. At this corner, outside the 'Eagle' inn, stood the toll gate to control entrance to what is now the London Road.

Near the Buckland end of London Road stood the fine old inn called The Bull, which still survives. This was the first or the final staging post for coaches travelling to and from Dover. For many years it exhibited a hanging sign depicting a rampant bull. On one side of the sign was the warning

*THE BULL IS TAME, SO FEAR HIM NOT,
AS LONG AS YOU DO PAY YOUR SHOT'*

On the other side of the sign is
*WHEN MONEY'S GONE AND CREDIT'S BAD,
IT'S THAT WHICH MAKES THE BULL RUN MAD'*

From the Bull the traveller had to ford the river, now covered by Buckland Bridge, and bear left to Crabble Hill. Up Crabble Hill, a few yards beyond the present Gate Inn, stood the second toll gate, the gate keeper's house being on the lower side. This inn was a favourite

On the Dover side was

*I'M MUCH REFRESHED,
HERE TAKE YOUR PAY
BE SURE I'LL CALL ANOTHER DAY'*

The road continues from the present traffic lights, where the left hand road leads down to River. The turnpike road, called Upper River Road, passes on to Kearsney with the Old Park Hill on the right and then through the upper part of Temple Ewell. Whitfield Hill was then only a little used rough farm track. Upper River Road was completely built then from a little used track. It was a long hard pull for the horses up to Barham Downs and through a turnpike gate there, but a mile further on was the first halt, at what was then the Half Way House, now unfortunately renamed.

Here the horses were changed, the old group being fed and rested, later to wait to take a coach from Canterbury down to Dover. This stretch of turnpike, across Barham Downs to Bridge, was almost completely newly built, to complete the turnpike to London. It was opened in 1791.

In 1763 a new road from Dover to Folkestone was granted by Parliament. This left Dover at a point near Archcliffe Fort and passed west-wards up

the old Kings Highway over the cliff, and down into the valley beyond the Plough Inn, from whence it passed through Capel to Folkestone.

In 1783 the old road from Archcliffe Fort over the cliff was abandoned and a new cut was made, up the Folkestone Road to the Elms Vale turning, where a



The Gate Inn, which stands slightly townwards from the site of the original turnpike gate.

halt for many travellers to Dover after they had passed through the gate and for many years it has exhibited a hanging sign which showed a gate on both sides. On one side was the wording

*THIS GATE HANGS HIGH,
AND HINDER NONE.
REFRESH AND PAY, AND TRAVEL ON*

toll gate across the Folkestone Road was accompanied by the gate keeper's house on the triangle of land at the junction of the two roads. From there the new piece of road passed westwards through

Maxton to join the original road beyond the Plough Inn.

The Dover, Deal and Sandwich turnpike dates from 1797. It led up Laureston Place and then up the old Castle Hill Road to the top of the hill, to near the turning to Guston. Old Castle Hill Road was a steep and narrow stretch of hill which was a great problem for coaches and heavily laden wagons. Teams of additional trace horses were kept in a stable in Ashen Tree Lane, to be hired for the ascent of the hill, when necessary.

The illustration shows the toll gate at the top of the hill, which was situated near the present road up to the Cannon Gate of the castle. The horse rider

is paying his due to the gate keeper, whose little house is shown on the right. Pedestrians were not charged.

From this gate the road led on to the Deal Road, now designated as the A258, and there was another toll gate near the present Swingate Inn, its site being marked by the present slight kink in the road there. The stretch of road from there, the present A258, as far as the cross road leading to



The junction of the Folkestone Road with Elms Vale Road, the site of the turnpike gate. The present house there was built on the site of the original gate keeper's cottage. Note the position of the horse trough.



A fine old print of the turnpike gate at the top of Castle Hill. The gate keeper's cottage is on the right, and the gate keeper himself is taking the fee from the horseman.

Pedestrians were not charged. They passed through the posts beside the gate.

24 Martin Mill and St Margaret's was a new section cut by the turnpike makers. The original road, before the turnpike cutting is now designated as the B258, passing through West Cliffe. Further on towards Walmer is the Five Bells Inn, so named after the bells in the tower of the nearby parish church. It was an important stopping place on the turnpike, and offered a change of horses and stabling and food for man and beast. Nearby was a blacksmith's shop, where travellers' horses could be reshod, a very necessary convenience.

The road on through Walmer and Deal to Sandwich, is beyond the scope of this present article.

In 1798 the road up Laureston Place and the Old Castle Hill was shut and a new cut was made from Upmarket. This provided a wider road with a slightly easier gradient. It was of particular importance at that time when there was much defence activity in the area because of a threatened invasion by the French. As soon as this new section of the road was completed it was handed over to the Dover, Deal and Sandwich road trustees.

In 1801 the Dover, Whitfield, Waldershare, Eastry and Sandwich road was formed. This started at Kearsney and turned up Whitfield Hill, which before that time had been merely a rough cattle track and continued for most of its way on the site of the present A256.

There have been considerable recent alterations to this road, especially at the roundabout at

the top of Whitfield Hill, where the old road has been eliminated by recent work when the A2 was built. At this point the old toll gate house still survived until the road works forced its demolition.

The gate outside the Eagle at the junction of London Road and, Bridge Street was demolished in 1855, and the gate by the Gate Inn on Crabble Hill was bought by the Corporation in 1871 for £10 and used for a short time to collect one of the town's taxes, the Coal Dues, but soon afterwards it was demolished.

The gate at the Elms Vale turning was the last surviving gate in the Dover district, until it and the gate keeper's house were demolished and a local worthy, Major Lawes, erected a pair of villas on the three cornered site. He also placed a horse drinking trough at the junction on the site of the present bus waiting shelter. This trough still survives and can be seen in the Market Square.

Parliament's Turnpike Act of 1823 unified all the previous acts into a



The last remains of the gate keeper's cottage, which stood at the top of Whitfield Hill.

single unit, and from that time efforts were made to discontinue them wherever possible.

Several codicils are necessary.

This information has resulted from the study of many different documents and they do not always agree on specific details or exact dates. but the information given here is as accurate as is possible. The dates given are those on which Parliament gave its approval. The date of the completion of any turnpike was at least a year, sometimes several years later.

Mention has been made of Upmarket. This is the triangular open space where the bottom of Castle Hill Road, Laureston Place, Ashen Tree Lane and Woolcomber Street meet. Here was the site of Dover's second market, very much hated by the town's authorities. The main market, in the Market Square, was closely controlled by the townsfolk and its activities, controlled by the Market Bell, gave very preferential treatment to the people. The Upmarket, probably under the protection of the castle however, was very much a freelance operation outside the town's control and country people, bringing in their

poultry, vegetables and fruit for sale, often preferred to patronise this little market, outside the town walls and outside the town's jurisdiction and control. There was nothing the town authorities could do about the matter, however, and Upmarket survived there, although in a small way, until the early nineteenth century.



This is the site of the old Upmarket which survived for centuries, in spite of the enmity of the Corporation, who were unable to control it, since it was outside their jurisdiction. At the centre is the base of Castle Hill, the new cut to the castle made in 1798.



The old horse trough which stood at the junction of Folkestone Road and Elms Vale Road. Many of these appeared on principal roads, as acts of charity, to refresh the thousands of horses who toiled ceaselessly on the turnpike roads.

Fortunately it still survives, but is now situated in the Market Square.