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THE ROAD BETWEEN DARTFORD GRAVESEND AND ROCHESTER

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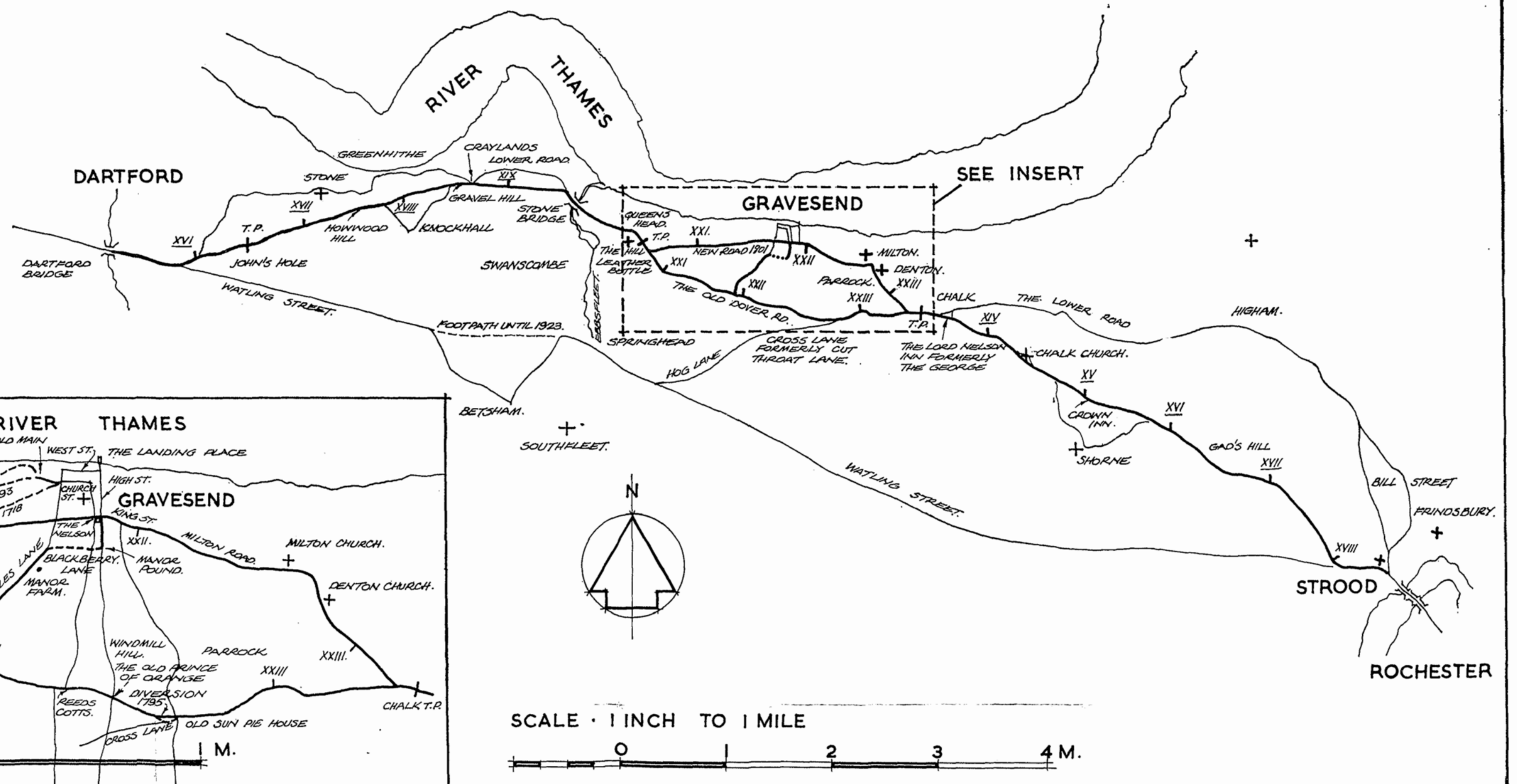


FIG. 1.

THE ROAD BETWEEN DARTFORD, GRAVESEND AND STROOD

By R. H. HISCOCK, LL.B.

FROM the Roman era and possibly earlier the main road from London to Dover has followed approximately the line of what was later known as Watling Street. In the medieval period one major deviation from the Watling Street occurred between Dartford and Strood where the road was diverted through the town of Gravesend and Watling Street became a by-road and footpath until the arterial road, now the A2 or M2, was opened in 1924.

This article deals with the road between Dartford and Strood and the various Turnpike Acts under which it was maintained during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

THE VARIATIONS IN THE COURSE OF THE ROAD

This was governed by two geographical features. First the Ebbsfleet which in Roman times seems to have been navigable as far as Springhead where the important settlement of Vagniacae grew up. This was the natural point for the road to make for between the Medway crossing at Rochester and the Darenth crossing at Dartford, as any line further north would have had to make a diversion to the south to cross the Ebbsfleet here. Secondly, the origin of the town of Gravesend as the eastern terminus of the Long Ferry on the Thames from London, which was in existence prior to 1293, from the evidence of a lawsuit in that year. This caused travellers from the Continent and East Kent to make for Gravesend. At about the same period the Ebbsfleet seems to have silted up and a bridge or causeway across it was built near its junction with the Thames at Stonebridge, Northfleet, enabling travellers to continue direct from Gravesend to rejoin Watling Street at Brent, Dartford.

