

# The Metropolis Road Commission 1826–1872

*Establishment and Operation of the Commission 1826–1836  
(Part 2)*

by

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## **Dealing with Complaints**

As an institution providing a service to the public, one area of business the Commission handled, was complaints. These were received not only from the users of the roads but also from the lessees of the various toll roads. A variety of complaints will be examined in this section: toll exemptions, accidents on the roads, problems with the amount charged as toll, toll collectors and the location of toll bars. Complaints about the condition of the roads and footpaths, water and lighting have been mentioned in the previous section.

## **Accidents and Compensation**

Many who complained to the Commission about accidents they had been involved in, sought compensation. Any situation pertaining to problems with the roads was, as usual, first referred to the General Surveyor. After examine the circumstances, he would report back to the Commission and a final decision would then be made. In most cases no compensation was granted, as the Commission

was not found to be at fault. One such case involved William Bethel, who applied for compensation in 1829, when his coach had been overturned in a trench in Islington.<sup>1</sup> And, another involved Joseph Nicolls whose horse drowned in 1833 while unloading a barge of materials for use on the roads.<sup>2</sup> The Commission concluded it was not liable in either situation.

In some cases, other companies were clearly responsible. In 1833, William South sought compensation from the MRC for injury to his horse and harness; it had fallen into a hole in the road, dug by the Gas Company.<sup>3</sup> He was referred to that company for redress. And in 1836, Thomas Cowell claimed fifteen shillings for the cost of a lamb that was run over by a water cart. The Commission suggested he contact the water contractor for that road.<sup>4</sup>

A more questionable refusal for compensation occurred in 1830: Mr. Tootell applied for £20 in compensation 'on behalf of a poor boy who lost the sight of one eye when breaking stones on the Kilburn Road eighteen months ago.'<sup>5</sup> Although it was clear the boy was working on the road, the Commission refused the petition. The boy may have been one of the many pauper labourers that were common in the nineteenth century. Indeed, James Loudon Mc Adam advocated the use of pauper labourers. In 1810, he claimed a 'woman *sitting* will break more limestone for a road than two strong labourers on their feet with long hammers in a given time.'<sup>6</sup>

In 1835, Mr. Moody applied for compensation for an accident that occurred to his coach horses and harness, due to an opening in the road that had been left unwatched.<sup>7</sup> The Commission suggested he should apply to Mr Aslot (who was probably either a contractor, providing material for the repair of the roads or a contractor who did road repairs) for redress. In 1834, a Mr. Aslot had complained of the toll that was demanded of him for materials to be used on the road.<sup>8</sup> After writing to the Commission about the circumstances of the accident, it was revealed he didn't have permission from the Commission to open the road. The solicitor duly informed him that he would be penalized for the omission.<sup>9</sup> Mr. Aslot, in reply, pleaded ignorance of the necessity of obtaining permission and the Commission let him off with a warning.<sup>10</sup>

A similar situation occurred with the 'Rocket Portsmouth Coach'. It overturned at Brompton due to an open sewer that had been left unlighted and unwatched. Enquiry was made of the road's surveyor and he informed the Commission that no notice had been given to him about the road opening. A Mr. Farlan was found to be responsible for the hole and he was informed he was liable for the damage done to the coach. He also would be penalized for failing to

inform the Commission of his intention to open the road.<sup>11</sup> As previously mentioned in Part 1, many private householders were installing water closets and cisterns in their residences and paying for the laying of pipes themselves. However, they often did not realize the necessity of asking the MRC for permission to open the road. Unlike Mr. Moody's case, the Commission did not forgo the penalty as, at a meeting a month later, it was noted that the accountant had given notice to Mr. Farlan.<sup>12</sup>

A contentious case involved a Mrs. Bevan, who sought compensation for a broken leg. She claimed to have fallen into a hole in the footpath on the Hanwell Road. The Commission, however, found that she had fallen not into a hole, but an open drain, on wasteland by the side of the road. The drain was necessary to carry off excess water on the road. Although the Commission refused to pay compensation,<sup>13</sup> three months later, Mrs. Bevan, still seeking compensation, again wrote to the Commission restating her claim: it was on a footpath not wasteland where her accident had occurred.<sup>14</sup> The General Surveyor was directed to look further into the matter. No further reference is made to the case.

