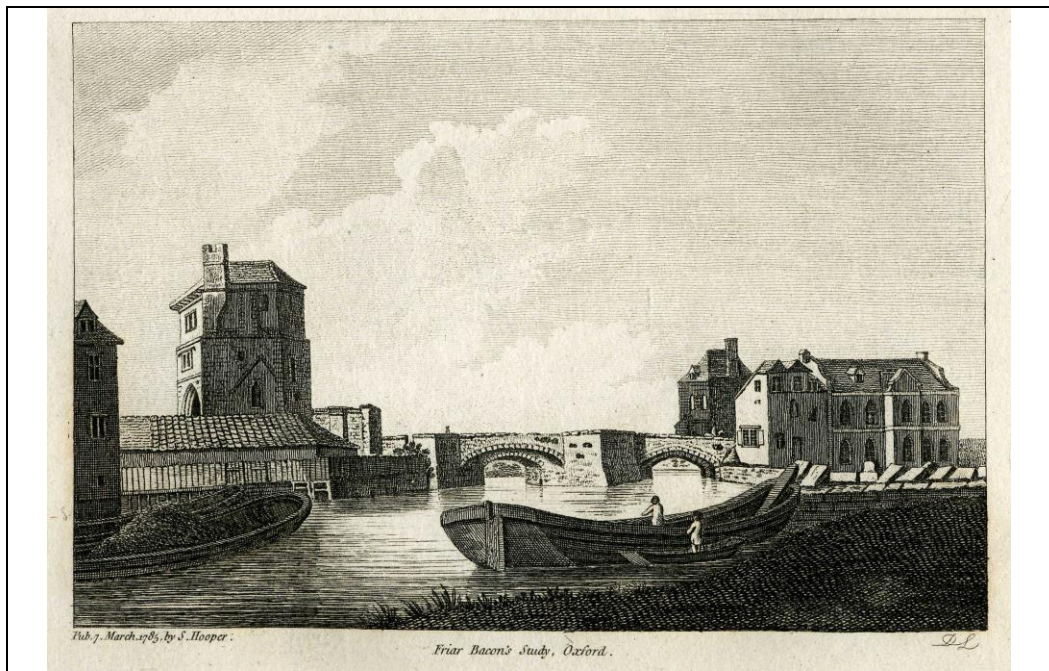


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RUTV 7 is booklet number 7 in a series on the turnpike roads of Oxfordshire and adjoining areas.



A view of the old Folly Bridge and Fryar Bacon's Study, Oxford

Turnpike Roads through Abingdon

7.1 Introduction

Between the departure of the Roman Legions and the late 17th century, no significant new roads were built in England. Highways and tracks recovered easily from the light traffic. There were improvements to river crossing during the Saxon and medieval periods, particularly the construction of bridges over medium size rivers such as the upper Thames. The long-term care of these new structures was often left to local religious institutions, but this system broke down after the dissolution of the monasteries. An increased pressure from trade in the Tudor period coincided with this loss of strategic care, leading to serious deterioration in the transport network in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The turnpike system, by which a body of trustees maintained and improved a specific section of main road and charged users a toll, was a successful response to rectify this situation. The first roads to be turnpiked were the main radials from London; this initial burst of activity was complete by about 1720. Abingdon is an important hub for the road network in the upper Thames valley and roads through the town were turnpiked during the second wave of Parliamentary activity around 1750.

7.2 Ancient Routes through Abingdon

Abingdon is sited at the confluence of the Thames and the Ock. The town is located on the southern bank of the Thames but the long northward sweep of the Thames through Oxford means that in this region, safe crossing of the river for roads running east/west is particularly important (Figure 7.1). Like the river crossing at Oxford, Abingdon is situated upstream of the point where a large tributary joins the Thames and a series of islands have formed. Under these circumstances the river flow is divided into a number of minor channels, spreading the water over a large area and creating a series of relatively shallow, fordable streams. It is difficult to imagine crossing the present river, even by a number of small stages, but it must be remembered that during the 18th century the Thames Commissioners cut a deep navigation channel and confined the river within narrow banks.

Iron Age and Roman settlers occupied the site of Abingdon and no doubt river travel was often preferable to travel over the tracks and fords of the river valley. There is no direct evidence for a major Roman road passing through Abingdon, though it is reasonable to think that minor roads from the regional centre at Dorchester ran westwards through Abingdon to the religious centre at Frilford. The Iron Age settlement at Barton Farm may be on this track and the Roman finds close to the Ashville Industrial Estate include a cemetery, a feature that was often located on the road outside a settlement. Tracks from the Roman potteries in the area around Boars Hill and Foxcombe Hill would have intersected with this road close to the present Ock Bridge. Furthermore, the area on the southern bank of the River Ock is called Caldecott, a name commonly found on the line of known Roman roads (Hindle 1993).

Thus, there may have been a Roman trade route running south from Boars Hill, crossing the Ock west of the present town and carrying on towards Spinis (near Newbury) or to Cunetio (near Marlborough). The former was definitely a trade road by Saxon times but there is less known about the latter route. It would have headed south-west from the Ock and met the putative Roman road that runs south from Frilford at Belmont, the Roman site near to Wantage (see RUTV 1). A track following the low ridge on the southern bank of the Ock was in use during medieval times. Nevertheless, it was not the principal route from Wantage to Abingdon and despite being slightly above the river, it still crossed some fairly wet ground. A wealthy Wantage gentleman left a bequest for the improvement of this road from Grove, across Pinmarsh

to Cow Common (Garnish per. comm.). This straight road from Wantage to Caldecott and the Ock Bridge is still a distinct feature on the Rocque map of 1762 (Figure 7.2) but all traces of this trans-Vale track were lost when it was selected as the line for the Wilts & Berks Canal in the early 19th century.

In Saxon times, major highways crossed the Thames by fords at Oxford and Wallingford. Abingdon may have been more important as a crossing of the Ock rather than a principal crossing of the Thames. This part of Berkshire was on the border between the rival kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia, changing hands a number of times. In the 8th century King Offa granted land in Goosey to persuade a monastic settlement to move off Andersey Island (Baker 1963). By the 11th century a thriving monastery was established on the western bank of the Thames. The present town grew up at the gates of the great medieval abbey that became one of the richest ecclesiastical institutions in the country. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions the major trade route that ran from Northampton, in Mercia, to the important Channel port of Southampton in Wessex. This lay along what is now the A34, making the important Thames crossing south of Oxford and crossing the Ock at Abingdon. The route from South Hinksey to Abingdon would have followed the high ground, descending to the Ock valley either through Bagley Wood or over Foxcombe Hill. The fords and later the bridges over the Ock focussed activity at this point and led to the growth of a small town upon the higher ground of the northern bank. Travellers would aim to keep to the west of the Stert stream, so that the centre of Abingdon grew up a little distant from the islands that formed the, then less important, crossing of the Thames (Figure 7.3). South of Abingdon the road passed over a damp clay vale before reaching the relatively dry conditions on the Downs. Since pack animals carried most goods at this time, this journey would have been easier than it was to become when heavily laden wagons had to traverse the mud and mire of the eastern end of the Vale.

Despite the tendency of the river channel to silt up, the town of Abingdon derived some importance from river trade. A substantial proportion of heavy or delicate merchandise to riverside towns would have been carried by river barge rather than by wagon. Agricultural goods from the rich farmlands of the Vale were brought to the wharves near to Abingdon for transportation downstream whereas merchandise from London was distributed from the riverside warehouses. In the 11th century the monks of Abingdon Abbey cut a navigation channel to the east of Abingdon to improve the passage of barges up to Oxford. By the late 16th century it had become difficult for barges to navigate this Swift Ditch and so in 1630s pound locks were built on this stretch of the river. Throughout this period Culham Reach, rather than the town, was the preferred spot for heavy barges to berth and unload. In 1612, Richard Whistler of Sutton was given a lease to land beside the river, provided that he built a lock and made the river navigable as far as St Helen's (Carter & Smith 1981). A lease to Frances Cordywell in 1629 is worded more precisely, that "the ground is intended to be a wharf". In 1653 Elizabeth Sawyer had a lease from Christ's Hospital with rights to load and unload "all woods, coals and wares" at the wharf. However, there was constant trouble over wharfage dues and the rates were amended on several occasions (Carter & Smith 1981). James Watkins leased the wharf in 1704 and the Watkins family were still tenants in 1735. It is this wharf that was referred to as "Watkins Wharf" in the original proposal for the north/south turnpike through Abingdon in 1755.

7.3 Bridges on Roads through Abingdon

7.3.1 Crossing The Ock

On the Gough map of 1360 the highway from Oxford to Abingdon was one of the more important roads in the Kingdom (RUTV 13). However, this map indicates that the main Thames bridges were at Oxford and Wallingford. Providing a crossing over the Ock seems to be what made Abingdon of note, even after the abbey had attained some importance nationally. There are

two ancient crossings of the Ock near Abingdon. St Helen's Bridge, near the junction with the Thames, is closer to the centre of the present town. The Ock Bridge is about half a mile west of the centre. This latter is rather a strange position if its main function was to carry the north/south traffic through Abingdon. However, it can be argued that Ock Bridge is the site of older crossing point, which kept Newbury bound traffic away from the boggy ground adjacent to the Thames.

The Ock Bridge is clearly very old and the stone structure contains part of a round-headed, barrel vaulted arch, which may date from the 12th century (Steane 1981). During recent engineering work to deepen the channel, timber piles of a very early bridge were found (Andrew, pers. comm.). Abbot Faritius may have used the Ock Bridge when he entered the town in 1101 to walk barefoot to the abbey (VHCB 4, 434). Jervoise (1930) believed that much of the present stone bridge over the Ock could be contemporary with the Thames bridges in Abingdon. The bridge has ecclesiastical associations and was maintained with alms collected by a hermit who lived beside the bridge. In the 14th century there was a hospital dedicated to St Mary Magdalene on the bridge and in 1547 there was a chapel "on the south end of Oke Bridge in Abingdon townne" (VHCB 4, 434). Even after the church lost control there was a need to keep this roadway in good repair and a lease of 1563 made it a condition that the tenant of the hermitage repaired Ock Bridge (Smith & Carter 1978). The hermitage was isolated from the town and for this reason was used to house the sick and suspected plague victims. However, in 1645 the chapel was demolished and the materials used in the town (Cox 1993). In the 18th century the bridge was widened on the upstream side with semi-circular arches and the causeway straightened (Steane 1981). This was probably undertaken by the turnpike trust in collaboration with Christ's Hospital. The upstream side bridge appears modern as a result of widened in 1979 but on the downstream side several of the Gothic arches are still visible (Figure 7.4).