By the end of the sixteenth century the Dover Road followed two courses between Chalk and Northfleet, one now known as Old Road, Gravesend, and Dover Road, Northfleet, about a mile to the south of the town of Gravesend and the other from Chalk to Gravesend water-side and then across the chalk cliffs near the river to Northfleet. The 'Old Road' is probably the earlier of the two and its course may have been dictated by the flooding of the valley below Milton Church at high tides prior to the building of the Sea Walls. The Domesday tide mill at Milton seems to have been near the Church, 'Millers Field' adjoined the

churchyard to the north and the tide must have flowed up to this point. It is interesting to note that the similar Mill at Northfleet was on the Creek near Stonebridge. Both these roads are shown in Symonson's map of 1596. This map marks the windmill on Windmill Hill, Gravesend, with a road running to the south of it and a loop road to the north. Philip Symonson was a Rochester man and would know the area. The course of the Watling Street between Strood and Dartford is not marked and certainly by the eighteenth century, and probably earlier, it had become a footpath between Park Corner, Swanscombe, and Sandy Lane, Betsham, but its site remained as the parish boundary between Southfleet and Swanscombe.

Chalk was dug at Gravesend at least as early as the fifteenth century and these diggings have from time to time interfered with the course of the road between Gravesend and Northfleet. A plan of 1693 in the Darnley Collection at the Kent Archives Office shows a new road 'set back from the waterside to the east of Gravesend town' the old road having been quarried away. On 23rd May, 1688, the Corporation Minutes refer to a letter to be written by the Mayor to Mr. Francis Brooke to empower him to enter a caveat in the Corporation's name for 'preventing the turning of the way near Northfleet, provided the said Corporation be at no charge'. A later Cobham Estate map shows the 'new road' of 1693 as 'old road' and a 'road to Northfleet cut c. 1716' further south, in addition to the proposed site for the 'New Road' which was cut in 1801 and is the present New Road—Overcliffe—London Road between Gravesend and Northfleet. Throughout the eighteenth century there were variations in the route between Gravesend and Northfleet due to the chalk diggings. Robert Pocock, the Gravesend historian, writing in 1797, states that the road across the cliffs was dangerous and almost disused.

In addition to the main road there is some evidence of a number of parallel or loop roads. There was a road through Stone and Greenhithe to Craylands (now in part only a footpath) and thence as the Lower Road to the Black Eagle, Northfleet. This Lower Road between Craylands and the Black Eagle, Northfleet, is reputed to have been the main road prior to the present road, having been cut by the Turnpike Commissioners, but there is no documentary evidence of this. From Chalk a Lower Road runs through Higham and Bill Street to Strood. There is a road between Watling Street near Springhead and Chalk connecting with this Lower Road which, judging from the original junction with the Old Turnpike Road near Echo Square, Gravesend, may well be older than the line of the Old Road, possibly connecting Roman settlements at Higham with those at Springhead. A deviation round Chalk Church and a road from Deadman's Bottom, Shorne, to Shorne Village and thence to Gadshill may also represent an earlier road.

THE TURNPIKE ACTS

The Turnpike Acts were passed to carry out improvements to the trunk roads of the country made necessary by the increase in travel and improvement of vehicles which took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the need to have one authority responsible for a length of main road, instead of a number of parishes.

The road between Northfleet and Strood was turnpiked in 1711 and was the second Kent road to be so treated.

The Act recited that 'the greatest part of the highway between the towns of North-fleet Gravesend and Rochester . . . about seven miles in length and being an ancient Post and Coach Road as well for Carts and Carriages between London Rochester Maidstone Canterbury Dover Deal and Margrett is in many places too narrow and become very hollow and dangerous for Passengers and often occasions long stops to the Post and others travelling thereon and is prejudicial to trade . . .'. It then makes provision for the Justices of the Peace in Quarter Sessions to appoint Surveyors and gives them powers to pay and appoint labourers and require carts and persons who are liable to maintain the road by Statute to work on the road, and also gives powers to dig gravel and levy tolls.

The roads to which the Act applied are not set out in detail but the Trustees took over the road from Stonebridge through Northfleet and along the line of the Old Road between Northfleet and Strood. It also took over the course of the road across the chalk cliffs from the Queen's Head, Northfleet, to Gravesend and probably that between Gravesend and Chalk. Apparently the Commissioners made an alteration in the line of this road as in the Gravesend Corporation accounts for 1713-14 there is an entry on 12th April, 1714, for drawing and engrossing two orders, one for Northfleet survey and the other for Gravesend survey, to stop up the highway or road leading from Gravesend to Northfleet as agreed, 2s., and there are entries for 'biscake bear and tobacco 2s. 5d.' for 'wine' 13s., and for 'coffee and sugr' 1s., when 'viewing the highway'. This would seem to be the alteration of 1716 shown on the Darnley plan. The Act does not give any express powers to make deviations in the existing course of the road but only power to widen it, but not over ten yards nor to pull down any houses or take over any orchards or gardens, but the Trustees assumed power to deviate.

There is a short length of unmade road between Stuart Road and Bath Street, Gravesend, now known as Clifton Road, which, until the end of the nineteenth century, was known as the Old Main, which is the last remaining section of this road of 1716. The rest of its course except between Pier Road and Burch Road, Rosherville, has been quarried away.

The 1711 Act was for thirteen years but if the highway was sufficiently repaired before this and the monies for the work repaid the Tolls were to cease. In 1724 another Act was passed extending the term for fifteen years from 6th June, 1725. There was again a somewhat optimistic provision in this Act that if before fifteen years the roads were sufficiently 'amended' then the Justices in Quarter Sessions could direct that the Tolls were to cease. This Act also provided for a sum of £100 per annum to be appropriated for repair of the road from Chatham to Boughton after all expenses of the Northfleet and Strood road had been paid. This sum was allotted by Quarter Sessions between the various parishes concerned. (See *Kentish Sources, Some Roads and Bridges*, E. Melling, 1959, p. 20.)

