

In 1663 the first Turnpike Act was passed establishing a turnpike trust to maintain the New Great North Road between Wadesmill in Hertfordshire and Stilton in Huntingdonshire. The principle embodied in this act – that travellers should contribute towards road repair through the payment of tolls – became the basic concept underlying most road improvement over the next two centuries.

Turnpike trusts were empowered to finance road improvement by issuing mortgage debt which allowed them to raise considerable sums of money. Income from tolls was to be applied to the payment of the interest on the money borrowed and to ensure future road maintenance. Each turnpike act appointed a body of trustees to manage the trust. These were typically men of local importance, such as local landowners, justices of the peace and members of parliament.

### Turnpikes in Sussex

The first turnpike act affecting Sussex was passed in 1697, with a road connecting Reigate to Crawley; in 1710 the Sevenoaks to Tunbridge Wells road was turnpiked (part of Tunbridge Wells then lying in Sussex) followed in 1717 by the London to East Grinstead Road. It is significant that these early turnpike roads stopped just over the Sussex border: the roads of the Weald were notoriously bad and frequently impassable by wheeled transport. The first turnpike act to extend turnpike roads fully into Sussex, passed in 1749, linked Kingston-upon-Thames in Surrey, via Hindhead and Midhurst, to Chichester.

Before 1760 the turnpike roads in Sussex ran north to south, connecting London to the coastal ports or to market towns such as Horsham. In the late 1760s cross-country routes, particularly around Tunbridge Wells and Lewes, were turnpiked. The growth of Brighton as a fashionable resort led to a number of projects in 1770 to improve travelling times to and from London. In the 1770s a large number of cross-routes of local importance were begun. After 1800 a number of trans-Weald roads linking London to the resorts were added. Some of these involved the repair of existing highways or were short stretches of new road intended to shorten routes or avoid steep gradients.

### The Beeding turnpike road

The Beeding turnpike road, established by act in 1807, fell into this category, providing an alternate route through the Adur gap instead of climbing Beeding Hill and extending the Horsham road to



## The Beeding Tollhouse – an icon of 19th century turnpikes

By Danae Tankard

*Above, the toll house as currently reconstructed at the Museum, with the missing end and chimney added to the Museum's original reconstruction and moved to its present site.*

*Below, the house in situ c1950 showing the original chimney and the truncated front room. The section to the left is an addition to the original house. The photo shows the south-west corner.*





## ➡ The Beeding Tollhouse

the coast. This new road was the last part of a 17-mile route beginning in Horsham, through the parishes of Shipley, West Grinstead, Ashurst, Steyning and Bramber, established by act in 1764 and managed by the Horsham and Steyning Trust. The 1807 act appointed 105 trustees, including large local landowners such as Sir Charles Goring of Wiston. A quorum of five was to meet at the White Horse Inn in Steyning on the second Monday after the passing of the Act in order to execute its provisions. Notice of subsequent meetings was to be affixed 'at some public place in the town of Steyning' and on the 'several turnpike gates on the said new road' at least seven days in advance. The new stretch of road (now the B2135) was always referred to as the 'new turnpike road to avoid Beeding Hill' and had one gate at Beeding in the parish of Upper Beeding. A plan of the new road made by T W Huggins in 1808 shows the existing road with the route of the proposed new road and site of the new turnpike gate.

The Beeding gate tolls were being leased from at least 1815 when an advertisement for the toll auction was published in *The Sussex Weekly Advertiser*. Toll leasing or farming – by which lessees contracted to pay the trusts a fixed sum, usually in instalments, in return for the right to the proceeds from the gates – had become a widespread practice by the end of the 18th century. It guaranteed the trustees a steady income and freed them from the problems caused by dishonest toll or gate keepers withholding funds. Trusts were required to advertise the toll auction one month in advance and to include in the notice the net amount of the previous year's proceeds. The tolls were to 'be put up at the sum they were let for or produced in the previous year', and there was to be a three-minute interval after every bid. If no one placed a further bid



*The house being dismantled in 1969, showing that the chimney (and the original internal partition between front and back room) had been removed.*

the last bidder became the farmer.

The Beeding turnpike road is poorly documented, particularly for the early years of its operation. A trustees' minute book for the period 1869 to 1885 provides basic information about the trust's business and the annual toll auction.