St Helen's Bridge, closer to the centre of the present town, would have grown in importance as the abbey increased in economic power. In style this bridge is similar to the older parts of Burford Bridge and probably dates from a similar time. Both Burford and St Helen's Bridges were certainly the responsibility of the Fraternity of the Holy Cross. John Leland, agent to Henry VIII, attributes the building of St Helen's Bridge to Joannes de S. Helena (Toulmin Smith 1964), who was a contemporary of Geoffrey Barber, financier of the Burford Bridge. Joannes had been known as Sir John Golafre of Fyfield, prior to taking the Lordship of St Helen's (Cobham 1872), and on his death left his wealth for the "mayntanaunce of the hospitall and the bridges". St Helen's Bridge gave access to the area south of the town but this land is very low lying and must have flooded regularly. Hence, any advantage of position, close to the town, was countered by the difficulty of travel on the far bank. Leland entered the town from the direction of Wallingford in the 1540s across St Helen's Bridge, stating "at this confluence self in the very mouth is a very fair of 7 arches; and a very litle beneth this bridge booth the armes yoinid and renning in one botom goith ynto Ise" (Toulmin Smith 1964). The old St Helen's Bridge over the Ock was rebuilt much later in 1793 (Jervoise 1930) but still retained the pointed Gothic arches. However, no trace of these remains since the whole area was restructured at the junction of the Wilts & Berks Canal with the Thames. The present cast iron bridge is dated 1824.

7.3.2 Crossing The Thames

A series of fords formed the original track to the east of Abingdon across to Culham. When, in the 11th century, Purden's Stream or the Swift Ditch (VHCO 5, 28) was improved, the new channel was too deep to cross safely. A ferry was installed, though the ferry-man charged heavily for his services (Cox 1989) and still "Dyvers persones drowned at the ferry" (Toulmin Smith 1964). As the abbey rose in both political and economic importance, a more reliable link to the London road was sought. Members of the Guild of the Fraternity of the Holy Cross in Abingdon had sufficient wealth to finance replacement of the old fords and ferry with two major

bridges over the arms of the Thames east of the town. The main bridge over the streams nearest the town is known as the Burford (Borough ford) Bridge and this is connected by a causeway to the Culham Bridge over the Swift Ditch (Figure 7.3).

In 1416 two members of Fraternity of the Holy Cross, John Howchion (or Hutchion) and John Bret (or Brite) (Preston 1929), were granted a licence by Henry V to build and repair bridges and a causeway at Abingdon. John Howchion and John Banberie of the Fraternity (Cobham 1872) paid the abbey £115 in compensation for the ferry to Culham Hithe and the strip of land on Andersey Island across which the causeway was to run (Cox 1989). The stonemasonry skills employed in construction of the abbey were adapted to create the Gothic arches of the new bridges. This provided a dry route for traffic crossing between the Oxfordshire and Berkshire banks of the Thames. Howchion laid the first stone in June 1416 and 300 men were employed at a penny a day throughout the summer to complete the crossing. Hearn in his notes on Leland (Toulmin Smith 1964) believed that John of St Helen's, who had given money for St Helen's Bridge, was the initial financier of the Burford Bridge. He thought that Geoffrey Barber, a wool merchant who had made his fortune in Bristol and then returned to live in Abingdon, paid for Culham Bridge and also for completion of the Burford Bridge. Barber provided 1000 marks to finance the work and Sir Peter Bessels gave stone from his quarries at Besselsleigh and Sandford. Long-term financial support to maintain the bridge became an important function of the Brotherhood, who appointed proctors and priests to collect alms and donation for the bridges (Preston 1929). In 1430 an additional bridge was built into the causeway, slightly to the east of the Burford Bridge. These three arches are known as Maud Hales' Bridge, after the wife of William Hales, a wealthy London mercer who paid for its construction (VHCB 4, 436). This section was also known as New Bridge but subsequent improvements to the Thames mean that now water only passes under these three arches during periods of heavy flooding.

The new crossing was a great success and was celebrated in a poem by Richard Forman in 1457 (Toulmin Smith 1964) thus;

"....For cartes with cariage may goo and come clere
That many wynters afore were mareed in the myre.
And some oute of her sadels flette to the grounde
Went forthe in the Water wist no man whare"

The new route gave better access to the deep-water wharves at Henley. For instance, in the mid-15th century stone from Taynton quarries, bound for the King's new College at Eton, was carried by road through Culham, as far as Henley before being loaded onto barges.

Leland describes the Burford Bridge in the 1540s as "The greath bridge at Abbingdon over Ise hath a 14 arches" (Toulmin Smith 1964). Six Gothic arches are still visible on the downstream side of the narrow section of the bridge closest to the town and four other Gothic arches survive in the improved section of the bridge. There have been several changes to the arches over the main navigation channel; the present arch replaces the original semi-circular arch built by the Thames Commissioners and two old Gothic arches (Figure 7.5). The records of Christ's Hospital, the charity that replaced the Fraternity of the Holy Cross after the dissolution of the monasteries and chantries, contain numerous references to repairs of the Thames crossing (Cox 1993). In 1553 piddles from the abbey were used to repair the roadway and in 1568, four pence was spent for "setting 2 stones at Burford to save the corners from perishing with cartes". The abbey buildings were a source of building materials after the dissolution and in 1590 William Blacknall sold three loads of stones from the abbey for New Bridge at three shillings.

The old Culham Bridge, to the south of the present road, has three major arches and two lower arches on the approach (Figure 7.6). It has needed repair on several occasions, perhaps because it was vulnerable to barges using the old navigation channel. In June 1595 two arches of Culham

Bridge collapsed and had to be rebuilt. Again in 1611, an arch at Culham Bridge collapsed: such repairs may account for differences in the shape of the main arches. This bridge was attacked by Prince Rupert in January 1645 but his advance across the causeway was foiled and the bridge survived, although it needed some repairs after the war in 1647 (Cox 1993).

Abingdon was captured by Parliamentary forces in May 1644 and became the stronghold closest to the King's army based in Oxford. Major General Browne, commander of the Parliamentary forces in Abingdon, placed a turnpike across the road north at the Vineyard and breached Abingdon Bridge as part of his defences around the town. A drawbridge gave controlled access to the London road but was a major barrier to Royalist attacks from the Oxfordshire bank. In 1647, after cessation of hostilities, Christ's Hospital began to repair damage to the bridges leading into their town (Smith & Carter 1981). Edward Hucks was paid for over 200 loads of gravel and stone to assist in the work. Thomas Matthews the mason to the Hospital was paid £6 for rebuilding each of three arches. Timothy Jarman was twice paid for "13 loads of large stones for breach about Hart Bridge" and Mr Howe for "the use of boards during the construction of the new arch". Hart Bridge probably refers to the section that now forms the navigation arch, beside the old Nags Head Inn. It was presumably at this point that the Parliamentary forces had breached the old bridge and fitted a drawbridge. Old iron was taken from the drawbridge later the same year when the new arches had been built. Ock Bridge had also been breached and St Helen's Bridge damaged. William Narroway was paid for work "at the Arch of Ock Bridge that was broken" and "for work at the Arch of St Helen's Bridge". These works ensured that normal traffic and vital trade resumed quickly after the end of hostilities.

7.3.3 The Bridges at Wallingford and Henley

The dry crossing of the Thames over Burford and Culham Bridges and the causeway, attracted the traffic and associated trade from the rival Borough of Wallingford. Stow noted in Leland's itinerary that "the makyng of this bridge was a great hinderens to the towne of walingford, withar the trade was of Glostarshire" (Toulmin Smith 1964). Wallingford Bridge had not been well cared for and as early as 1344 it had "threatened to become a ruin". By 1429, when competition from the new bridge at Abingdon had materialised, it was reported, "Walynsford Bridge is so ruinous that many accidents have occurred to people and carts crossing the same" (Jervoise 1930). Wallingford was set on a path of relative decline (Crampton 1965) and although the old bridge was repaired in 1530 it was badly damaged during the Civil War. The Royalist defenders of the town destroyed the two centre arches and a wooden drawbridge was put in their place. Wallingford was the last Royalist stronghold in the area to surrender but once peace was restored the inhabitants of the town did not immediately rebuild the main bridge in the way the citizens of Abingdon had done.

Prior to the improvements of the Thames Commissioners, the Thames could be crossed at Henley by the Bokingrysforde (Crocker 1982). Several tracks radiate westwards from the ford, on the northern bank of the river, intersecting the Thames again on the other side of the Chilterns. These routes were several miles less than the equivalent journey by river (Figure 7.1b). The ancient pack and prime way from the ford near Bell Lane, Henley passes close by Cold Harbour Farm, a name suggesting that this could have been a Roman road. It carries on west through Peppard, going close by Exlade Street (again Roman links) to meet the river at Goring. The road through Assendon to Watlington and Oxford is probably of similar antiquity whereas Margery has suggested that the road through Bix is of Roman origin. It is this latter road that became the dominant route for road travel in the post-medieval period.

The river at Henley may have been bridged during the reign of King John and in 1223 the warden of the bridge was granted wood from Windsor Forest for the repair of the bridge. A chapel to St Katherine was established in 1382 for "the reparation and emendation of the bridge"

(Crocker 1982). The hermitage associated with this later became an inn that occupied the site on which the Angel inn now stands. The bridge, which was constructed of wood on masonry piers, was damaged during the Civil War but survived until the late 18th century.