In 1737 a further Act was passed extending the period for twenty-one years from 6th June, 1740, and the Trust was extended to take over the road from 'the east end of Dartford Bridge through the Parish of Dartford and the several Parishes of Stone Swanscombe and Northfleet and the great main road from the said Parish of Northfleet to the Pump near the Parish Church of Strood'. A question had arisen as to whether the previous Acts applied to the road across the chalk cliffs from Northfleet to Gravesend and the Act continued 'and for as much as certain doubts have arisen with relation to the road leading from Northfleet to Gravesend whether the same is comprised within the first above mentioned Acts or either of them . . . be it therefore hereby enacted and declared that the main road leading from The Queen's Head at Northfleet by the Chalk Clift (now occupied by the Society of Bricklayers) to the Town of Gravesend is and ought to be deemed and taken as part of the road directed to be repaired . . .'. There was also an express provision that tolls were not liable for County bridges. This was inserted to make it clear that the Trustees were not liable to contribute towards Stonebridge at Northfleet for which the County was liable under the Statute of Bridges of 1531. In 1835 the Trustees took over this bridge subject to the County paying them £16 per annum. In 1863 there was some trouble due to flooding and the Trustees found that the County had only paid £16 for two years. After some correspondence the County agreed to put the bridge in repair after which the Trustees were to be paid £16 per annum to keep it in repair.

In 1761 a further Act was passed in which the road was defined as from 'Dartford to Northfleet and Gravesend and from Gravesend to Chalk and from Northfleet to Chalk and thence to Stones end near the Parish Church of Strood'. The reference to 'Stones end' probably relates to the end of the paving in Strood High Street, although the Paving Act for Strood and Rochester was not passed until 1768. This is the first Act which refers specifically to the road from Gravesend to Chalk but it seems that this road was maintained under the earlier

Acts as there are references in them to Tide Coaches (see below, p. 245). The Act also recites that part of the roads were 'so extremely bad and dangerous that it is become necessary to divert and alter the present course of that part of the said Roads and to purchase further land for the purpose'. This was the section of road across the chalk cliffs which had been undermined and damaged due to quarrying. The Act contained provisions to prevent this and to stop diggings within fifteen feet of the road and to have the pits fenced. The road across the chalk cliffs was in such a bad condition that the Trustees at their meeting on 17th April, 1761, resolved to 'take over the road from Queen Mary's Green by John Goldsmith's farm houses to the Manor Pound at the upper end of Gravesend Town' as this was considered the most eligible road to Gravesend. This followed the course of the present Pelham Road, at one time known as Styles Lane from a Tenant Farmer of that name, from the Old Road to its junction with the present Darnley Road. It then turned eastwards and ran along what are now the back gardens of the houses on the North side of Cobham Street, the northern boundary of the road following the line of the back fences and thence curved round into Windmill Street. This curve is still clearly visible in the curved frontage of two shops (Numbers 2 and 3 Wrotham Road) and the northern boundary of the offices of the Gravesend Rubber Company (Number 4 Wrotham Road) which are on the site of the road. This section of the road was known as Blackberry Lane. On 1st May it was reported at the Trustees' meeting that the road from Queen Mary's Green passed John Goldsmith's house to the Manor Pound was provided and repaired. Queen Mary's Green was in Pelham Road opposite the present White Post public house. It was originally 'The green near the old Parish Church of St. Mary's' and is sometimes referred to as St. Mary's Green. The church became derelict in the sixteenth century and according to a manuscript note of Robert Pocock the last ruins and the churchyard walls were grubbed up in 1797 by James Bayley, the tenant of the Manor Farm. Further material from the old church was used to repair the road in 1822 after the Parish had resumed responsibility for it. John Goldsmith's house was the old Manor Farm in Pelham Road, pulled down about 1880, and stood on the site of Numbers 4, 6 and 8 Pelham Road. The Manor Pound was at the junction of Manor Road and Windmill Street on the north-west corner.

The Trustees carried out a number of improvements under this Act in addition to the above. In November, 1763, the lower part of Leather Bottle Lane (now Springhead Road), Northfleet, was widened and made 'a large commodious sweep'. At the same meeting the road between the bottom of Sir John Falstaff's Hill (now Gadshill) and Maze Sole Pond, Frindsbury, was ordered to be widened. In October,

1764, the road near the Coach and Horses, Chalk, was ordered to be widened and made straight and also near the Crown, Shorne, and Chalk church.

In 1777 a straight road was made through Chalk village. Previously the road at Chalk (east to west) had turned sharp right opposite the Parsonage (now the Old Manor House) into Vicarage Lane and then sharp left into Lower Higham Road, opposite Great Clayne Farm (recently demolished and formerly the Vicarage). At their meeting in October, 1777, the Trustees ordered that as soon as convenient to the Trust the road at Chalk Turnpike Gate should be diverted and turned to go (east to west) from the parsonage house at Chalk behind the barn there in the occupation of Mr. Benjamin Hubble upon a straight line to come out near the sign of the King of Prussia in Chalk Street, and at the same time the present Toll House and Gate there be taken down and removed to some convenient place near the Blacksmith's Forge in Chalk Street. This is the line of the present road, although the former is still also a road forming together a triangle of Lower Higham Road, Chalk Street and Vicarage Lane.

In May, 1775, the Trustees ordered a pond for washing sheep to be built at Northfleet Bridge for the benefit of farmers who had built the former pond there which had been taken away when the drain was made, 'the same to be repaired by the farmers as previously'. This pond figures in a number of nineteenth-century prints and photographs and occupied the triangle of road now used for a 'bus park at the junction with Grove Road adjoining Northfleet football ground.

