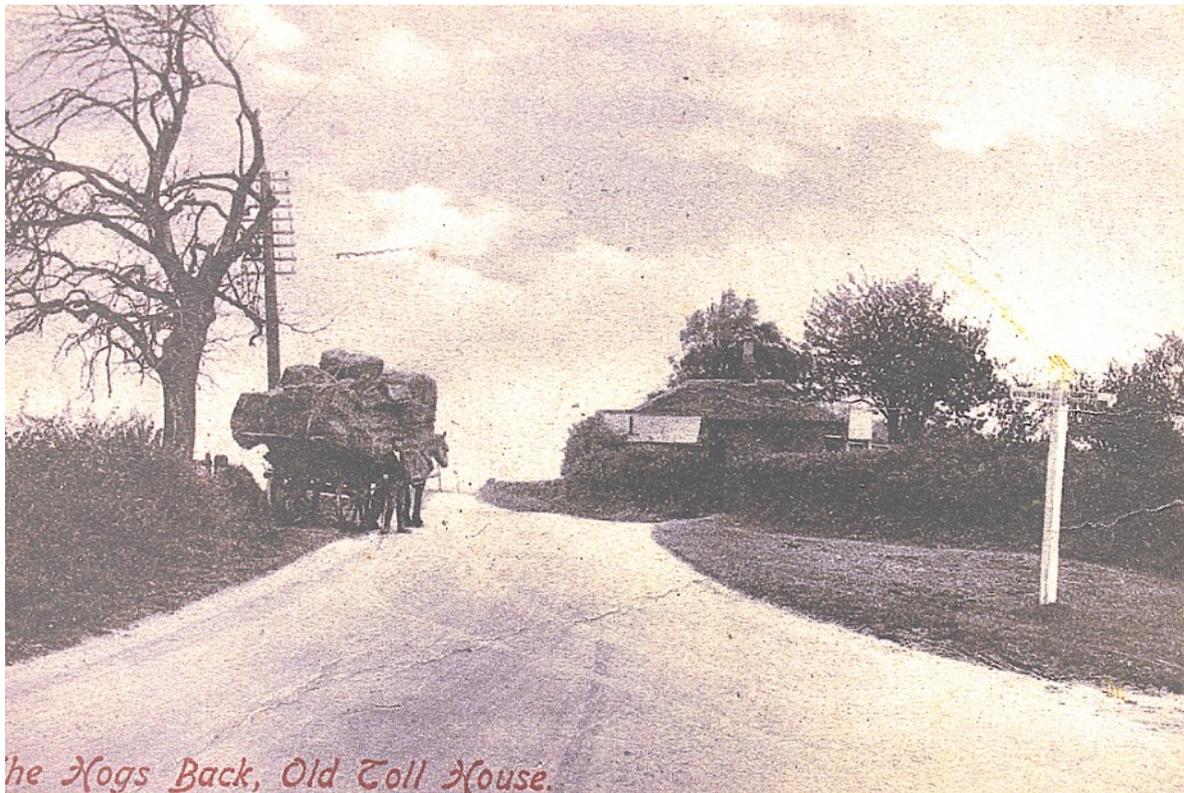


The turnpike road

Until 1933, when the Guildford and Godalming Bypass Road (now the A3) was opened, there was just one 'national' long-distance road in the parish: the turnpike road from London to Southampton that ran along the Hog's Back between Guildford and Farnham, now known as the A31.

Turnpikes were toll roads that were first created in the later seventeenth century as a way of improving the national road network. An Act of Parliament of 1555 put the responsibility of road maintenance onto the parishes through which they passed. However, as traffic increased through the seventeenth century, parishes couldn't or wouldn't cope with the demands of serious repairs and the condition of the roads rapidly deteriorated. Parliament saw the creation of toll roads as a way to overcome the problem.



The roads were to be run by independent trusts that were established by Act of Parliament and the Guildford to Farnham Turnpike Trust was formed in 1757.

The trusts resurfaced existing roads, sometime built new ones, set up tollgates, placed distance stones every mile along the way and employed people to maintain and run the roads. They were called turnpikes after the revolving spikes that were fixed to some of the early toll gates.

The tolls were fixed by the original Act and the gates at which they were collected were situated every few miles along the route. Compton had a toll house near the junction of Down Lane and the Hog's Back that survived to be photographed in the early twentieth century.

Milestones were made compulsory for all turnpikes in 1767. They were placed every mile along turnpike roads and one survives in Compton parish at the end of the westbound slip road where the A3 joins the A31.

The turnpike trusts were a popular investment and the network of roads grew through the Georgian era until, by 1838, there were 22,000 miles of them throughout the country.



Compton's only milestone.



A typical toll house and gate preserved at the Weald and Downland Museum.

Who used the turnpikes?

Both long distance and local travellers used the roads, although many people tried to avoid tolls by using alternative, less well-maintained, routes.

At every gate, travellers on a turnpike road were confronted by a large board on which a long list of the tolls would be displayed. The Act specified the maximum toll allowable for each vehicle or animal; for instance one shilling and sixpence for a coach pulled by four horses, a penny for an unladen horse and 10 pence for a drove of 20 cows, etc.

One can see that a wide variety of users travelled the roads but it is the stage coaches, the high speed transport of the era, for which they are famous. Travelling at up to 12mph they rushed along the Hog's Back completing the journey between Guildford and Farnham in an hour or so.

The journey from London to Southampton took two days with an overnight stop at a coaching inn such as the Angel in Guildford or the Bush in Farnham. Then, as now, the Hog's Back was a busy highway - although crossing the road would have been considerably easier and safer in the eighteenth century than it is today!

The inns were an integral part of the system because the coaches required regular stops at the end of each stage to exchange tired horses for fresh ones. The inns also allowed the passengers to enjoy the comforts of the house to prepare themselves for the next part of their journey, including overnight accommodation.

The end of the road

By 1840, their time was running out for railways were beginning to take away their trade. The roads became gradually less profitable over the following decades and, by 1876, the Guildford to Farnham trust was wound up and the road became free to use. In 1888 the Local Government Act placed the responsibility of maintaining roads onto the County Councils when all remaining turnpike trusts were dissolved. The legacy of the turnpike trusts is the network of routes that form the basis today's road transport system.

With the decline of road traffic in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Hog's Back became very much quieter until the era of cheap motoring that began in the 1920s. Now a noisy dual carriageway road, it is difficult to imagine the slow world of the stage coach trade.

