

Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

TOLLS AND TOLL GATES IN LANCASTER

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 120

Although we think of British roads as free to travel along, there are places where tolls are currently charged – the M6 Toll Road and many large bridges and tunnels, for example. The toll gates are sited at pinch-points that allow the money to be collected and where its evasion is difficult.

Toll roads remain more common in the USA and on many European motorways. We have forgotten that charging to travel has mediaeval origins in many British cities, Lancaster included.

Up to 1886 there were toll gates around the town They were situated so as to monitor and charge for all the goods traffic into the town. They were at White Cross to intercept goods coming in from the south; at the eastern end of St Leonard's Gate for traffic from the east; where Moor Lane crossed the Lancaster canal; and at the southern end of "The New Bridge" (Skerton Bridge) after it opened in 1787. Before Skerton Bridge there was a toll point at the Lancaster end of the medieval bridge over the River Lune. The Moor Lane toll gate was moved eastwards to the new junction of Moor Lane and East Road when the latter was built.

At a time before regular substantial grants from beyond the town, from national government for example, the road tolls system proved a steady supply of income for municipal projects. The money was easy to collect.

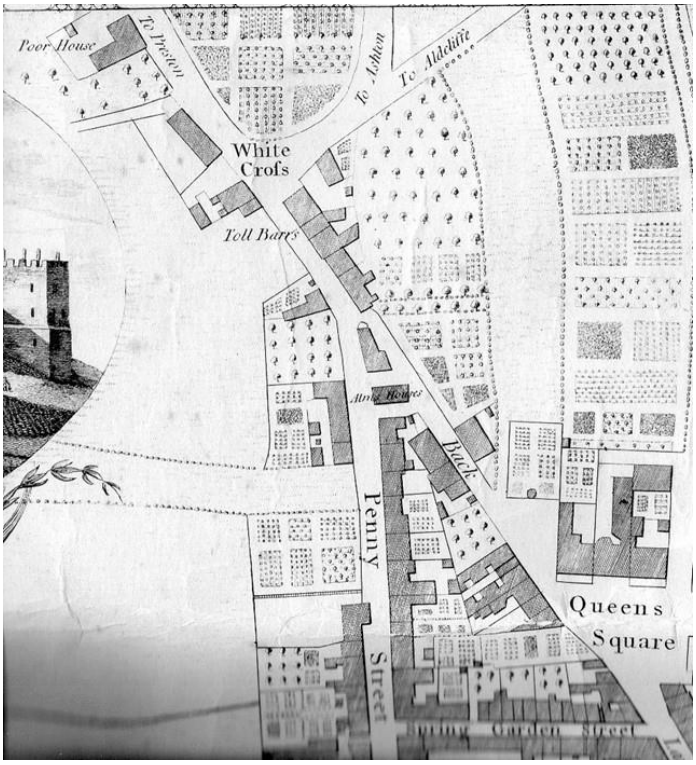
The actual collection of the tolls was contracted out to private individuals who periodically had to bid competitively for the contracts. The charges were set by the Corporation and the contractor added on their costs and a profit margin. There were usually 'break clauses' in the contract to ensure its fair implementation.

During the nineteenth century the system of tolls on goods entering Lancaster for its food markets came under fire. It affected those on foot more than those in carriages (harder to stop); there were allegations of overcharging and threatening behaviour at the toll gates; and it more seriously affected the smaller traders bringing farm produce into town.

The system increasingly looked like a medieval relic. Additionally the amount collected was verging on the trivial – under 1 per cent of the Borough's income in the 1880s. However, it was not possible legally for the Borough to just abolish the tolls, take down the toll gates across the roads and rent out the attached toll houses to anyone other than the toll-gate keepers.

They needed someone sufficiently rich and philanthropic to give them a sum of money that, invested safely, would yield the same income as the toll receipts. In 1886, James Williamson junior, the future Lord Ashton and newly elected MP for Lancaster, provided the necessary money (£1500), and the tolls and toll gates were abolished at the end of the year. The toll houses at East Road/Moor Lane, St Leonard's Gate and the south end of Skerton Bridge have survived.

Lord Ashton went on to provide the much larger funds needed for several major developments in Lancaster including Williamson Park improvements, the Ashton Memorial, and the new Town Hall and Queen Victoria Monument on Dalton Square.



The toll gates at White Cross. South is at the top of this map by Stephen Mackreth, 1778



Toll house at the junction of East Road and Moor lane, now a private house

A TABLE

OF THE

TOLLS, CUSTOMS AND DUTIES,

PAYABLE TO THE

Corporation of Lancaster:

AND WHICH TIME IMMEMORIAL HAVE BEEN RECEIVED BY THE

Bailiffs of the said Borough and Corporation.

	s	d
FOR every Single Horse Pack passing through or out of the said Town and all other Places within the Hundred, except as hereafter	0	2
For every Fardle or Piece of a Pack	0	1
For every smaller Parcel above $13\frac{1}{2}d$ value	0	$0\frac{1}{2}$
Corn Grain and Salt for every Sack or Horse Load only	0	$0\frac{1}{2}$
Nutts, Hemp-seed, Ashes and Cockles for every Sack or other Quantity above the value of $13\frac{1}{2}d$	0	1
For every Dicker of Hides Tanned or Raw	0	8
For every Hide under a Dicker	0	1
For every Dozen of Calf Skins drest or undrest	0	2
For every dozen of Sheep Skins in the Wool	0	2
For every Horse Load or Pack of Sheeps' Pelts	0	2
Fir Deals per Score	0	4
For every Single Cart Load of other Boards or Timber	0	4
For every Hundred-weight of Iron, or other Merchandize except what is particularly rated	0	1
For e[illegible]		

Part of the passage toll charges in 1886

Other guides of interest

Guide No. 17 Queen Victoria Monument, Lancaster
Guide No. 43 Philanthropists in Lancaster
Guide no. 55 The Ashton Memorial, Lancaster
Guide No. 114 Lancaster's Four Town Halls

Text – Gordon Clark. Photographs (unless otherwise attributed) – Gordon Clark.
Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (2023).
Lancaster Civic Vision is the trading name of Lancaster Civic Society, registered charity no. 258434