

THE ROADS THAT LED BY PRESTOUNGRANGE

[Leithen Hopes], in *Peblis* [Peebles] were all united into the Barony of Prestoungrange.’⁸⁴

THE KIRK ROAD

The difficulties that the Church was facing at this time were considerable. As mentioned above, the original Church of Preston was destroyed by Lord Hertford in the ‘rough wooing’ of 1544. However, it may well have been that the religious powers of the day knew that times were changing and the Churches were never rebuilt here in Preston or Prestonpans. Prestonpans was to be without a Church for over fifty years until Mr. John Davidson was appointed Minister of “*South Preston, including Ye Pannis East and West.*”⁸⁵

During the intervening period, the people of Prestonpans attended the Old Kirk at Tranent. There is a road shown on John Adair’s map linking the Tranent Church with the village of Preston, and this follows roughly the line of Johnnie Cope’s Road but takes a more direct route diagonally to the south east across to the Church. Indeed, the direct line of the route was probably diverted onto the line of the route running today from the ‘Roupin Steps’ heading east to the Church. This track has been known as the ‘Brickworks Road’, owing to the presence of a brickworks along its length at one time, but before this it



Figure 9: The line of road formerly known as the Kirk Road, and the Brickworks Road, leading from Johnnie Cope’s Road.

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was known as ‘The Kirk Road’ and on the 1829 “Plan of the improvement made on the Turnpike Road at Tranent” by William Kempt⁸⁶ it was shown as such. This route is still in existence today, following a public right of way.

THIEVES, WHILLIWHAES, AND UNSEEN DANGERS ON THE ROADS

To travel on the roads in these times was not a pleasant, or altogether safe, experience. The following extract from Mr. James Melville’s diary in 1572 gives us a graphic description of what the roads were like then:

For, first ryding from Hadington to Smeton, reposing on our gyde, we went forward, who be it under night, far, lot when we war in graittest danger of collpittes and sinks, the darknes was sa grait, that our gyde knew nocht whar he was, nor whom to gyde, sa that iff God haid nocht gydet us, we haid bein lyk Thales wha compased the erthe, and dyed in a draw-well at his awin dur! When we haid spent a guid part of the night, at last ane of our hors rashed on his nes [nose] upon a gevill of a hous, lot whether at was hous or stak or henche, we knew not, nether saw hors or man na nocht our awin finger-end til light and doon grapes, ellanges and find a dur, and chapping, we gat some folks that tauld us we war in Tranent, fra the quhilk conducing a gyde, with a lantern knit to his hors teall to schwa us the way with grait fas cherie throw the coll hors gett, we cam to Smeton.⁸⁷

Smeton was of course Smeaton and the ‘Coll-hors-gett’ could well have been any of the roads used for transporting coal, perhaps even leading to Acheson’s Haven on the coast at Prestonpans.

Apart from the poor condition of the roads, the traveller had to be wary of those that lay in wait to rob, steal and murder. Writing in 1615, Calderwood calls these people ‘The Whilliwhaes.’

About this tyme, certaine bair and idle gentlemen lay in wait upon passengers, by the ways about Edinburgh and in other parts of Eist Lothian, en route wold needs have money from them. The commone people call them Whilliwhaes.⁸⁸

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There are many ‘Thieves Roads’ indicated on OS maps of Scotland, particularly in the Scottish Borders, where cattle reiving was rife. In Lothian, part of the ancient route of the Great North Road route to England is called the ‘Thieve’s Dykes’ just outside Haddington in the Garleton Hills. However this is probably not because of cattle reiving, but because of it being frequented by these robbers or ‘Whilliwhaes’. This part of this ancient route is now ploughed over but it used to be the place called ‘Yellowcraigs’ in the Garleton Hills near to the ancient Barnes Castle. ‘Holloways’ – the sunken tracks made by the pressure of many passes by wheel, hoof and foot can still be seen here. This part of the road is also known as ‘Cope’s Road’ as this was the road that General Cope took from landing at Dunbar to proceed to Prestonpans and his inglorious defeat in 1745 at the hand of Bonnie Prince Charlie and his Jacobite rebels at Prestonpans.⁸⁹