The Gough map of 1360 showed a road from Wallingford to Oxford and a road to Oxford through Wycombe but no road through Henley. The early Plantagenet kings used only the road through Wallingford to reach Oxford and Woodstock but from the early 13th century onwards some journeys were made through Henley (RUTV 9). The highway from London to Oxford over Henley Bridge is considerably shorter than the ancient road through Reading and across the bridge at Wallingford. Hence, as Wallingford Castle declined in favour as a royal residence, the road across the bridges at Maidenhead and Henley prospered. This route, partially along the banks of the Thames, was later eclipsed by the Uxbridge, Wycombe route from London to Oxford and the west. The Henley road crosses the Chilterns where the hills are relatively low and so avoids the steep ascents and descents around Wycombe and Stokenchurch. Nevertheless, it crossed the wet and muddy valley of the Thame at Dorchester, close to its confluence with the Thames making it less attractive than the Wycombe road for Oxford bound traffic. However, the Henley road became the principal approach to the river crossing beside the abbey at Abingdon. The branch from Dorchester to Abingdon displaced the road through Wallingford as the southerly route to the Gloucester (Figure 7.1c). By 1675 Ogilby chose to classify the road from Henley through Abingdon as the principal route from London to St David's, though Gloucester. He did not consider the road from Dorchester to Oxford as a main road.

In Tudor times Henley was the head of river navigation for larger trading vessels. Goods were carried from the west to be loaded onto barges here. Wallingford's river trade declined along with its function as a river crossing and traffic from north Berkshire found Abingdon Bridge a more convenient road to the Thames-side wharves and main highways to London.

7.4 Pre-Turnpike Roads through Abingdon

7.4.1 The Old Roads

Building of the Burford and Culham Bridges reflects the fact that the main axis of communication in this part of the Thames valley had changed significantly since the Saxon period. The north/south road between the Midlands and the Channel ports had declined in importance relative too the east/west route between London and the Severn valley. In the medieval period, London began to dominate the flow of trade across the Kingdom. More and more wagons, laden with West Country cloth and agricultural products from Wiltshire and north Berkshire began to flow along the road to Abingdon. The Dorchester road carried traffic by a relatively short route to the deeper water of the lower Thames at Henley.

Some of the traffic heading west from Henley was bound for Oxford but a higher proportion was heading for the bridges at Abingdon. These gave travellers heading west a reliable road to the Corallian ridge on the northern edge of the Vale of White Horse, cutting across the great northern loop of the Thames (Figure 7.1c). The Abingdon road avoided a difficult crossing of the Thames west of Oxford or the long journey north of the Thames loop across the wet ground to Hanborough and Witney. West of Abingdon, the road reached the high ground by an easy incline through Shippon and the continued along a ridgeway to Faringdon. From this ridge the traveller from Abingdon could access one of several medieval bridges across the Thames.

The most important for western traffic was St John's Bridge, Lechlade (the Gloucester road), but there was also the bridge at Radcot (the Burford road) and Newbridge (the Witney road). It is generally said that these bridges date from a similar period to the stone bridge at Wallingford (1337, ca 1200, ca 1250 respectively) and so pre-date Abingdon Bridge. Cobham (1872) says

Francis Little believed that John of St Helen's, alias John Golafre of Fyfield, also built "New Bridge in Oxfordshire" implying that this bridge on the Witney road is contemporary with Abingdon Bridge, but this has not been substantiated. The original function of these bridges was to facilitate the wool trade from the Cotswolds to the south coast, during the early medieval period. As a result they were oriented for north/south travel in the same way as Ock Bridge, Abingdon (Figure 7.1b). St John's Bridge was the best placed as an east/west crossing and it was this route that developed as the principal road from the Abingdon Bridge to Gloucester.

The first reliable road maps of the area are those published by John Ogilby in 1675, although they were copied, almost unaltered for up to a century afterwards (Figure 7.7a-d). These strip maps show only the principal roads but three of these pass through Abingdon (Figure 7.8). The route across Abingdon Bridge is the London to St David's road, one of the principal radials out of the capital. Two roads converge on Abingdon from the north and diverge again to the south. The most important is the Oxford to Chichester road which, with the exception of a section between St Helen's Bridge, Abingdon, and Milton Hill, follows the line of the old A34 to Newbury. The other is the Oxford to Salisbury road that takes a more westerly track along the Roman road over Foxcombe, down the packhorse road through Wootton and crosses Ock Bridge. It then follows the line of the old A34 to the Packhorse Inn but thereafter is now merely a green road to Hungerford (RUTV 2). Ogilby's commentary to the maps indicates the condition of these roads. In general those across the high ground were fairly good but the road south across the Ock valley were clearly muddy and difficult. This view is further enhanced by the comments of Constantijn Huygens, secretary to William of Orange during their journey from Hungerford in December 1688. He noted that the road from Newbury to Abingdon was "everywhere very dirty, but at the last four (miles) near Abington, so bad as I had ever seen. Isac, who was riding with me fell off his horse in the mud and so did another young man near me" (Cox 1993). On hearing the news that James had fled, William set off for London across the Abingdon Bridge to Henley, via Dorchester and Benson to claim the crown.

Morden's map of Berkshire published in 1695 shows the east/west road but only marks the Oxford to Newbury road on the north/south axis. These two routes carried most through traffic and began to suffer increasing damage from a combination of heavy use and piecemeal administration. This made them the primary candidates to be taken into the care of turnpike trusts in the early years of the 18th century.

7.4.2 Road Maintenance

Although the parish was legally responsible for the highway, in Abingdon the Borough seems to have maintained some of the roads and Christ's Hospital kept all the bridges. An ordinance of the new Borough in 1599 stated that "streets and lanes... for want of Reparations are nowe in great Ruine and decay, and forthat great Trade of Maulting within the Borough is the chiefest meanes and cawse thereof, by reason of much Carriage of Corne and Graine in and out of said Borough, and by the bringing in of great Store of Strawe or fuell for drying malt.... ". To rectify this the Borough imposed a toll of one penny on each "Carte or Wayne (the wheels thereof being bound with iron)" (Cox 1993).

It was common for the wealthy residents of the town to bequeath money for the repair of local roads. Katharine Audlett and Thomas Reade the elder had done this in the 16th century. In 1605, Thomas Reade the younger of Barton House (Figure 7.3) left £5 "to mendinge of the highway from Sugworthe gate (south of Bagley Wood) so farre as myne ground goeth towards Norcot" (Cox 1993), i.e. the Oxford to Abingdon road.

Repairs involved "Pitching the streets"; simply spreading loads of stones onto the soft ground and allowing vehicles to consolidate it. The heavy military traffic of the Civil War caused

considerable damage so, between 1671 and 1676, all the principal streets were pitched with pebbles at a cost of £800 (Carter & Smith 1981). Nevertheless, this casual and uncoordinated maintenance was insufficient to rectify the damage caused by large numbers of heavy vehicles. The creation of turnpike trusts to administer roads that ran some distance through several parishes was the way this problem was dealt with in the 18th century.

7.5 Abingdon Turnpikes

The east/west road through Abingdon was turnpiked in 1736 at about the same time as other sections of the London to Gloucester road further to the east and to the west. The main north/south road was turnpiked as part of the improvement of roads south of Oxford in 1755. In 1768 a third, less important turnpike was formed from Abingdon through Cumnor to the new Thames bridge at Swinford. Fortunately the Minutes book of the Henley to Dorchester Turnpike Trust have survived for the period 1821 to 1873. Important sections of these were transcribed by John Crocker and are quoted below. Information on the other trusts has only been found in general publications and newspapers.

During the turnpike era Abingdon was a crossroads, with both the north/south and east/west routes through the town (Figure 7.9). However, the road from Henley and on to Gloucester was clearly the more important highway, carrying vehicles to and from London and the Severn valley. Although the town was a node in an important network, the roads in the town were not maintained by a turnpike trust and responsibility for the important bridges over the Thames and the Ock remained primarily in the hands of the Borough and Christ's Hospital.

7.6 Henley, Dorchester and Abingdon Turnpike

"The Roads leading from Henley Bridge, in the County of Oxford, to Dorchester Bridge, and from thence to Culham Bridge, and to a Place called Milestone, in the Road leading to Magdalen Bridge" came under the care of a turnpike trust by an Act of Parliament in 1736 (Figure 7.10a). The turnpike was clearly conceived as a route both to Abingdon and Oxford but the former was apparently the more important. The act instructed the trustees to "order and direct the Roads leading from Henley Bridge to Dorchester Bridge and from thence to Culham Bridge (they being the most ruinous) to be repaired in the first place".

This trust was independent but its creation was linked to a general improvement in the route that Ogilby had described as the London to St David's road. To the east of Henley, the section through Maidenhead Thicket and Hurley to Henley Bridge was turnpiked in 1728 under the direction of the existing Maidenhead Turnpike Trust. To the west, beyond Abingdon and Fyfield, the Fyfield to St John's Bridge Turnpike Trust had been established by an Act of 1733. Another, less important turnpike, the Reading, Henley and St Albans Road, which passed north/south through Henley, was not created until 1768.

Turnpike Acts normally gave the trustees up to 21 years to achieve the necessary improvements to the roads. This was rarely achieved and most trusts sought to renew and amend their powers on several occasions spanning over 100 years. The first renewal of the Henley to Dorchester Trust in 1754, extended their responsibilities westwards "for repairing and widening the Roads leading from the End of Culham Bridge next to Culham, in the County of Oxford, to the End of Burford Bridge next to Abingdon, in the County of Berks, and from the Mayor's Stone at the end of Boar Street (the old name for Bath Street) in the Town of Abingdon aforesaid, to Shippon, in the said County of Berks, and from thence to the West End of the Town of Fyfield in the same County" (Figure 7.10b). This took in the road across the firmer ground of the Corallian ridge west of Abingdon. This new section of road was principally an Abingdon concern and seems to have become the autonomous Fyfield Trust in later years. However, the streets of Abingdon

itself were not included under any turnpike administration since the Borough already made adequate provisions for the repair of these. A strange exception in the second act was that tolls paid "for carriages loaden with Cheese or Copper going to be shipped at Abingdon" should be refunded. Obviously some special interest group had lobbied hard for this particular concession. Further acts made minor changes, mainly to the tolls and the basis of charging tolls (Table 7.1). The 1821 act made specific provisions for the Assendon Road that branches off at the end of the Fair Mile, west of Henley.