In 1778 the Trustees agreed to widen the road between the front of Mr. Holmes's house at Denton in the road beginning at the foot of the hill leading to Paddock and thence to the cottage belonging to Mr. Joynes in the parish of Gravesend. Both these houses have been demolished. Mr. Holmes's house was probably the house known as Upper Denton to the south of the Old Road which had been demolished by the early nineteenth century and Mr. Joynes's cottage was the house he built and resided in known as Mount Pleasant Place, adjoining Singlewell Road, which was demolished in 1821 after his death, and it had been purchased by Colonel Dalton of Parrock Hall.

In October, 1781, the Trustees decided to apply for a new Act and in January, 1782, to insert a clause 'to turn the road from Northfleet Street by the top of Gravesend Town to Chalk Street'. This would have followed the line of the present road, but in February they rescinded the proposal as they were 'fully satisfied that such alteration was not for the benefit of the public and would increase the great debt'. The latter was presumably the more compelling reason. The Gravesend Corporation, at a meeting on 11th January, had already decided to oppose the Act unless the direct line through the town was agreed and asked

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Lady Darnley to concur. Their opposition was not successful and the Act was passed without provision for the direct road.

In 1783 there was another diversion of the road across the chalk cliffs near Gravesend through lands belonging to the Earl of Darnley and Messrs. Wellington. From a plan in the Gravesend Library, apparently prepared for the Corporation to show the advantages of the direct line for a road between Gravesend and Northfleet, this road is shown along the edge of the cliffs at Rosherville where, at a later period, was the Upper Walk in Rosherville Gardens. Its course may also be followed by the present Cross Road at Rosherville between Burch Road and Pier Road and the entry now leading to some garages on the east side of Pier Road. It left the Old Main or Clifton Road at its junction with Bath Street running in a south-west direction. There was a further deviation at the Gravesend end in 1789.

In 1787 an alteration in the line of the road at Denton cut through the churchyard of the ruined church of St. Mary, and Robert Pocock records in a manuscript note that a fragment of the churchyard wall could be seen on the south side of the road. The ruins of the church (rebuilt in 1901) were on the north side.

In 1790 as a result of a Petition from the principal inhabitants of Dartford the Trustees agreed to improve East Hill, which was 'narrow, crooked and steep'. In July, 1795, part of the causeway of the road at the Chalk Hole near Gravel Hill (Swanscombe) fell in and the Trustees agreed to divert the course of the road to prevent further trouble. In April, 1796, the Trustees referred the proposed alteration to the Justices to settle. In the same year an alteration was made in the road near the present Echo Square, Gravesend, of which there is a plan in the Archives Office (reproduced in *Kentish Sources, Some Roads and Bridges*, by E. Melling, p. 44). The effect was to bring the road direct to the junction with the Cobham Road (Echo Square) instead of joining the road from Springhead (now Cross Lane, formerly Cut Throat Lane), some way to the west. A row of cottages were built on this slip of land or sand bank between the roads in 1868 which still exist.

In October, 1796, the Trustees agreed to apply for a further Act. The Gravesend Corporation once more brought forward proposals for a direct road from Northfleet, and Mr. Evans, the Town Clerk, attended a meeting of the Trustees to press for a road from the Leather Bottle, Northfleet, through King Street, Gravesend, to Chalk. The Trustees agreed to apply for optional powers but this did not satisfy the Corporation, who wanted the Trustees to undertake to carry the powers into effect as soon as possible. On 18th February, 1797, the Trustees resolved that if the Corporation were not satisfied with the optional clause they would suspend their application, which they did.

In September, 1800, the Trustees gave the Corporation notice of

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their intention to apply for a new Act. The Town Clerk was instructed to watch their proceedings in order to provide for the new road. On 25th May, 1801, the Corporation agreed to Petition the House of Commons that the Trustees should be directed to cause the road between Northfleet and Gravesend to be carried in a straight line from the Leather Bottle, Northfleet, to and through King Street in the town of Gravesend. A copy of the Petition appears in the Corporation Minutes. The Corporation Minutes of 1st September, 1801, report that their efforts had been attended with complete success and that the thanks of the Court be conveyed to Alderman Curtis and others who had assisted. In addition to entries in the Minutes there are a number of items in the Accounts for expenses in connection with this matter. The Corporation agreed to find funds to be advanced to the Trustees to a total of about £750.

The Trustees applied for the Act and in November, 1801, appointed Mr. Collins, of Leybourne, to survey the road. The road was to be thirty-four feet in width, footpaths on each side six feet at bottom and five feet at top. Mr. Collins' price for the work was £2,826 8s. Od. and was accepted by the Trustees who, at this period, were meeting at the Queen's Head, Northfleet, presumably so as to be near the work. At one meeting they agreed to have a footpath on the north side of the road only, but both paths were constructed. The provisions against chalk pits were extended from fifteen feet to thirty feet, but these seem to have been disregarded.

Payments were made to Mr. Collins on account from time to time and the Trustees authorized the final payment to be made to him of £226 8s. Od. on 22nd January, 1803.

Some difficulties arose over the junction of the new road with High Street, Gravesend. On 20th September, 1802, the Trustees agreed to buy two messuages belonging to Edward Martin and William Laurence at the top of the High Street for £697 15s. Od. and in March, 1803, there was a suggestion for rounding the corner at the top of High Street and setting back the Carpenter's Arms. This was discussed further in July, when it was agreed to widen King Street, and plans were prepared by Mr. Coast. This bottleneck at the top of High Street was not finally eliminated until after the Trust finished when the Nelson was rebuilt in 1878 and set back in line with the south side of the road. Two of the oldest photographs of the town show the old Nelson jutting into the New Road shortly before its demolition.