The Commission, of course, was, at times, obliged to pay compensation. John Billings asked the Commission to reconsider the £5 compensation granted to him; he considered the actual amount of loss from the accident to his horse to be £10. After duly considering the circumstances the Commission granted him £7.10.00.<sup>15</sup>

In 1833, Francis Peck claimed compensation for an injury sustained while driving an omnibus over some stones and rubbish left on the Kensington road.<sup>16</sup> As usual, the matter was referred to the General Surveyor. Six months later, the Solicitor reported to the Board that the accident had been caused by some paving stones left by the side of the road; consequently, Mr. Peck had been left crippled for life. The Commission granted him £25 in compensation.<sup>17</sup>

In comparison to the amount granted to Mr. Peck, the rather large amount of £69.17.00 was sought and granted to Joseph Limpus. He claimed his two stage-coach horses broke through a drain on the Hammersmith Road. One was killed and the other rendered useless.<sup>18</sup> The Commission accepted responsibility, and the General Surveyor was directed to settle the matter.

Although the MRC did grant compensation, the Commission examined each case carefully before it conceded responsibility. It would seem that human life was judged to be of less value than that of a horse.

## Problems with the Collection of Tolls

The collecting of tolls created great difficulty for all toll trusts. Problems stemmed from the method of collection and the complex regulations that governed the levying of the tolls. Numerous acts of Parliament contained schedules and rates of tolls that applied to local areas; there was no nationwide system. As mentioned earlier in Part 1, there were many regulations concerning the weight of wheels, the number of draught horses, the weight of wagons and the extra charges that could be incurred. An act had been passed in 1822, to simplify the situation, however, it contained forty-one clauses dealing with tolls and extra charges.<sup>19</sup>

Soon after the MRC had been formed in 1827, it received many complaints from several coach masters; they requested an explanation about the tolls taken every time they passed through Kensington gate. The Commission, therefore decided to send a copy of the regulations to the toll lessee, Mr. Levy and put a copy in the major newspapers so that the matter could be clarified for all concerned.<sup>20</sup>

Later in 1830, Coach Master, Thomas Chandler and others in Kensington requested the Commission to reduce the toll by half. The Commission refused the request.<sup>21</sup>

The MRC, aware of the problem, sought to reorganise the system as one of its earliest priorities. As stated in the First Report to Parliament, the Commissioners,

have had under consideration the variety of the rates of toll, and for the regulations under which they are levied, throughout the several districts; and they are persuaded that many salutary alterations may be made therein, and that in justice to the public, as well as for the sake of an uniformity in system, it would be highly expedient to make one set of regulations apply to all the districts, and that the numerous inconsistencies which at present pervade the toll-tables should be got rid of, and the rates equalized upon principles of equity; not, however wholly overlooking local considerations, and certainly without any view of increasing the aggregate amount of toll; and it is the intention of the Commissioners to carry this improvement into effect an early opportunity.<sup>22</sup>

In the early years of the MRC, the amount of debt that it had inherited from the individual trusts precluded any major improvements. It could ill afford

a decrease in its income from any reduction or abolishment of tolls or gates. Initially, the only improvements it was able to make were the removal of two turnpike gates on the Marylebone road and the elimination of the Sunday foot toll on the Lea Bridge.<sup>23</sup> In subsequent years, further slight improvements were made. In 1828, despite ‘the considerable sacrifice of revenue’, night tolls were abolished. These had been a constant problem, as ‘being levied only within particular hours, and attended with other circumstances liable to doubt and contradiction, were the fruitful source of vexation and dispute.’<sup>24</sup>

The MRC was not able to achieve its goal of reorganization until 1829. A significant number of gates were removed from the central part of London. The fast growth of the metropolis had resulted in what had been roads, becoming streets with turnpike gates. This situation was very unpopular and inconvenient. Although travellers and residents near the gates were happy with their removal, others were not. With no gates, upkeep of the road surface became the responsibility of the parishes. As reported in *The Times*, on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1829, ‘The case as we expected and hinted yesterday; an opposition, a parochial opposition, is springing up against the Metropolis Trust, for the attempt to take down the gates in the precincts of London, and to throw the maintenance of those roads upon the several parishes.’<sup>25</sup> Despite determined opposition by the parishes the bill to abolish the gates was passed.