A description of the road and its features is given below, commencing at the Henley end and going westwards through Dorchester and Abingdon to the edge of Fyfield.

7.6.1 Henley to Bix

The turnpike trust was charged with improving and maintaining the road. The main bridges were either administered by separate commissions or were the responsibility of the county, through the justices. For several years after the turnpiking of the roads into Henley, traffic from Maidenhead and Hurley had to pass over the old wooden bridge. In 1774 a great flood swept this away (Philips 1981) and, under an Act of 1781, powers were granted to build a new stone bridge immediately adjacent to the old structure. The Bridge Commissioners started to levy tolls on traffic across what remained of the old bridge, charging three pence for each horse (Crocker 1982). A temporary tollhouse was erected on the site now occupied by the Carpenters Arms and was let at ten shillings a week to Richard Taylor. After completion of the bridge in 1788, the Commissioners began to use income from tolls to repay their £10,000 loan. In the first year the new tollhouse on the eastern bank of the river (Figure 7.11) was leased to John Gibson of Colnbrook for £770. The tolls consistently brought the commissioners an income of about £900/a, allowing them to finance improvements in the town, such as street lighting (Crocker 1982). However, after 1837 with the coming of the railway, income fell dramatically and by 1861 was only £210/a.

At the end of the Fair Mile, west of Henley, two roads climb up onto the Chilterns. The right fork is the old route to Oxford via Assendon and Watlington across the ancient bridge at Chiselhampton. Although this seems to have been almost as important as the Dorchester road in medieval times, it crosses a high ridge on the Chilterns and descends steeply to Watlington so was less suitable for wheeled vehicles. The turnpike took a left hand fork up the hill to Bix Common: the earliest road was along what is now a tortuous track to the east of the present dual carriageway. The climb to Bix is long and steep and on several occasions attempts were made to improve this section of road. An article in the Oxford Journal of 1765 suggests that changes were made in that year (Davies JOJ). In 1798 the Bridge Commissioners invested £150 from bonds to help build the new road up Bix Hill. This was probably when the line of the present main road was established. Travellers continued to use the old road and so in 1821 the surveyor built a bank across it to prevent carriages avoiding the new turnpike.

The road up the hill was a good place to site a tollgate, although the Act stated that a tollhouse could not be built within a mile and a half of either Henley or Abingdon. There may not have been a permanent gate here when the trust was created but in 1772 the residents of Dorchester lobbied for a gate to be built near the Fox at Bix as an alternative to the gate at Dorchester Bridge (Davies JOJ). The old Fox Inn was on the west side of the road, opposite the modern pub of the same name, and so a tollhouse was initially built at the top of the hill. Around 1810 a side-gate was installed at the bottom of the hill to intercept traffic using the Assendon road. In 1827 the trustees decided to concentrate resources at the top of the hill and so they built a new tollhouse, close to the junction of the old and new roads at Bix. This bay-windowed tollhouse can still be seen today. The lessee of the tolls, Mrs Wells purchased the redundant toll-house beside the Assendon Gate and the trust suffered a small loss of income from traffic that then

moved toll-free along the Assendon road. There is an old, two storeys, flintstone house where the Assendon road branches; this may be the old tollhouse.

West of Bix the original road snaked through the woods east of Nettlebed and then down Gangsdown Hill and Harcourt Hill to Bensington (Benson). However, in 1825, following a survey of the road by Mr McAdam, the famous road engineer, several major improvements were made. Permission was granted by Mr Stoner to construct a new, straight section of road across his property "to the stile in Offal Wood and thence to Nettlebed" (Figure 7.12). The trust sought contractors to remove the tree stumps left when the wood was cleared and their surveyor stopped up the footway to Offal Wood and the cart road to Bennets Lane. This new road is very straight and might be mistaken for a Roman road. The trustees later tried to sell the land over which the old abandoned road ran but much of this is still a series of lanes and minor roads.

At the same time, major changes were also made to the road at Gangsdown Hill and Ambrose Farm. The Henley Road trustees met with the trustees of the Nuffield Common, Wallingford, Wantage to Faringdon Turnpike to consider a new road at the junction of the two turnpikes near Nuffield Common. The Wantage Road Trust had improved the road from Wallingford Bridge up Brixton Hill to the junction on Nuffield Common in 1764 (RUTV 5). There was no toll collection on this section and the Wantage Road Trust sought to avoid responsibility for a steep climb by moving the junction with the Henley Road from the top to the bottom of Gangsdown Hill (Figure 7.12). It may be that they had already begun this work before Mr McAdam's survey but it made sense for the two trusts to co-operate. Land was purchased from Mr Butler of Mays Farm to create a roadway 41 feet wide and the Henley to Dorchester Trust took over responsibility at "the 7th milestone from Henley, on Gangsdown Hill at the point where the Dorchester Trust road meets a partly formed highway from the Wantage Trust". The highway leading from the Henley Road towards Wallingford remained under the jurisdiction of the Wantage Trust; this is the line of the present main road to Crowmarsh and Oxford. These modifications were not complete at the time of the survey used in the 1830 Ordnance Survey map. The Nettlebed road was in place but the milestone remains on the old road. The work near Ambrose Farm was incomplete with milestones still marked through Nuffield and down Harcourt Hill.

The turnpike ran from Gangsdown Hill, across Goulds Heath and down Beggar's Bush Hill to Bensington. A section of this route was lost when Benson airfield was constructed and the main road was diverted along the old Wantage road turnpike as far as Crowmarsh from where a new road goes northwards to bypass Benson. The Old London Road emerges in Benson village and the route continues across the flat flood plain of the Thames towards the bridge at Dorchester.

7.6.2 Dorchester to Culham

At Dorchester the Henley Turnpike originally used a medieval bridge to cross over the Thames (Figure 7.13a). The Romans may have built a bridge here, beside their town at Dorchester, but this had probably been lost by Saxon times. There are records of a bridge in the 12th century and in 1381 the Burgesses of Dorchester were granted pontage (right to take tolls) for three years to repair their bridge (VHCO 5, 40). The ancient bridge, similar in style to Newbridge, carried traffic that had crossed the Thames at Wallingford and was bound for Oxford. In the 12th to the 14th centuries the Reading, Wallingford, Dorchester to Oxford road was the most frequently followed route for royal journeys between the principal residences at Windsor and Woodstock (RUTV 9). Dorchester Bridge continued to be important when Henley displaced Wallingford as the main route along the Thames to Oxford. Leland said of Dorchester "a great stone causey is made to come well onto it. There be 5 principal arches in the bridge and the causey joining to the south" (Toulmin Smith 1964).

By the early 19th century this bridge was insufficient to carry the traffic using the turnpike and after a meeting of a Grand Jury in 1808 (VHCO 5, 40), a new bridge was commissioned by the county Justices. In April 1812 the Oxford Journal carried an advertisement "To Builders - Persons willing to contract and enter into security with the Magistrates of the county of Oxford for the erecting and completing a bridge and causeway at Dorchester". Plans could be seen at the offices of Wm Elias Taunton, Oxford, or of Mr Sandys, the architect of Manchester Square, London. It was stated that materials such as stone, lime, sand, timber etc. might be procured in the neighbourhood on reasonable terms. The foundation stone had been laid in 1811 and Jackson's Oxford Journal of 11th July 1812 carries an advertisement "Dorchester Bridge - Wanted immediately, a number of labourers. Men who have been accustomed to excavating etc will be preferred. Also will be shortly wanted, a few good masons. Any persons having a quantity of sound elm timber to dispose of are requested to send their proposals addressed to Mr Johnson, George Inn, Dorchester, Oxon, without delay." Steane (1981) suggests this new bridge, designed by Francis Sandys (Cook & Rowley 1985) cost nearly £24,000 and was finished by 1813 (Figure 7.13b) but Andrew (pers. comm.) believes that it was not open until 1815. It is a simple segmented arch, faced with Headington stone and rests on substantial elm planks laid on elm piles. These piles required underpinning soon after construction in 1824. The new bridge is 100m upstream of the old bridge, which was demolished in September 1815. The old bridge foundations are said still to be visible at low water (VHCO 5, 40).

The first tollgate to be built on the turnpike road was probably located beside the old bridge, on the Dorchester bank. This irritated local inhabitants who, in 1772, lobbied for the gate to be sited at Bix. However, a gate remained at Dorchester even after the creation of the Bix Gate and in 1815, when the new bridge was constructed, the trustees built a new toll-house at the western end of the causeway. This distinctive bay fronted cottage still survives, although the weighing engine that stood beside it to check overweight wagons has disappeared without trace. The pattern of road use was altered and Bridge End, the lane to the old bridge, became a side road. The side gate in Back Lane, Dorchester was removed and re-erected near to the Castle Inn in 1821. Disputes frequently arose; in 1853 the Dorchester gatekeeper was illegally trying to take tolls at Bridge End "where a bar formally stood" but in 1858 the side bar was reinstated since "inhabitants refuse to pay tolls on various pretexts".

The inns of Dorchester were important staging posts for coaches using the turnpike road. The George still retains the character of the coaching era with a range of balconied rooms around the courtyard, approached through a large arch in the front of the building. The by-pass and gravel workings now obscure the line of roads to the west of Dorchester where the turnpike road from London branched beyond the town. The arm leading to Oxford through the Sandford Gate is dealt with in RUTV 8; the other branch to Abingdon is dealt with here.

This section of road across the wet clay of the Thames valley needed constant repair and the trustees employed barges to carry large flints for these repairs, unloading them at Burcot (VHCO 5, 65). The trust made constant efforts to improve the road and remove unnecessary gradients. At Clifton Hampden the road used to go down into the village and an estate map of 1786 shows this, whereas on a later map of 1797 this loop has been replaced by the present road on the high ground, above the village (VHCO 5, 16).

