

## Crossing the Pennines

Marsden lies on one of the shortest east-west routes across the southern Pennines. It may well have been in use in Mesolithic times; the Romans certainly built a road this way, which was probably still used in the Middle Ages. Then came packhorse tracks, followed by the Turnpike, the canal and the railway.

## Turnpike Roads

By the late 17th century, it was becoming obvious that the existing roads were inadequate for the growing levels of traffic. The road surfaces suffered badly from the wear and tear caused by the metal tyres on the wagon wheels, and they could become impassable in wet weather. As a response, local entrepreneurs formed themselves into Turnpike Trusts, whose purpose was to take on the responsibility for maintaining and improving important roads in return for tolls paid by the road users. They invested in making the roads more suitable for wheeled traffic by resurfacing and widening them and, where necessary, straightening them out. In some sections it was necessary to build a completely new stretch of road. Each Trust was established by Act of Parliament as a not-for-profit organisation with the authority to carry out any improvements, including the requisition of land where widening or deviation was necessary.

The peak period for the establishment of Turnpike Trusts was the 18th century, tailing off towards the early 19th century, by which time most important routes had been turnpiked and the canals were taking over much of the bulk transport. By 1836, there were around 22,000 miles of turnpike road in operation. The Local Government Act of 1888 transferred responsibility for maintaining the main roads to County Councils and County Borough Councils.

## The Turnpike through Marsden

An Act of Parliament, passed in 1758, established the Wakefield to Austerlands Turnpike Trust. The Trust was to take over and improve the existing route from Wakefield to Austerlands on the western edge of Saddleworth, where it would connect with an already existing turnpike from Manchester. The route was divided into 'parcels', each put out to tender from contractors. Among the successful bidders was John Metcalf - Blind Jack of Knaresborough - who built the section from Town Gate to Standedge Foot in Saddleworth. He later returned to build Carrs Road and

Mount Road. The Turnpike Trust made piecemeal improvements to their road, but there were two major changes of route after the original one had been established.

## The routes through Marsden

It has become the norm to refer to the successive routes as the First, Second and Third Turnpikes. This is misleading for two reasons. Firstly, they were merely differing routes taken by the same turnpike over time. Secondly, they were partly the result of ongoing improvements made by the Trust, as and when the funds were available. In this leaflet the three main stages in the road's development are:

**Route 1** - dotted black line - said to have been complete by 1760, but probably not until later

**Route 2** - dotted blue line - probably completed 1819 or slightly later

**Route 3** - dotted green line - fully opened 3rd Aug. 1839

## Toll-bars

A feature of all turnpike roads was the toll-bar or toll-gate. In Marsden, chains seem to have been used rather than gates. These were placed at strategic points to collect the tolls from travellers. Each would have had a large board displaying the various rates. Six such toll-bars are known to have existed on the successive routes taken by the turnpike, and these are marked on the map:

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| a) Chain       | b) Gilberts      |
| c) Mount Bar   | d) Stubbin Road  |
| e) Green Bower | f) Throstle Nest |

Sadly, no trace is known to remain from any of them.

## Turnpike Inns

These were sited along the turnpike and catered for the travellers' needs. The original route largely followed the existing roads through Marsden, so the inns to serve it were already in existence. With changes to the route, new ones were established. There were at least sixteen roadside inns, only two of which remain in business, and five of the rest have long since been demolished.

The inns are the subject of a separate leaflet.

## Route 1

### 1 Milepost

One of the original 18th century mileposts remains along Meltham Road, on the south side, to the east of the old house called Badger Gate. It has been moved a little from its original position, and an iron staple has been fixed into its top. In the process of moving, it has been rotated 45 degrees to the left. On the side that would have faced Marsden, it says 'To H 6M' and on the other side 'To A 9M', meaning that from this point it is six miles to Huddersfield and nine miles to Austerlands.



### 2 Old road at Chain

An older road, at a slightly lower level than the present Meltham Road can still be traced by the fact that the old farm houses of Badger Gate, Badger Hey and Chain are clearly aligned to an older road, now grassed over. This would have been the original route of the turnpike road.



The new, straighter road was built some time between 1772 and 1818. The name Chain probably denotes that at one time a chain was stretched across the road here to collect tolls.

### 3 Old cottages on Brougham Road, formerly known as Idle Row

The date of these cottages is not known, but a will of one of the residents exists from 1740 showing that there was a road here long before the turnpike.