### The Beeding tollhouse

The Beeding tollhouse was probably built between 1808 and 1810. Tollhouses are typically of one storey with two or three rooms but their architectural style varies enormously. The Houghton and Clay Lane, Parham tollhouses (1813 and 1821) have walls of faced flint with brick quoins and slated

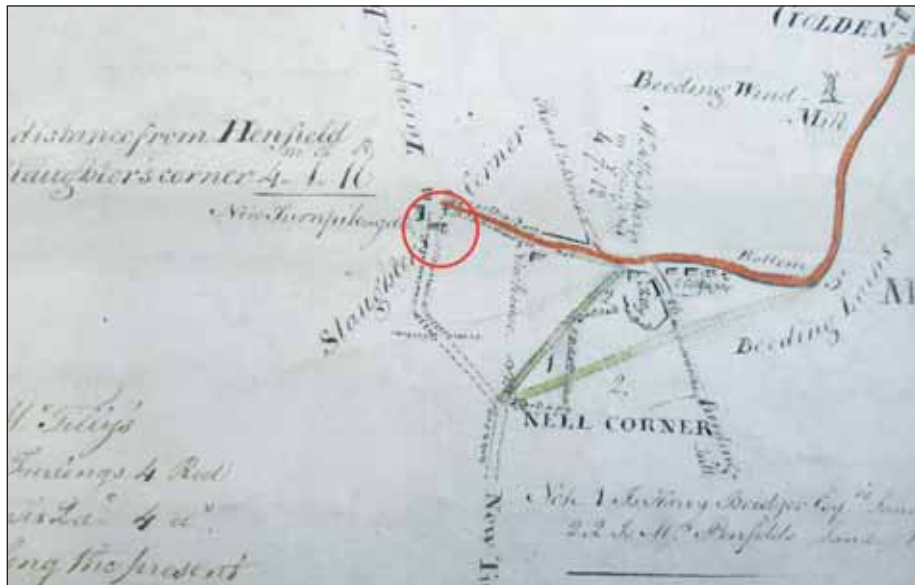
roofs; the Northchapel tollhouse (1801) is brick-built with a red tiled roof. The most elaborate of the surviving Sussex tollhouses is Long Furlong on what is now the A280, built around 1800 in a gothic revival style with a crenellated façade and a pair of flanking towers, but its flamboyance is due to its original function as a lodge gate house to the Michelgrove Estate. The Beeding tollhouse is similar in appearance to others built in the first quarter of the 19th century in the triangle between Worthing, Horsham and Shoreham, including Teville, Dial Post and Findon, owned by the Worthing Branch Turnpike, and Bramber owned by the

*Left, the toll house as originally reconstructed at the Museum, just inside the front entrance. The sign advertises the Museum's first season of open weekends in 1970, when adult entry was 4s. (20p, equivalent to a little over £2 today).*

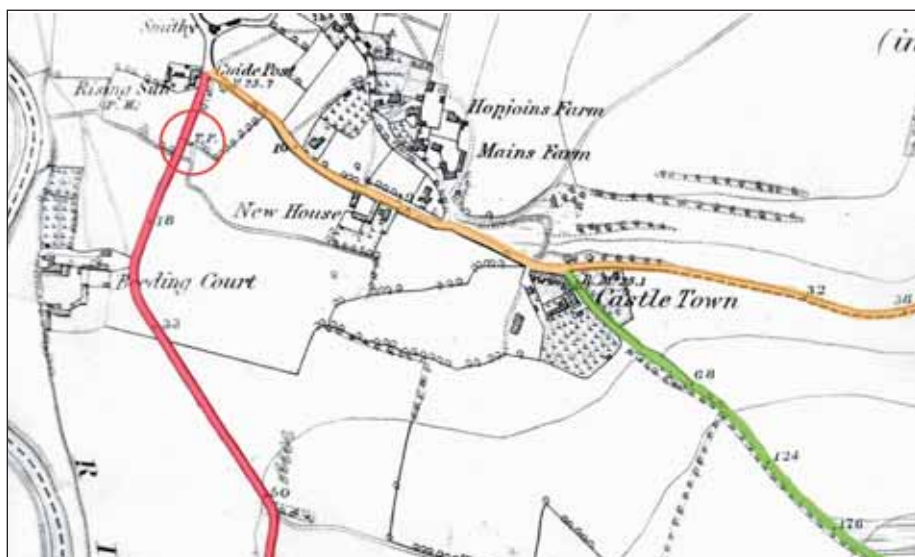
*Right, another view of the house in 1970. The Museum had decided that the reconstruction would show the house in its truncated form and with its internal partition and chimney removed, as it was when dismantled, but with a hipped end instead of the gable. The resulting single room was not an accurate representation of the original house, hence the changes made when it was moved to its current site.*







A plan of part of the new road just south of Beeding, by T W Huggins, 1808. The red circle shows the position of the Beeding gate and house.



The Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" = 1 mile map (1875), showing the area south of Beeding, with the turnpike road (red), the old road going over Beeding Hill (green), and the road marked red on the 1808 plan (orange). The red circle shows the position of the Beeding toll cottage (marked "T.P.").