The coming of the railways around 1840 led to substantial changes in the pattern of traffic in the Thames valley. In 1837 the trust had refused a request that the Great Western Railway pass "under the road in the Parish of Culham". The GWR line to Bristol was opened in 1840 and the line from Didcot Junction to Oxford in June 1844 (RUTV 12). During November 1843 the Directors of the GWR proposed that, "in the formation of their station at Culham, they divert the line of the road over the railway". Although the railway took away the long distance traffic from

which the trust had derived much of its toll income, it did stimulate local traffic on roads that led directly to stations. The Henley Road trustees responded to the building of the Culham Station by erecting two new tollgates either side of the railway (Figure 7.14). The new Clifton Gate was situated where the two roads merge "at the west side of the road leading to Clifton ferry" (the brick bridge at Clifton was not built until 1864). The brick tollhouse with a square section bay was completed in 1847; the wooden section of the Turnpike Forge is a 20th century addition.

The initial turnpike Act only dealt with the road as far as Culham Bridge and obliged the trustees not to erect a tollhouse within a mile and a half of Abingdon. Advertisements for the auction of tolls up to 1805 do not mention Culham Bridge Gate but in 1812 there is a reference to "the Side Gate at Culham" and a gate is marked beside the bridge on a map drawn in 1825. It may have been erected when the Sutton Courtenay Bridge was built in 1809. The building still survives and the current owner reports that foundations of an older building tied to the stone bridge were found during building work. This may be the remains of a hermit's shelter dating from the medieval administration of the bridge.

There was also a side gate at the Waggon & Horses junction to intercept traffic over Sutton Courtenay Bridge (there was a toll on the bridge as well). In 1842 the trustees resolved to build a new tollhouse 100 yards to the east of this on the main highway. The new gate became operational in 1844 and the tollhouse survives, substantially unaltered, opposite the road to the European School. Like the Clifton Toll-House, it is a utilitarian design, reflecting the changed financial circumstances of the trusts since it had commissioned the tollhouses at Bix and Dorchester only two decades earlier. The Culham Bridge Gate further down the main road was closed when the new gate opened and the building bought by Mr Morrell.

7.6.3 Culham and Abingdon

The main trust, based in Henley, seems to have little involvement with the road westwards from Culham Bridge and the Fyfield Trust evolved to look after this. Following the act of 1754, the trustees probably did little more than maintain and repair the stonework of the three medieval bridges and the causeway, which led across the streams of the Thames to Abingdon. In 1790 the Thames Commissioners created a wide arch in the navigation channel under Burford Bridge (Figure 7.5). This may have been the place where repairs had been made after the Civil War. The eastern end of the bridges was only wide enough for one cart but in 1800 the Maud Hales' Bridge was widened by 8 feet and in 1818/9 Hart Bridge was also widened. As it left the Crown & Thistle in March 1828 the "up" Stroudwater coach was involved in a serious accident on Abingdon Bridge. This led to complaints that "although the bridge was suitable to commerce of the country at the time it was built and very preferable to the ferry that preceded it, it is now by no means adequate to the improved state of commerce and travelling in the present day". The wall of Culham Bridge has a stone engraved "I.S. 1808", suggesting that some repairs were also made here in the early 19th century. In 1829/30 the Fyfield Trust, used its powers under the 1822 Act to widen the Burford and the Culham Bridges on the upstream side. This major improvement lasted until 1927 when a new bridge was built at Culham, upstream of the old bridge. At the same time Maud Hales' Bridge and eastern end of Burford Bridge were reconstructed and widened. The main navigation arch was replaced and two of the older arches incorporated into a wider span (Figure 7.5).

7.6.4 The Faringdon Road to Fyfield

From the western edge of Abingdon the Faringdon Road ran northwards to Shippon before turning west along the high ground. Part of the Shippon section was lost when Abingdon airfield was built in the twentieth century. On the 1878 Ordnance Survey map there is a tollhouse north of Shippon (Figure 7.14) in the middle of what is now the housing estate beside the airfield. However, this was a mid-19th century structure and may be the "new gate, price £38" recorded in the Fyfield accounts of the period. On the 1814 OS map and the 1824 Greenwood map the

tollgate is closer to Abingdon, at the Mayor's Stone in Bath Street (Figure 7.15). This older tollhouse was demolished in the 1950s (Baker 1963). The Oxford to Fyfield turnpike road from Foxcombe Hill joined this Faringdon Road close to Oakley House, east of the modern golf course at Frilford. The turnpike continued through Tubney to Fyfield where it merged with the road from Oxford, now the A420. The 1878 OS map shows a tollhouse to the east of Fyfield at Piling Hill; this probably belonged to the Fyfield to Botley Trust.

Beyond here the Fyfield to St John's Bridge Trust took responsibility for the road (see RUTV 6). The importance to the citizens of Abingdon of maintaining the whole route to Gloucester may be judged by the fact that Abingdon Borough contributed £40 to help the Fyfield to St John's Bridge Trust raise and repair the road between Buscot and Lechlade in 1767 (Smith & Carter 1978).

7.6.5 Administration of the Trust

In the 1736 Act, 166 individuals along with the Burgesses of Abingdon, Henley, Wallingford, Aldermen of Oxford and Vice Chancellor of the University were named as trustees. They were to hold their first meeting at the Bell Inn, Henley, signifying where the major promoters of the road were probably based. In the 1754 Act another 260 individual trustees were named. Trustees had to be men of some substance and victuallers were specifically excluded, as was anyone in a position to profit directly from the trust. Nevertheless, the trustees had vested interests in the increased prosperity that a good road would bring. There were a number of peers in the list, including the Marquis of Carnarvon and Lord Archibald Hamilton in the first act and Lord Viscount Wenman, Lord Parker and Viscounts Barrington, Bateman and Fane in the second. The senior gentry were represented including Sir John Stonehouse of Radley, Sir Robert Throgmorton of Buckland and Sir Mark Pleydell of Coleshill. The lesser gentry and professionals who were trustees came from local towns and villages such as Henley, Bix, Clifton and Abingdon but other were from places not directly on the line of the turnpike. Ferdinando Collins a landowner from Lockinge, Richard Cox of Ardington, William Stirling an attorney from Wantage, Henry Pye from Faringdon House, William Bowles of Hanney, Robert and John Butler from Wantage along with Thomas Bigg and members of the Toovey family of Wallingford are all recognisable as local worthies, many of them appearing as trustees for other turnpikes. Thus, although the turnpike network was not planned nationally, trusts had members in common and they brought with them regional interests beyond the bounds of a particular turnpike road.

The minutes of the trust show that they met at an inn close to the subject of their deliberations. They often chose the inn called the White Hart at either Dorchester, Nettlebed or Henley for their meetings. The Chairman would be selected from among the trustees whereas the paid officers appointed by the trust were generally drawn from the local communities. The minutes books of the Henley, Dorchester to Abingdon Trust were in the possession of Cooper, Son & Caldicott of Henley. Members of the Cooper family acted as clerk to the trust for many years. Thomas Cooper was clerk to the Hurley Trust, the Henley Bridge Trust and to the Henley Road Trust in early 1800s (Figure 7.16) and in 1841 was paid £100 by the Henley Road Trustees towards his expenses in "getting the new Act". The Hedges family of Wallingford were treasurers to the trust; J.A. Hedges handing over to his son J. Kirby Hedges in 1854. They both served as treasurer to the Wantage Road Trust as well. Administration of the Abingdon to Fyfield section appears to have passed to the individuals who ran the Abingdon to Chilton Trust and was referred to as the Fyfield Road. In 1812, Samuel Sellwood of Abingdon, clerk to the trustees of the turnpike, advertised the tolls on both roads in the same advertisement. No records of this Fyfield Road trust can be traced.

Until 1820 the Henley Road Trust appears to have used local men as surveyors. In 1812 they advertised for two working surveyors to take charge of the sections from Burcot Brook to the Chancellor's Mile, Oxford and from Dorchester to Culham (Figure 7.16). However, in 1821 more professional help was sought and William Glanville and Thomas Hollis were asked to give up the management of the road. The trustees appointed Mr McAdam as their surveyor at a salary of 100 guineas per year. It is difficult to judge from the Minutes whether it was John Loudon McAdam (1756-1836) or his son or the family firm who acted in this role, but all seem to have been involved at some stage. The surveyor had the power to nominate sub-surveyors at 2 guineas a week. These were probably local men who worked under the guidance of the famous road engineer and co-ordinated use of the Statute Labour that each parish had to contribute to the upkeep of the road. McAdam was surveyor on the turnpikes that adjoined the Henley road, notably that from Maidenhead to Henley Bridge, that from Fyfield to St John's Bridge and the Abingdon to Chilton Pond Turnpike. During 1823 Mr McAdam was asked to survey the road, particularly the dangerous state of the hills. The Bix to Nettlebed section was identified as requiring particular action. In February 1824 Mr John Loudon McAdam presented the trust with a report. This began "In compliance with the desire of my son, James McAdam, I have inspected the road from Henley towards Oxford. I find the road greatly altered for the better but the quantity of mud with which the road was overloaded has not yet been overcome, and some attention to finding better and cleaner materials will be necessary to make the road solid and good." He recommended the use of picked flints, despite the fact that they may initially be more costly. He also suggested that Statute Labour should no longer be relied upon to supply cartage since this was always "inconveniently and frequently unprofitably applied" and paid carters would be better value. The report may have identified other poor sections of road since a few months later a committee was set up to survey the road "from Goulds Heath to the top of Gangsdown Hill to suggest methods of improving". By November 1824 the trust has decided on the changes near Nettlebed and at Gangsdown Hill and asked Mr Neighbour (of Oxford?) to draw up a map. This cost 20 guineas plus the cost of the vellum and is the map now in the Oxfordshire Record Office. The road work itself is described above in section 7.6.1.

By 1831 the trustees thought their road was in such a good condition that there was little for Mr McAdam to do, so his salary was reduced to 50 guineas per year. The next change in payment to the surveyor was recorded in 1851 when James McAdam replaced his late father, Sir James McAdam, at salary of £30/a. When James also died in 1853, Mr Harding, who had been one of McAdam's sub-surveyors on the Hurley Turnpike in 1849, was appointed to the post on the Henley Road. He seems to have continued J.L. McAdam's policy on materials and in 1859 used 300 tons of flints and gravel, at a cost of two shillings per yard, in repairing the road. Even after the fall in income when the railways opened, the trust continued to improve the road, paying £408 in 1867 to lower the hill at Beggar's Bush.

