

The Metropolis Road Commission 1826–1872

*Establishment and Operation of the Commission 1826–1836
(Part 1)*

by

Geraldine A. TWILLEY

Overview of Transportation in Britain

In Britain, the principle methods of transportation until the seventeenth century were by river and sea; however, by the middle part of that century great changes were underway in the economic, political and social fabric of society. The increasing demands of industry and the steady rise in the volume of trade lead to increasing pressure on many traditional institutions: the transportation system was one such area.

A glance at an outline map of Britain shows that, unlike most comparable islands, Britain is very well served with rivers and sea inlets; consequently, most long haul loads were transported by water. Rivers, however, are prone to flooding in spring, ice in winter and droughts in summer, so they can be unreliable. The intervention of man in building weirs, dams and mills also inhibited their usability. The canal system, although an important factor in the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution, was not started until the 1760s and served only part of the country.

Coastal shipping could also encounter difficulties. Harbours were likely to silt up and would then have to be dredged, a costly procedure that would have

been passed onto the shipping companies as higher harbour fees. Weather conditions were unpredictable and a lack of adequate maps contributed a considerable degree of danger to any journey. Of course, war was the most serious threat to shipping. During wartime, merchant seamen were frequently impressed into Navy service and merchant ships were regularly attacked by privateers. Not only were entire cargoes liable to be lost, but also ships often had to wait for long periods in port for an escort. It was claimed in 1720, that 'the clothiers in Yorkshire would rather give double the price for land carriage than have their wool brought by sea where it receives so much damage'. William Stout commented that although coastal shipping was cheaper than land carriage, 'goods are long a-coming, and damage by rats, who eat out the corks in liquor and oyle casks, to the loss (off) some whole casks of oyle and vinigar'.¹ Sea transportation could, therefore, be costly and unreliable.

Development and Maintenance of Early Roads

The earliest roads in Britain were merely tracks connecting settlements to one another or to local ports. Most travelling was done on foot or by packhorse. Although little is known about these early tracks, it can be assumed they were formed where the inhabitants of an area felt the need either for social interaction or for trading. As there was no systematic maintenance of these tracks, their usability depended on the weather.

It was not till the Roman occupation in AD 43, that a system of roads was constructed. The Romans needed good communication lines in order to maintain control, move troops quickly, and monitor what was happening throughout their empire. Roman roads are characterized, in the minds of most Britons, as the straightest and flattest routes possible between two points. This is often the case as the troops were pedestrians so it was not surprising that they chose the most direct routes. By AD 150, the Romans had built some 13,000 to 16,000 kms of road in England including four great roads, still traceable in parts today. Even after the withdrawal of the Romans in AD 410, these roads continued to be used and provided a basic network.

Although the Roman network was used throughout the Saxon (600–1066) and Norman periods (1066–1485), it was not well maintained. The four great highways the Romans had built acquired English names (Watling Street,

Ermine Street, Fosse Way and Icknield Way). Due to their importance as main roads they became regarded as being under the kings' special protection; however, many other Roman roads did not serve the new, growing centres of Norman or medieval England such as Oxford, Coventry, Plymouth and the many villages between them. New routes connected these centres but these roads differed from the Roman roads, as they were mainly tracks without a maintained surface.

English kings considered the maintenance of roads and bridges to be important for the same reason as the Romans: their use to move troops easily throughout the country. The king imposed the responsibility and any costs necessary for the upkeep of a road onto the Lord of the Manor. He, in turn would make his tenants shoulder the burden. Certain rights of way were legislated; for instance, if a track were impassable due to wet weather, a traveller had the right to diverge from the way even if that entailed trampling crops. This right was enshrined into law in 1285.

A few new roads were built mostly as a result of military considerations. In 1278, Edward I (1272–1307) ordered the roads into Wales to be widened and enlarged in order to crush all resistance to his rule in Wales.

Much information on travel routes comes from the itineraries of the monarchs' journeys. The court was frequently on the move from the time of King John to Queen Elizabeth. King John (1199–1216) spent only one month of his entire reign without a move, and that was when he was besieging Rochester Castle in November 1215. Edward I averaged almost nine moves each month throughout his reign, travelling 575 kms in 25 days (including the six days when he did not travel) in January 1300. A monarch's baggage train comprised of from ten to twenty carts, and everything, including his wardrobe, had to be moved about the country. There must have been adequate roads to accommodate this traffic.

The use of roads, of course, was not limited to the king and his troops. Wealthy, important landowners often held estates in different parts of the country, necessitating travel between them. The nobility also attended on the monarch and his court in the different locations it was held.

Another group of travellers were those concerned with religious matters. The practice of appeals to the Pope in Rome involved, according to the Webbs, 'an astonishing amount of journeying of ecclesiasts and legal agents of one kind or another'.² Pilgrims made up a large proportion of the travelling population, as

a pilgrimage came to be thought of as an important duty by all sections of society. The pilgrims in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' were by no means unusual.

Although people travelled far less than we do in this century, according to Hindle, it was 'not typical'³ for a peasant to spend most of his life in one place. At the beginning of the medieval period, with the imposition of the feudal system, peasants were no longer free to leave their manor permanently, but they no doubt travelled to their local market town and, periodically, to the great fairs that were held regularly. After the Black Death in the fourteenth century, the large reduction in population and consequently, the shortage of labour, forced people to move to better paying jobs outside the feudal system which was then in decline. Not only were ordinary labourers on the move but many others such as minstrels, messengers, merchants and outlaws also travelled.

By the end of the medieval period the roads were in an adequate condition, however, the situation was beginning to change. William Harrison, writing in 1586, stated that the highways had deteriorated drastically in the previous twenty years.⁴ One probable cause was the dissolution of the monasteries between 1536 and 1540, as the monks had considered it their duty to maintain parts of the road. Another cause: the rapid growth of the Tudor economy. Medieval roads had been adequate for the amount of traffic using them, but by the sixteenth century this balance was upset. The roads were no longer able to cope with the increasing volume of traffic.

The deteriorating condition of the roads was recognised. In the first half of the sixteenth century, a number of statutes concerned with road improvement—but only in specific locations—were enacted. In 1555, Parliament recognizing that reliance on the old manorial system had broken down, decided to tackle the problem, and passed a landmark statute. This act provided for the establishment of a new organizational structure, tasked with maintaining all roads throughout the kingdom.

This 1555 statute⁵ was for 300 years, the nation's principle system of road maintenance. Responsibility for road maintenance was divided between the Parish, each individual resident within the Parish and on the newly created position of Surveyor of Highways—an appointment made by each parish and overseen by the local justices. Under this system the parish was responsible for the roads that passed through it. It was however, unsuccessful; many parishes refused responsibility or were unable to carry out the extensive repairs that were needed.

A large burden was placed on the parish-appointed Surveyor of Highways who had to perform his duties without pay for the term of one year. Initially, he had to take over the balance of the highway rate from the previous surveyor; moreover he needed to learn his duties and responsibilities, as he had to satisfy the local justices at the end of his term. Three times a year he had to examine the condition of the roads and, if necessary, make the owners of the adjacent land keep the way clear. If he found any wagons or carts that contravened the legal limits, he was 'expressly required to stand up in the parish church, "immediately after sermon ended", and proclaim the offenders, giving notice that, if not amended within thirty days, he would himself put the matter right and charge the expenses to the defaulters'.⁶ If that was not enough to make him unpopular, it was also his responsibility to get his neighbours, who were legally bound, to provide all the necessary equipment, materials and labour to repair the roads for four days a year; this Statute Duty, as it was known, was later extended to six days a year.

There was, not surprisingly, unwillingness to take on this unpopular position. Some parishes neglected to appoint a surveyor and those who did have surveyors found resistance from locals when called to perform their statute duty. A surveyor in Shrewsbury in 1766, shared what seems to have been a common problem,

The experience of ages has shown the inutility of Statute work. It is a burden from which everybody has endeavoured, and always will endeavour to screen themselves, and one another. Teams and labourers coming out for Statute work, are generally idle, careless, and under no commands. I have found, by ten years service in the office of Surveyor, that five hired labourers will do as much work as ten or twelve who come out upon the statute. They make a holiday of it, lounge about and trifle away their time. As they are in no danger of being turned out of their work, they stand in no awe of the Surveyor. It is a common saying amongst us, that if a drop of sweat should happen to fall from any of them, it would infallibly produce a quagmire. In short, Statute work will never mend the roads effectually.⁷

As a result of individuals failing to perform their statute duty, Parliament, in 1654, required the parish to levy a rate not exceeding a shilling in the pound for road repair. If the parish failed to make the rate, the surveyor could enforce it by having it confirmed by the nearest justice. Unfortunately, this law was passed during the Commonwealth (1649–1660); and with the Restoration

of King Charles II (1660–1685), all legislation from this period was voided. Although the Restoration Parliament tried to restore a Highway rate, they were unsuccessful.

The poor condition of the roads did not stop an increasing reliance on them as major transportation routes. From the mid-sixteenth century onward, regular carrier services between main towns were developed. By 1600, for instance, there was a thrice-weekly carrier between Ipswich and London.⁸ The development of the first real carriages—designed to give a degree of comfort to travellers willing to pay—came into being in the sixteenth century. Up until then most travellers rode on horses, or had to travel on carts, the bodies of which were placed on the axles; the new carriages had the body slung on straps above the axles. For the maintenance of the roads, this was bad news. The increase in the numbers of carriages resulted in the surface of the roads becoming rutted from carriage wheels; consequently, more frequent maintenance was needed.

Although various other statutes were enacted in an attempt to make the parish system of maintenance more effective, they did not succeed. The concept of having those who live near a road responsible for its maintenance could only work in limited situations. With the increasing rise in all forms of traffic, those parishes situated along the main arteries of the kingdom, bore a disproportionate heavy burden. No matter how willing a parish was to fulfil its statutory duty, it was often the case that there were just not enough funds to cope with damage done by the rising tide of road users; the lack of any central organization and control hindered any real improvements.

The Introduction of the Turnpike

It was not until 1663, that a new concept in road maintenance was introduced, by which those using the road paid towards its repair. Parliament passed an Act that enabled the Justices of the Peace for Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire to levy tolls on travellers for repair of the Great North Road sections that passed through their counties. The Great North Road was a major artery linking London to Edinburgh via York. The erection of three tollgates or turnpikes was authorised between Wadesmill in Hertfordshire and Stilton in Hertfordshire. Initially, there was opposition to this new system; the gate

planned for Stilton produced so much local opposition, it was never erected. The 1663 Act had an eleven year limit and, although it was extended to twenty-one, eventually it expired and the gates were removed.

Although there was opposition to the turnpikes, there were a number of factors that outweighed it. The most significant: the increase in the volume of traffic due to the expanding economy, which made it increasingly difficult for parishes, especially those on main routes, to maintain their roads. Added to this, the war with France in the 1690s made coastal trade more difficult and costly and this increased the volume of overland transport. Moreover in 1691, justices were empowered to levy a highway rate on parishes, which did not repair their roads. For many parishes, a turnpike may have seemed a desirable alternative, as tolls tended to significantly subsidize the highway rate.

Although the next turnpike act was not passed until 1695, the concept had been established. The advantages of the system were quickly recognised and, by 1700, seven Acts of Parliament had been passed authorising the establishment of turnpike trusts. From 1700 to 1750 there were, on average, ten acts a year and, from then on 'Turnpike Mania'. Between 1750 and 1790 there were about forty Acts a year; in the final decade of the eighteenth century, there were on average, fifty a year.⁹

Turnpike Trusts

The hundreds of turnpike trusts established from 1700 onward had almost identical constitutions and functions. Trusts were usually solicited by local residents concerned with improving a particular stretch of road. Those who promoted turnpike trusts were town councils, merchants, manufacturers, farmers, landowners and gentlemen. They were often the people who were responsible for repair of the road. The trusts were run by persons of local importance who were named in the Act as the first Trustees. The Trustees were empowered to construct and maintain a specific length of road, and to levy a toll upon certain types of traffic. The income was to be used to maintain the road. The trusts were seen as a temporary measure, their authority given for a limited term, usually twenty-one years. However, most applied for and were granted extensions every twenty-one years. Therefore, although envisaged as temporary organizations, trusts became virtually permanent bodies.

It had not been the intention of Parliament to allow the turnpike to supersede the responsibility of the parish to maintain the roads, or for individuals to forgo performance of their statute duty. Ultimately, parishes were still legally responsible for the condition of the roads. Parliament assumed the installation of a turnpike would be a temporary measure; once a road was returned to an acceptable condition, a turnpike could be abolished. This was the reasoning behind the limited term and the lack of authority given the trustees in regard to the levying of the parish rate.