The name Idle Row was not a comment of the nature of the residents, but probably comes from 'idle' as an old dialect word for a small stream. Such a stream passes the western end of the row in a culvert under Brougham Road and on under New Mills. It supplied water to the two old mills next to the river which were later swallowed up in the expanding New Mills.

#### 4 The Old Town Bridge

There has probably been a bridge at this point for several centuries, almost certainly preceded by a ford. The iron bridge which now crosses the Wessenden Brook was built in 1876 to replace this much older one. There is an account in old parish records for 1569 of a woman falling from a wooden bridge into the river and drowning, which may well refer to a bridge on this site.

A petition from the parishioners of Marsden in Almondbury to the Petty Sessions in Wakefield in 1664 asked for funds to repair the wooden bridge which served the 'Greate Roade' into Lancashire and Cheshire, and had stood there since 'time out of minde'. It is obvious that this is Town Bridge. Another petition in 1725 asked for money towards the cost of building a new stone bridge. Again, this is most likely to refer to this crossing point.



The only date previously given for this stone bridge in the literature is 1798, but the 1725 petition suggests that it was built much earlier. It was known at one time as Kaye's Bridge, possibly named after the landlord of the Old Red Lion on Market Place during the late 18th century who invested heavily in the new turnpike.

#### 5 Throstle Nest

These cottages, at least one of which dates from 1773, take their name from a more extensive area which included properties that lay along the adjacent part of Fall Lane.



The ancient trans-Pennine route climbed up by the south end of the cottages in a winding sunken lane, rising very steeply to the old house at High Gate. This old track was totally unsuited to wheeled traffic. It is now a footpath.

#### 6 Gilberts - formerly Gilbert Intack

At some time it has also been known as Gilberts Bar, referring to the fact that there was a toll bar here, probably from the inauguration of the turnpike.



The 1841 and 1851 censuses both list toll collectors at this property. By this time, the final route was fully opened, some distance to the west. Either there was a new toll bar on Manchester Road, or tolls were still being collected from travellers along Mount Road.

#### 7 John Metcalf's 'floating road'

This section of road was used by Blind Jack of Knaresborough to convince the Turnpike Trustees that his road-building method was more practical than the one they proposed.

The Trustees wanted the peat dug out down to the bedrock, and the new road built up from there. Blind Jack



showed that the road could be founded on successive layers of heather bundles, laid down until they gave a firm enough surface to support layers of gravel and then stone. He proved that his method was both cheap and quick, and his foundations are still supporting the road today.

From Gilberts to Thieves Clough, the road followed the course of the Roman Road.

#### 8 Thieves Clough Bridge

This bridge, of which only the arch now remains, is at a slight angle to Metcalf's road, and is much narrower than the roadway. It clearly predates the Turnpike, although there is no record of when it was built. It would have been built to serve the old trackway into Lancashire, and replaced either a ford or an earlier bridge on what must have been a well-used road.



### Route 2

#### 9 Ottiwells Bridge

In 'The Life and Times of John Metcalf', Blind Jack describes constructing this bridge 'twelve yards in the span and nine yards in breadth' during the building of Carrs Road and Mount Road some time between 1789 and 1791. Although the bridge is now impossible to see beneath the widened carriageway, the stone arch remains in place. Extensive reinforcement work was carried out on the bridge in 2011, during which the original stone arch was briefly exposed, enabling this photograph to be taken. It remains underneath the modern road, still doing its job after 240 or so years.



#### 10 The new roadway over Warcock Hill

The road used to continue the line of Mount Road over Carr Clough and its small stream, where there must have been a bridge or a culvert. This may have been washed away, but there are references to older routes of the turnpike being deliberately cut off by the Trustees to stop road users avoiding the tolls. This part of the road is now completely grassed over but the levelled roadway with its banks and ditches is still clearly visible. Although both Carrs Road and Mount Road are clearly shown on a map of 1794, this section is missing. It does, however, appear on a map of 1818, so there appears to have been a delay before this part was built. It forms part of the Standedge Trail.

## Route 3

### 11 Old house on Stubbin Road

This is probably a very old road, and the date stone on this house confirms that it was in existence in 1772, before the turnpike came this way. A map of 1818 shows Stubbin Road as a continuation of a road along the Colne valley from Slaithwaite which was either a new route for the turnpike, or an existing road which was turnpiked later. It was clearly neglected while work was proceeding on the final route, as a complaint from road users about its poor state appeared in the Leeds Mercury in October 1838. This was less than a year before the whole route was finally completed.