The turnpike Acts obliged the trustees to erect markers at one mile intervals along the road. A similar design of milestone was used along both the Henley and Faringdon Road sections (Figure 7.17). The stone has not weathered well and most of the surviving milestones are illegible, though those at Dorchester and Nettlebed are still readable. Many stones were intentionally defaced during World War II and Oxfordshire was less diligent than Berkshire in protecting milestones prior to them becoming ancient monuments. The elegant, simple stone pillars were originally engraved with Roman numerals indicating the distance from the main towns (the stone near Oakley House has recently been restored to this condition). The milestone at Dorchester still bears evidence of the Roman numerals underneath the engraving of later Arabic numerals. The Roman numerals would suggest that the stones date from before 1760 (RUTV 10) and since the same pattern is used on both sections of the road they may all date from the time of the 1754 Act. A General Act of 1828 obliged trusts to put up markers where their road crossed a parish boundary. One of the stones erected by the Fyfield Trust survives at

Gozzards Farm on the boundary between St Helen's and Marcham parishes. Following the alterations to the road at Bix and Gangsdown, in 1832 the surveyor was instructed to measure the whole line of the new road and to fix and paint milestones. The old milestones would have been removed from the abandoned sections. In 1850 the trust paid five shillings per stone to have the markers painted and relettered. It cost a similar amount per stone when the 26 stones on the Henley, Oxford and Abingdon section recut in 1873 just prior to the trust being wound up. One iron plate was purchased at a cost of £2 for one of the damaged stones; the stone at Bix has been drilled so may have held this cast iron marker plate.

7.6.6 Finances and Tolls

Tolls and the basis on which they were levied changed over the lifetime of the trust (Table 7.1). In 1736 a coach or wagon drawn by four horses paid a shilling to use the road; a horse not drawing a vehicle paid two pence and cattle were charged at ten pence a score and sheep half this rate. After 1754 the toll was based on the horse not the vehicle, presumably since it was easier to interpret the rules as the types of coach proliferated. The cost of a standard coach & four doubled on the Henley Road although the toll on a waggon changed very little and the rates for horses and cattle were unaltered. Tolls on the Culham to Fyfield road were half the level on the Henley-Dorchester-Abingdon section. By 1822 the tolls for a coach & four had fallen back to their earlier level but for wagons the tolls depended on the width of the wheels on the vehicle since it was felt that heavy vehicles with narrow wheels caused the most damage to the road. In 1841, faced with falling income as a result of the railways, the trust put up its tolls, particularly for a standard stagecoach, though in 1861 the tolls were reduced by a third for horses drawing any wagon or carriage.

At the peak of the coaching era, during the early 19th century, the trust let the toll collection along the whole of the Henley road for just under £3,000/a and tolls on the Fyfield Road were let for about £500/a (Figure 7.18a). By this period more than half the coaching traffic going through Dorchester was bound for Oxford rather than Abingdon (RUTV 11) and the Sandford Gate was let for a slightly higher amount than the Culham Gate (Figure 7.18b). Initially the trust would have paid a gatekeeper who merely collected the tolls and handed these directly to the treasurer. However, as early as 1767 the trustees began to lease out the right to collect the tolls (JOJ). Tolls were let at public auction for a period of up to three years and the trust incurred some cost, advertising the auction (Figure 7.16) and in entertaining the bidders; the latter cost the trust about £5. The lessees were not necessarily local men. Nathaniel Levy, who leased the Culham Gate in 1822, gave evidence to the House of Commons Committee on the impact of railways on the turnpikes in 1842. He claimed to be a toll farmer on several turnpikes in the Maidenhead area (see RUTV 12). William Leiver lessee of Bix Gate in 1834, was from Wallingford and John Bolton who leased Dorchester Gate in 1836 was "of Paddington". As income declined in the 1850s and 1860s, gates were let together and Thomas Gardner of Exeter took all three Dorchester Gates (i.e. with Culham and Clifton) for several years. James Tonge who leased Bix and Sandford Gates at a similar period was from Pendleton near Manchester. Other lessees may have been local, notably Thomas Porter and William Rackley who leased several gates from the 1830s to the 1850s.

These businessmen are unlikely to have taken tolls themselves but hired men to collect the money on their behalf. Thomas Porter leased the tolls at Dorchester in 1841 but in the census of that year, John Withers toll collector aged 40, was living alone in Dorchester Toll-House. The change in financial circumstances after 1840 may be judged from the fact that when the trust hired someone to collect tolls for a short period in 1831 at Dorchester, they paid 25 shillings per week whereas in 1841 they only paid 7 shillings per week for Mr Bowles to look after Culham Gate. The lease of the Dorchester Gate in 1830 was £1,060/a, about £20 per week, so that toll-gatherer's wages were not a dominant cost.

Between 1779 and 1805 the toll income from the Dorchester and Bix Gates doubled to just under £2,000/a; the Dorchester Gate was clearly the more valuable. Sometime before 1812 new side gates were erected at Assendon, Culham and Sandford but these were still let with the two main gates (Figure 7.16). By 1820 the gates were being let separately making it easier to judge the pattern of travel on the various sections. The Dorchester Gate generated slightly more income than the Assendon/Bix Gate whereas the sum of the incomes from the two western gates at Sandford and Culham was a little more than Dorchester (Figure 7.18b). This suggests that just under half the traffic in any direction was long distance traffic with a similar number of vehicles originating in or beyond Henley and Abingdon. Slightly more than half of the traffic was generated from within the network, paying for day tickets at Dorchester. A stagecoach & four would pay 1s-4d for a ticket and a two-horse cart about 8d. Taking an average toll of one shilling, the Dorchester Gate probably issued 400 tickets a week to the 800 or so vehicles passing through it.

Income had risen steadily until about 1820 but in the following two decades there was little further change. This is a little surprising given that this was viewed as the golden age of the stagecoach (Aldin 1928). In June 1840 the trustees took into consideration "the falling off of tolls in consequence of the progress of the GWR" and they determined to offer the tolls at Dorchester for £450 and Bix for £300, less than half the normal rent. Initially they had no bidders even at this price, though eventually Thomas Porter took them for £430/a and £270/a respectively. The Bix Gate seems to have suffered particularly badly from the loss of long distance traffic after 1840 and by 1850 it was let for only one sixth of the amount raised twenty years earlier (Figure 7.18b). The Dorchester and Sandford Gates also suffered but the increased income from Culham and Clifton Gates, strategically built either side of Culham Station, bought the sum of the "Three Dorchester Gates" as they were called, to a value similar to that before the railway was laid. However, there had been an increase in toll rates in 1841 so there had been some fall in total traffic.

Although the turnpike trust had in theory removed much of the liability that Christ's Hospital had for the bridges at Abingdon, the Governors made a contribution of £12/a to the Henley Road Trust (Baker 1963). After 1860, when the turnpike was in decline, Christ's Hospital resumed repairs to the bridge. This set a legal precedent that in the 20th century cost the Governors a considerable amount of money. When, in 1926, the Counties of Oxford and Berkshire decided to make major improvements to the Culham and Burford Bridges, they claimed that Christ's Hospital had a continuing obligation to repair these structures and should contribute to the rebuilding. The matter was eventually settled out of Court in 1929 with the Governors making a large payment to remove their historic responsibilities for the bridges over the Thames and the Ock (Liverage & Liverage 1989).

7.6.7 Use of the Road

Ogilby's London to St David's road had been selected as a post road by Postmaster General Thomas Wittering around 1635. Post boys travelled on horseback from London across the bridges at Henley, Abingdon and St John's Bridge to reach Gloucester and South Wales. Following the success of Palmer's stagecoach on the Bath Road, mail coaches began to run along the main turnpike roads in the 1780s. The Gloucester Mail used the Henley road to reach Oxford along the Sandford branch. After a petition in 1804, a new mail coach to Stroud was started using the other branch of the Henley Road. The Stroud Mail was well established by 1828 (Aldin 1928), running through Henley, Abingdon and Faringdon towards the west. Although mail coaches were exempt from tolls, the choice of a turnpike as a mail route was an endorsement of its importance on a principal route radiating from London.

The range of wagons and coaches specified in the toll charges indicates that a great variety of merchandise and passenger traffic used the road. There would have been considerable local traffic carrying goods from the local farms to the market towns of Abingdon and Henley. Henley was also an important river port where malt, grain and timber were loaded on to barges for shipment to London and manufactured goods were unloaded. Abingdon had a similar, though smaller trade from wharves beside the Thames, but also had malting, sacking and leather manufactories in the Borough.

7.7 Oxford to Newbury

The road south from Oxford had been an important trade route between Mercia and Wessex: Wood suggests that a Saxon bridge had augmented the old ford at Oxford. Soon after the Norman conquest, Robert d'Oilly commissioned the building of the Grandpont, a stone bridge and causeway crossing the Thames outside the south gate of Oxford. Abingdon Abbey had built a Chapel to St Nicholas beside the Grandpont and installed a hermit to collect donations and look after the repair of the bridge (VHCO 4, 286). The road south of Abingdon was referred to as a herepath in the Saxon Charters that defined the western boundary of Harwell Parish (McIlroy 1985). This indicates that the track was wide enough for armed soldiers to use it. Nevertheless, in the post-medieval period the road from the Midlands to the Channel ports declined in importance as London trade became the dominant factor in English commerce. Nevertheless, it continued to be a major route through the Stuart period; in two of her journeys, Celia Fiennes travelled from "Abington along the Market Hillsly or Elsley road" (Hayward 1947). Although Ogilby showed two roads running south from Abingdon to Chichester and Salisbury, Morden in 1695 only marked the road to Newbury suggesting that this had remained the dominant road.