Apart from removing gates, the MRC also sought to simplify toll fees. The new tolls were to be calculated ‘upon the beast or beast drawing, rather than upon the particular description of carriages, as is at present the case upon several roads.’<sup>26</sup> So that ‘for every horse drawing a wheeled carriage, 3d. for every seven miles of Road made use of should be levied; and for every horse not drawing, 1.1/2d.’<sup>27</sup> The roads were organised into sixteen districts, ‘and one toll, which is the same in each District, carries the passenger from one end of it to the other.’<sup>28</sup>

Despite the efforts of the MRC to standardize and simplify the toll rates, there were still complaints. In 1829, a petition was submitted to the MRC against the new tolls on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Districts, by Abraham Hale and others. The petitioners wanted to pay just once for both districts.<sup>29</sup> No doubt, this would have been more efficient, as the 10<sup>th</sup> District was the City Road, the shortest of the Commission’s roads, being just 1.4 miles in length. It fed into the 9<sup>th</sup> District, the Highgate & Hampstead Road, the second longest at 17.4 miles. The Commission did grant the petition but it did not satisfy Hale, as he and Alexander Hamilton sought further relief, which the Commission refused to grant.<sup>30</sup>

Although, the Commission required each toll lessee to display the rates at each gate and published any changes in *The Times*, misunderstandings still occurred. In 1834, Mr. Hitchman questioned why a toll was taken every time for a cart and horse hired by him to collect firewood. The Commission referred him to the relevant clause in the MRC Act.<sup>31</sup>

One further problem connected to toll collection: the collectors, themselves, who were gatekeepers employed by the toll lessee. They had to weigh wagons, measure the width of their wheels; determine who was either eligible for an exemption or had to pay a fine; and, generally, interpret the many regulations correctly. Although genuine mistakes were made, the general opinion of the time was that the gatekeepers were dishonest and corrupt.

Much of the correspondence received by the MRC complained of mistakes in the tolls collected. Generally, the Commission referred the complainants to the toll lessee as, in 1831, when Mr Gray complained that a toll collector had imposed an extra toll on his hay cart.<sup>32</sup>

In some instances the Commission referred the complainants to the magistrates for redress. As in 1830, when Mr. Montpurit complained that a 'double toll had been demanded and taken from him at the Black Lion Gate, Uxbridge Road for a cart with one horse.'<sup>33</sup> And in 1832, Mr. Elley complained that a second toll was demanded for a second horse.<sup>34</sup>

Mr Whittle complained strongly that 'infamous extortions have been practised at the bars recently erected at Cambridge Heath.'<sup>35</sup> In reply, the Commissioners stated they were 'always ready to protect the public from extortions practised at any of their gates, but as he had made no specific charges against any particular party he be referred to the magistrate for redress.'<sup>36</sup>

The Commission did monitor the lessees to try and ensure they were following the regulations. In 1828, Mr. Hearne complained about an extra toll being taken on stagecoaches at the Kilburn and Edgware Gate. The Solicitor was appointed to investigate his case and other similar cases that had arisen.<sup>37</sup> In 1830, the Commission observed the practice of issuing tickets with different letters on the same day in the same district on the Uxbridge Road. It was decided the lessee 'Mr. Levy be informed the Commission are of the opinion that such practices if continued may led to irregularity in paying the tolls.'<sup>38</sup>

In 1836, a long-term, illegal practice came to light. Two complaints were received, one from Mr. Blackburne and the other from Mr. Soulby, they had been stopped on the City Road and compelled to pay toll where there was

no appearance of a turnpike. The lessee, Mr. Everett was summoned to the Commission and his explanation was, that it has been the practice to take toll there for many years. He stated he would lose £150 per annum if he had to give it up, but he would do so if the Commission so instructed him. The Commission informed him that the inconvenience to passengers was very great, and they had received many complaints and 'that they never contemplated the collection of tolls at that bar, which was so described and not as a gate in the returns to Parliament.'<sup>39</sup>

It was not only gatekeepers who were dishonest, trustees also had to cope with travellers who tried to evade paying the toll. Bars, such as the one mentioned above, were often put across the sides of the roads to try and stop people avoiding the tollgate, but they were often of limited success.

