

## Alford to Boston Turnpike Road

Originally the maintenance of all roads was the responsibility of the parish that they ran through and many local people were engaged to repair them. It was largely the horses and wagons that passed through the village that caused the



most damage to them, yet they contributed nothing towards their upkeep, so gradually brought resentment from the locals as many were unpaid for their labours.

By the eighteenth century as more wheeled vehicles were using the roads, new ideas had to be found to build better and stronger highways to replace what was really little more than dirt tracks, so traffic could travel faster and more easily. One way to raise funds was for a group of local people to attain permission from Parliament to take over a section of road and collect tolls from the people that actually used the roads to pay for the maintenance

At a meeting that was held in Stickney Parish Church in July 1739 it was proposed and agreed by all that The Vestry was to petition Richard Fidel the MP for Boston to obtain an Act of Parliament to bring a road through Stickney from Bar Green to the bridge at North Dike and for turnpikes to be erected at both places to provide the revenue that could be used for the maintenance of the highway.

It was another twenty six years before the Spilsby Board of Trustees was formed and the Turnpike Road from Alford to Boston was opened in 1765 at a length of twenty seven miles, with an added extension from Boston to Cowbridge later. At the junction of Ulceby Cross just south of Alford the Dexthorpe Trust operated another Road that terminated at the town of Louth.

All of the Turnpike Trusts were originally set up for a period of only twenty one years, although after 1834, parliament allowed them to virtually continue after such time had elapsed without obtaining a new Act.



There were six toll houses built along this main route. Alford, Dalby, and Toynton Bars were all let by an auction that was held in Spilsby Town Hall, and the Northdike Bridge, Hilldike Bridge, and Burton Corner Bars were auctioned at Boston soon afterwards, with all of them being relinquished for three years to the highest tender on the day. The successful bidder would pay the Trust the agreed amount and was entitled to keep any profit over this as his income. This method of raising the necessary funds encouraged the toll keepers to be vigilant and not to favour any individuals that would otherwise reduce the Trusts revenue.

The amount bid for the Toll Bars had to be paid in monthly instalments as set out by the Act of 1773 for regulating Turnpike Roads, and the value would be reflected by the volume of traffic expected to pass through them. In comparison, at the auctions in 1816, the Hilldike Bar was let at an annually rent of £325 while in the same year the Toll Bar at Dalby raised little more than £82 for the Spilsby Board of Trustees.

When the Railway network arrived and spread out across the country the Stage Coaches and the long distance Goods Wagons and Vans found their business reduced and eventually disappeared forever, consequently the revenue to the Turnpike Trusts was drastically affected with many of them becoming bankrupt. The Alford to Boston Turnpike Road was finally free from all tolls on the 1st November 1878. In Wide Bargate near Cammack's shop and recessed into the pavement there is still the iron Turnpike sign that once denoted the end of the Alford to Boston Turnpike Trustees responsibility's. The last Turnpike in England closed in 1895 and by then the upkeep of the Highways became the responsibility of the Town and District councils



## Royal Mail Coaches

When the first Royal Mail Coach Service started in 1784 the Turnpike roads were used extensively by them as their elegant and light weight coaches could eventually travel faster and more safely than a rider on horseback and cover much greater distances in a day. The Mail Coaches had the right of way on the roads and never paid tolls or even had to stop at the toll gates, as they all had to be readily opened upon their approach. Some of the long distance coaches would change their drivers at certain intervals along the route, resting at various staging posts or Inns, as the men were mostly employed on a contract. The Guard though, was employed directly by the Royal Mail and had to travel the whole journey with the Post bags.

Originally all the relevant letters sent from London were left at the Boston Mail Office and were collected three days a week by the Post Boys who delivered then to the respective Villages through to Louth, Alford and Horncastle on horseback.

There were no actual Royal Mail Coaches to The Nags Head at Stickney until July 1807 when the London service was first extended from Boston through to the White Hart Inn at Spilsby and continuing on to Louth. Any passengers or letters for Alford were left at The New Inn, at Ulceby Cross and were promptly collected by a Mail Gig, sent out from the Windmill Inn in the town. Any letters for Grimsby had to be collected from Louth.

In December in 1839 a serious accident occurred when the Mail Coach entering Stickney from Louth, was making a sharp turn. Mr Attfield the Guard fell off the coach and hit his head on the road with such a force it first appeared that he was dead. He was picked up and taken to Mr Coupland the Surgeon at Boston, and despite the extensive injuries to his body he had no broken bones and slowly made a full recovery.

