

THE ROADS THAT LED BY PRESTOUNGRANGE



Figure 12: The Route of the Great Post Road from the Garleton Hills to Musselburgh; from Blaeu, C; and Blaeu, J; 1654; Lothian and Linlithquo; Shelf Mark: WD3B/8; © National Library of Scotland

1686¹²⁰ by the joining to the Justices of the Peace those landowners appointed to collect tax on behalf of the King, ie the Commissioners of Supply.

However, the case for road improvement was not always borne in mind when the time came for agricultural improvement.

ENCLOSURE AND AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT

An Act of the Scottish Parliament of 1661 gave protection to landowners' enclosures and allowed them to 'cast about highways to their conveniency, providing they do not remove them above 200 ells upon their whole ground.'¹²¹ This had the effect of creating sharp right-angled bends as estates built walls around their land. This made transport difficult – especially for carriages – and concentrated traffic in a single channel where before the line of the road varied across quite a wide area of land, taking the most convenient and driest line.

Examples of enclosure can be seen in the great walls surrounding the Prestoungrange and Drummore Estates, as well

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Prospectus Ocei maritimi a Lothian: a Pico de Stoney hill: The Coast of Lothian from Stoney hill.

Figure 13: Ships sailing into Morrison's Haven and Prestonpans can just be seen in the distance in this image from Slezer's 1693 *Theatrum Scotiae*.

The beginnings of early field enclosures are also evident.

Plate 22; Shelf Mark: EMS.b.5.1; © National Library of Scotland.

as at Whitburgh Estate where the Salters Road was subsequently straightened. Looking at the 'Plan of the Battle of Preston 21st September 1745' (anon) one can also see where the extensive gardens of Preston House have encroached directly over the roads, forcing them to go around the walls, and McNeill mentions the building of Preston House as blocking off the old highway through the village.¹²² The Great North Road is named as a 'defile leading to the village of Preston' as is the road now known as East Loan; a defile being a narrow gap.

THE BATTLE OF PRESTONPANS

It is worth at this point to mention the Battle of Prestonpans, as contemporary descriptions give some indication as to the landscape of the time. Cadell¹²³ details that the roads beyond Haddington took two different ways, which gave General Cope a choice. The southern route by Haddington, Gladsmuir, and Tranent, was not suitable for Cope's troops, being broken up by hollow roads, coal pits and walls. The northern road went over the Garleton Hills past former residences of the Setons, as previously mentioned. Cope eventually encamped in the vicinity of Seton West Mains. The rebel forces of Prince