As the trusts became virtually permanent bodies, they began to take over the duties of the parish. The parish appointed surveyor began to give way to the turnpike trust surveyor. In 1716, he was given power to agree with the parish for an annual amount to be paid in lieu of statute labour.

With the increase in the number of toll roads, and the expansion of the trusts' powers, opposition grew, and there were a number of serious riots throughout the country. In particular, between 1727–1735, tollhouses, gates and bars were burnt or destroyed with such frequency that the courts raised the sentence for these crimes—from three months hard labour and a public whipping to death without the benefit of clergy. With the increasing number of turnpikes, users of the roads were feeling the burden. The fishermen of Hastings, for example, alleged the tolls would 'discourage them from following their employment, and will impoverish the greatest part of the inhabitants'.¹⁰

Opponents of the system claimed that some landowners deliberately let roads fall into disrepair in order to obtain a turnpike, thereby transferring repair costs to the road users. But as the tolls promised to relieve the parishioners of their statute duty, opposition was often swept aside. In the early years of turnpike law, sixteen (or 39%) of the forty-one bills proposed between 1664–1713 were rejected. However, with the growing volume in traffic, parishes found it increasingly difficult to maintain the roads; turnpikes became the accepted alternative and between 1714–1733, only fifteen of the many bills placed before Parliament were rejected.¹¹ In the *Gentleman's Magazine* of September 1754, it was stated that as soon as a Turnpike Act was obtained,

all the parishes through which the road passes consider the Act as a benefit ticket, and an exemption from their usual expenses, and elude the payment of their just quota towards the reparation of the road, by compounding with the Trustees for a less sum, or by doing their Statute Labour in a fraudulent

manner; and in both these cases they are generally favoured by the neighbouring Justices and gentlemen, for the ease of their own estates.¹²

There were some structural problems with the trusts; although the amount of the toll was set, the trustees could grant preferential rates to individuals or businesses. One major problem: there was no limit to the amount of borrowed capital for which the trustees could mortgage the tolls. The situation could—and did—arise whereby the interest on the mortgage debt might easily absorb the whole amount budgeted for road repairs. By the end of the eighteenth century, the mortgaging of tolls had been abused to such an extent that some trusts defaulted on the paying of interest on their bonded debt. Sir James McAdam¹³ stated, in 1839, that he knew of some trusts that had not paid interest for over sixty years.

As each generation of trustees renewed their twenty-one year limit they also succeeded in gaining greater freedom from controls, so that 'they could spend what they pleased, borrow what they pleased and manage the business as they pleased'.¹⁴ They acquired new powers such as the right to compulsory purchase land in order to widen roads and erect bars against bye lanes, close ancient highways, divert others and compel every one to travel on the road they had constructed. Trustees, as the Edinburgh Review stated in Oct. 1819,

are the only persons entrusted by Parliament to levy a large revenue from the public without being required to account in any way for what they receive. A still greater defect is the want of any proper remedy when a set of commissioners abuse their trust. They may suffer their road to become a perfect ruin; they may embezzle funds and commit every sort of malpractice, and yet go on levying tolls, keeping possession of the road and defying all complaints.¹⁵

Answerable to no authority, it was very much up to the trustees how well—or how badly—they administered the road under their jurisdiction. Contemporary views both praised and decried the condition of toll roads.

The Importance of London

Daniel Defoe, in his travels around Britain noted the growing importance of London when he wrote of Shooberry in his book, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–1727):

N.B. I am the more particular in my remark in this place ['Shooberry'] because in the course of my travels the reader will meet with the like in almost every place of note through the whole island, where it will be seen how this whole kingdom, as well the people, as the land, and even the sea, in every part of it, are employ'd to furnish something, and I may add, the best of every thing, to supply the city of London with provisions; I mean by provisions, corn, flesh, fish, butter, cheese, salt, fewel, timber, &C, and cloths also; with every thing necessary for building, and furniture for their own use, or for trades.¹⁶

London was, as Defoe stated, the centre of the country. Not only were the monarch, the government, the law courts and the financial institutions based in the capital, but London was the commercial centre as well. By the 1700's, the great port of London handled 80% of England's imports, 69% of its exports and 86% of its re-exports. Many of the items for re-export were luxury goods from Asia and the Americas. This last figure emphasizes London's role as an entrepot, although London had many craftsmen, and later, some factories, its prominence lay in its role as a trading centre. Goods were brought to London, not only to satisfy the growing population, but also for re-export.

London was also the source of the country's cultural and fashionable life. It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the early turnpiking reflects the heavy demands on the routes leading to the capital. Of the thirteen main roads leading out of London, most were turnpiked by 1750.

The London roads faced unique problems as the population doubled between 1780 and 1820. The first Census in 1801, put the population figure at 900,000.¹⁷ The boundaries of London expanded with the creation of suburbs such as Kensington and Kentish town. This was aided by the introduction of the omnibus in 1829, which allowed the average worker to live far from his employment. The omnibus was a vehicle pulled by three horses, with benches inside for twenty passengers. Each held more than the popular short-stage coach, which allowed six passengers inside and a few outside, and the fares on the omnibus were much lower. The increasing number of coaches and carts that used the roads, caused great damage to the surface; repairs generally consisted of filling in the holes with broken stones. It was becoming increasingly clear that something had to be done to improve the situation.

The Move Towards Consolidation

The early nineteenth century saw a number of significant reforms to society, such as the establishment of the Metropolitan Police Force (1829) the Reform Act (1832) that extended the franchise, the Factory Act (1833), which regulated the working hours of women and children and was the government's first step towards regulation of work conditions. These and other acts reflect the growing pressure on the government to legislate to improve the living and working conditions of the population.

Parliament was also aware of the growing feelings of dissatisfaction with the condition of the nation's roads. The rapid increase in the number of coaches, the development of the postal system and the huge amount of goods moved by road were placing a significant burden on the roads. The initial response was to continue restricting traffic by placing greater limits on the weight of a wagon and on the width of its wheels. It was thought that road damage could be limited if the vehicle's weight and the width of its wheels could be regulated. As shown in the following table from 1808, the narrower the wheels the lighter the wagon had to be.

Weight Table

	Tons.	Cwt.
A waggon having sixteen-inch wheels is allowed to weigh	8	0
" " " nine-inch " " "	6	0
" " " six-inch " " "	4	5
" " " three-inch " " "	3	10
A stage-coach having two-inch wheels is allowed to carry any weight. ¹⁸		

Numerous acts regulating wheel width were passed, and there was even a suggestion that wheels be abolished altogether in favour of cylindrical rollers. To check the weight of wagons, large crane-like weighing machines were erected at the side of the road that actually lifted a wagon off the ground.

The many regulations on wheel restrictions, did not lessen the number of complaints about road conditions, so gradually the debate began to focus less on restricting traffic, and more on maintaining the road surface. The first step along this road was due to the Post Office. The growing postal business needed good roads, as all mail was transported by road. The Postmaster-General took an interest in the condition of the roads used by his mail coaches,

particularly the London to Holyhead Road, which he described as unsafe for any coach. Spurred by the Postmaster and the Irish Members of Parliament, who regularly had to travel along the road from their constituencies to attend Parliament, a House of Commons Committee in 1810, strongly suggested something be done.

Mainly due to the energy of Sir Henry Parnell, one of the Irish MPs, Parliament funded repairs, and the task of fixing the road was given to Thomas Telford one of the greatest civil engineers of his time. Telford focused on building a surface that would support the traffic upon it. He and Parnell also managed to streamline the number of trusts responsible for the road. The road was so successful, it was considered the best in the kingdom; Telford's methods were to influence road builders for many years.

The Board of Agriculture was also reporting on the poor state of the roads, and pressing for their improvement. Its Chairman, Sir John Sinclair, promoted a bill to reform highway administration. Although the bill did not pass, it resulted in a number of Parliamentary Committees tasked with examining the state of the roads. Among evidence heard at these committees was a memorandum from John Loudon McAdam who, until his death in 1836, was to be Parliament's expert authority on road maintenance.

McAdam, like Telford, believed the roads had to be constructed to cope with the traffic, not the traffic regulated to preserve the road. Although his methods were inferior to Telford's, they were cheaper and far better than any existing at the time. He also had very clear ideas on the administration of the roads, and stressed the necessity of the trusts to annually report their receipts and expenditures. McAdam also advocated the creation of a central authority to oversee all trusts.

The publication of his memorandum saw his ideas spread throughout the country; his success as the Surveyor of the Bristol Turnpikes resulted in his acting as surveyor to thirty-four different trusts by 1819. He became a public figure, popularly called 'McAdam the Magician', and was regarded as a great public benefactor. Charles Dickens wrote of the hard road surface invented by McAdam that still bears his name, 'Our shops, our horse's legs, our boots, our hearts have all been benefited by the introduction of Macadam'.¹⁹

In 1819, McAdam's supporters in Parliament managed to arrange a committee to look into road conditions. Its findings included a long eulogy of his methods. In the committee's conclusions was a recommendation that the

government award him a grant. He was eventually given the rather substantial amount of £10,000 in recognition of his services. All of McAdam's suggestions were reiterated in the committee's final report, including the idea that the numerous turnpike trusts around the metropolis be consolidated into one body. McAdam considered these roads the worst in the kingdom, even though they yielded the highest toll rate per mile, £500 on average a year. In successive committees in 1820 and 1821 all of McAdam's recommendations were repeated and Sir Henry Parnell and Thomas Telford were called to testify on the success of combining the trusts on the Holyhead Road.

The roads around London received the most complaints, due to the increase in traffic and the many tollgates, which caused so much delay to travellers. A letter from 'XY' to *The Times* newspaper in 1816 stated, 'Within six miles of London there cannot be less than twenty tollgates on the ten principle roads, requiring two able-bodied men for each gate, and not fewer side bars on the crossroads' he continues, 'passengers on horseback, or in coaches would, rather pay double the present sum than be put to the delay and interruption now incurred'.²⁰ The first report of the Metropolis Road Commission (hereinafter the MRC) acknowledged that, 'A great public inconvenience also arises from numerous turnpike gates being stationed in the very streets of the metropolis'.²¹

In 1820, a group of MPs, led by Davies Gilbert and Sir Henry Parnell sought a consolidation of all the metropolitan roads. The bill was ambitious and would have wiped out more than fifty separate trusts. Although it passed its second reading, it ran into opposition from the trusts and without Government support, it was narrowly defeated by a vote of 72 to 71. The narrow defeat must have encouraged the reformers as the issue of consolidation was soon taken up by another supporter of McAdam's, Viscount Lowther, M.P. (1787–1872).

In 1824, the renewal of the Kensington and Hyde Park Turnpike Act had revealed a significant degree of corruption within the trust. In 1825, Lowther moved for a committee to inquire into the management of the metropolitan trusts. He cited the situation of the Kensington and Hyde Park Trust and the Stamford Hill Trust. Concerning the latter, he found a large amount had been charged for annuities. Further investigation had shown that the trustees had been borrowing money from each other at the rate of ten per cent, to be paid by annuity. Lowther also mentioned the Bishopsgate Street Gate that had been established just to provide funds for the ordinary expenses of the parish. He

further stated, 'that very great abuses existed under the present system, and it invariably happened, that where the largest sums were received from tolls, there the worst management prevailed'.²² He also claimed that, since the beginning of the century, traffic had increased to such an extent that £200,000 a year was paid in tolls within a ten mile radius of St. Paul's, but that mismanagement and servicing the funded debt absorbed seven-tenths of this sum.²³

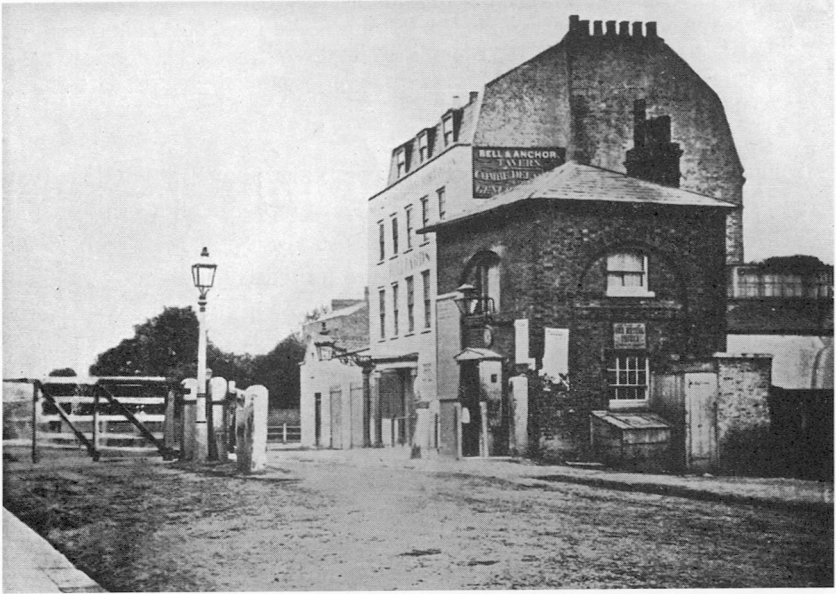
The committee was headed by Lowther, and McAdam was the chief witness. Not surprisingly, the committee's recommendations repeated previous committee's findings and restated McAdam's ideas. It concluded,

that a consolidation of all the trusts adjoining London is the only effectual method of introducing a proper and uniform system of management in the roads, economy in the funds, and of relieving the public from the present inconvenient situations and obnoxious multiplicity of turnpike gates, with which the inhabitants are now faced in every direction.²⁴

