

## THE ROADS THAT LED BY PRESTOUNGRANGE



*Figure 16: The tunnel built by Laird Prestoungrange to avoid tolls on his coal wagons. © A Ralton, 2004.*



*Figure 17: Another view of the tunnel, and in particular the fine masonry work. © A Ralton, 2004.*

and use of the tunnel of course avoided the Wallyford By-bar and Ravenshaugh Tolls.

Sir William was known to have pressed for concessions for coal and salt works he owned. Research by Graham<sup>139</sup> has revealed what was agreed at a meeting of the Trustees in August 1750:

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*At a meeting of the Trustees on 7th August 1750 at Haddington House a petition from the Rt. Hon. William Grant of Prestoungrange, Advocate showing that, in July 1745, Petitioner purchased Barony of Prestoungrange and Dolphingston with Coals and Saltworks lying in the Parish of Prestonpans at a judicial roup and sale before the Court of Session. That these Coal and Saltworks were estimated in that sale by taking a medium of the free produce for 12 years preceding same and providing £200 per annum and price set upon them by the Lords was 5 years purchase of this supposed medium of the casual rent or £1,000.*

*The Petition goes on to make a case for relief of toll duty as most of the trade was westward to Edinburgh and was being subject to tolls at Ravenshaugh and also in Midlothian.*

*In the first instance the Trustees excused tolls for one year for carts carrying coal or salt westwards on production of a certificate from the "Coall or Saltwork Grieves" and refunded tolls collected from empty vehicles from the west on the return loaded journey. Vehicles proceeding to and from the east had to pay tolls. Subsequently after further discussion it was agreed that all tolls would be excused on production of receipts and that refunds of tolls collected from empty vehicles from east and west would be made on the loaded return journey.*

Tolls were payable regardless of the distance travelled to cross them, and Sir William would obviously have been liable for them as much as anyone else. It must have made good economic sense to go to the expense of building a tunnel so that tolls could be avoided, which implies that there was considerable traffic making this journey. A roadway is clearly seen shown on the Roy Map leading to Dolphingston and after a one field length it splits into two branches with the eastern branch heading to Dolphingston Colliery and the western branch heading to Prestoungrange North Lodge. To the north at Morrison's Haven a roadway is clearly shown making a wishbone-type line surrounding the village of Morrison's Haven, with an access point south at the midway point of the road. Perhaps these roads formed part of a one-way system for journeys between Morrison's Haven and Dolphingston. There was also a road named the "Coal gate loan" running southwards from Bankfoot and following a line close by the east garden wall of Prestoungrange House to

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Figure 18: Forrest's map of 1799, showing the "Clinking Gate," Beggars Bush (in the far left hand corner), and the "Wagon Road" to Tranent, etc: "Map of Haddingtonshire," NW; Shelf Mark: EMS.s.637; © National Library of Scotland.

reach the 'Middle Road.'<sup>140</sup> This may be the same road as the "Clinking Gate" as shown on William Forrest's Map of 1799. This was shifted to the east at some point in its history (60 years before Robert Hislop wrote his undated reminiscences, therefore probably around the early 1800's).<sup>141</sup>

Some people went to extreme lengths to avoid paying tolls. The tollkeeper at Ravenshaugh had the misfortune to experience the heavy-handed brutality of the occupying British Army on 5 October 1760 when he requested payment for allowing a troop of light dragoons through. For his troubles he received a severe beating, as did a few women who happened to be there with him at the time.<sup>142</sup> Written in a satirical style portraying the soldiers as bold defenders against French impostors disguised as tollkeepers, in fact these were innocent tollkeepers subject to a violent attack. The incident reveals the brutality of certain officers of the army at this time which came to a head with the Tranent Militia Riots and massacre of innocent people in 1797. The pamphlet says:

*A report still prevails, that those Frenchmen in Petticoats were really Women, and that the one disguised in the Toll-keeper's Garb was in fact the tollgatherer appointed by the Trustees for Turnpike Roads. The Improbability, nay the utter Impossibility of this Account, will appear from the following reasons: First, It is agreed, that none but Cowards, Dastards and Poltroons Would beat women*

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The Dragoons were to receive some form of punishment at least, paying £200 damages on top of a £5 fine for each officer.<sup>143</sup>

A more unusual means of avoiding tolls is light-heartedly recounted by McNeill. The first passage concerns the toll-keeper at Ravenshaugh in the early 1800's and the second a group of youths who wished to avoid paying tolls for their pony. McNeill captures the stories as follows:<sup>144</sup>