### 12 Sherbrook Cottages

This row of old cottages now stands at a distinctly lower level than the modern road surface, strongly suggesting that they predate the building of Manchester Road, and that there was an older road or track at this point.



### 13 Manchester Road milepost

This milepost is made of cast iron. It is one of a batch of 600 made for the West Riding County Council in 1893 to replace the stone originals.



### 14 Cottage at the top of Oliver Lane

Here, Manchester Road is at a much higher level than Oliver Lane.

The gable end of the house had to be moved back at an angle in order to line up with the road formation.



### 15 Fall Lane Bridge

This major piece of construction enabled the new road to maintain a steady and not too steep incline out of the village, making for a relatively easy climb for horse-drawn vehicles.



### 16 Standedge Cutting

The cutting severs the second route of the turnpike over Standedge. While the cutting was being dug, a temporary bridge was built to enable traffic to continue using the older route. This late 19th century photograph reveals how the road originally was much narrower than it is today.



### Today

Over the years since the roads were taken into public ownership, there have been periodic improvements made to meet the needs of very high levels of motorised traffic. By the 1960s, the A62 was one of the busiest trans-Pennine routes, with heavy lorries passing through continuously. The building of the M62 diverted most of this traffic away from the Colne valley and, although busy at times, the A62 is a much quieter road these days.

### Aknowledgments

Cover image - John Metcalf (Blind Jack of Knaresborough)