It was Lowther's contention that consolidation was essential, due to the poor state of the roads and the mismanagement and corruption of trustees. Although, it is difficult to gauge the real condition of the roads, Albert in his book *The Turnpike Road System in England*, has examined the accounts of the county of Middlesex where most of the London trusts were located. There were in total 20 trusts with 158 miles of roads. By excluding three small trusts, which controlled only nine miles of roads and held a disproportionate share of debt and arrears, he was able to show a clearer picture of the London trusts. He states,

Interest charges accounted for a small, manageable percentage of expenditure and compared extremely favourably with the average for all trusts. Only in Essex did the trusts pay out a smaller proportion of their funds in interest charges. The arrears of interest were negligible, and twelve of the seventeen trusts had no arrears at all. Finally, the income and expenditure per mile of the London trusts was higher than in any other part of the country and almost ten times the national average, while the debt per mile was only double that average. This meant that the London trusts were able to spend the greatest part of their funds directly for road repair.²⁵

Although the trusts that managed the London roads may not have been the best in the country they do seem to have been doing an adequate job. It is not surprising they opposed consolidation. McAdam's damning criticism must therefore be looked at in a different light: the desire to see his beliefs implemented



Hammersmith Toll-Gate

may have made him overstate his case. The tide, however, was against the London trusts, and another attempt at forcing consolidation was made in 1825. This time, the number of trusts to be consolidated was reduced: instead of consolidating all the trusts north and south of the Thames, which encompassed 277 miles, the new bill covered only 14 trusts north of the river controlling 133 miles. Excluded were 3 large and influential trusts which consequently reduced opposition to the bill. Critics also claimed that the bill was rushed through Parliament. The trustees of the Brentford Road Trust certainly thought so, although they were one of the trusts due to be consolidated under the MRC Act. They wrote to *The Times* regarding the passing of the act,

Under the plea that the session was nearly at an end, and the public interest was suffering, those who solicited, or, as it is technically called in modern language, 'worked the bill', used the greatest activity to forward it through the different stages. It was read a first time when there were hardly more than 18 members present, and almost as soon as the usual forms would admit, a second time in nearly as thin a house. When, as the trustees learnt what was

going forward, they solicited to be heard, that the calumnies that had been heaped upon them might be refuted, the only favour they could obtain was that the bill should be sent to a committee upstairs, but they were informed.... that it was too late to say anything against the principle of the bill, as that had been established by the second reading.²⁶

It had been hoped that the successful consolidation of the London trusts would spur other consolidations but with a few minor exceptions this was not to be the case. Although Parliament cited the success of the Metropolis Roads Commission in 1833, as the only way forward for trusts in difficulty, no plans were ever introduced. Also, by the late 1830's, the Whig government's majority had declined, and the unrest spreading throughout the county from 1836, contributed to the government's lack of will to promote further consolidations.

The Metropolis Road Commission

When the Metropolis Road Act was passed in 1826, the Commission was made responsible for amalgamating fourteen separate turnpike trusts under one authority. In total, the MRC controlled 133 miles of road, upon which were forty-seven turnpike gates, forty-four side bars, and seventeen weighing machines. Below, is a chart of the different trusts.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Name of Trust</i>	<i>Length in miles</i>
1.	Isleworth	5.0
2.	Brentford	12.0
3.	Kensington	16.4
4.	Uxbridge	16.5
5.	Harrow	10.1
6.	Kilburn	11.0
7.	Marylebone	4.7
8.	Camden Town	3.0
9.	Highgate & Hampstead	17.4
10.	City Road	1.4
11.	Old Street Road	1.4
12.	Stamford Hill & Green Lane	21.0
13.	Hackney	6.4
14.	Lea Bridge	4.0

Commissioners and Officers

As was common with every turnpike act, the names of the Commissioners were listed in the Metropolis Road Act. In all, 37 persons (see: Appendix 1) were named along with the members of Parliament for the City of London, the County of Middlesex and the City of Westminster. Many of the members of Parliament had supported reform of the roads. All the Commissioners would have been men of property as the 1822 Act required trustees to have estates worth £100 or be heir to one of £200. Justices of the Peace, who had authority over areas through which the roads of the Commission ran, were not allowed to become trustees. This was probably to avoid any conflict of interest as justices did have some authority over trusts, being able to compel them to pay fines, or acting as mediators of disputes.

Trustees were required to send an annual report to Parliament in April, and to have regular meetings. The date of the first meeting to be held was stated, but little else was stipulated, and as there was no supervisory body above them, they had great freedom to do as they wished. Parliament required only three trustees to act as a quorum. According to Albert, this was necessary as 'meetings were usually badly attended'.²⁷ In the case of the MRC this was not so, many Commissioners attended regularly and quite a few attended nearly all the meetings. As *The Times* stated when the MRC bill was passed,

The members of London, Westminster and Middlesex, are the only gentlemen who may always presume to be within convenient call for forming a board; and their attendance is so little secured by the Act, we should not ever suspect that Lord Lowther would travel from Westmoreland, where he may have roads to superintend, and poachers to prosecute, to examine the qualifications of a road surveyor, or settle the conditions of a *Turnpike lease* in London, did we not know that, as father of the bill, his parental affection has hitherto led him to watch its progress, and to appoint its guardians.²⁸

Lord Lowther, was elected chairman of the Commission, he is described in the 'Dictionary of National Biography' as 'a good business man (who) took no real initiative in politics'.²⁹ The Webbs, take a more positive view in describing his role at the MRC; 'He undertook the chairmanship in 1826, and, with the greatest assiduity, presided for no less than forty-six years'.³⁰

Between 1826–1836, the Commission held 198 meetings, the majority held in the early years; in 1827, there were 38 meetings while later, in 1835, there were

only 14. Initially, attendance at the meetings was also high; in 1826 the average was 19 members, this gradually dropped to 8 members in the 1830s. Albert states that, 'Despite generally indifferent participation there was relatively high-attendance at the initial meetings possibly due to a greater interest in the policy decisions made at these meetings'.³¹ This is true for the MRC, as the 1820s were extremely busy for the Commission, as it was trying to merge fourteen turnpike trusts into one administrative entity.

There was a core group of members, who attended more than fifty per cent of the meetings throughout the first ten years; Ashton (57%), Austin (87%), Carpenter (67%), Jones (70%), Lowther (78%) and Mildred (57%). Most other members attended periodically. There were, however, seventeen who attended less than ten times throughout the ten-year period. Many in this group, belonged to the peerage and included, Lord Viscount Belgrave, the Earl of Essex, Sir John Selbrite and Sir Henry Parnell. Persons of note were often included in the list of trustees of turnpikes so as to 'facilitate the passage of the act through Parliament, and once it had passed to serve as an assurance of the trusts' creditworthiness'.³² Also, they may have wished to be seen, to be contributing to the common good, by attaching their names to a piece of high-profile legislation.

The first meeting of the Commission was held on 31st June 1826, at the British Coffee House in Cockspur Street. During the eighteenth century the coffee house had become a popular place to hold meetings and debate ideas and early meetings of the Commission were held there. Although the Commission did not come into effect until 1827, early meetings were held to deal with the following: handover of business from the various trusts, examination of the condition of the roads and appointment of staff to the Commission. In October, permanent premises were found at 22, Whitehall Place. After the Commissioners took their oaths of office, they considered selection of the senior administrative staff. John Witt Lyon was appointed solicitor to the Commission.

John Leach Panter, who although named as a Commissioner in the Act, resigned. He took the position of chief clerk to the Commission. He was paid £400 a year, after 'giving security to the amount of £5,000'.³³ Richard Robertson was appointed accountant and assistant to Panter at a salary of £200 with a security deposit of £2,000; Henry Browse was made inspector at an annual salary of £200; McAdam's son, James, was appointed chief surveyor at a salary of £500 plus a £200 allowance for travel expenses upon a security deposit

of £5,000. Probably to ensure he did not work with other trusts as his father had done, the Commissioners inserted the following clause into his contract, 'who shall give up the whole of his time to the duties of the Trust'.³⁴

One of the first major responsibilities of the Commission was to prepare the annual report to be presented in April. It involved so much work that the Board voted to each member of the Finance Committee a quarter of his salary as they had been 'laboriously employed from the 8th Oct. to the 31st Dec. 1827 (a mistake in the minutes. It should be 1826.) in examining the accounts of the late trustees and preparing Books, Estimates and Plans for the commencement on the Establishment on the 1st Jan. 1827 the period named for the whole of the roads being placed under the control of the present Commissioners'.³⁵ They also granted all the sub-surveyors a quarter of their salary.

The accountant, Robertson, must have borne a heavy responsibility, as in 1828, he asked for compensation for working 12–14 hour days. The Commissioners voted him £100, half his yearly salary, in recognition of his efforts.

Another Commission employee who seemed to work beyond the norm was Henry Browse. Every January, he was granted a gratuity of £50. But it was not until 1835, when 'the General Surveyor pointed out the extraordinary expenses Mr. Browse is subject to in the execution of his duties',³⁶ that his salary was raised to £300, and he was given a gratuity of £100.

When the Commission took over, all clerks, officers, and collectors of tolls employed by the former trusts were discharged; subsequently the following were appointed as sub-surveyors,

Thomas Onians—Marylebone & Harrow Roads

James Treherne—Uxbridge Road

Thomas Chandler—Brentworth & Isleworth Roads

William Mortlock—Highgate & Hampstead Roads

Alexander Chandler—Kilburn & Edgware Roads

Pankhurst (his first name is not recorded.)—Hackney & Lea Bridge Roads

Three posts were not filled, and it was decided to look among the former surveyors to find any suitable candidates. The following three men filled these positions:

Simon Mortlock (possibly a relative of William)—Stamford Road

William Newman—Kensington Road

Blea (again, the first name is not recorded)—City Road

Most of the sub-surveyors performed their duties without incident, the exception being Pankhurst. Within his first year of employment, McAdam submitted a report to the Commissioners 'detailing several frauds against the public'³⁷ perpetrated by Pankhurst. The Commission decided to take legal action, and a warrant was issued for Pankhurst's arrest. Unfortunately, he was not to be found, so the Commission turned to Pankhurst's guarantor, John Gardener, who agreed to pay, but asked the Commission to accept payment in instalments.

Rather quickly, Simon Mortlock's duties were expanded, as in 1827, the Stamford Hill tolls were unlet. The Board's practice was to administer any unlet roads until the next letting; Mortlock was given the responsibility. By 1828, the Board recognised he could not give his full attention to the roads, and manage the tolls as well. It 'strongly recommended' that another sub-surveyor be employed, and that Mortlock be a full-time manager of tolls. Joseph Manuel was appointed as sub-surveyor of the Stamford Hill Roads at a salary of £150. Mortlock must not have been so happy with his new position, because, in 1829, he petitioned the Board for compensation 'on account of losses sustained by him in consequence of his situation as Superintendent of Tolls'.³⁸

Manuel seems to have impressed the Commissioners, in 1832, they reported on the good state of the Stamford Roads and paid him £10 'in testimony of their appreciation'.³⁹ Four months later, perhaps hoping to trade on the Commissioners' good opinion of his efforts, he asked for a pay rise. His request was refused, after which he resigned. John Harding took the position at the same basic salary—£150 per year—the Commission paid to all sub-surveyors.

The Commission occasionally awarded £10 in compensation to employees it felt had performed extra duties. Onians and Chandler, both sub-surveyors, received that amount in 1829; Newman, in 1832 also received £10 in recognition of 'prosecuting to conviction the party who stole some road materials from that district and also his exertions in forming the broken stone road at Brompton'.⁴⁰

The Commission was also generous to one of its oldest sub-surveyors, James Treherne. In consideration of his age and the condition of the road it recommended a new sub-surveyor be employed. George Gibson was employed at the salary of £150, but the Commissioners stipulated £50 of his salary was to go to Treherne 'as long as he shall be able to attend to his duties on the road'.⁴¹ The following May, Gibson petitioned to be paid the full £150 and as the

Commission had received 'a very favourable account' of his performance, it accepted his request.⁴² No mention was made of Treherne; it is possible his death could have prompted Gibson to ask for the full salary.