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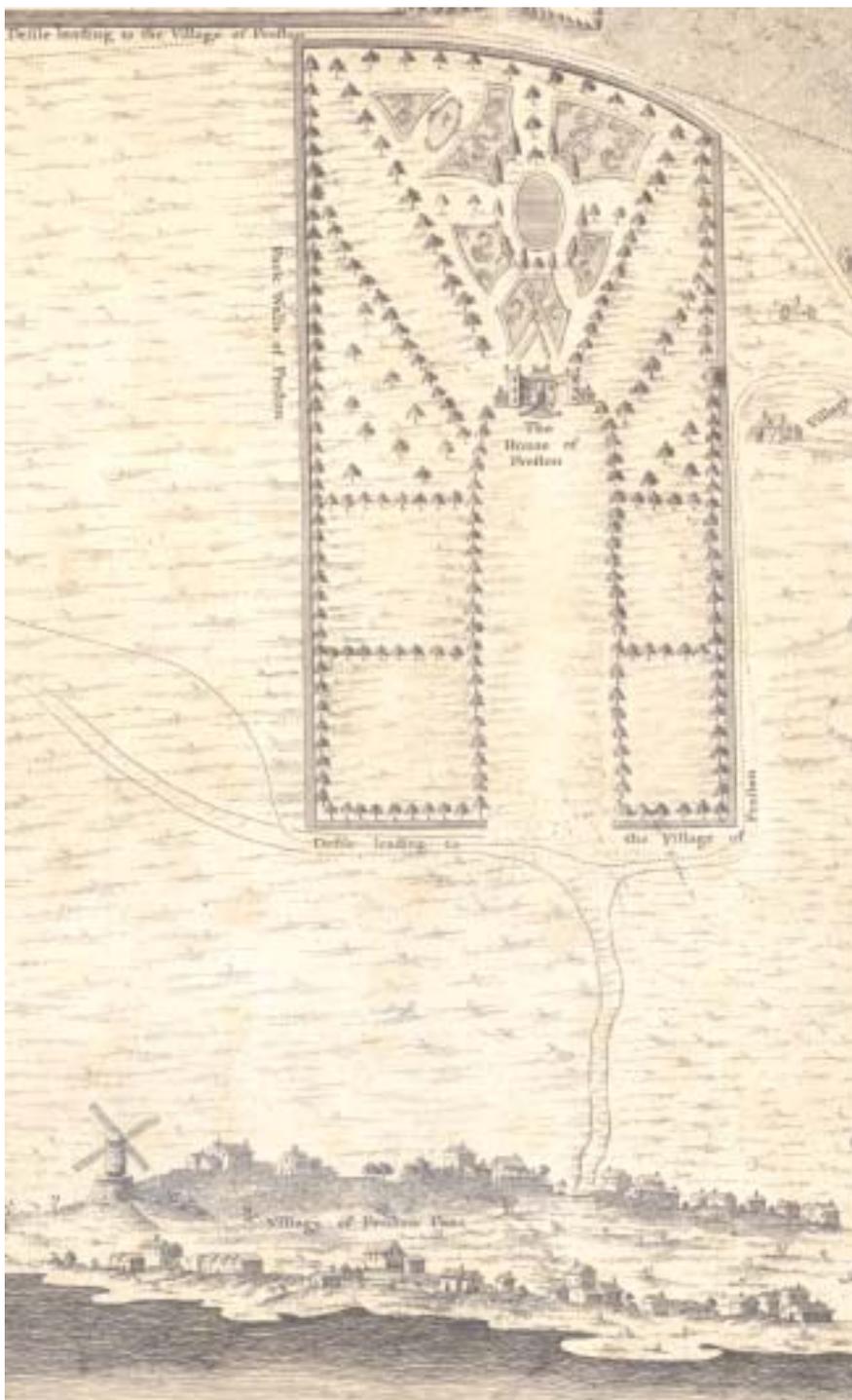


Figure 14: The Battle of Preston Map by Christopher Seton shows the Great Post Road, and also East Loan as 'defiles'. Note the windmill in the foreground, presumably next to Nethershot House and also the Church. Christopher Seton; 1745; Plan of the battle at Preston, 21st Septemr. 1745. By an officer of the Army who was present; Shelf Mark: EMS.s.90 Case.6.4; © National Library of Scotland.

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Charlie took the high ground from Musselburgh, encamping at Tranent, where he had three options for crossing the great morass and bog that intervened between Tranent and Seton: a footpath passing near the farm of Riggonhead; the cart way between Cockenzie and Tranent; and the waggonway for taking coal from Tranent coal pits down “The Heugh” to Cockenzie Harbour (the first railway in Scotland dating from 1722,¹²⁴ part of which is still in use as a walkway today).

Cadell also notes how Cope ordered the walls surrounding Lord Grange’s Preston House to be knocked down in case these were to be used as cover for rebel troops. Although occupying only four or five acres, it is said that because of the many walkways, it would have taken someone at least two hours to walk round the whole estate grounds. The outcome of the Battle of Prestonpans is well known, as is the final outcome of the Rebellion and the defeat of the Jacobites. Johnny Cope’s Road is the road that General Cope took when fleeing the scene of the battle and the carnage inflicted on his own troops – he continued on to Soutra and the road south.

After the Rebellion, there was a sense that more information was needed about the geography of the country as this knowledge is especially critical during war-time. General William Roy was thus commissioned to carry out a survey of Scotland and these, at a scale of 2 inches to the mile,¹²⁵ were the first detailed maps of the countryside.

TURNPIKES AND TOLLS

The condition of the roads was obviously noted at this time also. The Great Post Road was one of the first turnpike roads in Scotland. The name *turnpike* was given after the horizontal bar that spanned the road and could be swung aside to allow toll payers through. However, this road was not the first turnpike road in Scotland. That honour lies with the County of Edinburgh, who were successful in passing an Act in 1712 to establish turnpikes within the county. (This was of course ordered under the powers of the Westminster Parliament following the Union with England in 1707).