## **Vans, Wagons & Stage Coaches**

Before the Louth Mail Coach Service was fully operating in 1807, a goods wagon service was already running between Louth and London as early as 1790. Gibbeson & Co operated a Stage Wagon that would leave Louth on a Saturday morning at three and arrive in London the following Saturday, carrying goods or fares in either direction. By 1806 a Stage Coach Service had become well established with The Lord Nelson and The Old Boston Coaches travelling three days a week between Snow Hill in London and arriving at twelve noon in Boston. An excursion every Thursday afternoon would continue through the Villages of Sibsey and Stickney and terminate at Spilsby where it was met at the White Hart Inn by a Diligence from Louth. The Champion Stage Coach from the Peacock Inn also ran a service from Boston passing through Sibsey and Stickney, but then headed west for New Bolingbroke and travelled through Revesby and Scrivelsby to reach its final destination at Horncastle.

When the railways arrived it was eventually realised they were faster and a much safer way to travel as the Highway Men found it very difficult to stop a train. The journey times were considerably shorter, the ride was more comfortable, and consequently the Goods Wagons and the Stage Coach services eventually disappeared for ever. Some stage coach operators were quick to diversify and became a feeder service to the railway stations or formed a network of links between towns and stations

## **Road Names and Mile Posts**

One of the conditions of the setting up of a Turnpike Trust was that from 1767 official way markers had to be positioned along the road with the distance from the last Town and the distance to the next and also the total mileage to London had to be marked on every Mile Post or Stone along the route. This was originally to ensure that the many Stage Coach and Mail Coach Drivers kept to their strict schedules and was also used to calculate the postal charges before a standard postage rate was introduced in 1840. As Stickney didn't have a Church Tower Clock until the end of the Nineteenth Century the villagers would set or check their watches by the punctual arrival of the Coaches.

Within the boundaries of Stickney there were four mile posts but all of the originals have since disappeared. There was one placed about a hundred yards North of The Northdike Bridge, with the next one close to the crossroads of Pinfold Lane and Blythes Lane. Another Mile Post that was seven miles from Spilsby was sited between the two junctions of West Fen Lane and Hagnaby Lane very near to the house that is now known as Bar Green

The fourth Mile post was positioned virtually outside the Nags Head. This is where the Mail Coach used to stop before the first Post Office was established in the Church Yard. The Old Thatched Inn was once described as an Ancient Posting house but was demolished in 1877 and a new house built on the site. Some years later a circular AA Road Sign is pictured on a village postcard during the time that



Jack Scarborough kept the Post Office in Stickney. This mileage sign was attached to the end wall of a large out building that once stood by the main road opposite the Church. The Building was taken down in 1973 to make way for a new dwelling. The yellow and black enamelled sign was removed and is now fixed to the gable end of the garage behind this bungalow

The Major Road through the Village has been known by many names during its time. Before the term Turnpike Road was used, all disclosures in old deeds referred to it as The Kings Highway. In many of the censuses that were taken every ten years it was often called the Turnpike but mostly referred to as High Street. One old postcard even calls it Oxford Street probably named after Oxford House where the Bett family lived and worked as Butchers for many years. When the Trunk Roads Act was passed in 1936 the Rampar became the A16 and now is under the management of the Highways Agency

## Toll Houses

**Alford Toll** house is about one mile from the town centre and is a single storey building near a sharp bend on the left hand side of the road leading towards Ulceby Cross. In 1861 John Hurst and his large family lived here and were farmers with twenty acres of land as well as operating the toll bar. The old house is still standing and has been modernised and is inhabited.

**Dalby Toll house** was situated near the top of the hill on the junction of the road to Langton. On the 1805 ordnance survey map it is shown as standing on the left side of the turnpike road. Described as a small two roomed cottage with a pantry, and a washhouse outside

The toll bar was obviously well known and renowned as an ideal meeting place. Very often a steeple chase would take place from here and The South Wold Hounds are mentioned many times as meeting here from 1824 to 1887

Thomas Cole had been the Toll Bar Keeper for many years before he died in 1838 although some of his family continued to live here for sometime after his death. John Brumpton is mentioned in 1872 as earning his living as a tailor as well as collecting the Tolls at this Bar

One Sunday afternoon in December during the severe winter of 1836 the Royal Mail coach leaving Louth had to stop at Drilby Top on account of the snow being too deep to continue any further. The guard took the Post bags and set out on horseback, followed by a servant with two other horses from Mr Marshall's stables, and a gentleman who had travelled from Grimsby. On eventually reaching Dalby Toll Bar they had to leave the Turnpike Road and take to the fields as the hill was too treacherous to descend. Unfortunately the Guard inadvertently rode into the chalk pit and his steed was immediately killed. Being badly shaken but only slightly bruised, he mounted another horse and proceeded with the servant over the fields to Spilsby where the bags were taken by Chaise and Four to Boston. The gentleman who was travelling with them that day, gratefully accepted lodging for the night at Mr Stanton's at Dalby