In 1838 the Trustees of Pinnock's Charity pulled down the old almshouses in King Street and, in rebuilding them, set back in order to widen the road. There was some correspondence with their Clerk as the Almshouse Trustees claimed that the Turnpike Trustees had promised to pay them for this. The Gravesend Improvement Com-

missioners maintained the pavements in King Street and Milton Road, which were part of the turnpike, and in 1841 there was a threat of proceedings as the Trustees claimed that the Commissioners had encroached on the road.

In June, 1803, a Mr. Asser was appointed to prepare plans of the old road across the chalk cliffs showing the names of the adjoining owners and whether they had any other means of access, and in August a Committee was appointed to dispose of this road.

In 1804 the Trustees resolved to offer part of the road to Northfleet via the White Post (Blackberry Lane) to Mrs. Tadman, its site having been purchased from her late husband. She did not wish to buy and in August, 1808, the site of Blackberry Lane was sold to Laurence Ruck for £125. He was the owner of the adjoining lands and a house known as 'Rucklands', now the Masonic Hall in Wrotham Road. Prior to this sale in March, 1808, the Trustees' Surveyor had been instructed to take so much of the materials from Blackberry Lane as he could make use of to repair the New Road. The parish resumed responsibility for Styles Lane again and in 1811 they took steps to prevent Mr. Styles and a Mr. Assiter from encroaching on the road by ploughing, and in 1829 resolved to repair Styles Lane and fence the pond to prevent accidents.

The construction of the New Road in 1801 was the last major diversion in the course of the road made by the Trustees.

When the South Eastern Railway built the North Kent line (opened in 1849) a level-crossing was built at Milton Road, Gravesend, which caused trouble. From the start, the Trustees were opposed to this crossing and finally in 1864 the Company agreed to replace it with a bridge, resulting in a small diversion of the road.

In 1852 there was trouble with the European and American Electric Printing Telegraph Company who had left the footpath in 'a very insufficient state producing great public annoyance in so populous a locality'. The Mayor of Gravesend also joined in the complaints. In 1863 the British Electric Telegraph Company erected posts for overhead wires and once more the Trustees objected.

In 1859 there was some correspondence with Charles Dickens, apparently in connection with his tunnel under the road at Gads Hill, between his house and The Wilderness on the south side of the road, to which the Trustees agreed. The Rector of Milton (the Rev. Johnstone) was not so fortunate when he paved a crossing from the church to his new Rectory opposite in 1865, and the Trustees objected and requested him to remove it.

FINANCES AND TOLLS

The first Act of 1711 imposed the following tolls:

For every horse 1d.

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For every coach chariot calash chaise and wagon 1s.

For every cart 6d.

For every score of Sheep or Lambs 4d.

For every score of Calves 4d.

For every score of Hogs 6d. and so for every greater or lesser number of Sheep Lambs Calves or Hogs proportionably [not being under five].

For [every] score of Oxen and Neat Cattle 8d. and so for every greater or lesser number [proportionably].

There is a note in the printed copy of the Act at the Record Office that the words in square brackets were 'interlined on the Roll'.

Soldiers, Postmen and Postboys were exempt and 'Horses loaden [sic] with Fish only for London and the said Horses returning back' were also exempt.

There were provisions for distraining on persons who refused to pay the Tolls and for Surveyors and collectors to account to Quarter Sessions half yearly and power to mortgage the Tolls at interest not exceeding 6 per cent. There are accounts for the years 1719-1744 among the Quarter Sessions Papers in the Kent Archives Office Q/SB. They are not very informative, the items consisting merely of 'Tolls collected' on one side and 'payments made to Treasurer' on the other. The average during this period is about £200 per half year, e.g. March to October 1719 Receipts £211 19s. 8d. Payments £203 3s. 4d. 1739 March to October £181 1s. 4½d. paid £172 19s. 10d. 1739 receipts £193 17s. 1d. expenses £167 18s. 10d. The highest receipts for a half year were in 1732 when £258 2s. 9d. was received.

The Justices were empowered to set up toll-gates, but the only gate set up under this Act was at Chalk at a point on the Lower Higham Road between its junction with Chalk Street and Vicarage Lane.

The Act of 1724 did not alter the rates of tolls but provided that they should be paid before passage. There were also some rather complicated provisions that Tolls were not to be paid twice in twenty-four hours for the same horse etcetera or with a coach chariot calash chaise waggon or other carriage drawn with the same horse or horses or 'the greater part of the same horses' or in the case of stage coaches, if the coach should not be the same yet if the horses are the same. There was also a penalty of 10s. for persons near gates allowing animals or vehicles to pass through their grounds thus avoiding payment of tolls.

This was also the first Act to allot £100 per annum to the repair of the road from Chatham to Boughton.

The Act of 1737 altered the tolls from 6th June, 1740, as follows:

For every coach Berlin landau Chariot Chaise Calash or other carriage drawn by six horses or more the sum of one shilling and sixpence.

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For every coach Berlin landau Chariot Chaise Calash or other carriage drawn by four horses one shilling.

For every coach Berlin landau Chariot Chaise Calash or other carriage drawn by two horses sixpence.

For every Chaise Calash Chair or other carriage drawn by one horse only the sum of four pence.

The remaining Tolls were to be 'as in the former Acts'.

There was a provision for the Trustees to compound with owners of Tide Coaches from Gravesend to Chatham and Rochester (see below p. 245). There was also a provision for free passage on election days.

This Act which extended the Trust's road from Stonebridge to Dartford provided for one or more gate or gates on the additional road but no such gate to the westward of Stonebridge. (It would seem that this ought to have read 'eastward'.) No additional gate was set up under this Act.