THE GREAT NORTH ROAD AND ITS ROYAL CONNECTIONS

The coastal route was used by Edward I in 1296 on his return from his mission to quell the rebellious Scots in the Wars of Independence.⁹⁰ The line that this route took was roughly along a straight line between Preston and Seton Castle to Linton and Dunbar. From Edinburgh, the road would have led to Musselburgh over the Figgate Whins, possibly following the line of an ancient Roman road later to be known as the Fishwives Causeway, crossing over the Roman Bridge (actually built 1529–1530 at the behest of Lady Seton, but quite possibly on the site of a far more ancient crossing of the Esk), then to Preston, Seton, Cantyhall, Seton Hill, Cottyburn, Coates, Gatefoot, Pencraig, Upper Hailes and Linton.⁹¹

A common element in the eastern part of the road from Preston was the way it joined up with property of the Seton family, also known as the Earls of Wintoun. Not only did they own Seton Castle, but they also had properties in the Garleton Hills in the early seventeenth century (Garmylton-Noble or Garleton-East and Barnes Castle were owned by the Setons). The Setons may even have owned substantial parts of Preston village at that time⁹² as well as owning Pinkie House in Musselburgh. The establishment of the roads between major landowner properties no doubt helped to keep them in at least serviceable condition – consider that Wintoun Loan was the

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name of the road connecting Seton Castle with Wintoun House in Pencaitland and this still exists in part as old farm tracks and as part of the current public road. McNeill states that between Holyrood House and Seton Palace “there were [...] continual royal processions along this way, and that these were often more the scene of merriment than discretion.” Therefore, not always were the processions as solemn as those on the Holy stop (Olivestob).⁹³

The information carried north by Sir Robert Carey in 1603, when he rode from London to Edinburgh along this way, a journey of almost four hundred miles in sixty hours – a considerable achievement – was of a more sombre nature, confirming the death of Queen Elizabeth of England.⁹⁴

James, the son of Mary Queen of Scots, was to ascend to the throne of the Kingdom of Great Britain and become James I of England, Ireland and Wales as well as VI of Scotland.

England had by this time made some progress in establishing a network of postal routes for conveying the King’s despatches, and various staging posts were set up throughout the country.⁹⁵

On his journey south on 5th April 1603 James no doubt became well aware of the condition of the roads in Scotland in comparison with those south of the border, although English roads were not without their own difficulties. The time taken to travel from London to Berwick, utilising twenty stages, was forty hours in summer and sixty hours in winter. However, in reality, the time taken could be as much as eight days and the stage between Alnwick and Berwick sometimes took as much as seventeen hours for a little over thirty miles.⁹⁶ With his retinue of five hundred noblemen he would stop at the south west corner of the orchard of Seton Castle as Robert, the seventh Lord Seton, was buried,⁹⁷ since the Setons were a most influential and powerful family, particularly in the reign of the Stewart monarchs.

The importance of good communications between England and Scotland in order for James to keep up to date with the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh became of great significance. The condition of cross-border routes at this time was generally extremely hazardous. Prior to the Union of the Crowns, the continual warring between England and Scotland meant there was very little incentive to improve these routes. The steep ravines of ‘Ye Peaths’⁹⁸ at Pease bay in Berwickshire were a significant obstacle to overcome. Cromwell even went so far as to say of his journey here in 1650, that he would not

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‘without nearly a miracle’ get through ‘the straight paths at Copperspath’ (Cockburnspath).⁹⁹

In 1617, on his first trip north after his Coronation, James I and VI made a request for a total of three hundred and thirty six horses over fifteen stages in Berwickshire alone.¹⁰⁰ In anticipation of this journey Sir John Hamilton of Preston petitioned the Scottish Lords of Council.

McNeill comments on Hamilton’s shrewdness in convincing the Lords to sanction the mending of the roadway through Preston ‘Lest strangers with His Majesty should observe its poverty strickenness’¹⁰¹ and he pleaded for the authority to levy a toll to remedy the poor state of the road as follows:

That altho the Lords have taken great course for enlarging and mending all highways and passages throu which his Majesty will pass on his approaching visit to Scotland, there is a very eminent and open place oversine, to wit, the high gait throu the town of Preston which is so broken after a small rayne and weit as hardlie is passible.

Now it is quite a schame that the common streit of a throu fairing toune so neir to the burgh of Edinburgh sail not be mendit; and unless it is mendit in tyme, and a good calsay made throu the same, it will be a grit discredit quhan that the strangers that accompanie his Majesty sail sie the same.