Although the Commission seems to have treated its own employees very well, it found difficulty dealing with the employees of the former trusts. When the MRC Act came into force, all employees of the former trusts were removed from their positions. This probably caused hardship to some, particularly, the older ones with little chance of finding new employment. There was no provision in the Act for a redress of grievances. Two former elderly employees did face hardship and appealed to the Commission for aid, Mr. Battery and Mr. Blizard, formerly of the Kensington Trusts. Battery, a former clerk, petitioned the Commission in January 1826, to grant him an annuity or pension. It was refused.⁴³ He repeated the request in April as well as the following year in June. In January 1828, he 'solicited the Board to make some provision for him during the remainder of his life'.⁴⁴

The Commission responded that there was no provision in the MRC Act for such a situation; however, in 1832, one of the Commissioners seemed to have taken up his case. Ashton put forward a claim by Battery for £50, for services done before the MRC Act came into effect. He recommended Battery be granted a portion of that amount, as he was destitute. The Commission gave him £25.⁴⁵ The amount of £1 a month was paid to him; however, by November 1833, Ashton again petitioned the Commission on Battery's behalf to grant him the further £25 as 'he was still in a state of great destitution and in very precarious health for age and infirmity'.⁴⁶ Battery was given the £25 and there is no further reference to him in the minutes. It is interesting that Ashton took up his case. It is likely he was a former trustee of the Kensington Trust and as a clerk Battery was known to him. According to the minutes of December 1826, Ashton 'on the part of the Trustees of the Kensington Road'⁴⁷ had to arrange for a loan of £1,000 to be paid off. Clearly he had a connection to that particular trust.

William Blizard was also a former employee in need. He had been a surveyor for thirty-three years, and—like Battery—requested a pension from the Commission but was refused.⁴⁸ He petitioned again a year later, 'praying the Board would make provision for him during the remainder of his life'.⁴⁹ The Commission responded that there was no such provision in the Act. Two weeks later, Blizard's son, Jonathan, 'applied for a situation to enable him to support

his father'.⁵⁰ The Commissioners informed him no positions were vacant. In January 1829 and later in December, Blizard again, unsuccessfully applied for assistance; he was 'soliciting for a gratuity in consequence of his great age and past services as surveyor to the late Kensington Trustees'.⁵¹ He was referred to the Board's former decision. After this date, there is no further reference to him in the minutes.

Services

The Turnpike Trusts provided a number of services beyond road maintenance. These included watering, lighting and the watching of the roads. When the MRC took over those duties, a great deal of confusion ensued as each Trust had its own system, and had contracts with various service providers at varying rates. In its first annual report to Parliament, the Commission expressed its concern about the lighting, watching, watering and repair of footpaths, as the funds for these came from different sources, and the management was under different authorities. Its goal was to unify the system. However, as in other areas of administration the Commission kept the finances of each road separately, so that each road received only the level of service it could financially bear.

Before looking at the details of the services the MRC provided, it is worth explaining the administration bodies that the Commission had to deal with in performing that duty. Until the late nineteenth century, London had no central authority. Porter, describes London as a city where its 'government was a fragmented historical relic, divided between hundreds of bodies, mutually distrustful and antagonistic'.⁵²

The central area of London, defined by its historic boundary walls, was known as 'the City'. Its multilayered government involved guilds, wards and parishes, creating entwined loyalties and a strong, independent identity. The Corporation of London was an entity unto itself, at the apex stood the Lord Mayor and the Court of Aldermen. The aldermen held office for life and wielded great power, serving as justices, responsible for order in their wards, issuing licences and frequently serving as Members of Parliament. The City opposed interference from Parliament and presented itself as the defender of London's rights. It was, however, more often protecting its own privileges, and according to Porter, 'its refusal to take responsibility for the rest of the town was

reactionary. By 1800, nine-tenths of Londoners were living outside the City, but the Corporation persisted in regarding itself as London's sole authority, offering pig-headed resistance to reforms'.⁵³

Outside the City, over three hundred bodies (including parish vestries, Justices of the Peace and Improvement Commissions) administered London. These latter commissions were Parliament's response to local pressures; it created special agencies with the power to raise rates or tolls to carry out specific local tasks. One of the most famous of these was the turnpike trust. Many other commissions were created to pay for such public services as lighting, draining, paving or watching the streets. However, despite the increasing demands for improvement commissions, the main burden of local administration rested on the seventy-eight parish vestries outside the City.

Parishes had the authority to set poor rates, the church rate, and appoint officials; however, how they did this—and how effective they were—differed greatly. Some districts, such as Chelsea and Kensington, which were still rather rural, had open vestry meetings and permitted all local ratepayers to participate. An executive vestry coexisted with open parish meetings in Hackney. Unfortunately, the rise in the population began to overwhelm this system. In St. Pancras, where the population rose from 600 in 1776, to 31,779 in 1801,⁵⁴ the parish administration fell into chaos. In St. Marylebone, a group of aristocrats managed to wrestle control of the vestry from the tradesmen who had, up until then run it; it restricted selection to the vestry to 103 of the parish's wealthiest men. The parishes also differed greatly in size: some numbering only a few thousand while St. George's, Hanover Square, had over 60,000 residents.⁵⁵ The MRC had dealings with all the vestries mentioned above.

Watching and Lighting

Since the Middle Ages, the responsibility of lighting in London had been with the householder; he had to light and clean the street outside his house. This continued until the late seventeenth century, when a group of householders combined to hire a lighting contractor, to take over their responsibility; and, in 1694, the City authorities gave the Convex Lights Company a monopoly for all similar deals within the City for an annual fee of £600. From 1694, the City was lit from 6 p.m. till midnight for 117 nights a year. In 1736, an Act creating

communal lighting allowed the City to raise a special lighting rate to pay for all-year, all-night lighting. This gave the City around 4,000 hours of lighting a year. Parishes quickly recognised street lighting as a deterrent to crime, and many sought local Acts of Parliament to raise a compulsory rate, as the City had done. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the lamp lighter had become a familiar figure on London's streets. Although London was well lit compared to other European capitals, the oil lamps did not produce much light; and it was not until the early nineteenth century—when gas lighting was introduced—that the streets were clearly illuminated.

With its dark narrow streets, London was regarded as a dangerous city. Of course, compared to other parts of the country, London had unique problems. It was a thriving metropolis with a relatively young population. Many of these new Londoners, who had left their families in the countryside, found it hard to find steady employment. With no support to fall back on, some found their way into petty crime. Pamphleteers sensationalised the exploits of a few notorious criminals and writers. In the 1770s, such notables as the Prime Minister, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, the Lord Mayor, and countless other lesser personages were all threatened and robbed in or around London. Even King George II, while walking alone in Kensington Gardens, was robbed; a man who jumped over a fence, asked the King for his money, his watch and the buckles in his shoes.⁵⁶ All seemed to confirm to the average citizen that London was a dangerous place to live.

Contemporaries were also concerned about the criminal gangs' high level of organization. One reason criminals were able to thrive was the failure of the policing system. Like lighting, watching was done as an unpaid communal duty. And by the seventeenth century, householders were paying others to do this duty for them; however, as was generally said, they relied on the cheap labour of old, dishonest and simpleminded men. In the eighteenth century, as with lighting, parishes began to introduce a more effective system: A rate-funded body of night watchmen, who were paid, replaced communal duties. Its effectiveness depended on parishes employing suitable men such as young ex-soldiers (the case in Marylebone, St. James and St. George's Hanover Square). The contemporary view of the watchmen, however, was that they were 'drunken and cowardly buffoons'.⁵⁷

In 1796, a magistrate, Patrick Colquhoun, published a 'Treatise on the Policing of the Metropolis', stating that the problem of crime in the city was



Newington Turnpike

much worse than had been realised, and that 115,000 Londoners lived wholly or partly from crime, The Government response was to establish a new Thames Police Office for crimes along the River Thames. Later, the Bow Street Foot Patrols were introduced; however, these took place at night as this was felt to be the most dangerous time. The first daytime patrols were not established until 1822, and an organized metropolitan police force under Government control, was not set up until 1829. The establishment of the police force did impact the MRC, as it was then able to cede responsibility to it. When in 1829, Hackney Parish wanted to take over control of the watching and lighting, the Commissioners suggested it wait ‘until the fate of Mr. Peel’s Police Bill now in progress through the House of Lords is ascertained’.⁵⁸

The MRC was responsible for lighting and watching most of the main roads within the Trust. It was not a duty the Commissioners felt should be theirs. In their Third Annual Report to Parliament in 1829, they stated that certain parishes ‘claim’ the Commission should watch and light the roads, and that the Commission had followed the directive of the Select Committee of the House of Commons to continue the practice but not extend it. They agreed with the Select Committee’s conclusion ‘that those matters more directly belong to the

several parishes, and ought not to be levied upon the public at large in the shape of Tolls'.⁵⁹

Generally, the minutes dealing with watching and lighting fall into three categories: requests for more lamps on a particular road, for gas lighting to replace oil lamps, and for the lighting on a road to be extended. Mostly, the commission refused these requests citing the poor financial situation or the limits of their legal obligations.

The Highgate and Hampstead Road and the Stamford Hill Road caused the MRC the most problems. Initially, the Board had trouble finding a contractor willing to light the Highgate and Hampstead road. When the MRC took over, the existing lighting contractor, Mr. Spratley, informed it of his desire to give up the contract as of 1st January 1827.⁶⁰ His decision was accepted, and the Board advertised for tenders but to no avail. They had no option but to request Mr. Spratley to continue his contract until a replacement could be found.⁶¹ Fortunately, a contractor on another road, Mr. Smith, offered to take over the contract at the same rate.

There must have been some additional problems with the lighting as in August; just six months after Mr. Smith had taken over the contract, the Commission decided to give up the duty of lighting and watching on that road. In August, it informed the Parish of St Pancras of its decision. As mentioned earlier, lighting and watching were felt by the Commissioners to be a service they provided only because former trustees had done so, that it was a duty they did not want to be burdened with. The Vestry of St. Pancras was not happy to be handed back this responsibility, as it informed the Commission, the vestry had no authority to watch or light any portion of the parish. Also, that 'there are 21 trusts with powers for lighting the different portions of the Parish of St. Pancras, and that the portions of the Highgate and Hampstead roads lighted by the Commission were not within the jurisdiction of any of the Trusts'.⁶² The Directors of the Poor of St. Pancras also wrote requesting the Commission not give up its responsibilities but were referred back to the arguments in the original letter of Aug. 6th.

The response of St. Pancras Parish was to take legal action in early January 1828. Its lawyer, Mr. Scadding, informed the Commission, the parish had taken measures to compel the Commission to continue its duties. Some discussion about the situation took place in June, as Mr. Scadding and Mr. Panter, solicitor to the Commission, attended that month's Board meeting; however, a

resolution was not reached, and the court case went ahead. The verdict found in favour of the parish. By October, Mr. Scadding informed the Commission of the decision of the Court of King's Bench and the Commission's duty to continue to light the road.

The Commission also had to deal with complaints about the lack of adequate lighting, from the inhabitants along the Highgate and Hampstead road. In June 1831, Mr. Hodsol and sixty others wrote asking for a rate to be levied on them, in order to pay for lighting the road with gas.⁶³ As mentioned earlier, requests made to the Commission for improvements in lighting, usually assumed the Commission would bear the cost. In this case, the residents were willing to pay, and after some consideration the Commission agreed to their request.

Lord Melbourne, (Prime Minister 1834 & 1835–1841) forwarded an application for more lighting from the Kentish Town Commission for Paving and Lighting (Kentish Town being part of the Highgate and Hampstead Road). The General Surveyor was appointed to consider the situation, and he reported to the Board that there were twelve oil lamps on the southeast side of the road under the jurisdiction of the Lighting and Paving Commission and one gas lamp on the northwest side. In his opinion it was 'not expedient to comply'⁶⁴ with the request. The Commissioners accepted his recommendation and rejected Kentish Town's request. Refusing to accept the decision, Kentish Town sent a deputation to the next Board meeting in August to restate their argument. It is unlikely the Commissioners changed their decision.

The Stamford Hill Road was also a cause of much trouble to the Commission. It was an important road, described by McAdam 'as one of the greatest thoroughfares under the Commission'.⁶⁵ Unlike other roads, the Commissioners were responsible for selecting the watchmen, and, apart from horses the Commission had to provide the necessary equipment. After reviewing the situation in 1827, the Commission decided that the five existing horse patrols were too many; it cut the number to two, keeping Thomas Tebwoth and William Clarkson. Mr. Hobson, one of the Commissioners, intervened on behalf of the men let go, stating that the dismissal 'without any previous notice appears to him to be a case of particular hardship and that as they had been at the Expense of procuring horses and accoutrements he considered they were deserving of some remuneration'.⁶⁶ In response to this plea, the Commission granted each man £10.