7.7.1 Fryer Bacon's Study to Hinksey

The 1755 Parliamentary bill to turnpike the north/south road through Abingdon was "A petition to repair the causeway from Fryer Bacon's Study, near the City of Oxford, through Bagley Wood to Abingdon and thence up Milton Hill, in the road to East Ilsley, as also for repairing Hinksey Hill, and from thence to Foxcombe Hill, being part of the road from Oxford to Faringdon". This turnpike was the first attempt at a general improvement of the south-western approaches to the city. The Act gave trustees power to turnpike the old road out of the south gate of Oxford from the Berkshire side of Folly Bridge, across the river at South Hinksey and then "from the top of Hinksey Hill to a certain gate near the house at Foxcombe Hill called Foxcombe Hill Gate, part of the road from Hinksey Hill to Faringdon". This road along Foxcombe Hill met the newly turnpiked Abingdon to Faringdon road near Oakley House on Frilford Heath, close to the Dog House Inn. At the same time the trust took responsibility for the branch southwards, from the top of Hinksey Hill through Abingdon as far as the base of the Downs, what was to become the old A34 trunk road. This route was described to Parliament as being part of the Great Road from Oxford to Portsmouth (JHC 27, 419). These two highways were among those recommended by Ogilby in 1675 and had been used for several centuries by travellers wishing to travel south and west from Oxford. However, it was the road south from Hinksey that was to prosper in the late 18th century, drawing traffic down to Abingdon. Meanwhile the other branch, from the top of Hinksey Hill to the Foxcombe Hill Gate and on to the Faringdon Road, was soon to decline and is now an unclassified minor road.

By 1757 work had begun and the road out of Oxford was closed temporarily so that one of the arches on the Grandpont could be repaired (Davies JOJ). Nevertheless, in 1760 the causeway was still in a poor state of repair and in 1778 the Commissioners were asked to consider lowering it and rebuilding this section of road. Improvements during 1779 involved demolishing Fryer Bacon's Study (Figure 7.19) and prompted calls in Jackson's Oxford Journal to "Save our Bacon". In 1779 a new toll-house was built near Lower White House but by 1784 there was

pressure on the trustees to pay off the debts and end the power to collect tolls: on this occasion these were resisted. At the southern tip of the gravel terrace, the road turned westwards to cross the Hinksey stream and reach the Berkshire bank of the Thames flood plain. This area is now dominated by the Redbridge railway arch but this still has within its ramp the old Mayweed Bridge that was used by the turnpike to cross over the sidestream of the Thames.

Folly Bridge, the main crossing of the river leading to Fryer Bacon's Study, was in a very poor state of repair in the late 18th century. After much wrangling between the city and Berkshire, an Act of 1815 (55 Geo III, c94) authorised the taking down of the old bridge and the building of a new structure. However, the old bridge actually collapsed in 1823 and the remains were demolished in 1824. A temporary structure was set up and served until 1827 when the new bridge opened to traffic (Phillips 1981). The four narrow arches of the older bridge were replaced by the three stone spans that cost £11,000 and are still in use today. At the same time £8,000 was spent on improvements to the navigation, realigning the river so it was less likely to undermine the piers on the north-west corner of the bridge. To save expense, the bridge trustees arranged for their tolls to be taken at the Hinksey Turnpike Gate. On the Greenwood map of 1824 the only toll-bar between Oxford and Abingdon was marked half way between Folly Bridge and Hinksey. The tollhouse was constructed in its present position on the northern bank in 1844 to better intercept traffic to the new Abingdon Road railway station at the end of Western Road. Business was brisk and by 1850 the loan for the construction of the bridge had been paid off and, under pressure from Thomas Goodlake of Letcombe, tolls were suspended on the bridge. A Victorian tollhouse survived until the late 20th century close to Mayweed Bridge. This may have been built when the bridge was freed from tolls but the turnpike still had powers to collect tolls on the Hinksey Road.

7.7.2 The Two Roads South of Hinksey

During medieval times, the preferred route westwards from Oxford had been across Grandpont, up Hinksey Hill and then south-west along the old Roman road over Foxcombe Hill, following the Corallian Ridge to Faringdon. At the time of the 1755 Act this was probably still the chief roads westwards, preferable to the northern route through Hanborough, Witney and across the Cotswolds. It fed traffic from Oxford onto the Fyfield to St John's Bridge Turnpike and was as important as the other branch leading south to Abingdon. However, in 1767 a new route west from Oxford was created when the improvements to Botley Causeway and the new bridge at Swinford were completed. Traffic from Oxford to Witney and the new road across the Cotswolds travelled this way and vehicles from Oxford could also reach the more direct road onto the Corallian ridge along what is now the A420. As a result the Foxcombe road lost most of its traffic and was probably abandoned by the trustees in 1777.

Southwards from Hinksey Hill, Ogilby had recommended two possible routes to Abingdon; one through Bagley Wood, the other over Boars Hill and then south along the Wootton road. The more direct road through the wood, bringing the road into the centre of Abingdon, had become the preferred route by the 18th century. The original petition to Parliament in December 1755 was for a road "leading from a place called Fryer Bacon's Study near Oxford in the County of Berks, through Bagley Wood to the end of a certain street in the Borough of Abingdon called The Vineyard and thence through Abingdon over a place called Watkins Wharf and over Mr William Birch's Bridge through Caldecott Lane, up Cooper Way by a farm called Gilbert's, through the fields called Gallow Ley and Drayton East Town Field, the lane called Milton Lane and the village of Milton, up Milton Hill to a pond called Chilton Pond being on or near the road leading to East Ilsley". Clearly, the initial plan was to bring traffic through the centre of Abingdon, along the wharf and across the Ock by St Helen's Bridge, close by the mill. From there it would use the more easterly of the roads recommended by Ogilby, close to the Thames.

Rocque's main map of 1761 (Figure 7.2 is a summary) shows a major route from Caldecott Road, past Stonehill Farm, passing between Drayton and the rough, boggy ground of Sutton Wick. This was probably the intended route. However, by January 1756 the recommended route south of Abingdon had been altered. It was said that "the road from Watkins Wharf to Milton Hill is esteemed a bridleway only and the repairing and widening thereof will attend with a very great expense by reason of the very many difficulties which may arise from disputes touching the private property of the several places over which such parts of the road lie and therefore praying that the said road may be carried agreeable to the prayer to the end of a street called Vineyard in the Borough of Abingdon and from thence through the said Borough, over Ock Bridge, through the villages of Drayton and Steventon to Chilton Pond" (JHC 27, 403). Thus, it appears that land disputes rather than the quality of the road determined the final route out of Abingdon. This revised route across Ock Bridge was approved as the turnpike and it developed to become the main road south.

Improvement to the road through Bagley Wood was much appreciated by travellers and although the wood continued to be a frequent haunt of highwaymen, the new road was praised by the Revd Woodward, the parson of East Hendred (Gibson 1982). This approval accords with comments in the Oxford Journal of July 1757 that the judges of the assize arrived in Oxford "having been conducted along the new turnpike road through Bagley Wood, which is the first time (they) have taken this route". Presumably they came from the Abingdon Assizes. A tollhouse was located at Hinksey, probably along the Grandpont. A weighing engine was installed at this toll-gate but in January 1805 a notice in Jackson's Oxford Journal announced that the trustees had "discontinued use for a period, compensating the lessee for the loss of income" from fines on overloaded wagons. A second gate was located at Northcourt Lane between Bagley Wood and Abingdon. There had been pressure to remove this gate "on the Hinksey road at the southern end of Bagley Wood" (Oxford Journal Sept 1791) but the trustees continued to improve the road and required the income from tolls to do this. The Journal of April 1809 notes "the trustees decided to fill up the valley between the two hills in Bagley Wood, next beyond the directing post in the way in to Abingdon, in the manner the other valley in the Wood is filled up". The result of this improvement is still evident today.

The wording of the Commons Committee papers suggests that unlike their colleagues on the Henley Road Trust the Hinksey Road trustees did have some responsibilities within the Borough of Abingdon, between the Vineyard and from the western end of Ock Street (Figure 7.2). They constructed a new section of road, now Spring Road, to link the Faringdon Road Turnpike to Ock Bridge. This improvement may have been necessary due to regular flooding of Ock Street. The old hermitage on Ock Bridge had been demolished after the Civil War but the trustees recognised the value of taking tolls at the bridge. Their new tollhouse can be seen on the 2" OS map of 1814 just beyond the point where the road crossed the River Ock (Figure 7.15).

7.7.3 Abingdon to Chilton Pond

The decision to improve the route through Steventon finally settled the ambiguity over the preferred route south of Abingdon. An estate map of 1771 in Milton House shows all four highways at the Milton Hill crossroads being of equal status in terms of width. However, notes taken by Bryant Barrett in 1766, soon after he took over Milton House, state that the four arms of the sign post at the top of Milton Hill read "To Hungerford; To Ilsley and Nuberry: To Abingdon - Cart Road; To Abingdon - Pack Road but no Cart Road" (diary in Milton House). He noted that the Cart Road was to Steventon. There is no mention of the turnpike road in either of these sources, although the trust had presumably taken responsibility for the main road by this time. By 1814 when the first sketches were prepared for the Ordnance Survey map, a section of the old route from Abingdon to Milton had been lost (Figure 7.15), presumably as a result of the

construction of the canal. The final decline of the old Hungerford road from Milton Hill was inevitable and all resources were used to improve the Ilsley road as the main road to the south.

South of Abingdon, beyond the Ock Bridge, there a second gate at the cross roads in the centre of Drayton and a third next to the Packhorse Inn on Milton Hill (Figure 7.15). Additional provision for collecting tolls were made in 1840 when Steventon was for a while the western terminus of the GWR (Lingham 1992). There was an enormous increase in traffic along this section of road; e.g. in 1842 77,000 passengers and 12,500 tons of freight were carried by the GWR from Steventon. This business went as quickly as it arrived when in 1844 Didcot Junction was opened and most travel was from the new station located there (RUTV 12). However, the small brick tollhouse constructed at the top of Steventon Hill when the station was built, was retained and survived into the 1950s. The simple rectangular structure was demolished to build a modern dwelling. The tollhouse in Drayton may also have been replaced in the mid 19th century. A hexagonal bungalow, said to have been a tollhouse, stood on the Abingdon Road by the lane to Sutton Wick until the 20th century. However, there is no documentary evidence of this.