## Exemptions

Besides the many different fees that could be charges for using the road, there were also concessions granted to certain people or groups. Most Parliamentary Acts allowed free passage to the royal family, the military, the Post, churchgoers on Sunday, funerals and carts with agricultural implements not going to market. It is, therefore, surprising that, in 1827, the Superintendent of the Post sent an official notice to the MRC informing the Commission that mail coaches were not required to pay toll on Sundays,<sup>40</sup> as this was a standard exemption. It seems that the gatekeeper on the Kensington Road had been demanding a toll. After consulting with Mr. Freeling, Secretary to the Post Office and the Solicitor General, the Commission acknowledged the exemption and also informed the toll lessee, Mr. Levy.<sup>41</sup>

Many trusts had their own special exemptions. The MRC granted concessions to water carts and contractors hauling materials to be used on the roads (as shown by the complaint of Mr. Aslot discussed above). The Commission received many exemption requests from the public, but generally refused them, as any changes would affect the toll lease. Mr. Tollet petitioned three times, to be relieved from paying a second toll on the lower part of the Uxbridge Road, when he changed his horses for fresh ones. The Commission informed him it was unable to change the conditions under which the toll had been leased and that he should make his request to the lessee.<sup>42</sup>

Mr. Byng, a Commissioner himself, presented the unfortunate case of Mr. Coomes to the Commission. Coomes was 'a horticulturalist' who lived near the Enfield Gate. His grounds were on one side of the gate and his house and shed on the other. Byng requested the Commission 'exempt him from paying tolls on his vegetables taken home from his grounds on Friday to wash and prepare for Saturday market when the toll is again paid.'<sup>43</sup> The Commission agreed to consider the matter but nothing was reported until ten months later. At that time, Mr. Austin stated he had determined that Mr. Coomes' house was three-quarters of a mile from the gate on one side, and his grounds a quarter of a mile on the other side. However, Mrs Coomes had informed him that her husband had given up the intention of making any further applications so that the Commission could consider the matter closed.<sup>44</sup>

Compounding for tolls was also a common practice. It was especially useful for those who used the gates frequently. However, it was often a privilege that could be abused, as it was a power very generally exercised. Inhabitants of a particular parish and even individual toll road trustees, sought to compound the amount they should pay into a low annual rate. The Epping and Ongar Trust had approximately fifty compounders listed in its minutes, paying from 5s.3d to 21s each annually. This allowed them exemption from all tolls on themselves, their horses, their carriages, their families and their servants. The Trustees became aware of the disadvantage of this system and tried to abolish it but were unable to do so, due to the opposition from other Trustees, including, perhaps surprisingly, the treasurer.<sup>45</sup>

Compounding for tolls was not a practice popular with the MRC. In 1829, Messers T & G Sanders requested to compound for new tolls. The Commission refused.<sup>46</sup> They tried again six years later, offering £5 per annum as composition for tolls on their wagons and carts on the Lea Bridge Road. Although the Commission declined their offer,<sup>47</sup> Messers Saunders apparently did not acknowledge it, as a year later they claimed there was an understanding that the Commission would 'afford them relief' from paying the toll.<sup>48</sup>



## Positions of Toll Gates, Bars and Houses

After the MRC was formed in 1827, it issued its first report—just three months after its establishment—acknowledged there were too many turnpike gates in central London.

The districts of Old-street, Mary-le-Bone, and some others, in which gates of this class are placed, were formerly roads in the neighbourhood of the metropolis; but in consequence of the extensive ranges of houses built within these few years in those directions, such roads have become streets, and new form part of the town itself. The Commissioners, therefore, are inclined to be of opinion, that all the gates so situated should be removed, and that these streets, like others in the metropolis, should be upheld and repaired at that charge of the respective parishes.<sup>49</sup>

However, the Commission was only able to remove two gates along the Marylebone Road by 1827, and two more along Oxford Street, the following year. Some members of the public may have been dissatisfied with the lack of progress, as in 1827, Mr. Davis the lessee of the Old Street Road reported that a gate had been ‘taken away by persons unknown.’<sup>50</sup> The Commission had to replace it and requested the General Surveyor to find out, if possible, who had taken it.