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2 & 7 - Google maps,  
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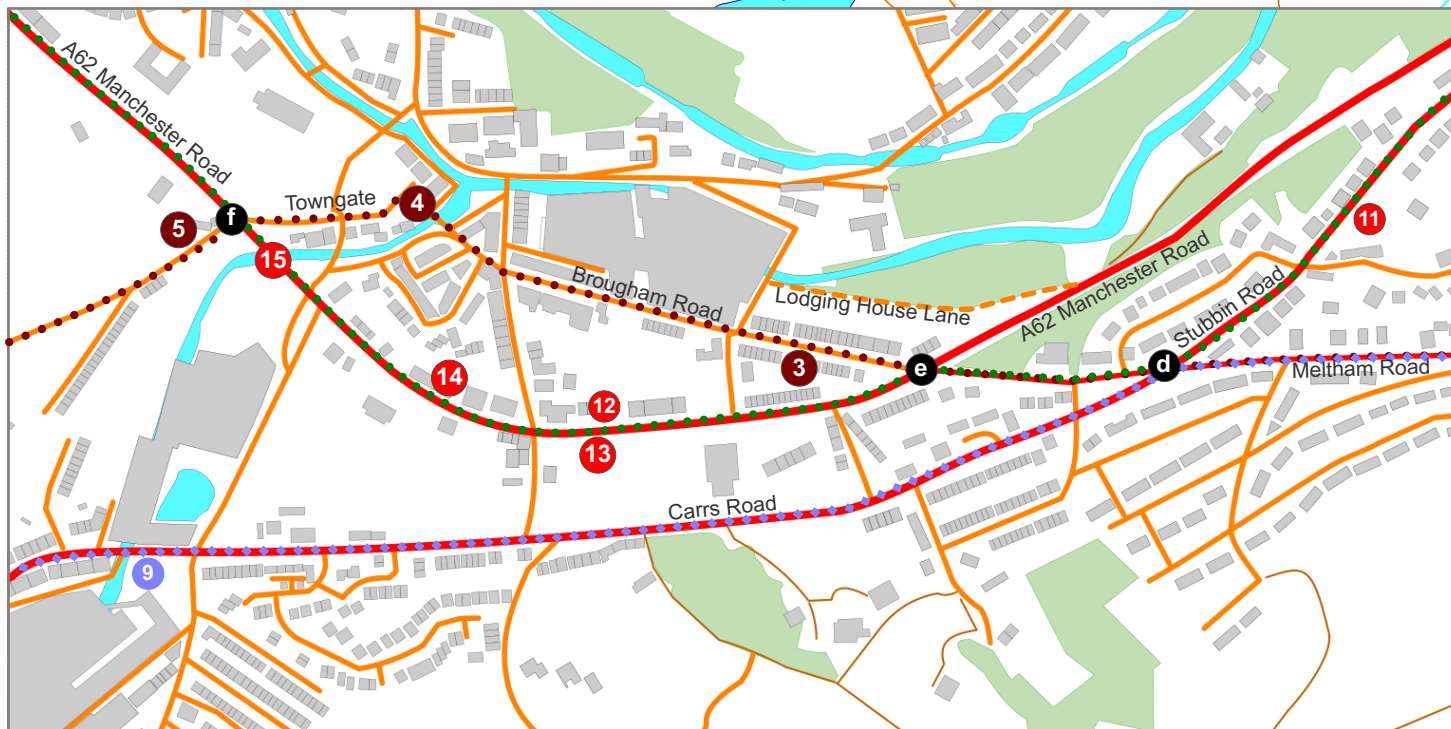
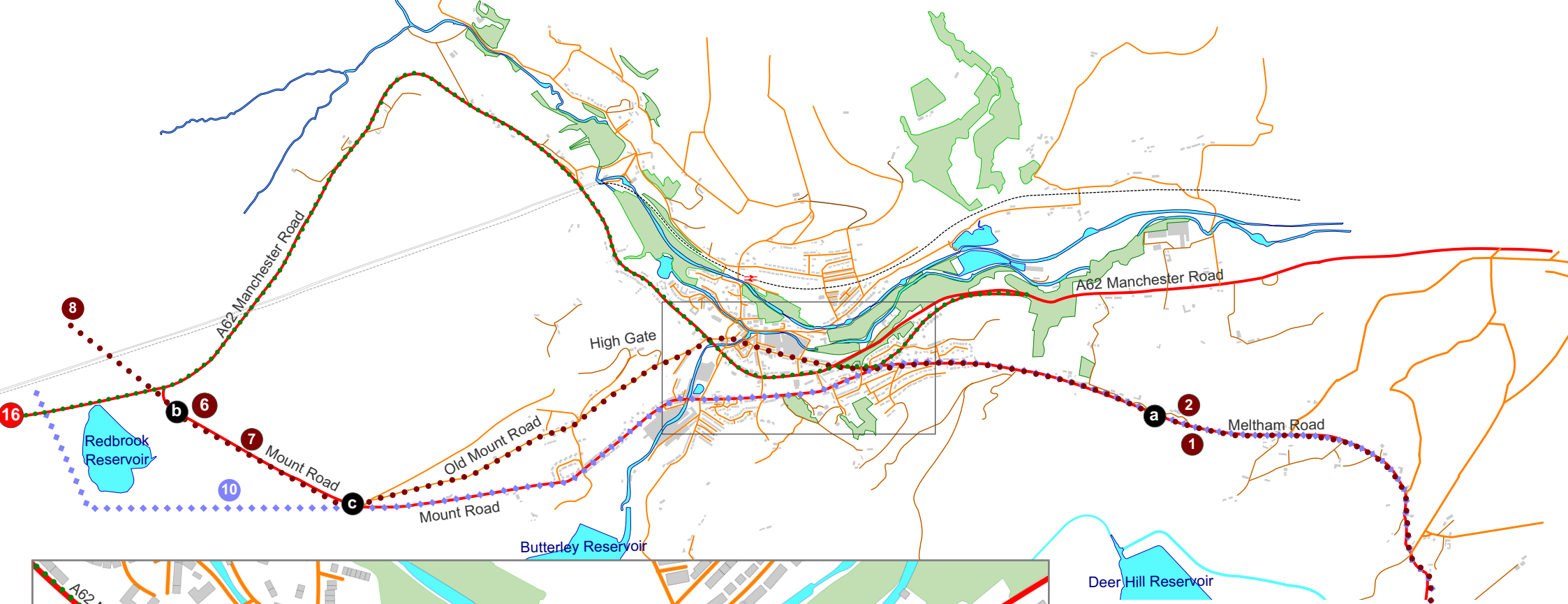
# Marsden History Group



## Crossing the Pennines The Turnpike Road

Mike Pinder 2018

[www.marsdenhistory.co.uk](http://www.marsdenhistory.co.uk)



### Route 1

1. Old road at Chain
2. Milepost
3. Idle Row
4. Old Town Bridge
5. Throstle Nest
6. Gilberts
7. Metcalf's floating road
8. Thieves Clough Bridge

### Turnpikes

- a. Chain
- b. Gilberts
- c. Mount Bar
- d. Stubbin Road
- e. Green Bower
- f. Throstle Nest

### Route 2

9. Ottiwells Bridge
10. Warcock Hill

### Route 3

11. Stubbin Road
12. Sherbrook Cottages
13. Manchester Road milepost
14. Oliver Lane
15. Fall Lane Bridge
16. Standedge Cutting