Every year, a committee appointed from the Commission would meet to select the watchmen for the Stamford Road. It must have felt the road was

becoming safer; in 1829, the committee recommended the watch boxes be removed and the swords of the watchmen be taken away.⁶⁷ The following year it decided 'the pistols to be unnecessary appendages (and) had resolved that they should not be given to the men in future Albert'.⁶⁸ It was, no doubt, hoping that the newly formed police force would take over this duty.

The main problem the Commission faced with the Stamford Hill Road—more than with any other road—was the failure of its inhabitants to pay their rates for watching and lighting. As early as 1829, James Sandford, the collector for the Commission recommended summoning all persons who refused to pay their rates.⁶⁹ It must have done this, as the Commission received a petition, just a month later, from 'sundry persons' appealing against the rate levied. The Board was unable to consider the petition when it was presented to the meeting, until there was a 'fuller attendance of the Commission';⁷⁰ as, rather unusually, there were only six Commissioners present. In 1830, Sandford again called 'for a Petty Sessions on the defaulters appearing in the Book of the Stamford Hill Watching & Lighting rates',⁷¹ and the Commission agreed.

The Parish of Hackney, responsible for part of the Stamford Hill Road, wanted to take over the duties of watching and lighting. It probably thought it could do it more cheaply. In 1829, Mr. C. H. Pulley on behalf of the parish, wrote that it wished 'to light and water certain roads on condition of being relieved from paying the present rates'.⁷² The Commission responded that it would consider the matter; however, only fourteen days later, Pulley informed it that a deputation from the Parish of Hackney Trustees for Watching and Lighting was ready to visit the Commission. The Commissioners suggested that, as the Police Bill would impact any decision, they should wait until it had made its way through the Lords. This they did, and, in the Commission's Fifth Annual Report to Parliament in 1831, it was stated that portions of the 11th District, the Stamford Hill Road, were under the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police. The Commission was therefore, partly relieved from night watching; it expressed the hope that it would be able to give up this duty on all the roads in the future.

As the Commission had given up night watching, it had to change the rate charged. For houses in the back streets, the Commission decided not to make any charge; and for those houses in the main street of Stamford Hill on Hackney Road, half the regular rate would be charged.⁷³ In 1830, £150 was re-funded to Hackney Parish for lighting and watching.⁷⁴

In 1831, there was a dispute about the amount levied for Stamford Hill. The Commissioners conferred with the solicitor as to the rate charged and minuted, 'that as only one amount for Lighting & Watching can be legally made a 4d rate be charged throughout but that in all cases of the Inhabitants of the Back Street the collector be instructed to enforce only 3d in the pound'.⁷⁵

By an Act of 1833, (3&4 William 4th Cap. 90) the Commission was able to give up its task of watching and lighting if a parish requested to take on those duties. Hackney Parish did not wish to take over the lighting responsibility, and Mr. Pulley proposed the Commission forgo the charge for lighting lamps on the inhabitants of Hackney if the Trustees of Hackney would pay a sum towards the lighting. The Commission's response was that it would forgo collection of the last lighting rate; there would be no further assessment 'upon condition that the Parish pays this Commission for lighting such lamps £250 per annum at Midsummer every year'.⁷⁶ A month later, Mr. Pulley informed the Commission that the Parish declined the offer, but requested a meeting to reach an agreement. He attended a Board meeting and agreed to the conditions discussed. This, in effect meant that the parish took over the whole cost for lighting. As the minutes state, the 'charge for lighting the lamps from 23rd March last to be transferred by the Gas Company to the Hackney Trustees'.⁷⁷

Other parishes of the Stamford Hill Road were less reluctant than Hackney to take over responsibility. Soon after the Act came into force, the Commission received requests from the parishes of Tottenham and Edmonton, through which part of the Stamford Hill Road ran. The Commission proposed the rate of 4d in the pound on parishes watched by the Metropolitan Police and lighted & watched by the MRC and 6d in the pound to be charged to Tottenham and Edmonton Parishes allowing a 2d deduction if they adopted the Act.

Tottenham Parish found itself unable to take over the watch. John Cock, on behalf of the vestry, informed the Commission, 'owing to continuous opposition the Parish of Tottenham has not been able to organise a force to watch their roads'.⁷⁸ The Commission responded by agreeing to take back the duty, and continued to select and appoint the watchmen.

Water & Watering the Roads

The Commission was responsible for watering the roads from March through to the end of summer. This service was provided 'to keep down the dust and deaden the rumbling of the carriages and the step of the horses'.⁷⁹ One major problem was securing enough water for this service. Some sources were natural or man-made ponds, wells and springs or from rivers such as the Thames and the Lea; however, this was often not enough. Former trustees had been forced to contract with various private water companies for a reliable supply. When the MRC took over, it inherited 102 water carts valued at £1,398.⁸⁰ The carts had previously been used by some of the Trusts, who had supplied their own labourers to water parts of the roads. The Commission contacted the various companies, who had contracted to water other parts of the roads, enquiring as to the terms and conditions of their existing contracts, as well as 'inquiring the terms upon which they would engage to supply water for the whole of the roads through which their mains respectively pass'.⁸¹ A quick reply was received from Mr. I. G. Lynde of the Chelsea Water Company, who agreed to continue watering the Knightsbridge road for the same amount of £48 per mile a season—the same as under the former Trustees.

An initial survey by the General Surveyor revealed that the Marylebone Road had no pumps. The Commission agreed that spring wells should be located as the source of water for the road. Also, an approach should be made to the West Middlesex Water Company, for an estimate to water that road. Mr. M. K. Knight replied on behalf of the company and offered to water the road for £75 per mile per season, which was accepted by the Commission; consequently, no wells needed to be dug.

By 1828, the Commission sought to rationalize the watering system, by advertising for tenders for one year and accepting the lowest bids, (see: appendix 2). Most tenders were offered by individuals who, with a few exceptions, offered to water only one road. The Commission accepted each of the lowest tenders with one exception—the one of £1,500 for the Islington road made by Mr. Laycock. The Commission considered it 'exorbitant', and rejected his further offer of £1,250 as 'too high',⁸² and decided to advertise again. A lower tender must have been found, as no further mention of it is made in the minutes.

Although the Commission had quickly established a system for getting the roads watered, it received many complaints from the public. These fell into two

main categories; firstly, the inadequate amount of water being used to water the roads; and secondly, the quality of the water itself. In this period there was an increasing demand for water brought about by the large growth in the population. This was coupled with the increase in the number of households installing their own water cistern and indoor water closets. Those wealthy enough bought their water from companies such as the New River Company (1606–1902), the most successful and longest lasting of the London's water companies. By 1822, it was supplying 4 million gallons a day to 10,000 customers through its leaky, wooded pipes.⁸³ Those not wealthy enough to buy a water supply used public standpipes. One pipe commonly served as many as sixteen houses and it was turned on for only a few minutes once a week.⁸⁴

The Commission frequently received complaints about the inadequate amount of water used on the roads; one such typical petition was sent by Mr. W. A. Garratt and twenty-seven residents of Hampstead who complained about the 'neglectful manner of watering the roads'.⁸⁵ The Commission responded that, as the wells on the road were dry and water had to be brought in from Kentish Town, it would do its best to procure a larger supply. Additionally, another petition from W. H. Cotton and others, requesting the road at Clapton be watered more effectively, and that the watering rates be lowered. The Commission replied that the money from the rates was used to water as far as the supply of water would permit; there would be no lowering of the rates.⁸⁶

Leading newspapers also published complaints, such as *The Times*, which published the following in 1826: 'We should be glad to learn why the Kensington Road from Grosvenor Place to the New Turnpike is left unwatered. This is a great inconvenience to the passengers who are inundated with dust, and is ruinous to the furniture, etc., in the adjacent houses. The same section of the road, which is now left without water was a short time back left without light'.⁸⁷

Not everyone was dissatisfied with the poor service. Very tongue in cheek, *The Times*, a year earlier, published the following item of interest; 'A notice is affixed in the shop window of Mr. Lockyer, of Kensington, chemist and druggist, to the following effect: "*The Mud and Dust Company*" beg leave to return their best thanks to all those who have the care of the roads about London, for the advantageous manner, as far as the interests of the Company are concerned, in which they have attended to the said roads'.⁸⁸

There were those who sought to increase the frequency of the service. Raikes Curne Esq. requested 'leave on behalf of himself and other inhabitants of Hyde

Park Terrace to water the Uxbridge Road contiguous to their houses during dry weather during the cessation of the Commission's contracts',⁸⁹ the Commission agreed, but would not extend the scope of the area watered. James Small and seventy-five inhabitants of Cambridge Road Bethnal Green requested that road be watered. His request was refused by the Commission who suggested the residents could water it at their own expense.⁹⁰

The other main category of complaints about the water received by the MRC was in regard to its quality. There was very little difference between drains and sewers at this time. The word 'sewer' meant a channel for the removal of surface water. What had been an adequate system established in London in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for a semi-rural population was unable to cope with a growing urban population. Although there was a Commission of Sewers that had administered the drainage of the London area since the sixteenth century, it was widely perceived to be corrupt and had done little to improve or protect the system. This had resulted in the drains carrying sewage and the refuse of slaughterhouses, as well as rainwater and draining mainly into the rivers Thames and Lea, which were also the source of much of London's drinking water. Sheppard quotes a nineteenth century contemporary as observing, many Londoners were 'made to consume, in some form or other, a portion of their own excrement'.⁹¹ At least 140 sewers discharged their contents into the Thames in 1828. There was however, a growing awareness of the health risks posed by dirty water. In 1832, over 5,000 Londoners died, in the first of four outbreaks of cholera, which had infected the water supply. Edwin Chadwick, the main campaigner to improve the health of the population, investigated an outbreak of typhus in East London. He suggested that many of the 'Causes of Fever in the Metropolis . . . might be removed by proper sanitary [*sic*] Measures, the chief of which were to be the construction of drains or sewers to all houses and the provision of a plentiful supply of water to carry away the sewage'.⁹²

This growing awareness by the populous of the dangers of unfiltered water was no doubt one reason the Commission receiving numerous complaints about the 'offensiveness of the water used'⁹³ and the Director of the Poor for St. Pancras Parish requested that part of the Hampstead and Highgate Roads 'may not be watered by the filthy water now used'.⁹⁴ The Commission responded to the latter complaint by informing the Director that the roads would not 'bear the charge of watering through the medium of a watering company'.⁹⁵

but that if the inhabitants would pay half the cost, the Board would make a contract.

It is clear from the numerous complaints that contractors were using sewer water to water the roads. The Commission for Sewers for Westminster wrote objecting to the damming of the sewer at Kilburn for watering the roads.⁹⁶ Moreover, the inhabitants of Kilburn Road were so concerned about the quality of the water that their petition included a medical certificate about the dangers to their health from the 'fected water'.⁹⁷

The Commission approached the West Middlesex Water Company to water the Kilburn road, but the conditions submitted by the Company were initially unacceptable. However, a contract must have reached for in 1833, the West Middlesex Water Company agreed to provide water for watering the road through Kilburn (for the same rate as charged last year) and for the road to Kilburn and that a man, horse and a cart be employed.⁹⁸ The inhabitants of the road must have been satisfied, as in 1833 the Commission received a petition from Rev. George Hancock and 62 inhabitants of the Kilburn Road requesting that the road be watered the same as the previous year. The Commission responded that, before a decision could be made, it needed to ask the Commission for Sewers for Westminster if it would permit water to be taken from the Bayswater Stream.⁹⁹ It was probably hoping to find a cheaper source of water rather than having to rely on a private company. Unfortunately, the Sewers Commission refused the request. The Commission had to inform the inhabitants of Kilburn that it would only be able to water the road if it could find a supply of water on the same terms as on other roads. As mentioned earlier, the Commission was able to continue the contract with the West Middlesex Water Company.

The poor quality of the water also became an issue in Camden Town as well as on the Highgate and Hampstead roads. The minutes of January 1831 report that the inhabitants of these areas had made 'numerous' applications 'upon which the water from sewers has been used'.¹⁰⁰ The complaints about the 'putrid water used for watering the Cambridge Heath end of the Hackney road'¹⁰¹ also included a letter from the Central Board of Health, which resulted in all watering being stopped in those areas. A few years later, in May 1834, the Commission received a memorial from the Duke of St. Albans and other inhabitants of Highgate Hill, requesting that watering be recommenced. The Commission responded that, watering would only begin when the Hampstead

Water Company could guarantee an adequate supply. Two months later, a contract was signed with the company to water Highgate Hill for £60 per mile for the season.