The location of tollgates and sidebars generated many complaints not just from the public, but also from the parishes in which they were situated. In 1828, Paddington Parish wanted to send a deputation to the Commission to request the removal of the side bar at Black Lion Lane. The Commission refused permission for the deputation to attend, suggesting they write a letter and informed them that the tolls on the road had been let on the existing conditions, so no alterations could be made.<sup>51</sup> Two months later, the Commission received a letter from the Parish and again replied it was ‘not expedient to remove’<sup>52</sup> the sidebars. This was not a problem the Parish would let rest. It sent a deputation in 1833, seeking the removal of the sidebars, but again met without success.<sup>53</sup>

In 1829, the Commission submitted a plan to Parliament to give up to the parishes certain roads (see Appendix 1) and this resulted in the removal of tollgates ‘from certain Streets of the Metropolis, extending over a space of between eight and nine miles.’<sup>54</sup> In all, fifteen gates, as well as numerous sidebars, were removed. The remaining MRC roads were divided into sixteen districts of about equal length (see Appendix 2) on which were 33 gates, 38 sidebars and 43 tollhouses.<sup>55</sup>

Even after the reorganisation, the Commission continued to receive complaints; they were generally, dealt with by sending a Commissioner and the General Surveyor to view the situation. Frequently, the complainants organised a memorial or petition and often sought to attend a meeting of the Commission to submit it. If an acceptable alternative position for the gate or bar was suggested, rather than just a request for its removal, which would result in a decrease in the revenue from that road, it was usually successful. For example, in 1831, Mr. Weld and thirty-three others complained about the sidebars that had recently been erected on the Uxbridge Road by the lessee, Lewis Levy. They requested the bars be removed to a different position. After Commissioner Ashton had inspected the site, the Commission agreed to consider moving the bars.<sup>56</sup>

A similar case involved the erection of a gate and bar at Mornington Crescent, in 1833, on the Hampstead Road. This led to Lord Southampton and other inhabitants to complain. Mrs. M. Wheeler also sent a letter of complaint, as did Mr. I. Wheeler who complained about the injury to his property and suggested a rearrangement of the gate and bar according to a plan he enclosed. After examining his plan, the Commission agreed it was 'expedient to change their position and adopt Mr. Wheeler's plan.'<sup>57</sup>

Those seeking the removal of a gate, often sought to have a member of the aristocracy involved in their petition, perhaps in the hopes that a lord or earl might carry more weight with the Commission than a mere mister. Often too, the peer's house was affected by the tollgate. The aristocracy owned significant areas of land within London and often maintained houses in the fashionable parts of central London. It is difficult to say if these petitioners influenced the Commission, but it did seem to afford Members of the House of Lords more consideration.

In 1835, a memorial from Lord Cadogan and other inhabitants of the Parish of St. George's, Hanover Square and St. Luke's Parish, Chelsea was sent to the Commission regarding the removal of a gate at Chelsea. The Commission decided that Lord Lowther should 'confer' with Earl Cadogan about the matter.<sup>58</sup> A few months later, Lowther reported on his meeting with the Earl. He stated, he had explained that the Commission was aware of the problem of gates in crowded residential areas, but that as the parishes responsible for the road were not willing to maintain it, there was no alternative but to keep the tollgate.<sup>59</sup> Although the memorial was unsuccessful, it is unlikely Lowther would have gone to the trouble of meeting and explaining the Commission's position, had it not been sponsored by a fellow Lord.

Of course, the Commission did review every request for the removal or relocation of a gate that it received, but it was reluctant to make any changes. Removal meant the lowering of a road's revenue, and as most of the roads had debts this would make it harder to pay them off. Also, as mentioned earlier, parishes were reluctant to take back their traditional legal responsibility as regards the roads. Relocation of a tollgate often only moved the problem. Gates were places of business, noisy and busy, most people did not want one near their residence. Often, it was impossible for the Commission to do anything, and with a few exceptions, the requests were refused.

In the case of the Pine Apple Gate on the Edgware Road, the Commission wanted to help the residents, but was only able to make a slight improvement in the situation. A memorial had been submitted by the inhabitants for the removal of the gate in September 1836.<sup>60</sup> Two months later, the Commission received a letter from the petitioners seeking a personal interview with the Commission to state their case. Commissioner Hume commented, that due to the 'numerous applications' the Board had received about that particular gate, he and the General Surveyor had that morning visited the site and 'he was of the opinion it would be wholly inexpedient to remove it, but he considered that any practicable accommodation should be granted to the petitioners with the view of lessening the inconvenience they complained of.'<sup>61</sup> The improvement was carried out, as just a month later, in December. The Commission noted that the turnpike house had been placed in the centre of the road with a gate on both sides and that a proper footpath would be formed either side of the road.<sup>62</sup>