1816 the Dalby Toll bar keeper demolished an old brick out building but when he removed the top soil to spread on his garden he found a complete skeleton laying just below the surface. The human remains were thought to be those of a man who had disappeared from Partney thirty five years before, and it's widely supposed he was murdered by the Gate Keeper at the time and buried beneath the floor of the Pig-sty

In the 1861 census of Lincolnshire the Toll Bar keeper living at the Toynton All Saints Toll House was Samuel Wooley a 27 year old man from Louth and his wife. It's a single storey dwelling situated on the east side of the main road just

north of the T-junction for Toynton, with a bridle way at the side of it. Although the house is still standing and is lived in, it has a high timber fence and crash barrier erected in front of it to protect it from the road pollution

As the toll bar was a familiar place, public notices were posted here and often plans of any local land that came up for auction could also be inspected at the house

While on the Turnpike Road in 1819 a Travelling Exhibition of wild beasts violently forced their way through the Toll gate at Toynton and assaulted the toll collector. The procession consisted of Mr George Wombwell and his wife with three other men, and when they were appended and brought before the Justice of the Peace in Spilsby Town Hall the company were fined Forty shillings for refusing to pay the tolls with an extra four guineas for cost

A machine man from Friskney was fined a total of nine shillings by the Spilsby Magistrates in 1842 for failing to stop and pay Chas Bennett the keeper of the Toynton Toll Bar. George Bell had claimed that agricultural machines were exempt from any tolls as he refused to stop and drove directly through the gate with his Thrashing Machine

**Hilldyke Bridge Toll** House is a two storey house built near the junction of the road heading east towards Boston Longhedges. The Old Pied Bull Inn once stood almost next to it but that was demolished in the 1970s. The census records for 1861 lists the Toll Bar Keeper living in this house as William Mowbray a thirty three year old man with his wife and family, and in 1872 William Killick was recorded as the Toll Colector

The house is still standing this day and is called Toll Bar although some of the garden was taken many years ago to make improvements to the road

One Sunday afternoon in 1839 when Mr JF Smyth a Druggist from Boston was returning from Sibsey Chapel he was stopped at Hilldike Toll Bar and asked to pay the four pence toll for his horse and gig to pass. The Wesleyan Minister remonstrated with the Toll collector that he was exempt under Sunday Law from paying tolls as he was returning from his place of "usual worship" but Joseph Harrison was adamant that he must pay because he did not attend Sibsey Chapel regularly

Mr Smyth took his complaint to the petty sessions and eventually won his case. The Magistrate ruled that it was his opinion and also that of Chief Justice Tindal that he was lawfully attending his usual place of worship as a Methodist Minister, as he was expected to preach at a wide variety of places within his circuit and therefore should be free from paying tolls on a Sunday. Mr Harrison apologised to the Minister and agreed to reimburse his money and pay all the expenses

**The Toll Bar House at Burton Corner** was abandoned towards the end of the Turnpike era and was finally demolished in 1878. All of the site and the whole garden were incorporated in a road widening scheme of the area



**Bar Green** is the north boundary of Stickney and an assumption from the name would probably suggest that there was once a Toll Gate here. It is rumoured that the toll collector would sit by the small north facing window at the end of the old mill house observing travellers and vehicles entering the village. Although despite the significance of the name there is no conclusive evidence that there was ever a Toll Bar or a Toll Keeper here. In the Parish Church records books there is a reference made to a place called Bar Green in 1739, which was many years before the Kings Highway through Stickney became part of the Turnpike Road system

In the 1874 auctions the toll bar at Dalby was let to Mr W Williams for two years for a rent of fifty three pounds and also the Burton Corner toll was taken by the same man. By 1878 though Mr Williams had acquired Dalby, Northdike Bridge, Hilldyke Bridge and Burton Corner Toll Bars although the Turnpike Roads had by now lost most of their long distant trade to the Railways and the Gates were let for this, the last time for only one year



## **Cowbridge Toll House**

One Friday evening in September 1862 Mr Mears the landlord of the White Horse public house and also the proprietor of an Omnibus was making a journey home to Boston from a day trip to the grounds of Revesby Abbey with twenty five passengers on board.

Having just passed the Cowbridge Toll House he was driving along the side of The Maud Foster Drain, when he steered his team of horses very close to the drain bank to avoid the overhanging trees on the other side of the road just before Skirbeck House. It was about nine thirty and almost dark by now. Mr Mears could barely see the side of the road and as the wheels caught the soft grass verge it gave way and the whole side of the omnibus suddenly dropped two feet on to the Tow path below. As the bus over turned all the men sitting on top were thrown in to the drain but managed to wade out virtually unhurt. The driver fell off and was dragged under the feet of the horses but once rescued suffered only slight bruising.