The time limit was for three years and to this effect, “that he should levy a duty of 2d. on any ‘horse-load’ of whatever goods should pass through the village, 4d. on every ‘cart-load’, 2d. on every ‘ox or cow’, and 4d. on every ‘ten sheep’ that should pass that way.” But an exception was made on all green wood that was conveyed through the town, on horse or cart, for use at Salt Preston.¹⁰²

THE BURGHE OF BARONY AND THE MERCAT CROSS

1617 was also the year in which the village of Preston and Prestonpans became a joint Burgh of Barony, after much influence from Sir John Hamilton.¹⁰³ This gave the people of Preston the right to free port and anchorage, and the right to hold a fair in honour of St. Jerome on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of October every year.¹⁰⁴

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Figure 10: Preston Cross with an ancient pillar in the foreground; and also a contemporary drawing of the curious stone mentioned above.

From the 1st Edition of Peter McNeill's book of Prestonpans and Vicinity; 1884.

With the fair came the building of Preston Cross, one of the finest examples of its kind in Scotland. It was reputed to have been built by William Wallace, the King's Master Mason who was also the builder of Wintoun House in Pencaitland and Heriot's School in Edinburgh.¹⁰⁵

The Chapmen of Lothian subsequently acquired a right to

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the cross in 1636.¹⁰⁶ They would no doubt agree prices of goods for the coming season and they acted in effect as a form of trader's guild. This set them apart from other *packmen*. Without some form of friendly society, life would have indeed been hard. Freemen and artisans of the burgh had a right to trade at the burgh market, but those who did not have such a privilege, such as the itinerant packmen, were taxed heavily for enjoying the benefits of attending markets. The Trade Guilds of various Burghs were a form of Trade Protection Society. The Chapman (the word perhaps derived from the old English Ceapman: 'ceap' meaning barter or dealing, thus a man who barter or deals)¹⁰⁷ were often victimised, and the regular occurrence of the 'Packman's grave' particularly noticeable on the OS Maps of the Lammermuirs, betrays the hard and dangerous life they led. Packmen were a frequent sight around farms of East Lothian even until early in the twentieth century.¹⁰⁸

The Cross and the Chapman Societies could of course be the subject of a book in their own right. I will mention a few things of interest to our subject matter here however. The Cross is divided into eight compartments, two of which are doorways and six which form alcoves with semi-circular mouldings at the top in the form of scallop shells. The scallop shell was the badge of the pilgrim, and it was frequently worn by those travelling on known pilgrim routes such as the way to Santiago de Compostella in northern Spain (where the bones of James the brother of Christ are reputed to be buried); or, closer to home, the Pilgrims travelling over the Forth from North Berwick to St. Andrews (where the bones of St. Andrew are reputed to be buried).

On James I and VI's return journey south on 1st July 1617, there were great demands made on the Parishioners of the land through which he was to travel to supply horses and carts to carry His Majesty, his Retinue and Chattels onwards to Dunbar. Those assisting with this move were to meet at:

*'Haliruid Hos about tua of the cloke in the moirning' and that the Parrochynneris were to supply a number of carts including from Tranent 'fourty cairtis with a three horss in everi cairt, and the Parrochynnaris of Prestoun, tuentie cairtis with twa horss in everye cairt, – and thair to lift His Majesteis cariadge and to carye the same thairfra to Dunbar, under the pane of £20 for everye horsse that salbe absent.'*¹⁰⁹

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STATUTE LABOUR ROADS I

As well as this, the Justices of the Peace of the County of East Lothian or Haddingtonshire were made responsible for mending and repairing the highways, which had been the case in England since 1555, following James's direction to the Privy Council in 1610.¹¹⁰

This means that the Justices of each County relied mainly on voluntary labour for four days per year for: '*upholding and repairing of the briggis that ar not utterlie ruined*' and also to '*provyde for helping of the Kingis Heicheways alsweil for the benefite of careagis as ease of passingeris*'.¹¹¹

This proved to be a most unreliable means of organising and going about the repair of roads as it seems that very seldom was anything substantive achieved and many roads were in very poor condition, even for foot and horse traffic.

When Charles I succeeded to the throne the Privy Council was instructed in March 1627 that 'hiewayes be made faire and passable for coaches and utherwayes,'¹¹² in anticipation of his journey north for Coronation in Scotland. Nothing appears to have been done in this respect as the orders were repeated in 1628 and 1629.