It was not until 1750 that the Great Post Road Bill was published, entitled ‘An Act for repairing the roads leading from Dunglass Bridge to the town of Haddington; and from thence to Ravenshaugh Burn in the County of Haddingtoun.’¹²⁶

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Its opening preamble sets out the reasons for its enactment:

Whereas the high roads leading from Dunglass Bridge to the town of Haddingtoun, and from thence to Ravenshaugh Burn, all in the County of Haddingtoun (being the Great Post Road from Edinburgh to London), are, by reason of the deepness of the soil, and many heavy carriages passing along the same, in many parts ruinous, and so much out of repair, that travellers cannot pass thereon without great danger:

And whereas the said road cannot by the ordinary course provided by the laws for repairing the highways of this Kingdom, be effectually amended, and kept in good repair, unless some provision be made for raising money, be applied for that purpose.'

The Act was not universally welcomed in East Lothian. The Justices of the Peace of the County of Haddington in the Minutes to their quarter session meeting of 4th May 1751 express strong opposition to it, even so far as to lobby the East Lothian MP Sir Hugh Dalrymple and also to lobby the Lord Advocate in order to persuade them to strongly oppose the Bill in Parliament.¹²⁷

The Commissioners of Supply of East Lothian also felt that such an Act would be injurious to their affairs. Sir John Hope of Dunglass indeed offered to repair the roads around his property himself; and it was generally felt that the Post Road was in sufficiently good condition not to need the measures of the aforesaid Bill.¹²⁸

Sir Hugh Dalrymple and Sir Andrew Fletcher, both Senators of the College of Justice and Justices of the Peace for East Lothian proposed that the Trustees of the turnpike road should have powers to erect the toll bar within the lands of the County of Edinburgh by up to 120 yards.¹²⁹

This no doubt would allow those going about their business in East Lothian District, and in particular Prestoungrange, enough latitude to be able to avoid the toll and not to be unduly penalised. Further reasons against the turnpike of the Great Post Road were given in the 'Memorandum for the Gentlemen of East Lothian' namely, there was already a tollgate at Jock's Lodge which raised sufficient funds for the repair of the Great Post Road throughout the County; that there were already tolls levied on loaded horses and carriages at *Canty* and at the *Watergate*, and it would be unjust to increase this; the toll prices proposed were at best not any less,

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and in some cases dearer than that already existing. Supporters of the Bill also thought that because the East Lothian part of the Great Post Road was currently not turnpiked then that would allow coal merchants, in particular the Laird of Woolmet, to exploit this road to avoid other turnpike roads, but this was stated as being unlikely.¹³⁰

The Bill, however, was successfully enacted despite the protests of the East Lothian Justices of the Peace and Commissioners of Supply.

In addition to the turnpike legislation, the statute labour roads continued, especially on the lesser roads but also in relation to the Great Post Road. A Committee of the Turnpike Trustees Meeting on 7th August 1750 proposed that:

All Heretors, Tenants and others, liable to send out wains and carts to the highways, shall be allowed to compound for three of the six days for which they are liable, at the rates following, viz. For every labouring horse above three years old, kept by such person, at the rate of 10d per annum, and for every labouring ox, at 5d per annum.

*That all householders, cottagers and labourers shall be allowed to compound for the whole six days for which they are liable, at the rate of 1/8d per annum.*¹³¹

This would also apply to the Great Post Road with regard to all persons living within the space of two computed miles from the Post Road.¹³² Perhaps a greater level of expertise was developing that allowed the general public to pay someone more willing and experienced to do their statute labour.

The Post Road would appear to have stuck to the line aforementioned going by Riggonhead to the north of Tranent and over the Garleton Hills and bypassing Haddington. This last fact is interesting in that one would normally have expected a main road to go through a major county town like Haddington. However, perhaps there was a disincentive to do so brought about by the status of such a Burgh e.g. perhaps the need to pay tolls to enter the market town. The Great Post Road to Preston over the Garletons is shown on Roy's map of 1755 as 'the short road from Edinburgh to Dunbar;' which implies that it had become less well-used and that the existing road through Haddington, Gladsmuir (where a branch left for Dalkeith) and Tranent continued on to Prestoungrange. This was the line later adopted as the Great Post Road, and is shown as the turnpike road on Roy's map of 1755 and later on Taylor & Skinner's map of 1776.