One of the gentlemen on board was a very well respected Draper called Mr William West who had a business in Boston market place. He was travelling on the top of the bus with his back to the side of the drain when the accident occurred. He fell backwards of the bus and became trapped under water by the full weight of the vehicle. Dr Adam attended to him after he was hastily taken to The Cow Bridge House but sadly could not save his life and pronounced him dead from accidental drowning. Most of the remaining passengers were stunned and frightened and many of the ladies inside the coach were severely bruised by the fall and some were cut by broken glass but all made a speedy recovery

## **North Dike Bridge**

A dispute arose in 1527 when the inhabitants of Stickney and Sibsey brought a suit against the Abbot of Revesby for not maintaining the causeway over the North Dike Bridge. The Jury in this case found that the peoples claim was just and right and that the Hermit living in the free tenement close by was responsible for any repairs necessary. A later record in 1694 in an old account book of the Village agreed that Mr Smith should be the Chosen surveyor and

Exponent for the people of Stickney, in their suit once again about the very poor condition of the Bridge over which all their trade goes to Boston.

Ever since the reign of Henry II the Abbot has been liable for the upkeep of the North Dike Bridge and an area of land called The Wydale was given to Revesby Abbey in return for all the essential maintenance being carried out.

On July 5<sup>th</sup> 1849 John Hildred was brought before the Justice of the peace at Stickney Court for profusely swearing at the Toll Gate keeper on the previous Sunday. Samuel Belton was the Toll keeper at the time and told the Magistrate, Reverend George Coltman "that he threaten to rob my house" and hung around the style most of the day using foul language at me because the gate was locked.

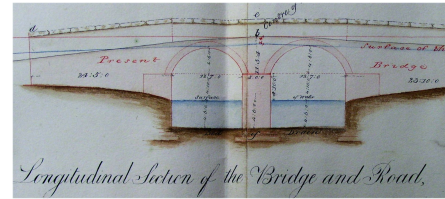
Before the Workhouse was built in Stickney many poor people were placed in the care of respectable householders with an allowance paid by the parish for the very basic upkeep of the individual for a year. In 1774 a Spinster called Elizabeth Mower was sent to the North Dike Toll Bar in the care of the Keeper William Harrison for the rate of thirty shillings. At one time Hilkiah Burgess lived in the Toll House and painted many Lincolnshire pictures in water colours, three of which portray scenes of Stickney.

The Thorndales Stream is a water course that flows from Cherry Corner eastwards towards the main road. It passes under the road and the adjoining field just north of Bar Bridge and is carried in an aqueduct underneath the East Fen Catchwater Drain and eventually discharges into the Hobhole Drain. The course of the stream would almost certainly have run under the Northdike Bridge before it was redirected when the Catchwater Drain was dug.

It is alleged that a small chapel stood here where a Hermit once lived. He was responsible for collecting the Bridge tolls from anyone wanting to cross the stream during the many years prior to 1765 when the Highway over it then became the responsibility of the Turnpike Trust.

The Stickney Church Records in 1720 mentions a toll of 1s 3d that was reclaimed by the Overseer on his expenses and again in 1731 when a slightly higher toll was levied to cross the North Dyke Bridge for business he had to conduct at The Wydale

The old double arched humped-back bridge at North Dike was taken down in 1831 by Joseph Corbett of Mareham Le Fen and replaced with a much wider single span structure for the price of Eleven Hundred pounds. Before the work commenced, a temporary road and wooden crossing over the drain had to be constructed just to the east of this.



As the excavating for the new bridge progressed the workmen discovered a large amount of stone and material from a previous structure. The stone arches that were uncovered nearby may well suggest that the bridge could have once been similar in construction to the famous triangular bridge at Crowland

An ancient stone effigy of Jesus on the cross was also discovered while digging the foundations for the bridge. This measured over three feet high and could have been mounted on or even inside the Chapel that is believed to have stood close by, probably on the site that was later to become the Toll House Garden

One dark November evening in 1808 Mr Alexander Magnus and his wife had travelled from Horncastle, through Stickney, on their way home to Freiston when their Gig was ambushed by two men on Horseback close to the Northdike Toll Bar. One of the men looked and spoke like a gentleman and the other one appeared to be his servant. As they produced what was later described as highly polished pistols with bayonets, they demanded the purse that contained five pounds fifteen shillings from Mr Magnus and a pocket book he was carrying. Both men quickly vanished into the darkness on their highly bred horses and on approaching the toll bar Mr Fletcher from Leake emerged and told how he had just been robbed of Sixteen Pounds by the same highway men

***Researched and written by Martin Gosling***