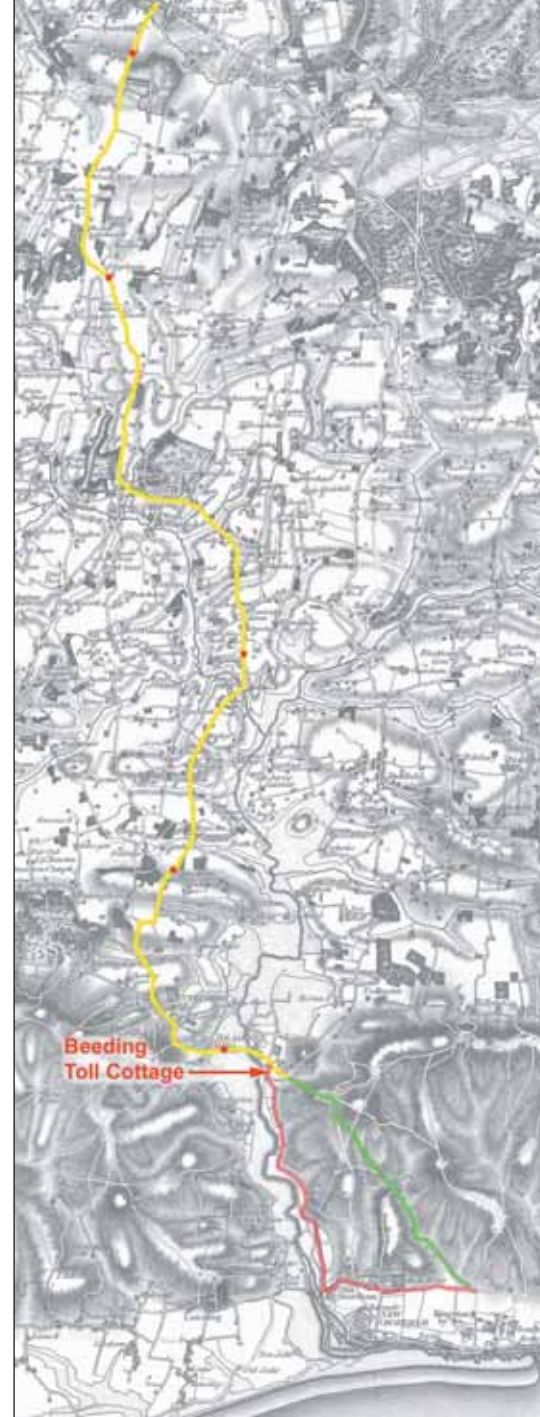
Horsham and Steyning Trust. All are single-storey and of simple timber construction, using softwood for the weatherboarding and hardwood for the principal posts and plates, with brick chimneys and slate roofs. There are at least four surviving 19th-century photographs or illustrations of the Bramber tollhouse and gate, one of which is shown in the Museum guidebook. None has so far been discovered of Beeding. The 1843 tithe map records that the tollhouse had 11 perches of land, the size of the garden recreated at the Museum.

Toll gates were required to have the tolls displayed on a board fixed to the front of the tollhouse, as can be seen in the photograph of the Bramber tollhouse. The toll board for Beeding does not survive; that displayed at the Museum is from Northchapel. In

addition to the toll board, toll collectors were required to display their names written in black letters at least two inches in height and breadth on a white board 'on some conspicuous part or parts' of the tollhouse.

### Toll collectors

Toll collectors were responsible at any time of the day or night for operating the gates and for issuing tickets, imposing fines, measuring wheels, weighing wagons and determining who was eligible for exemptions. There is no wage data available for the Beeding toll collector but in 1814 the toll collectors at the Heberden (Madehurst) and Houghton tollhouses were paid 7s and 8s a week respectively. In comparison, at the same date an agricultural labourer in Sussex could expect to earn about 10s to 11s a week, plus extra for piece work



Part of the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1" = 1 mile map of 1813, showing (yellow) the original Turnpike road from Horsham to Beeding created under an Act of 1764. The positions of the turnpikes are shown as red dots. The old road over Beeding Hill is shown in green, and the new road from Beeding to Shoreham created following the Act of 1807 is shown in red.

and harvest work. However, unlike agricultural work, which in summer required outdoor labour for periods of up to 12 hours, toll collecting was not physically strenuous, despite the anti-social hours. Toll collectors also lived rent free and were exempt from parish rates. This explains why many of them were relatively elderly – men like Henry Sayers, aged 65 and Jeremiah Cooper, aged 72, Beeding toll collectors in 1861