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Figure 15: Taylor & Skinner's Road maps were published in 1776 in strips showing the main roads of the day. This extract is from Plate 1 of their "Survey and maps of the roads of North Britain or Scotland"; and shows part of the road from Edinburgh to Berwick upon Tweed; Shelf Mark: EMS.b.3.48; © National Library of Scotland.

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The fact that a road led to Edinburgh via Prestoungrange indicates the importance of Prestoungrange as a destination. As an important coal mining centre and harbour at Morrison's Haven, Prestoungrange was important in the supply of coals and other merchandise landing there plus, of course, Prestonpans salt would have been in high demand for the grand houses of the New Town of Edinburgh, which was then developing.

The Taylor and Skinner Map of 1776 shows the tolls on the Great Post Road at Ravenshaugh near West Pans; and also at the Wallyford By-bar on the Prestonpans to Wallyford road. The Ravenshaugh Toll was one of the five tolls established on the Great Post Road in Haddingtonshire. The Trustees directed that walls should be built to stop people evading tolls, and this cut off the route across Drummorie Estate, which was probably the earliest line of the road.¹³³ A route across the estate continued to be the subject of an access dispute well into the 1960s although it is not recorded as a right of way today.

THE NETHERSHOT ROAD DISPUTE

There is a line of road shown on the Roy map running behind the main street of Prestonpans along the back of the houses. Looking at a modern town map of Prestonpans we would recognise this road as Nethershot Road. A 'shott'¹³⁴ was a measurement of land used in pre-improvement agriculture to indicate a block of arable land divided into strips or *selions*.¹³⁵ The land at Nethershot was part of the land owned by the Laird of Preston House, Lord Grange, who subsequently disposed of it to Mr William Ramsay, his factor some time after the 1745 rebellion (another part of Lord Grange's estate was sold to Watson's Hospital). It was not long before Ramsay settled on improving the land at Nethershot, and part of those plans involved stopping up the back lane to the public, and this he duly did by building walls and ditches across the road and turning people away from using it.¹³⁶

The reasons for the public using this road were that the High Street of Prestonpans at that time was in a very ruinous state, and the sea was encroaching on to this road making it doubly hazardous. William Ramsay, alongside David Dalrymple and James Erskine, advocates, tried to put a stop to this by claiming that there never was a public right to use the road, that Lord Grange had only allowed the public to use it at his discretion as an indulgence to his feuars – who used the road

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as a servitude access to their properties – that no one had complained when he had stopped up the road to the east of Nethershot commonly called the Links Park Road. (This road is open today as a right of way leading to Cockenzie.)

A lengthy legal battle between the Justices of the Peace of East Lothian and Ramsay, Erskine and Dalrymple and others then ensued over what was then called Preston Loan.

The Justices' response was to get a 'proof' from seven witnesses to attest that they had used the road since time immemorial and this proof was served on William Ramsay in 1752. The Justices claimed that the branch of the road which led to the west from the '*windmiln*' was a kirk road, and led to a seaport and that the road to the south led to a school and to a market town; and the encroachment of this was contrary to the Act of 1661 as he had blocked the route; they also claimed that Lord Grange never attempted to block this route as he had accepted it as public. Both sides employed legally trained advocates and the issue still appeared to be bubbling to the surface in 1762 (10 years later), despite the Justices' belief that they had previously done enough to secure access on the road.

Ramsay would have preferred the public to use the High Street and he did in fact plea to the Justices to improve this road along the coast. The Justices stuck to their guns and one presumes that they made the Preston Loan into a proper turnpike. The advocate for the Justices considered that the High Street was not sufficient for the public to use, it being less than ten feet wide between the walls on the one side and the sea on the other 'so that many times when the sea overflows it cannot be passed with safety.'¹³⁷ The road that William Ramsay tried to stop up is shown on his 1767; *Plan of the Lands of Preston*,¹³⁸ which implies he had accepted this by then.

TO TOLL OR NOT TO TOLL? OR HOW TO AVOID PAYING

A curious relic of the turnpike era can still be seen just to the south of the Royal Musselburgh Golf Club. There is a very finely built tunnel running under the old road (which is now fenced off to vehicular traffic). The tunnel was 133' long, 13'6" wide and 13'6" high. It is believed that this was built by Sir William Grant in order for coals to be transported between his colliery and Dolphingston to Morrison's Haven, and also salt from Prestonpans to be taken back on the return journey;