



Welcome to Issue 1 of this newsletter. It will contain short features on topics that do not easily fit into the main website, highlight interesting points on the website or introduce ideas that may be developed further.

The Hazards of Looking At Old Roads

It is quite surprising how difficult it is to make a detailed study of certain roads and bridges.

There is no trouble of course when it is a hill track but if you want to look at more modern roads and at bridges there are quite substantial hazards.

This photograph of the Old Priory Bridge in Blantyre is a case in question. The bridge itself may have been built by monks from the nearby Priory, who settled there from Jedburgh in the mid-1200's; or perhaps have replaced an early wooden bridge built by them. It is shown on Pont's map of c.1600.

It was in use until the 1920's when it was replaced by the modern road built on a massive embankment under which the river was culverted.



In an effort to get a better photo I tried climbing down a very steep and slippery slope, and of course slipped and started sliding towards what I later saw was a drop of 10 or 15 feet onto the river bed. Apart from pulling a muscle or two, it's interesting to reflect that one could quite easily become stranded in localities that are completely unfrequented. Shades of J G Ballard's novel *The Island* where someone crashes in the middle of a massive intersection of motorways and is unable to make their way out! One or two people have in fact told me of similar experiences and how they could have ended up in difficulties.

So far as roads go, it is not only impossible to stop on some to have a look at the road but even to look at them when driving as there are so many vehicles. Walking would be out of the question and cycling of course would be attendant with the usual difficulties of cars driving past at 60 mph.

This is a pity because you can quite often see interesting tracks off a main road that are near impossible to reach. At best you might find a layby half a mile away and then have a walk along a very busy road. Alternatively, as shown below, you could get a passenger to take the photo although they may not be the best of photographers!



This incidentally is a very nice track that used to be the main road between Edinburgh and Glasgow and is shown on a map of 1630. It may even have had its origins in the route followed by the monks of Newbattle Abbey over to their lands in the Monklands.

Note. Despite what I've said it's clearly possible to get good photos as this one of *Priory Bridge* shows. There is a photo of the Priory as well.

Blantyre Priory. Was there a tunnel under the River Clyde?

Mentioning Blantyre Priory reminds me that there is a tradition of a tunnel under the Clyde between Bothwell Castle and Blantyre Priory. The two face each other on either side of the river, although the Priory was sited on the top of cliffs. There is little to be seen today though there are extensive earthworks. The tunnel, if it existed, would have been ideal for



easy access to the castle particularly in time of conflict which of course was quite frequent.

Anyway the tradition is that local miners perhaps 150 or 200 years ago would cover a sack with tar to act as a diving bell, walk down the tunnel to where it was flooded then use the sack to breathe and come out on the other side. There was said to have been fine masonry visible.

I haven't found anything in print to confirm the tradition but stories about tunnels do seem to crop up from time to time, for example at Abbey St Bathans and the mention of tar covered sacks lends this story some credibility.

Higgin's Neuk

Although everyone knows Kincardine Bridge they may not have realised that it replaced a ferry that dates back some 200 years or more. Known as Higgin's Neuk ferry it was in its day an important crossing over the Forth. Early maps show the ferry and its replacement Kincardine Bridge. Little can be seen at the original site of the ferry but there are good views of both the Kincardine Bridge and the new Clackmannan Bridge.



Based on 1925 and 1914 OS maps. With thanks to Ordnance Survey.

Recent Additions

Notes on Roads from Walter Macfarlane's Geographical Collections

Macfarlane's Geographical Collections' consist of numerous descriptions of parishes and districts in Scotland dating mostly from the early 1700's. They contain many references to roads and bridges (and river ferries) that help reconstruct the highway system at that time.

Among the useful though fairly mundane entries, some stand out, among these is a "great fabrick" in Latheron parish in Caithness with a causeway thought to have been part of the Causeway Myre that led to Thurso, a road said to have been worked on by Cromwell's soldiers. Another made road, the "Causeway Mounth", south of Aberdeen is mentioned, as is Comyn's Road from Blair to Ruthven. There is an old tradition that the southern part of Loch Lomond had once been land with boatmen seeing the roofs of houses under the water and there was a stone with an iron ring at the Hill of Gartmore near Moss Flanders where boats used to be tied up. And then there is a Lesley of Balquhoyne who built a dyke around the top of Bennochie and a long Causeway across a great moss up to the fort "whither he brought such handsome Girls whom he fancied...."

Recommended sites

Travels in Italy by Mariana Stark

This book, presumably for those going on a Grand Tour, is highly entertaining and full of curious information about roads and travel in Italy, Germany and France in the 1790's.

"Rambles on Old Roads" will be produced each month. If any reader wishes to contribute an article or notes on their research these will be very welcome. Send contributions to geraldcummins2@aol.com. Copyright will remain with authors.