Many complaints were received about the smell emanating from the water. In 1832, from April to September, the Commission received, on average, one letter a month about the 'offensive smell' and the 'stagnant water' near residents' houses.

In 1833, the Commission wrote to several water companies to request the same amount of water under the same conditions as the previous year. It also sought tenders for watering the roads. About a month later, in response to the many complaints from the public they had received, the Commission decided to insert a new penalty clause into the conditions for watering and cartage. However, at the next meeting the Commission was 'now informed that the Contractors having tendered upon the usual conditions, they would all throw up their contracts, if any penal clauses were now introduced therein'.¹⁰² Consequently, no amendments were made to the contracts.

The Commission did acknowledge the severity of the problem of sewer water being used on the roads, mentioning in the 1833 Annual Report to Parliament that it had received many complaints on the matter, and had taken corrective measures.

By 1833, the problems regarding the amount of water used on the roads as well as the quality of that water seem to have been sorted out. There were no further complaints on these issues; the complaints by the public were mainly regarding areas that were not watered. Between 1833–1836, the Commission received seventeen petitions requesting, either watering of roads to be done more frequently, or that the area watered be extended. The Commission usually responded by having the General Surveyor review each situation, which generally resulted in the Commission refusing the requests, citing a lack of funding or an insufficient supply of water.

Complaints and petitions from the public comprised most of the references to watering in the minutes. There were also references to dealing with water supply companies. A number of companies supplied water to London, but the Commission mainly dealt with Mr. M. K. Knight on behalf of the West Middlesex Water Company. The company was a supplier of water to the Commission, but in their dealings, the relationship was sometimes testy. In November 1830, it was reported that Mr. Knight was 'persisting in the claim



Clapton Gate

of the West Middlesex Water Company to the expense of lowering the main in the Kensington Road'.¹⁰³ The Commission refused the claim. In 1833, Mr. Knight complained about the high rate charged for reinstating the road after opening to lay pipes. The Commission informed him that the standard rate of 1/9 per square yard was charged in all cases, and 'as no profit had accrued to the Commission from the adoption of that rate it could not be reduced'.¹⁰⁴ Mr. Knight responded a month later 'urging further objections to the cost'.¹⁰⁵

The West Middlesex Water Company, however, sought the Commission's support when it wanted to stop the London Gas Company from laying pipes at Knightsbridge, as it felt those pipes were too close to their water pipes, thus contravening the Kensington Paving Act. The Commission referred the matter to their Solicitor for review.¹⁰⁶

With the growing demand for water, water companies were expanding and laying more pipes, replacing the old wooden one with iron. The Chelsea Water Works Company¹⁰⁷ and the Grand Junction Water Works Company,¹⁰⁸ seeking

support for bills they planned to present to Parliament, first sent their plans to the Commission. In both cases, the Commission felt the plans would interfere with the roads too much and decided to oppose both bills. A compromise was reached when clauses protecting the roads were inserted into both bills.¹⁰⁹

Footpaths & Paving

By the late eighteenth century many of London's new streets were paved, but there were still many that were little more than tracks. Trying to improve the situation, some householders or shopkeepers placed round stones, or cobbles, outside front doors. Walking the streets without becoming bemired or injured was almost impossible. Dr. Johnson remarked there were two types of people in London: those who gave the wall and those who took it. Despite the recognised rule of keeping to the right, many refused to give way. Although some protection was afforded by the rows of posts marking out the footways from the carriageways, pedestrians were often forced out into the road. Chairmen carrying sedan chairs, were meant to keep to the middle of the road; however, they often went onto the footpaths pushing pedestrians out of the way. Sir Richard Steel witting in *The Tatler* put forward the pedestrian's complaint,

In spite of all order, justice, and decorum, we the greater number of the queen's loyal subjects, for no reason in the world that because we want money, do not share alike in the division of her majesty's high road. The horses and slaves of the rich take up the whole street; while we peripatetics are very glad to watch an opportunity to whisk across a passage, very thankful that we are not run over for interrupting the machine, that carries in it a person neither more handsome, wise, or valiant than the meanest of us. For this reason, were I to propose a tax, it should certainly be upon coaches and chairs: for no man living can assign a reason why one man should have half a street to carry him at his ease, and perhaps only in pursuit of pleasures, when as good a man as himself wants room for his own person to pass upon the most necessary and urgent occasion

It is to me most miraculous, so unreasonable an usurpation as this I am speaking of, should so long have been tolerated. We hang a poor fellow for taking any trifle from us on the road, and bear with the rich for robbing us of the road itself.¹¹⁰

Footpaths, for the MRC were 'a frequent subject of complaint'. James McAdam, the General Surveyor, summed up the Commission's position in

the 5th Annual Report to Parliament in 1831, 'The management of these paths is in a most anomalous condition, belonging in some districts, to the parishes through which they run, and in others to the Commission; and while the expense of keeping them in good repair would be very considerable there is no provision made for their charge in any Act of Parliament. This subject appears to me highly worthy of the consideration of the Commissioners'.¹¹¹

Just prior to the report's submission to Parliament, the Commission had been brought to Court for the poor condition of some footpaths under its control; this may have been a partial cause of McAdam's dissatisfaction. In the minutes, the Solicitor reported to the Commission 'presentments had been made by the Grand Jury in the Court of King's Bench on their own view against the Commission for not repairing the footway in Church Lane in Kensington, the High Road and the Uxbridge Road'.¹¹² The Commission was therefore, duty bound to repair these footpaths.

The condition of the footpaths along the Kensington Road generated a lot of correspondence. Just a month after the Commission received notice of the presentment, a Mr. Griffiths also complained about the poor state of the footpath.¹¹³ Later, that same year, the Superintendent of Police, I. Bishop, even wrote about the 'broken state of the road pavement in Church Lane, Chelsea'.¹¹⁴ Although the Commission referred the matter to McAdam, not much was apparently done, as just eight months later in August 1832, Lord Holland and other inhabitants of Kensington Parish submitted their complaint about the footways. The Commission requested McAdam to immediately look into the situation.

Fortunately, two of the parishes along the road, the joint vestries of St. Marylebone and St. Johns, initiated plans for paving footways; and informed the Commission of its intention to pave part of Knightsbridge.¹¹⁵

The Commission felt it should not bear the complete cost of the repairing and paving of footpaths, and generally sought to share the cost with the various parishes. As the first footway noted in the minutes, the footway on the City Road must have been in bad repair. Although the smallest (just over a mile in length) of the roads administered by the Commission, the City Road was the cause of much correspondence. In 1830, McAdam reported to the Commission on the cost of repairing it. His estimate: £2498.10.03 for paving the footpath to a depth of three inches; and £56.08.00 annually for upkeep on the unpaved section. The Commission was willing to give £300 to the parishes concerned,

upon condition that the roads be paved and kept in repair by those parishes.¹¹⁶ No responses were received until, more than a year later, Jason Wall, on behalf of St. Lukes Parish, requested a contribution towards 'laying a foot pavement' on the City Road. The Commission—in apparent contradiction of its earlier decision—stated they were not 'empowered to make contributions'.¹¹⁷

An interesting reference was made a month later in a letter from a James Wall, (who may have been a relative of Jason Wall, although Wall is a common name) asking permission to lay a paved footway in the City Road. He also requested a contribution towards the cost; the Commission granted permission but gave no contribution.

Three months after his initial application, Jason Wall tried again and was more successful. The Commission was willing to give £400 'provided the Parishes of St. Lukes and St. Leonards Shoreditch will lend their aid to the same, in such manner as shall be approved by three members of this Board; Mr. Hobson, Jones and Carpenter'.¹¹⁸

After three more months, another reference to the City Road occurred in response to a letter from Mr. Charles Davis. The Commission replied by allocating £300 to McAdam. It was likely part of the £400 initially earmarked for the road; therefore, all the parishes must have fulfilled their obligation. As was common practice with the Commission, McAdam was sent to check the quality of the work before releasing the Commission's contribution.

The Commission did receive one further request in regard to the City Road. William Shirt asked for 60 yards of footpath to be paved on Baldwin Street, a street which ran off the main City Road. The Commission replied it had recently spent a lot on footpaths in that road but would consider the matter.¹¹⁹

As McAdam stated in the 5th Annual Report, responsibility for the repair and maintenance of footways was unclear, belonging with the parishes in some cases and with the Commission in others. Improvements, however, were made in one other way as well: by the residents themselves. Improvement Commissions (similar to those for lighting, watching and watering) could be formed to pave footpaths.

Generally, these Improvement Commissions were formed due to local pressure. Although very popular, they were not always as successful as those who campaigned for them hoped. St. Pancras, for instance, had sixteen Paving Boards acting under twenty-nine Acts of Parliament; the bad paving in the parish was notorious.¹²⁰ The Commission had dealings with a number of these

groups. It received £539.3.3 from the Paving Commission of St. Georges, Hanover Sq. in 1832.¹²¹ The Commission probably carried out the work on behalf of the paving commission. The Hamlet of Hammersmith asked the Commission to forgo £21 due for statute duty, as it had ‘heavy expense incurred for repairing footpaths’.¹²² In 1834, Thomas Hackman, on behalf of the residents of the Parish of Fulham, asked for a contribution to help pave the town; he was granted £50 on condition McAdam check the work.¹²³ In 1836, the Commission receive a request from George Lambert and 23 other inhabitants residing near the beginning of the Uxbridge Road for a contribution to improve the footpath there. The Commission’s initially response was that it had already spent a lot of money on that road but, eventually contributed £25 to the total cost of £150.¹²⁴

The Commission appeared happy to work with the parishes or improvement commissions, thereby sharing the cost, however, it appeared unwilling to give up total control. After all, any changes to the footpath could impact the road. A case in point: The Commission refused permission when the inhabitants of Kentish Town wanted to form a foot pavement in front of their houses, which would mean narrowing the road.¹²⁵ Also, when Henry Stratton, of the Commission for Paving the Parish of Bethnal Green, informed the Commission the parish would stop paying its annual £35, the matter was referred to the solicitor.¹²⁶

In the area of road maintenance, the Commission was rarely involved with individuals. However, with footpaths some individuals wrote directly to the Commission seeking permission to improve the road they lived on. A number of householders were obviously neither willing to wait until the Commission got around to improving their footpath nor for their neighbours to organise an improvement commission. Of course, being able to step out of one’s house onto a paved footway was a great convenience to any householder.

Lord Morley was one of the first individuals to propose paving the footpath outside his house in Kensington, at his own expense.¹²⁷ The Commission agreed, as it did when Lt. Col. Phillot requested permission to repair the footpath outside his house at Kensington Gore at his own expense. This time, however, it granted permission only on condition that McAdam check the work done.¹²⁸

Individual Commissioners also made improvements. Col. Clitherow noted the narrowness of Boston Lane, stating that if two wagons go across any ‘person

on the path is in danger'.¹²⁹ Since he owned the adjoining land, he suggested the Commission take as much as was necessary to make the footpath safe, as long as the Commission bore the cost, which it agreed to do.

Encroachments

Another area of concern for the Commission: the number of encroachments made upon the footways and sides of the road. The Commission's duty was to make the pathways as convenient for use as possible; it had hoped to achieve this by encouraging paving and the setting of boundaries. But it also had to remove any obstructions. Encroachments were often made upon the sides of the road by people who believed the land belonged to them or by those who hoped it would not be noticed. However, the sub-surveyors of the roads often reported these encroachments, as did members of the public who were inconvenienced by them. Often the encroachment was a small matter, a fence or wall that could easily be removed but it could also be a building the Commission could insist be demolished.

The first encroachment the Commission noted was by Mr. Elmore, who had dug a ditch outside his house. The Commission informed him about his encroachment, but he stated the land was his. After proving the land belonged to the MRC, the Commission requested McAdam to supervise the filling in of the ditch. It called on Elmore to pay the cost. Although Elmore complied with the Commission's decision, his neighbours also had problems with him. Mr. Reynolds wrote to the Commission about a wall built on the public road and his property by Elmore. Unfortunately, the Commission was unable to help him, as the wall was found not to be on the public road.

Usually a letter from the Commission's solicitor stating that an encroachment had been noted with a request to take down the obstruction was sufficient. However, in some cases, the Commission took legal action against the offenders, particularly if buildings or extensions were in the process of being erected or newly built. It inherited an ongoing prosecution against David Napier from the Trustees of the Marylebone Road. Having heard the facts, it suspended the prosecution, trusting that 'Mr. Napier will discontinue his present building, but if he persevere the Board deem the building so indisputably a nuisance that in justice to the Public the prosecution should be continued'.¹³⁰

In 1829, the solicitor served notice to John Dearle, a builder that he had to remove the houses he had been erecting.¹³¹ In 1833, it received an application from John Smith to stay the proceedings against him as for removal of a projection in the City Road.¹³² Although the Commission considered his petition it decided to continue the case. Smith, however, chose to ignore the verdict; the solicitor ordering him three times to remove the nuisance, and it was only with the threat of taking further legal action that Smith finally pulled down the building.