The Act of 1761 altered the description of the vehicles and the Tolls of cattle (which were still governed by the 1711 Act) as follows:

For every Coach Berlin Landau Chariot Chaise Calash Caravan Hearse Waggon Wain Cart Dray or other carriage drawn by six horses One shilling and six pence.

For every Coach Berlin Landau Chariot Chaise Calash Caravan Hearse Waggon Wain Cart Dray or other carriage drawn by four horses One shilling.

For every Coach Berlin Landau Chariot Chaise Calash Caravan Hearse Waggon Wain Cart Dray or other carriage drawn by two horses Sixpence.

For every Coach Berlin Landau Chariot Chaise Calash Caravan Hearse Waggon Wain Cart Dray or other carriage drawn by one horse Fourpence.

For every horse mare gelding mule or ass laden or unladen and not drawing One penny.

For every drove of Oxen cows or neat cattle Eightpence by the score and so in proportion.

For every drove of calves sheep or lambs Fivepence by the score and so in proportion.

For every drove of hogs Sixpence by the score and so in proportion.

If Tolls were paid at one gate and a note or ticket produced then no toll should be paid at any other gate. The exemptions were also extended to cover animals and vehicles engaged in local husbandry, repairs to the roads, carrying mail or vagrants with passes.

The Act of 1761 gave the Trustees power to install a weighing engine. There is no reference to this in the Minutes, but on 19th March, 1764, Henry Green of Northfleet, a shopkeeper, petitioned John Calcraft (of Ingress Abbey, Greenhithe), Lord of the Manor, to set up an engine on

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the waste at Northfleet Hill for weighing sainfoin hay and fodder which farmers sold and delivered at the Chalk Wharves (on the Thames) and other places. The Petition was signed by a number of landowners or farmers in Northfleet, at least one of whom was a Trustee and endorsed with the approval of John Calcraft and entered and recorded at the Kent Quarter Sessions at Maidstone on 1st May, 1764. Cooke in his *History of Northfleet* states that this weighbridge was on the London side of the gate set up at Northfleet in 1860 and in charge of the gatekeeper named Wilkinson.

The first meeting of the Trustees under this Act was on 17th April, 1761, at the George (later the Lord Nelson), Chalk. They agreed to keep the existing gate at Chalk and erect another at John in the Hole, near Dartford. This was at Stone, near the Welsh Tavern, and a road nearby is called Tollgate Road. At the Trustees' meeting on 1st May it was reported that this gate was open and that the Tolls from 8th April to 16th May amounted to £52 18s. 6d. In 1769 it was agreed to let the two gates to James Pearson for four years at £630 per annum. In the same year the Trustees agreed to borrow £488 10s. 0d. at 4½ per cent. and there is a minute that the existing debt at that date was £1,311 19s. 2d. By 1775 the Tolls were being let at £900 per annum. In 1761 the Clerk and Surveyor was paid £20 per annum, and in 1770 when the offices were separated, the Surveyor, Thomas Brandon, was paid £30 per annum.

In 1780 a Mr. Thomas Elliott objected to payment of Tolls on exchange of horses at Gravesend between the two gates. The Trustees took Counsel's opinion which was against them and when the next Act was obtained in 1782 it was expressly provided that persons were not to be exempt unless the same horses, etc., were used, but otherwise this Act did not alter the Tolls.

In 1781 the Tollhouse at John in the Hole was pulled down and a new one erected. This Tollhouse and gate were again rebuilt in 1811 and there is a drawing and plan in the Kent Archives Office which is reproduced in *Some Roads and Bridges*, page 44.

In 1791 the Mail Coach guard shot at the collector (William Rogers) at John in the Hole. He escaped serious injury, but another 'violent assault' took place in 1795 by Jeremy Lock of Canterbury which led to a prosecution by the Trustees. Rogers survived until 1800 and on his death, his widow was appointed collector.

The Act of 1801 altered the method of assessing the Tolls by charging so much per animal and not charging for the vehicle as follows:

For every Horse, Mare, Gelding or mule drawing any coach, Chariot, Phaeton, Calash, Curricule, Vis-a-Vis, Chaise, Diligence, Caravan, Hearse or litter the sum of Sixpence.

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For every Horse, Mare, Gelding, mule or beast of burden drawing any wagon wain cart or other such like carriage the sum of Fourpence.

For every Horse, Mare, Gelding mule or beast of burden not drawing Twopence.

For each Ass drawing any kind of carriage twopence.

For each Ass not drawing One penny.

For every Drove of Oxen, Cows, or Neat Cattle One shilling and fourpence per Score.

For every Drove of Calves sheep lambs or hogs Tenpence per score.

And in the case of Oxen drawing any carriage two Oxen shall be considered and paid for as one horse.

There were elaborate penalties for evading Tolls by going round gates or handing over tickets.

In 1803 Mr. Brandon the Surveyor's salary was increased to £50 and when he retired in 1807 his successor John Westbrook was paid £105.

An account for 1811 shows the total debts at £9,702 5s. 6d. and interest £620 1s. 11d. The rents from letting the Tolls were £2,560.

The last local Act was passed in 1822 and revoked all the previous Acts and was for a period of 21 years.

There was a general power to erect new gates as well as maintaining the existing gates or side bars and to enclose suitable gardens up to a quarter of an acre for the Toll Houses and that a lamp or lamps should be erected near the Toll Houses. The Tolls were almost identical with those in the 1801 Act, although there was a provision for receipts to be given *gratis* entitling the holder to pass through the other gates. There was also power for the Trustees to make the Tolls payable as to half at each gate.