The location of tollgates and sidebars was not the only source of complaint. A house for the toll collector needed to be positioned alongside most gates. Generally these were located to one side of the gate. In 1828, Commissioners Harrison and Austin reported on their inspection of the location of a tollhouse, prompted by a complaint by Mr. R. W. Painter. They were of the opinion that the tollhouse could be moved three feet further into the road without any inconvenience. This could be done at Mr. Painter's expense and under the direction of the General Surveyor.<sup>63</sup> Mr. Painter apparently did not take up the Commission's proposal. A month later, another letter was received from him, complained of the 'great injury to his property in Albany Street in consequence of the tollhouse being situated in front of his house.'<sup>64</sup> The Commission referred him to its previous offer.

## Toll Collectors

The one area the MRC received the most complaints concerned the behaviour of toll collectors. In a parliamentary committee in 1825, Lowther expressed, what was a common view of the toll collector, 'great complaints have been made of their want of civility to passengers. It is notorious that they are the most uncivil class of his Majesty's subjects.'<sup>65</sup> Not only were they considered to be rude but also dishonest. According to the Webbs, 'The varying rates of charge, the exemptions and compositions, the validity of tickets for return journeys or other gates, and many other complications of the toll made it impossible to devise any effective check on their receipts. It was notorious that they habitually kept back part of each day's collection for themselves.'<sup>66</sup>

The toll collectors' job was a complex one for those who usually had little formal education. They came from a variety of backgrounds. Lewis Levy, one of London's main toll lessees, when asked by Lowther's committee, how he found men for the job replied, 'Generally from recommendations, sometimes from noblemen's and gentlemen's servants, or any person that I think will suit me.'<sup>67</sup> In 1818, the New Cross Trust in Kent appointed two sawyers, a ropemaker, a bookseller, a pursemaker, a tailor and warehouseman and a collector of stamp duties.<sup>68</sup> It was also not uncommon for women to be employed as collectors.

The duties of the toll collector were complex, they had to, 'measure wheels, weigh wagons, determine who was eligible for exemptions and impose fines'<sup>69</sup> and all this on a busy London street. Lewis Levy gave his opinion on toll collectors to Lowther's committee, 'I believe they are more sinned against than sinning; there are very few men that take money from the pockets of the people that are not complained against.'<sup>70</sup>

Despite Levy's claim, contemporary accounts abound with examples of toll collectors' rudeness and dishonesty. The MRC was usually quick to deal with any complaints as Levy himself stated, 'for my own sake and for the commissioners themselves, if they find any man is not civil to the public, they always reserve a power in the lease that they shall be removed.'<sup>71</sup> An example of the MRC's quick response was in reply to a complaint by Mr. William Fry about Thomas Star, a toll collector on the Stamford Road, who demanded a night toll from him before 6 p.m.<sup>72</sup> The Commission sent a letter to the toll lessee to take action. Less than a week later, Fry wrote thanking the Commission for its quick attention. The lessee had suspended Star, but Fry requested he 'be reinstated as he is sensible of

his improper conduct.<sup>73</sup> Another complainant, Mr. William Curtis, was not so generous; he attended a meeting of the Commission along with the two toll collectors who had insulted him, demanding their dismissal.<sup>74</sup> A month later, one of them wrote to the Commission seeking to be reinstated, the Board accepted if the lessee agreed.<sup>75</sup>

There are many examples in the MRC's minutes of 'outrageous conduct' by toll collectors including 'abusive, drunken and insulting behaviour'. One collector, whom the Commission had received complaints, about, was described by the landlord of a public house 'as a natural thief.'<sup>76</sup> Another 'locked up and abandoned'<sup>77</sup> a passenger on a Saturday night. The Superintendent of Police himself wrote, that the collector at the Clapham gate had 'grossly misconducted himself.'<sup>78</sup> The 'outrage committed by the toll collector'<sup>79</sup> at Hampstead was referred directly to the magistrates. In 1836, the Solicitor suggested that cases of toll collectors convicted, by a magistrate, of improper behaviour should be reported to the Commission.<sup>80</sup>

Even when toll collectors did their job there were problems. Mr. Yate Lee complained about 'the great inconvenience to himself and other inhabitants in the neighbourhood of Park Street Gate from the noise used in waking the toll collector out of his sleep during the night.'<sup>81</sup>

Although the public seems to have had a very negative opinion of the toll collectors, seeing them as rude and dishonest, mistakes did happen. As one collector stated when charged with demanding a double toll, he 'did so under a mistake in the hurry of business at that time.'<sup>82</sup> The Commission nevertheless, suspended him from his position.