In the first year of the Commission, the number of encroachments on the New Road was greater than on any other road. The Commission noted that the projection of the houses on that road caused considerable inconvenience. Two further encroachments were noted, and a committee was established to review the situation and send out letters about the matter. The Commission took legal action, deciding to enforce the verdict against shop holders, Mr. Solomon Levy and Mr. Johnson. The solicitor later informed the Commission that Levy had conformed to the judgement of the court by removing the whole of the building except the extended wall. Levy petitioned the Commission to allow him to re-open his shop after the changes had been made. It replied it had 'no power to accede to Mr. Levy's request'.¹³³

Shop holders, taking more space to show off their wares, were often the worst offenders. In 1828, due to the number of encroachments at Angel Place, Pentonville, the Commission had to inform the shop holders to 'set back the fronts of their several building to the original line'.¹³⁴ Although it received petitions from them, the Commission refused to change its decision. One of the shop holders later complained about his neighbour's twelve-foot awning, which 'greatly annoyed him in his business'.¹³⁵ The Commission responded, it had no power to prevent the erection of the awning.

By the early 1830s, the majority of complaints were about encroachments on the City Road. As mentioned earlier, this particular road, although the shortest of the roads administered by the MRC, generated a disproportional number of problems. In 1830, Mr. Bleay, the sub-surveyor for the City Road, reported 'certain buildings being erected in front of houses'.¹³⁶ Later in that year, Mr. Churchill complained about the open portico that his neighbour, Mr. Taylor, had erected, and the matter was referred to the solicitor. Taylor, in response, petitioned the Commission to be allowed to keep the portico. It agreed, as long as there was no further encroachment. Churchill, no doubt wondering why the

portico had not been removed, wrote again to the Commission. He was informed of its decision, and advised that if he wished to take the matter further, that the law was open to him.

Between 1832–1833 approximately five further encroachments on the City Road were dealt with and after this time there were no further incidents of encroachments on any of the MRC roads.

Roads Over Bridges

The maintenance of the roads over bridges was one of the first duties the MRC gave up. In 1780, the responsibility for bridges was laid directly with the County, 'If a man build a bridge, and it becomes useful to the Country in general', said the Court, 'the County shall repair it'.¹³⁷ Up until that time, the responsibility had been unclear, at times resting with the actual bridge builder, a turnpike trust, the parish, a bridge authority or the county.

According to the Webbs, after this ruling, the Turnpike Trusts 'shifted shamelessly the charge of those (bridges) which they themselves constructed to reap their tolls'.¹³⁸ The MRC was indeed quick to give up the duty of repairing the bridges. It informed the Clerk of the Peace for the County of Middlesex the Commission's intention of 'relinquishing the charge of maintaining the roads over county bridges after 1st June next'.¹³⁹ The response was quick, Mr. E. Allen informed the Commission that the magistrates could not consent to the Commission giving up this duty. It replied by referring the matter to the solicitor.¹⁴⁰ The county magistrates did not give up so easily; in August 1828, a deputation of county magistrates requested a conference about the situation. At this time, Mr. Knight of the Bridge Co. also requested a meeting. He was, no doubt, concerned about added costs, as the Hammersmith Bridge had only been opened in 1827.

Despite meeting with the magistrates, no change was made to the Commission's decision, which it formally restated, 'Repairs of all county bridges be discontinued for the future and that posts be erected at each side of all such bridges denoting the Bridges boundaries'.¹⁴¹

After having succeeded in giving up the responsibility, the Commission accepted it back one year later. It agreed to a 'Resolution for the Magistrates of the Court of Middlesex offering £300 per year to the Commission to main-

tain the roads over bridges'.¹⁴² The minutes offer no information as to why the Commission did not initially negotiate with the County for an annual fee. It is, however, likely the County found the responsibility for road repair too great, and—lacking expertise—found it expedient to pay the Commission to perform this duty.

Although the County had agreed to pay the Commission to take the responsibility for the roads over bridges, payment became a problem. In 1833, the solicitor reported a cost of £34.10.2 for an indictment against the County of Middlesex regarding the repair of roads over bridges.¹⁴³

Sewers

As mentioned earlier, rapid population growth in the early nineteenth century put huge strains on public services. London had a piecemeal system of sewers, which dated to the sixteenth century, and it had not kept up with growing demand. As late as 1844, there was no underground drainage in Cheapside. Generally, sewage collected in cesspools and was collected by 'night-soil' collectors. Yet, even this old system of night-soil collection was breaking down under the growing demand. The ineffective and corrupt Commissioners of Sewers did little to protect or improve the system. As Inwood comments,

When Commissioners and their officials were asked why large parts of London were without main sewers, but relied on cesspools and open ditches to take their household waste, they generally claimed that their task was only to maintain existing sewers and drain off surface water. 'Do you consider it your duty to alter a sewer, or carry up a sewer, with reference to the health of the inhabitants?—Certainly not,' was a fairly typical exchange.¹⁴⁴

As the installation of water closets and cisterns became more popular, householders took it upon themselves to lay sewers. This trend can be seen clearly in the MRC's minutes. To break the road, the MRC had to give permission, and any work carried out had to be verified to be of a satisfactory standard by McAdam. The cost of reinstating the road was set at the rate of 1/9 per square yard. In the first few years of the Commission, several such requests were made. The Commission reviewed each one and generally granted permission.

Quite a few references to people who had gone ahead with the work without seeking permission were made. The Commission commented most sternly

about a Mr. Marriott 'having commenced operation before he make his said application and that such proceedings were quite unjustifiable and will not be again overlooked'.¹⁴⁵ It also took a strong line with the Commission for Sewers for Tower Hamlets which also broke up the road to lay sewers, referring the case to the solicitor. It is likely no legal action was taken as Tower Hamlets' Commissioner responded that, in future, he would 'inform the Commission if they deem it necessary to open the road'.¹⁴⁶ Generally, once the offence had been acknowledged, the Commission would remit the fine if the road was reinstated to McAdam's satisfaction and the offender paid the usual fee for making the road good.

Some however, refused to pay for breaking up the road, and the solicitor was assigned to enforce payment of a fine. There must have been more defaulters than usual in 1829, as the following list of names and amounts was noted in the minutes:

£34.17.1	East London Water Works Co.
£8.6.8.	W. Robinson
£12.4.0	given up by the Commission of Sewers of Westminster for roads and sewers in 1825.
£15.0.0	against Mr. Norton
£18.0.0	against Mr. Casterton
£35.4.0	against Col. Greville Howard as he claimed. ¹⁴⁷

Although it was not the Commission's responsibility to promote the building of sewers, it did contribute on three separate occasions to their installation when it was deemed beneficial to the road. Two individuals, James Bonnin and John Simpkins, asked for contributions. Bonnin requested compensation for the benefit offered to the Fulham Road from the sewer built at his expense at Brompton; the Commission granted him £100.¹⁴⁸ Simpkins, having built a 350ft. sewer at Notting Hill, asked for £140 towards the expense. Having judged it beneficial for the road, the Commission gave him £100.¹⁴⁹ Again in the Fulham Road, Mr. J. Houseman on behalf of the Commission for Sewers for Westminster, asked for a contribution to a planned sewer of 1,200 ft. According to McAdam, it would be 'of much advantage'¹⁵⁰ so a rather modest contribution of £50 was given.



Tottenham Court Turnpike

Gas

The Commission received much of its correspondence regarding gas from the companies providing gas lighting along the roads (see *Lighting & Watching*). Similar to water and sewers, the laying of gas pipes to provide these utilities directly impacted the roads; consequently, gas companies had to seek permission from the Commission to open the roads, and pay the standard fee of 1/9 per square yard to reinstate them. The level of the fee prompted two gas companies to complain. In 1828, Alex Henry, on behalf of the Imperial Gas Co., requested the rate be lowered as it had a considerable number of pipes to lay on the New Road. The Commission responded that, the amount charged was the standard rate, but it would consider the situation if the company submitted the extent of their plans.¹⁵¹ Two years later, the Brentford Gas Company also asked for a deduction in the rate charged, but was refused. It was, however, more successful in 1836, when it requested a deduction in the rate after opening the footpath

to lay mains at Twickenham. The Commission stated the total fee would be £240.14.3; the £191.3.9 for opening the footpath would be reduced to £150.¹⁵²

Two gas companies sought to involve the Commission in their dispute. The London Gas Co. requested permission to open the road from Knightsbridge to Kensington to lay gas pipes. The Commission acquiesced with the usual conditions. They then received a letter from Alexander Henry of the Imperial Gas Co., 'that the Commission will not permit the London Gas Co. to open the roads to lay their mains for certain reasons alleged. No detail was noted about the 'reasons alleged. The Commission responded that it 'cannot consent to refuse the application from the London Gas Co. or to interfere with the competition of rival companies'.¹⁵³ The West Middlesex Water Co. then entered the fray, asking the Commission to try to prevent the laying of the pipes as it considered them too close to their water pipes. The Commission stated that would be in contravention of the Kensington Paving Act, referring the matter to the solicitor.¹⁵⁴

The work must have gone ahead, as some time later, the Commission referred to £1,028 owed to it for work done by the London Gas Co. Unfortunately, it had trouble collecting; according to the minutes, the Commission asked for payment many times but received no answer. They referred the matter to the solicitor.¹⁵⁵ A few months later it received a reply: The London Gas Co asked for a reduction in the standard fee for opening the roads and to allow the amount to be settled by accruing rents for the gas lights. The Commission directed the solicitor to close the accounts.¹⁵⁶

Railways

The establishment of a national railway network was one of the key factors in the demise of the turnpike trusts. Trains could take people and freight to their destination faster, cheaper and more comfortably; moreover, much of the money that had been invested in turnpike trusts was now poured into the 'railway mania' which marked this period of the Victorian era.

The first passenger train was not in London but in the north of England in 1825. It was not until 1836, that London had its first passenger train, the London to Greenwich line. However, by the 1850s, the framework of a national system had been very quickly built.

The early development of the train system saw a pattern of individual, isolated lines with no links between them. Bills to permit a railway line were submitted to Parliament on a case-by-case basis, much as the turnpike system, itself, had started. The promoters of the London to Birmingham Bill were the first to contact the Commission. Mr. Richard Cread, on behalf of the company, sent plans of the proposed route in March 1832. The Commission responded by requesting more detailed plans and information on how the railway would effect the several roads of the MRC that the route would cross, and asked that the engineer attend the next meeting to explain the plans. At that meeting, a deputation from the company attended, but the solicitor noted in their plans that there were, 'various provisions interfering with the roads under the charge of the Commission'.¹⁵⁷ The Commission decided to watch the progress of the bill. The solicitor and the engineer of the railway company attended a further meeting in March 1834, and agreed to inform the Commission on any deviation from the stated plan. The Commission agreed that, as long as there were clauses to protect the roads, it would not oppose the bill.

The MRC followed this pattern of meetings and consultation with the three other railway companies it had dealings with. With two of these; the London to Windsor Railway Company, and the Birmingham, Bristol and Thames Junction Railway Company, the consultation was without incident. As the companies accepting clauses to protect the roads, the Commission did not oppose the passage of their Bills through Parliament. Dealings with the Great Western Railway Company, however, were another matter.

The Great Western Railway (GWR) was one of the country's major lines. Its engineer, Marc Isambard Brunel, was one of the greatest Victorians of the era, having solved the historic problem of underwater tunnelling. The terminal, Paddington Station was—and is still—considered a masterpiece of Victorian architecture. Initially, in January 1834, the GWR Company submitted its plan to the Commission; however, the plans were altered a few months later. Instead of terminating at Vauxhall Bridge it wanted it to be the Hoop and Toy Public House at Old Brompton. The view of the Commission was that such a measure would be detrimental to the public and it established a committee 'with the purpose of protecting the Public'.¹⁵⁸

In July, the solicitor reported to the Commission that the GWR Bill had passed the Committee stage in Parliament, and although certain clauses for the protection of MRC roads had been included, several others had been rejected.

The Commission's rather strong response was 'that if this bill pass the House of Commons the Solicitor cause a petition to be presented against it in the House of Lords and oppose it by Counsel, and by every other means to arrest its progress'.¹⁵⁹ This it did, and in December, the Solicitor submitted a bill in December for £400 for opposing the GWR Bill.