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and 1873. Other Beeding toll collectors were younger and combined their duties with other types of employment: John Hunton, aged 30 in 1841, and Albert Woolgar, 39 in 1881, were agricultural labourers, and Thomas Howell, 31 in 1871, was a bricklayer. At least three of the toll collectors were also the toll farmers: Thomas Howell, Jeremiah Cooper and Albert Woolgar. Woolgar was the winning bidder on seven occasions between 1876 and 1882. Toll farming provided an erratic income and was thus a precarious way to make a living since the toll income from the Beeding gate varied from a low of £118 in 1873 to a high of £150 in 1882. However, in the case of Thomas Howell and Albert Woolgar it did have the potential to secure them a small annual bonus of £2 to £3 in addition to their earnings from other work. Since both men were married it is probable that during the day when they were out at work their wives operated the toll gates.

In 1841 John Hunton was living in the two-roomed tollhouse with his wife, two young sons, and a lodger, Henry Charman, also an agricultural labourer. Not all the toll keepers had such large households: in 1851 John Linberry aged 46 was sharing the house with a lodger, Mary Suden, aged 74; Thomas Howell had a wife and young son; Albert and Caroline Woolgar had no children.

### The demise of the Beeding turnpike trust

Railways came relatively late to Sussex. A branch line between Brighton and Shoreham opened in 1840 and the first main line, linking Brighton to London, opened in 1841. The railway along the south coast was extended from Shoreham to Worthing in 1845, to Chichester in 1846, and to Portsmouth in 1847. A single track branch line from Shoreham

to Steyning and Horsham, with a station at Bramber, opened in 1861. The railway immediately transformed the transport network of Sussex and caused the revenue of turnpike trusts to drop sharply.

At a meeting of the trustees in August 1881 a letter was read from the Local Government Board advising them that in accordance with the provisions of The Annual Turnpike Acts Continuance Act of 1881 'the local act for this trust will continue in force until 1 November 1882 and no longer unless Parliament in the meantime provides'. The trustees were to give notice to their creditors of the trust's position and whether or not they were going to apply for a continuance of their powers. The trustees resolved that 'the clerk do forthwith give notice thereof to the creditors with a view to obtaining a continuance of the trust'.

The trust continued to operate until 1885. It is evident from the minutes that after the closure of the turnpike it was originally intended that the tollhouse be pulled down and four feet of its site incorporated into the road, which was to be taken over by the parish. The remainder of the site, with its garden, was offered for sale to John Drewitt junior, the adjoining owner, for £71 10s. He declined the offer and the minutes record that the trustees had resolved to offer it to him at the lower price of £60 or, if he refused, submit the site to public auction. In the event, the tollhouse was retained and the minutes of the final meeting of the trustees on 20 December 1885 record that it had been sold, although the name of the purchaser is not given. The vestry minutes for 20 March 1886 record that 'the new house at Beeding Gate be assessed', for parish rates. At some point between 1885 and 1891 the tollhouse was extended to provide a third room; by 1901 it had been extended again to provide a fourth room.

In *The Sussex County Magazine* for 1936 C A W Steyning described the closing of

the Bramber and Beeding toll gates:

*Some time ago there was an enquiry to the Sussex County Magazine as to the last toll gate to be closed in Sussex. One of the last must have been that at Bramber. It was closed in the spring of 1885. Within 2 days that at Beeding on the Shoreham road shared the same fate. I remember well the occurrence, for a large hole left in the road wasn't immediately filled up. A traction engine came along and was stuck in it. Horses were lent by Mr Elliott of Beeding Court farm, and my father supplied the planks for the 'jacking up' from his yard in the village.*

After the closure of the turnpikes Beeding and Bramber tollhouses became tearooms, catering for day trippers arriving by train. From at least 1891 to 1901 the Beeding tollhouse was occupied by Frederick Calver Mills, his wife Alice and daughter, Florence. Alice ran the tearoom whilst Frederick worked as a market gardener.

### The tollhouse at the Museum

In 1967 the Beeding tollhouse was badly damaged by a lorry and faced demolition. The following year it was dismantled by the Museum's first volunteer group and moved to the railway cutting store at West Dean. Because of the damage to the building it was decided to rebuild only the parts of it that remained. It was erected beside the entrance gate and became a visitor information centre and shop. In 1980 it was decided to rebuild the house to reconstruct the missing end and the chimney after a re-examination of the surviving timbers and comparison with photographic evidence of similar tollhouses, and to re-site it to its present location. The 'new' tollhouse was opened to the public in 1984.

*Kim Leslie, who undertook much of the early research on the tollhouse, has provided invaluable help with the text and maps for this article.*