

Turnpikes and Tollbooths

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Most of the roads in and around Rossendale are old turnpike roads and were constructed in the latter half of the 18th century, many of them by John Metcalf better known as Blind Jack of Knaresboro'. In all, he made 180 miles of turnpike roads, mostly in Lancashire including the road from Bury through Ewood Bridge to Haslingden and Blackburn; from Haslingden to Accrington and from Bury to Colne. A new Ewood Bridge (wider than the earlier one) was opened in 1795, seven years after the road from Edenfield to Haslingden had been turnpike and for both the road and bridge Blind Jack was paid £3000.

When the Bury to Bacup railway line was opened in 1846m the road level at Ewood was probably raised to its present height but the new bridge was built above the arches of Blind Jack's bridge and these arches can still be seen under the present bridge. When Blind Jack retired he left Lancashire and returned to his Knaresboro' district where he died in 1801 at the age of 93¹.

The latter half of the 18th century was a period of great prosperity in the Irwell Valley – the hand loom weavers were having their hey-day – so much that Blind Jack had difficulty in getting labour for some of his projects and had to pay so much for it that he was out of pocket with some of his projects.

The maintenance of the turnpike roads was the responsibility of the Turnpike Trusts but these Trusts mostly expired between 1875 and 1880 and the Turnpike Road Acts were finally merged into the Local Government Act of 1888.

The tolls for the use of the roads were collected at Toll Bars or Toll Gates. These were let for one year at a time to the highest bidder. The following notices refer to these lettings and give the takings of each for the previous year.

1794 February 18th

“Tolls arising from the Toll Gates on the district of road from Haslingden through Newchurch and Bacup to Todmorden, via Kirk Hill, Four Lane End, Garthorne and Sidegate at Sharney ford will be let by auction to the highest bidder at the house of James Whittaker, The Black Dog, Newchurch, on 17th March next, 1794..”

“ Notice is hereby given that a meeting will be held at the Black Bull, Burnley, W Roberts, 27th March next, at 11 o'clock, to take and consider the most effective means to enforce widening and repairing of the road from Burnley through Rossendale to Bury”.

¹ Actually died in 1810.

“Arising out and from the several toll gates erected in the district of road from Bury to Haslingden and from there to Blackburn and Whalley, will be let by auction to the best bidder at the house of Henry Haworth, the Black Dog, Inn, Haslingden, on Thursday 24th April next, between three and six o’clock in the afternoon, which tolls were last let at Pigslee Gate £310, Hudrake £370, Heywood Brow Gate £216, Knuzden Brook £200, Harwood Gate @255 – W. Carr 1794.

1796 Tolls.

“To be let at the house of R. Roberts, Bacup – Kirkhall £60 last year, Four Lane Ends £173, Grassholme and Sharneyford £116 – W. Carr 25th June 1799.”

“Tolls to be let at Mr Robert Burley’s, Bull & Butcher, Crawshawbooth, £182 Rawtenstall £114, Rochdale to Edenfield, Cheesden Bar £136”.

1820 Tolls.

Horses, mules, beasts drawing coaches chariot, chase curricule, gig, chair carriage or hearse, 6d. Horse, mule or beast drawing wagon, wain, cart, dray and where fellies of wheel were not over nine inches broad, 4s; larger 6d. A laden horse or mule not drawing or unladen, 1d. Oxen, cows, or meat cattle under 20, 10d, over 20, ½ d each.

Tolls in 1851.

Omnibus, coach, landau, phaeton, gig 9d. Dray, wagon, cart, etc 6d. Ass or dog drawing similar to above, 1d. Horse or mule, laden or unladen, 2d. Ass, 1d. Cattle droves of 20, 10d; over 1/4d each.

Toll Bars were very numerous in Rossendale and many of the old buildings are still in being. A table of tolls had to be shown printed in black letters on a white background but most of these have been destroyed. There are however three examples in the Rossendale Museum. The tables on the Bar House at Lock Gate between Haslingden and Rawtenstall were taken down many years ago but the old house built in 1785, is still standing. Other bars worth recording are the Peel Bridge Bar at Ramsbottom made in 1815, said to be built by the Grant brothers who took over the works known as the Square in 1821 and the Stake Lane Bar at Helmshore near where a gibbet once stood. In Stake Lane, bulls were once staked for bull-baiting there. The Top Bar, near Deeply Moor, at the junction of the roads from Waterfoot and from Bacup to Burnley was a popular resting place for cyclists and hikers before the First World War but it was pulled down by the Irwell Valley Water Board some years ago. Cheesden Bar, not far from Owd Betts on the Edenfield to Rochdale Road, was pulled down two years ago.

Any cattle found straying on the Turnpike roads in the old days were impounded and detained until their owner paid 2s a head and expenses. No windmill had to

be erected within 200 yards of the road under a penalty of £5 a day. It is difficult to find a reason for this restriction.

Before the Turnpikes were constructed, the roads of Rossendale were very poor and John Wesley, in his journal, said they were amongst the worst he had ever travelled. Many of them were mere winding tracks used by pack horses and Galloway ponies. The ponies were known as lime-gals and trains of them acted as carriers of goods to distant places and brought loads of lime from Clitheroe.

John Wesley visited Rossendale more than once. In his diary we can read that on Thursday May 7th 1747 "We left the mountains and came down to the fruitful valley of Rossendale. Here I preached to a large congregation of wild men, but it pleased God to hold them in chains so that even when I had done, none of them offered any rudeness, but all went quietly away." This took place at Millar Barn in Wolfenden Booth, now known just as Booth. An inscription on a house in Lane Head Lane, Bacup, records another of his visits.

Although the very old roads were superseded by the Turnpikes, some of them have survived and can still be followed. The one to Bury from Rawtenstall can be followed by turning right off the present road at a sign which says one mile to Baldingstone. It keeps to the moor behind Shuttleworth on the south side, goes past Bleakholt and behind Edenfield to Balladen and ends at Lomas Lane.

Another goes from Warth, below Waterfoot, through Brandwood to Stacksteads and yet another is Lumb Lane from Shawclough near Scoutbottom. Along these roads there are still many quaint old houses and it is surprising how they keep their old-world charm.

As we speed along the modern motorways it is all too easy to forget our debt to the roadmakers of the past.