### *RAVENSHEUCH HOUSE.*

*This ever-clean and tidy-looking building is better known to many as "Ravensheuch" or "Raven's Hauch Toll," and it was indeed a "toll-house." It was built a little previous to the year 1800 by Peter Kerr, a sterling old highlander, and somewhat of a character in his day. He was great-grandfather, by the mother's side, of a well-known and worthy character of the present day, Mr Charles Forman, salt manufacturer in Cockenzie. Mr Peter Kerr became contractor for and looked after a great many tolls in East Lothian, and held them for quite a series of years; but after building Ravensheuch House he kept the toll there also, and, while keeping a strict lookout after the others, made it his headquarters. One of his chief peculiarities was his constant refusal to charge toll for blackfaced sheep. Sheep were always charged at so much per score. When counting the flock, he was always observed to miss the black ones; but any time he was reminded of the evident mistake, "Na, na," was his invariable reply, "it's nae mistake o' Peter's, but ta Tevel never peys toll."*

### *THE PONY WHICH DID NOT PAY TOLL AT RAVENSHEUCH.*

*Some five-and-fifty years ago, half-a-dozen youths, ranging from twelve to sixteen years, left Seton West Mains one morning to spend a holiday in Musselburgh. They took a pony with them to get rides time about by the way. They paid toll both at Ravensheuch and West Pans when going, but forgot they had to pay toll again when returning, and spent all their coppers in the sweetie and bun shops at Musselburgh. On coming back to West Pans Toll on their way home, they just remembered they had to pay again, and had nothing wherewith to pay. They made a dash to get through behind a machine, but were caught. "Not so fast, my lads!" said the keeper,*

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*“not so fast!” “We dinna pay double toll on a wee beast like that?” queried the leader of the party. “Oh yes,” was the reply. They all set to rifling their pockets, and one did find as much as pay the fee. On getting to Ravensheuch they made a dash again, but it was of no avail. Again every pocket was turned inside out, but there were no coppers forthcoming, and the keeper threatened to stable the pony. They knew enough, however, to defy him to lay hands on it.*

*The half-dozen retired for a brief consultation, and a hearty laugh was the outcome. They again approached the keeper, with, “I say maister, if the pony doesna gang through the toll you dinna charge onything?” “Oh no,” was the reply; “if the gate doesna open, no pay.” “A’ richt,” quoth the leader, “come on boys,” when four of them laying hold of a leg a piece, one the head, and another the tail, they carried him amid great laughter right through on the footpath. The toll-keeper became so hilarious over the device that he laughed too, then ran and helped them.*

## THE NEED FOR ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

The difficulties experienced on the roads of this time can be seen to some extent to be as a consequence of the agricultural improvement and enclosure of fields, cutting off former routes that took a more convenient line. The growth of agriculture however was also one of the main drives for road improvement, given the necessity for transporting lime and manure for fertilising the fields.

An anonymous writer, under the pseudonym of ‘An East Lothian man’ writing in the *Farmer’s Magazine* of 1805 is critical of the lack of scientific principles in maintaining the Great Post Road in East Lothian.<sup>145</sup> The East Lothian man proposed a completely new line of the route on account of the steepness of the road travelling westwards after Linton Bridge, after which the road levelled, and then also after Tranent, as the road is noted as descending steeply to the banks of the Forth here. Travelling eastwards from Prestongrange this called for a very severe pull up to the high ground.

The road is shown as descending from the Tranent road along the road on the west side of Dolphingston Farm, which currently is shown as crossing the main Edinburgh to London

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*Figure 19: The “Map of the County of Haddington;” by Greenwood, Fowler, Sharp and Dower (1844), shows the first part of the Edinburgh to London railway line.*

*Shelf Mark: EMS.s.532; © National Library of Scotland.*

railway in line with the entrance to the Prestoungrange Estate. This road may still be traced, but it has in fact been stopped up and removed from the Council’s list of roads due to the dangers of crossing a railway line. It then followed the line along the south of Prestoungrange and around to the west, crossing the aforementioned tunnel and running north between the enclosure walls of Drummore and Prestoungrange estate.

An old milestone of the old road can be seen at the East Lodge Gatehouse of Drummore Estate. Martine<sup>146</sup> mentions this milestone and suggests that the lettering, now barely legible, said at one time: ‘Edinburgh 7’ on one face and on another face ‘Haddington 8’, although in fact the distances are 8 and 9 miles respectively. Martine also mentions that the road was indeed ‘A very severe and steep one to travel.’<sup>147</sup> This latter section of road was replaced by a new section of road from Levenhall to Dolphinston via Edgebuckling Brae in 1816.

The road to Dolphinston from Levenhall, Edgebuckling Brae, has been known by the name of Bluchers Brae and it is curious to note that there is still a house called Bluchers Hall near Mrs. Forman’s Pub at Levenhall. Blucher was the famous Field Marshal of Prussia in the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century. He was known for his courage and forcefulness.