The exemptions were wider than in the previous Acts and included the Royal Family and rectors, vicars and curates going to or returning from the church or chapel at which they officiated or visiting sick parishioners and any person attending divine service at his usual place of worship on Sunday if 'tolerated by law'.

On expiry this Act was renewed from year to year by the Annual Turnpike Acts until 1871.

An auction of the Tolls of the gates at Chalk and John's Hole with the side 'bars' or gates at Horns Cross for one year from 19th August, 1842, produced a successful bid by Lewis Levy of £3,410, the rent to be paid monthly in advance at 'the Western Door of Rochester Cathedral between the hours of ten and twelve in the forenoon'. The Clerk at the time was George Essell who was also Chapter Clerk and occupied the offices in the Precinct. There was trouble with the side bars, which were across the two side roads at Horns Cross. One of them blocked access to the yard at the rear of the public house and in 1838

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there was a claim for Tolls when horses were taken round to the stables from the front of the inn, to which strong objection was taken.

A further series of Annual Accounts at the Kent Archives Office run from 1823 to the end of the Trust in 1871. The income for 1823 is as follows:

	£	s.	d.
Income brought forward	£1,884	4	8 $\frac{3}{4}$
Balance in Surveyor's hands		79	14 6 $\frac{1}{2}$
Rents from Tolls	£3,550	0	0
Incidentals		8	0 0
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	£5,521	19	3 $\frac{1}{4}$
 The expenditure.			
Day Labour for maintenance and repairs		536	18 8
Team Labour		89	13 1
Gravel Hill balance of unliquidated account		432	16 0
Maintenance of buildings, houses, gates or bridges	£1,202	17	11 $\frac{3}{4}$
Land purchase and damage done		210	0 0
Salaries, Surveyors, Clerks, etc.		161	5 0
Printing and Stationery		1	7 0
Interest on Debt		169	10 0
Incidentals		73	19 8
Maidstone Road		100	0 0
Principal Debt paid off	£1,000	0	0
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	£3,978	7	4 $\frac{3}{4}$
Total Balance carried forward	£1,543	11	10 $\frac{1}{2}$
Amount of Debt secured on Tolls	£3,150	0	0
Purchase money lands at Northfleet		228	0 0
Purchase money land at Milton		210	0 0
Purchase money the site of houses at Milton		175	0 0
Balance of Contract for improvement of How Wood Hill (Stone)		700	0 0
Printers work		12	7 0

From this date the Tolls seem to have gradually declined. In 1824 they were £3,380; in 1827, £2,907; in 1832, £2,474. In 1843 there was an increase to £3,094 but the next year they dropped to £2,308. The opening of the North Kent line from London via Dartford to Gravesend and Strood (then called Rochester and Chatham) in 1849 lead to a drop from £1,808 in 1848 to £1,489 in 1850, £1,015 in 1852, £817 in 1854, £723 in 1858. There was a slight rise to £788 in 1859 but the Trustees decided it was necessary to take drastic action, and in 1860 they erected an additional gate on the Hill at Northfleet on the site of the old stocks

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opposite the present Roman Catholic Church. The cost of erecting this new Toll house and gate was £191 15s. 8d. The work was done by a Mr. Gould, a well-known builder and architect of Gravesend, and a Mr. J. K. White of 51 Orchard Road, Brentford, took the gate. The Northfleet local board objected to the siting of the gate, but without avail. In the Gravesend Free Press for 18th February, 1865, there was a letter complaining that owing to this gate it cost 8d. to pass from one part of Northfleet to the other.

The gate was financially successful, as in 1860 the Tolls went up to £1,010, and in 1865 to £1,156. These fell to £927 in 1870, the last full year of the Trust.

So far as expenditure is concerned there were improvements at Dartford Hill in 1825 and a purchase of cottages at Northfleet for £250 to improve the road in 1828. The last major expenditure was lowering West Hill and filling up the valley which cost £1,500 in 1828 and a further £2,109 in 1829. It is not clear where 'West Hill' was, but it may relate to what is now Gads Hill. This work resulted in the total debt going up to £8,650 in 1829. The debt was, however, gradually reduced and the Trust ended up with a surplus. The final account from 1st January, 1871, to the expiration of the Trust is as follows:

INCOME:

	£	s.	d.
Balance in Treasurer's Hands—brought forward	£147	3	1
Balance in Surveyor's Hands—brought forward	£5	13	0
Sale of Toll Houses surplus lands etc.	£218	18	6
Miscellaneous	£74	7	0
Revenue from Tolls	£878	15	0
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	£1,325	6	7
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There is a note that all surplus property of the Trust had been sold and all money due had been got in and all debts discharged.

EXPENDITURE:

	£	s.	d.
Manual Labour	£161	2	7
Team Labour and carriage of materials	£9	11	6
Materials for surface repairs	£491	0	5
Tradesmen's Bills	£28	17	11
Clerk, including allowance	£72	10	0
Surveyor, including allowance	£102	10	0
Law charges	£33	11	5
Incidental expenses	£28	11	11

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Balance due from Treasurer*	£397 10 7
(There is a note.) * The above balance will be distributed.	
Dartford Highway Board	£130 8 5
Gravesend and Milton Improvement Commissioners	£43 2 8
Rochester Highway Board	£196 17 10
Highway Surveyors, Strood	£27 1 8
	<hr/>
	£397 10 7
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This Trust paid its way and ended with a surplus which was paid over to the bodies who took over the Trust's liabilities. The road was classed as a 'Main Road' under the Highway Act, 1878. This meant that the County was entitled to claim a moiety of the cost of repairs. A return of 2nd April, 1879, gives the cost of maintenance as £602 for the previous year and the length as 13 miles.