Further alterations to the plans were submitted to the Commission. In January 1834, the GWR requested the Commission consent to the railway going over the Uxbridge road. It replied that, as it was a 'very inconvenient manner in which the railway is proposed to cross the road, the Board dissent therefore'.¹⁶⁰ It further stipulated that any work affecting the road had to be carried out by MRC officers at the expense of the GWR. Although the GWR did alter the plan, McAdam 'deemed it to be perfectly inadmissible'.¹⁶¹ No doubt, in an effort to change the Commission's decision, Brunel, himself, attended the Board, and brought with him a model of the GWR that would cross the road at Hanwell. The Commission, accepted the proposal with one proviso; it considered 'it requisite for the safety of the public that an opening should be made in the lateral walls to enable travellers to see each other when passing the roads where they cross'.¹⁶² Brunel accepted the proviso.

Construction on the line went ahead; however a year later in November 1836, the issue of the terminus again became a problem. The GWR Company's plan, to build the terminus at Paddington necessitated, it said, the raising of the Harrow road. The Commission decided to hear from all parties affected before giving consent. It received a petition from Mr. Penny and other inhabitants of Westbourne Grove and Pickering Terrace, who requested the Commission 'to withhold their consent to the proposal'.¹⁶³ The Commission informed them of its decision to consider all aspects before giving any consent.

By this time, the Commission was receiving so many requests from proposed railway companies that it resolved,

That before the Board can entertain any application for their assent to railway bills an undertaking be required on the part of the railway company to pay such reasonable charges as may be incurred in making the required surveys for enabling the Board to judge as to the Expediency of assenting to the proposed measure and what protection it may be necessary to give to the roads; and the railway company must also engage to any such law charges as may be necessary in preparing and agreeing upon Clauses to be inserted in the Bills for securing proper protection to the Public Roads under the charge of the Commission.¹⁶⁴

Copies were sent to all parties concerned.

The growing number of requests the MRC received from railway companies was noted in the Commissions 10th Annual Report to Parliament. The railways offered a more comfortable and cheaper alternative to coaches, which eventually were unable to compete against them. The resultant decline in the number of coaches also meant a decrease in the toll revenues and foreshadowed the end of the turnpike trusts.

Appendix 1

List of Commissioners as named in the Metropolis Roads Commission Act (7Geo.IV c.142 1826)

Lord Lowther, Lord Viscount Duncannon, Lord Viscount Belgrave, Sir Thomas Baring Baronet, Sir John Sebright Baronet, Sir Henry Parnell Baronet, Nicholson Calvet Esquire, James Brogden Esquire, Davies Gilbert Esquire, Col. Thomas Wood, William Heygate Esquire, George Holme Sumner Esquire, John Maberly Esquire, John Hume Esquire, Frankland Lewis Esquire, John Wilson Croker Esquire, William Holmes Esquire, John Calcraft Esquire, Sampson Hanbury Esquire, William Hobson Esquire, John Leach Panter Esquire, Robert Ashton Esquire, Daniel Mildred Esquire junior, Sir Thomas Thompson, Mark Beaufoy Esquire, Capt. James Deans, Richard Lambert Jones Esquire, John Carrick Esquire, Edmund Freherne Esquire, Richard Henry Cox Esquire, John Joseph Austin Esquire, Archibald Campbell Esquire, William Day Esquire, John Harrison of Eaton Place Esquire, Richard Carpenter Esquire, Alexander Milne Esquire.

Appendix 2

Tenders for watering the roads 1828

St. Pancras	H. Thornington	£948
Camden	"	£120
Marylebone	Ino. Drake	£195
City	William Lane	£98
Old Street	Thomas Chabot	£93.17.0
Hackney	Francis Rumsey	£442
Brentworth	Joseph Jessop	£490
Isleworth	Charles Eley	£537.6.0
Stamford	Stephen Reed	£686.11.0
Lea bridge	Samuel Palmer	£189.1.0
Uxbridge	William Nicholls	£208.19.0
Acton	"	"
Hayes	Thomas Kitchen	£218.18.0
Hillingdon	Giles Wain	£179.2.0
Hamwell	William Humphreys	£238.16.0

NOTES

- ¹ Albert, William *The Turnpike Road System in England 1663-1840* (Cambridge University Press 1972) p. 8
- ² Webb, Sidney & Beatrice *The Story of the King's Highway* (Frank Cass and Co. Ltd. 1963) p. 7
- ³ Hindle, Brian Paul *Medieval Roads* (Shire Publications Ltd. 1982) p. 8
- ⁴ *Ibid.* p. 10
- ⁵ 2&3 Philip & Mary Cap. 5.
- ⁶ Webbs, p. 16
- ⁷ Searle, Mark *Turnpikes & Toll-Bars* Vol. I (Hutchinson & Co. 1930) p. 86
- ⁸ Taylor, Christopher *Roads and Tracks of Britain* (Orion Books Ltd. 1994) p. 154

- 9 Ibid. p. 155
- 10 Ibid. p. 122
- 11 Albert, p. 28
- 12 Webbs, p. 124
- 13 The spelling has varied depending on the source. This spelling is the one used in the minute books of the MRC.
- 14 Webbs, p. 119
- 15 Ibid. p. 142
- 16 Albert, p. 43
- 17 Porter, Roy *London: A Social History* (Penguin Books 1994) p. 131
- 18 Searle, p. 138
- 19 Webbs, p. 175
- 20 Ibid. p. 181
- 21 MRC 51 First Report of the Metropolis Roads Commission April 9th 1827 p. 6
- 22 Searle, p. 269
- 23 Webbs, p. 178
- 24 Albert, p. 67
- 25 Ibid. p. 67
- 26 Ibid. p. 69
- 27 Ibid. p. 61
- 28 Searle, p. 277
- 29 Lee, Sidney (ed.) *Dictionary of National Biography* (Smith Elder & Co., London 1904) p. 224
- 30 Webbs, p. 190
- 31 Albert, p. 61
- 32 Ibid. p. 57
- 33 MRC 2 24.10.1826 p. 12
- 34 Ibid. p. 11
- 35 MRC 2 30/3/1827 p. 78
- 36 MRC 4 30/1/1835 p.119
- 37 MRC 2 30/8/1827 p. 152
- 38 Ibid. 10/4/1829 p. 373
- 39 MRC 3 6/1/1832 p. 292
- 40 Ibid. 6/4/1832 p. 324
- 41 Ibid. 6/1/1832 p. 291
- 42 Ibid. 12/5/1833 p. 427
- 43 MRC 2 12/1/1827 p. 15
- 44 Ibid. 4/1/1828 p. 210
- 45 Ibid. 3/2/1832 p. 297
- 46 MRC 3 15/11/1833 p. 24
- 47 MRC 1 8/12/1826 p. 28
- 48 MRC 2 26/1/1827 p. 28

- 49 Ibid. 14/3/1828 p. 241
- 50 Ibid. 28/3/1828 p. 244
- 51 Ibid. 18/12/1829 p. 66
- 52 Porter, p. 152
- 53 Ibid. p. 157
- 54 Inwood, p. 360
- 55 Sheppard, p. 214
- 56 Scott-Giles, C. W. *The Road Goes On* (The Epworth Press 1948) p. 140
- 57 Inwood, p. 375
- 58 MRC 2 29/5/1829 p. 388
- 59 MRC 51 3rd Annual Report to Parliament submitted 29th April 1829
- 60 MRC 2 5/1/1827 p. 6
- 61 Ibid. 12/1/1827 p. 15
- 62 Ibid. 30/8/1827 p. 154
- 63 MRC 3 17/6.1831 p. 238
- 64 Ibid. 15/3/1833 p. 407
- 65 MRC 52 First Report of the Metropolis Turnpike Roads. p. 17
- 66 MRC 2 14/9/1827 p. 160
- 67 MRC 3 11/9/1829 p. 24
- 68 Ibid. 10//9/1830 p. 163
- 69 Ibid. 3/8/1829 p. 17
- 70 Ibid. 11/4/1829 p. 24
- 71 Ibid. 5/11/1830 p. 174
- 72 MRC 2 15/5/1829 p. 383
- 73 MRC 3 9/10/1829 p. 34
- 74 Ibid. 26/3/1830 p.114
- 75 Ibid. 26/8/1831 p. 254
- 76 MRC 4 14/2/1834 p. 43
- 77 Ibid. 23/5/1834 p. 63
- 78 Ibid. 23/9/1836 p. 256
- 79 Picard, Liza *Victorian London* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2005) p. 29
- 80 MRC 2 30/3/1827 p. 75
- 81 Ibid. 9/3/1827 p. 58
- 82 Ibid. 29/2/1828 p. 235
- 83 Inwood. p. 280
- 84 Hibbert, Christopher *London: The Biography of a City* (Penguin Books 1977) p. 189
- 85 MRC 2 6/8/1827 p. 140.
- 86 Ibid. 3/8/1832 p. 350
- 87 Searle, p. 221
- 88 Ibid. p. 221
- 89 MRC 3 10/10/1830 p. 166
- 90 Ibid. 6/4/1832 p. 324

- 91 Sheppard, p. 281
- 92 Ibid. p. 280
- 93 MRC 2 6/4/1827 p. 80
- 94 Ibid. 11/5/1827 p. 98
- 95 Ibid. 11/5/1827 p. 98.
- 96 MRC 3 6/7/1832 p. 347
- 97 Ibid. 6/4/1832 p. 322
- 98 Ibid. 30/5/1833 p. 432
- 99 Ibid. 22/3/1833 p. 413
- 100 Ibid. 6/1/1832 p. 290
- 101 Ibid. 3/8/1832 p. 351
- 102 Ibid. 22/3/1833 p. 416
- 103 Ibid. 5/11/1830 p. 171
- 104 Ibid. 19/4/1833 p. 418
- 105 Ibid. 30/5/1833 p. 427
- 106 MRC 4 25/3/1835 p. 135
- 107 Ibid. 30/1/1835 p. 119
- 108 Ibid. 27/2/1835 p. 127
- 109 Ibid. 10/4/1835 p. 140
- 110 Scott-Giles, p. 110
- 111 MRC 51 5th Annual Report submitted to Parliament 15th April 1831
- 112 MRC 3 4/2/1831 p. 209
- 113 Ibid. 4/3/1831 p. 212
- 114 Ibid. 16/12/1831 p. 281
- 115 MRC 4 25/3/1835 p. 130
- 116 MRC 3 26/3/1830 p. 116
- 117 Ibid. 17/6/1831 p. 237
- 118 Ibid. 23/9/1831 p. 259
- 119 MRC 4 11/10/1833 p. 10
- 120 Hibbert, p.186
- 121 MRC 3 6/1/1832 p. 291
- 122 MRC 4 11/10/1833 p. 9
- 123 Ibid. 17/10/1834 p. 87
- 124 Ibid. 22/1/1836 p. 209
- 125 Ibid. 14/11/1834 p. 100
- 126 Ibid. 15/11/1833 p. 20
- 127 MRC 3 5/6/1830 p. 136
- 128 Ibid. 4/2/1831 p. 206
- 129 Ibid. 30/11/1832 p. 383
- 130 MRC 2 9/2/1827 p. 39
- 131 MRC 3 6/11/1829 p. 43
- 132 MRC 3 18/1/1833 p. 396

- 133 MRC 2 28/3/1828 p. 246
134 Ibid. 6/6/1828 p. 273
135 MRC 3 12/6/1829 p. 2
136 Ibid. 22/4/1830 p. 123
137 Webbs, p. 99
138 Ibid. p. 99
139 MRC 2 11/5/1827 p. 100
140 Ibid. 14/3/1828 p. 241
141 Ibid. 10/10/1828 p. 316
142 MRC 3 18/12/1829 p. 67
143 MRC 4 20/12/1833 p. 30
144 Inwood, p. 423
145 MRC 2 25/5/1827 p. 104
146 Ibid. 18/1/1828 p. 217
147 Ibid. 29/5/1829 p. 390
148 MRC 4 30/1/1835 p. 113
149 Ibid. 23/9/1836 p. 254
150 Ibid. 3/6/1836 p. 236
151 MRC 2 11/9/1828 p. 22
152 MRC 4 4/11/1836 p. 267
153 Ibid. 20/6/1834 p. 68
154 Ibid. 25/3/1835 p. 135
155 MRC 4 22/1/1836 p. 209
156 Ibid. 4/3/1836 p. 211
157 MRC 3 16/3/1832 p. 314
158 MRC 4 18/4/1834 p. 57
159 Ibid. 18/7/1834 p. 75
160 Ibid. 30/1/1835 p. 119
161 Ibid. 8/5/1835 p. 145
162 Ibid. 13/11/1835 p. 196
163 Ibid. 9/12/1836 p. 278
164 Ibid. 13/1/1837 p. 287