EDGEBUCKLING BRAE AND RAVENSHAUGH

The highway between *Edgebuckling Brae* and the water of Almond was singled out in particular for the Sheriff of Edinburgh to repair by the Privy Council.¹¹³

Edgebuckling Brae was where Somerset's troops camped prior to the Battle of Pinkie in 1544 after ransacking Prestonpans. Blaeu, in his notes to his Atlas of 1654 calls this brae 'Bush Hill' separating the Shires of Edinburgh and Haddington.¹¹⁴ On the other side of this hill is nearby Ravenshaugh Road and also nearby is a house named Beggars Bush, as well as Drummorie House, meaning 'The Great Ridge' in Gaelic. Edgebuckling Brae is thought to be on the line of the road off the A199 just outside Wallyford and bordering Drummorie Estate. Part of the road at one time crossed the grounds of Drummorie Estate as it descended to Ravenshaugh Bridge.¹¹⁵

Ravenshaugh Bridge is now long gone, with the Pinkie Burn being channelled into a conduit under the former line of the B1348 road, which has been superseded by a road nearer the

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Figure 11: The Adair map of 1682 showing Edgebuckling Brae, and the line of the Great Post Road; Adair, J; 1682; East Lothian; Shelf Mark: Adv.MS.70.2.11 (Adair 10); © National Library of Scotland.

coastline but still can be walked along today. The name Ravenshaugh is interesting: a haugh is a level piece of ground in a low wide valley; and 'Raven' could in fact refer to something which is *riven*, that is something that has been won or created through great human effort and this may imply that this piece of land was in fact reclaimed from marshland at one time. Another example is Ravensheugh, at the sands near Tynninghame in East Lothian, which again is in a broadly similar coastal environment.

The name 'Beggars Bush' is quite interesting also as this house lies on the former county boundary and not far from the former Ravenshaugh Bridge. It is supposed that the name was given to the place from the habit of vagrants sheltering there. There are many instances of Beggars Bush throughout the UK however, and it was often the case that beggars would beg for alms by the side of ancient bridges in medieval times and indeed this led to the formation of ancient hospitals on the side of bridges such as at St. Johnstoun (Perth). Further on along the post road we have Jock's Lodge (to the east of Meadowbank Stadium) and this place again was supposed to be named after an eccentric merchant named Jock who established a house there. This is an

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example of how ‘ribbon development’ can arise and how roads encourage settlements to develop alongside them.

In 1633 Charles I did finally venture north into Scotland for his Coronation; and the two months prior to his visit the prominent landowners of the day in Lothian were nominated by the Lords of Secret Counsell for:

*surveying and ryding the hiewayes betuix Seatoun and Edinburgh and fra Seatoun to Dalkeith and frome that to Edinburgh, and to have considerit what parts of the said hiewayes needed to be enlarged or repaired.*¹¹⁶

The said nominated landowners were William, Erle of Lothiane, William, Lord Ramsay, Sir John Hamiltoun of Prestoun, David Crichtoun of Lugtoun and Mr. James Raith of Edmiston (formerly the hamlet lying near Brunstane now on the A199 – Milton Road). They found that there were indeed defects in the highway at the back of Prestoungrange and Edgebucklin Brae and they reported this accordingly. They were however rebuked by the Privy Council for failing to order how and by whom these defects were to be corrected.¹¹⁷

For Charles’s journey from Dunglass to Seatoun the Lords of Privy Council directed the Constables of each of the Parishes in East Lothian should supply a total of five hundred and ninety one carts and one hundred and forty six horses and be waiting at a given point to deliver these to the King’s Master of the Carriage. In particular thirty carts were to come from the Parish of Prestoun and forty carts from the Parish of Tranent. Failure to provide the required horses and carts at said time meant a fine or a pointing of goods to the value of £6.¹¹⁸

STATUTE LABOUR ROADS II

The voluntary principle could be said to be highly depended upon with regard to road repairs at this time. This was further consolidated by the 1669 Act for repairing highways and bridges, which gave the Justices of the Peace powers to order all Parishioners to undertake six days work each year at any time most convenient except seed time or harvest.¹¹⁹ Those who lived a considerable distance away could opt out by paying 6/- per annum instead and this money was to be used to hire suitable labour.

The Act was to all intents and purposes largely ignored, resulting in the Privy Council fining the County’s Justices of the Peace. It was slightly strengthened in a further Act of