MILESTONES

The Act of 1737 contains penalties for defacing the milestones, but the Minutes for this period are lost and there is no record of the date when milestones were first placed on this road. The Act of 1822 provided for stones to be put up one mile apart and for direction posts to be erected, but stones had been set up long before this. In 1780 the Trustees directed the stones to be repainted and in 1803 after the New Road had been opened the Trustees directed the Surveyors to move the stones from the Old Road to the New Road.

From those still in existence it appears that at first they had the mileage from London in Roman figures engraved on one or sometimes two sides without any town name or the word 'miles'. At some date probably in the nineteenth century the stones were turned round so that the Roman figures are now at the back and plates were put on with the mileage from London Bridge and Gravesend or Rochester. These plates were removed during the 1939-1945 War, but in some cases, new plates of varying designs have been affixed to the stones since 1945.

The following stones still exist:

The sixteenth on Dartford Brent with figure 'VI' on the two rear sides. This may have been 'XVI' as the remaining figures are very faint, or possibly it refers to the distance from Gravesend which is six miles, but if so, it is the only stone to have a figure based not on London. There are modern plates on the front. The seventeenth has 'XVII' on the two rear sides and one modern plate. The eighteenth is likewise, but with two modern plates. The nineteenth has no engraved figures and

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may be a newer stone, neither has it any plates, only the marks where they were removed. The twentieth and twenty-first stones are both missing, but there are modern plates attached to a nearby house and a garden wall respectively. The twenty-second and twenty-third have both been removed, although their sites are known. The plates from the twenty-second, which was in Milton Road, Gravesend, at numbers 153/154 Milton Road are stored in the magazines at the Fort Gardens and are inscribed '22 miles to London', '7 miles to Rochester', although they are no longer accessible. The twenty-fourth has 'XXIV' on one rear side only; the twenty-fifth has no engraved figures but both have marks on the front where the old plates were removed. The twenty-sixth seems to have disappeared. The twenty-seventh has 'XXVII' on one rear side and the marks of plates on the front. The twenty-eighth has been removed.

COACH TRAFFIC

Colonel H. C. B. Rogers in *Turnpike to Iron Road* (1961) states that the first coaches were introduced about 1640. By 1647 Tide Coaches were running between Gravesend and Rochester in connection with the Long Ferry as in that year the Gravesend Corporation made an order forbidding such coaches and other public vehicles from plying elsewhere than in the 'inns or houses where their coaches or carts shall be'. The importance of this traffic was recognized in the Act of 1737 in which the Trustees were given powers to compound with the owners of Tide Coaches running from Gravesend to Rochester and Chatham and back, and which would pass through the Chalk gate.

Some evidence of the London traffic appears from the various Gravesend guide-books. The earliest published in 1817 states that coaches pass almost every hour to or from London.

The *Gravesend Gazetteer and Guide* of 1840, p. 14, lists some ten named coaches between London and Gravesend and continuing to Dover, Faversham, Canterbury and Brompton, and gives the up and down times in addition to Pearle's Omnibus. The Gravesend coach offices were at the Lord Nelson on the north-west corner of Windmill Street (on the site of the present Nelson) and the Prince of Orange on the south-west corner of High Street opposite (the site now being occupied by Burton's and the yard and stables by Chiesman's). This was usually known as the 'New' Prince of Orange to distinguish it from the 'Old' Prince of Orange at the junction of Windmill Street and the Old Road, and which at an earlier date was used as the coaching inn by vehicles on the Old Road.

Vehicles referred to in the Acts, from the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, are as follow:



FIG. 2.

Coaches at New Prince of Orange and Lord Nelson, New Road, Gravesend, c. 1830.

Chariot—a light, four-wheeled vehicle with only back seats, 1661.

Calash—a light carriage with low wheels having a removable folding hood, 1666.

Chaise—a light, open carriage for one or two persons, 1701.

Berlin—an old-fashioned four-wheeled covered carriage with a seat behind covered with a hood, 1731.

Landau—a four-wheeled carriage with top in two parts so that it may be closed or thrown half or entirely open, 1743.

Chair—a vehicle for one person; a sedan carried on poles, 1836; a light chaise drawn by one horse, 1821; a chariot or car, 1814.

Caravan—a covered carriage or cart, a house on wheels as those used by gipsies and showmen, 1674.

Hearse—a carriage or car constructed to carry a coffin, 1650.

Wain—a large open vehicle usually four-wheeled used for carrying heavy loads.

Dray—a low cart without sides for carrying heavy loads, especially that used by brewers, 1581.

Phaeton—a species of light four-wheeled open carriage usually drawn by a pair of horses with one or two seats facing forward, 1742.

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Curricie—a light two-wheeled carriage usually drawn by two horses abreast, 1756.

Vis-à-Vis—a light carriage for two persons sitting face to face, 1753.

Diligence—a public stage-coach, 1742.

Litter—a vehicle containing a couch shut in by curtains and carried on men's shoulders or by animals, 1774.

SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are copies of all the local Turnpike Acts except the 1711 Act in the Gravesend Public Library. There is a copy of the 1711 Act in the Public Record Office. In the Archives Office are Accounts for most of the years from 1711 to 1744 among the Quarter Sessions Papers Q/SB. There is another series from 1823-1871 with the Chalk Turnpike Papers T.7. There are also the Minutes from 1761-1809 and a Letter Book, 1837-1866 T.7.A.11, in addition to other miscellaneous papers. Use has also been made of R. P. Cruden's *Manuscript Collection* in the Gravesend Public Library for Corporation references to the road, and the interleaved copy of R. Pocock's *History of Gravesend*, 1797, which contains his additional manuscript notes.

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