

Book Reviews

Turnpike Roads to Banbury, by Alan Rosevear (with additional text and indexes by Jeremy Gibson), Banbury Historical Society, Vol 31, x + 214 pp, illus. (ISBN 978 0 900129 29 2), 2010. £15.00 (+ £3.00 p&p) (free to members).

This long-awaited publication fills cavities in the history of Banburyshire that remain open in most comparable regions of England. The role of roads in the social and economic changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has increasingly been recognised by historians, but there are few detailed studies of the changes that turnpike trusts brought about in particular areas. Turnpike trusts were entrusted by Parliament, usually in response to petitions from local people, with the duty of maintaining particular stretches of road, and were granted the right to collect tolls from road-users, from riders of horses and drivers of horse-drawn vehicles or groups of beasts, but not from pedestrians, nor from various exempted groups. A trust's powers usually lasted for 21 years, after which they had to be renewed by a further Act of Parliament. While the first trust was designated in 1663, most were created in the eighteenth century. The routes from London to the principal regional cities were mostly under the control of trusts by 1760. From 1750 many Acts were passed for networks of roads based on market towns, for Tetbury, Bishop's Castle and Lyme Regis for example, but no such Act related to Banbury where the roads leading into the town were managed by six different trusts. New trusts continued to be authorised into the 1830s and even the 1840s, particularly in industrial regions, but the last of the roads serving Banbury, the route to Brailes and Shipston-on-Stour, was turnpiked in 1802.

The study of turnpike roads poses numerous difficulties. Trusts were private bodies and the rate of survival of their archives is uneven; those that remain are usually in the collections of solicitors, or in some cases in the papers of great estates. While it is not too difficult to trace copies of the first Acts of Parliament for particular roads, finding copies of those renewing trusts' powers can be difficult, and tracing the progress of parliamentary bills can involve much laborious toil. Newspapers reveal some information about turnpikes, particularly when trusts annually advertised the leasing-out of their tolls, listing their tollhouses in the process, but not every trust did so, and the proceedings of meetings of trustees were rarely reported.

Alan Rosevear's book will save future historians of Banbury and Banburyshire an enormous amount of fatigue. It concisely summarises the development of each of the turnpike trusts that were of consequence to the town, many more than the six which actually passed through or terminated there. The quotations from petitions calling for roads to be placed under the control of trusts recorded in the *Journal of the House of Commons* are particularly useful and throw light on many aspects of Banbury's eighteenth century history.