The decision to turnpike only as far as Chilton reflects the influence of the underlying ground on the maintenance of a good road. The road across the wet, clay land around Drayton, bounded by arable fields was notoriously bad in the 17th century and this factor would have been an important driving force for the creation of the turnpike trust. However, beyond Chilton the road climbs onto the high Downs where the sub-soil creates a much better foundation for the highway and vehicles could find the best track across open grassland. Hence, there was less need to deal with the road south of Chilton. When, in 1765, a trust was formed to maintain this road, towns in the river valleys further south took the initiative. The Hursley, Andover, Newbury, Chilton Pond and Newtown River Trust was responsible for the road from Chilton to south of Winchester and seems to have concentrated effort on the southern sections. Milestones beyond Chilton carry the date 1776, over ten years after the trust came into existence Their first gate travelling south was at Donnington Bridge, by side of the Castle Inn.

7.7.4 Administration of the Trust

The trustees of the Abingdon Road turnpike met regularly at the Crown & Thistle in Abingdon, where John Bowles acted as clerk in the 1770s and Samuel Sellwood had this function from the 1780s until at least 1812 (Figure 7.17). After 1770 the changes arising from the construction of Swinford Bridge resulted in a restructuring of the Fryer Bacon's Study to Chilton Pond Trust. The Foxcombe Hill road had become redundant with the opening of the roads from Botley to Fyfield and to Swinford in 1767 and so no longer functioned as a turnpike. The 1777 Act divided the trust into two independent districts; the Oxford District was responsible from Folly Bridge to the Vineyard in Abingdon and the Abingdon District covered the road on to Chilton. The accounts show that sometime between 1795 and 1810 the trust was reorganised into three independent districts; Folly Bridge Trust covered the Oxford end, Hinksey Road Trust the route through Bagley Wood and Abingdon to Chilton Pond Trust administered the southern end. The Abingdon to Chilton section continued to be managed from Abingdon but the Hinksey and Folly Bridge sections were probably administered from Oxford. Mr William Elias Taunton of Oxford was clerk to the Hinksey Turnpike in 1805.

Income from the lease of the tolls on each section of the road was less than that of the major trunk routes into Oxford but was comparable with the Abingdon to Fyfield Road and other cross-country turnpikes. The combined Fryer Bacon's Study to Chilton Pond Trust had an income of about £500/a at the beginning of the 19th century and in 1835 the three districts had a combined income of three times this amount; Folly Bridge about £600/a, Hinksey Road about £300/a and Abingdon to Chilton over £500/a (Figure 7.20). By 1845, when traffic to the new railway stations alongside the turnpikes created a short-term boost, the income from tolls almost

doubled but by the 1850s, the loss of long distance traffic had resulted in a substantial fall in the value of the lease (RUTV 12).

There are three main types of milestones remaining along this road (Figure 7.17). These generally correspond to the three main districts and so probably date from after 1777. Only one stone with a cast iron plate survives near Redbridge. A series of simple milestones are still to be seen through Bagley Wood whereas south of Abingdon two types of triangular milestones are to be found. However, one of these designs is used on the Wallingford to Wantage Turnpike and so may date from the mid-19th century when the Abingdon Highways Board was responsible for the network.

7.8 Abingdon to Swinford

The creation of the Wootton Turnpike was linked with the building of the Swinford Toll-Bridge over the Thames in 1767 and with the general improvement of the western approaches to Oxford across Botley Causeway (see RUTV 8). The original petition to Parliament in 1768 by the Mayor and Burgesses of Abingdon and other inhabitants of Berkshire, covered the road from "the Mayor's Stone at the end of Boar Street Abingdon, through Cumner to the Ancient Horse Road at Swinford and from Cumner to the ferry across the Isis at Bablake Hyth" (JHC 21, 493). In support of this Mr John Payne reported in January 1768, that the road to Swinford was very ruinous and leave was given to repair this but not the road to Bablock Hythe ferry. The trust sought to renew its powers in 1789 (JHC 44, 157) but the solicitor had problems due to the illness and ultimate death of his son, so the Act was not passed until 1790. In evidence Mr Thomas Curtis revealed that the trust had borrowed £1,562/10/= and had large arrears of interest (JHC 45, 105) The 2" OS map of 1814 shows a turnpike gate where the road from Oxford over Foxcombe Hill crossed the Wootton road (Figure 7.15). Although it provided a short cut for traffic between Abingdon and Witney, the main road to Oxford probably remained more attractive for the small amount of commercial traffic between these centres. This is an example of a turnpike that drew its inspiration from older trade routes rather than actual economic need. The old packhorse track from the Cotswolds to the Thames Valley had probably become an irrelevance as the main turnpike network speeded traffic on the roads around Oxford.

In 1787 the Botley to Newlands Trust made provision for travellers who had paid at the Wootton turnpike to have tolls deducted over Swinford Bridge. The Wootton road was effectively absorbed into the Botley Trust through the Act of 1814. The northern section of old Wootton Turnpike became the main approach to Swinford Bridge for the new low level route through Dean Court and arrangements were made to share tolls. The accounts of the trust show this turnpike was unprofitable in the 19th century and the last set of figures found are for 1829 when the income from tolls was about £100/a (Figure 7.20), insufficient to cover interest charges or maintenance costs. Today it is an unclassified minor road with no milestones; even on the 1878 OS map there are no stones marked. It is possible that no permanent markers were ever erected on this road since it never raised enough money to cover basic operating costs. Two milestones on the northern section of the road, one of them actually on Swinford Bridge, were clearly erected by the Botley to Newlands Trust after it adsorbed the Swinford Road Trust.

7.9 The Proposed Bridge at Culham

An attempt to further enhance its position of Abingdon by building another bridge over the Thames was vehemently opposed by the inhabitants of Wallingford, its rival downstream. The plan was to cross the river at Culham wharf and "turnpike the road through Dudcote, Hagbourne and Aston to Streatley", connecting "the rich corn lands of the Vale with markets in Reading and Wallingford" (GA Oxon b113, 27). In 1802 Wallingford citizens petitioned against the "Bill for building a bridge across the River Thames or Isis at Culham near Abingdon and making a new

turnpike from thence to Streatley". This petition pointed out that there was already an adequate turnpike from Reading, through Streatley to Wallingford and over the bridge at Shillingford to join the London Road, by which traffic could reach Oxford and Abingdon. The proposed bridge would shorten the journey by two miles but the loss in traffic across Shillingford Bridge would make it impossible for that trust to repay the outstanding loan of £4,500 it had borrowed to replace the ferry over the Thames. The Shillingford Bridge had been proposed in 1764 and had been opened to traffic in April 1767. One of a series of illustrations by Samuel Ireland, printed in 1792, shows a coach crossing this wooden latticework bridge. In evidence to a Parliamentary Committee in 1783 (JHC 39, 713) the outstanding debt was stated to be £6,200 and so trust had made progress by repaying £1,700 of this by the end of the century. To a small degree, it was said that the new turnpike would also damage the business of the Dorchester Turnpike and the Wallingford, Wantage to Faringdon Trust.

The appeal seems to have succeeded and the new scheme was abandoned. However, a revised version of this project was promoted and by an Act of 1807 the Proprietors of the Sutton Courtenay Toll-Bridge were empowered to build a bridge at or near Culham Ferry with a centre arch sufficient to allow free passage of barges on the river (Phillips 1981). The trustees could borrow up to £7,000 but the bridge was completed by Edward Clarke of Barrington for only £1,765. The bridge was extended in 1809 to cross the new Culham Cut (VHCO 5, 28). The toll income was enhanced through business created by the opening of the GWR but later there was a fall in revenue when the line was built through to Oxford. A tollhouse had been erected on the southern bank and this was used until the toll was finally removed in 1939. Although the Culham to Hagbourne road was never turnpiked, the southern section of the proposed road was incorporated into the Harwell to Streatley Turnpike (RUTV 4). The Shillingford Trust pre-empted any further moves from its uppity neighbour by replacing the light wooden structure with an elegant stone bridge, completed in 1827. The cost of this sharply increased the Shillingford Trust's debt but the structure still carries the main road across the river.

7.10 The End of the Turnpikes and Modern Developments

Railways dominated long distance travel from the 1840s onwards and the turnpikes declined as the coach and waggon traffic fell away. Neither Abingdon nor Henley was on the main railway lines and both lost both road and river traffic as trains became the preferred method for moving goods and passengers. The powers of the turnpike trusts were progressively transferred to local authorities and around Abingdon the main roads became the responsibility of the Abingdon Highways Board. In 1860 the Borough of Abingdon spent £638/a on its local roads but by 1880 the Abingdon Highways Board spent £4683/a on 22 miles of main road and 83 miles of district roads.

The Fryer Bacon's Study to Chilton Pond Trust had been wound up relatively early in 1867. An attempt had been made to dis-turnpike the Henley road in 1868 but it was not until 1873 that this was achieved and even then the section from Culham to Abingdon remained the responsibility of the trust until 1875. The trust disposed of its assets, selling off unwanted strips of land beside the road in early 1873. The tollhouses were the most valuable asset; these were valued and sold off to the owners of adjoining properties for £75 (Bix), £58/10/- (Culham), £56/5/= (Dorchester), £50 (Clifton) and £48 (Sandford) respectively. By the time that the 1878 Ordnance Survey map was printed, the Bix Toll-House had become the Post Office, a function it retained for many years. The Clifton Toll-House became a forge and later a petrol station was added to serve the needs of travellers on the old turnpike. One of the final decisions of the trust was to give £5 to each of three of their men who had worked for almost 45 years on the road. Mr Hedges the treasurer was given £20 but this still left a balance of £60 when the trust was finally wound up.

When, in the 20th century, long distance road transport revived, the north/south route again became the dominant axis through Abingdon. Although the Thames bridges still carry east/west traffic, London traffic passes well to the north or south of the town. The wartime airfields at Benson and Abingdon were built across the old turnpike road from London to Gloucester, permanently altering the pattern of roads around both Wallingford and Abingdon. Nevertheless, the lines laid down by the old turnpike system still form the basis for the network of A Class roads in the area and several of the milestones and toll-houses survive as memorials to the great improvements brought to road travel by the work of the turnpike trusts.

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Steventon, south of Abingdon



Bagley Wood, north of Abingdon

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