The toll collectors were held in such low esteem that many abuses were practiced on them. In Searle's collection of contemporary material on turnpikes, there are many instances of the public, not just bilking or cheating the collector, but also of flogging, horsewhipping and even running over him.

The toll collectors did have some supporters. The Commission received a letter from Mr. Couling suggesting, 'the expedience of investing the toll collectors with the power of police officers, with the view of impeding the escape of thieves.'<sup>83</sup> The Commission replied that it was lessees who employed collectors and that the Commission had no reason to believe it would be successful.

The magazine *Punch*, sympathized with one particular toll collector's plight at Chancery Lane,

If it is worth while to keep a horse, it is worth while to feed and take care of him.  
We wish the City Authorities would feel this with regard to their turnpikeman

who is consigned to the unstable accommodation of a high stool immediately under the Chancery Lane lamp-post. Surely, if he is worth planting at all as a picquet or pike-man, he has a right to insist that his post—lamp-post though it be—should be well and sufficiently fortified. Such, however is the excessive shakiness of his situation, that when he darts forth for a toll his stool is frequently shoved by some malicious urchin into the midst of the crash of coal carts, wagons, carriages, vans, buses and barrows; when, upon endeavouring to extricate his seat of office, he finds himself abandoned . . . . We call upon the City authorities either to abolish or protect their toll-keeper; but to set him up as a mere ninepin, at the corner of Fleet Street, —an unprotected skittle to be bowled down half a dozen times a day by the rude hand of ruffianism, for the pastime of the people—is a piece of cruelty that the humanity of the nineteenth century utterly revolts against.<sup>84</sup>

### Other Areas of Complaint

The MRC was considered responsible for obstructions on the road or any hindrance to traffic. Some were clearly the Commission's responsibility, such as the request from Mr. Marshall to remove the 'gravel put upon the Stamford Road to fill a hole (which) had been thrown back into his garden.'<sup>85</sup> Or the complaint concerning the road scraping in High Street Kensington, which had been 'left for many days to accumulate to the annoyance of shopkeepers and passengers.'<sup>86</sup> Even the complaint by Mr. I. I. Luke about the inhabitants of Peel Street, Kensington, that they continue 'the nuisance of conveying their soil into the road instead of the new sewer.'<sup>87</sup> These types of complaints were usually delegated to the General Surveyor to deal with.

In 1836, the General Surveyor himself, Sir James McAdam, (he was knighted in 1834), complained to the Commission about 'the injurious effects to the Uxbridge road from the recommencement of carting mud from the Serpentine river along that road to Kensington Gardens'. Since the Commission had received no reply to the letter they had sent to the Commission of Woods and Forests it was decided a personal application be made by Lowther and Col. Cliterow 'to remedy this evil.'<sup>88</sup>

The location of hackney coach stands was also deemed the responsibility of the Commission. In 1827, complaints from some inhabitants of High Street Kensington were received, asking for the coach stand to be removed. Lowther and Commissioner Croker were appointed to examine the site<sup>89</sup> and agreed with

the residents, although they suggested it be relocated.<sup>90</sup> Some years later, in 1834, complaints were received about a coach stand nearby in Slone Square. The stand had been extending down the Brompton Road and the petitioners requested it be sent back to its former limits. The Commission agreed and also decided to erect a board marking the limits of the stand.<sup>91</sup>

Other complaints the Commission received were considered the responsibility of the police and referred to them. These often included complaints about public houses and their patrons. In 1831, the Rev. Lusignan and several inhabitants of Chelsea complained about the nuisance 'caused by the conduct of depraved persons about the Goat and Boot bar.'<sup>92</sup> Similar complaints were received from Lt. Col. Phillot, who wrote twice, in 1832<sup>93</sup> and 1843<sup>94</sup> to the Commission about the Halfway Pubic House in Kensington.

A complaint received about dung carts outside the Coach and Horses Public House, Notting Hill was initially directed to Simon Mortlake, the Superintendent of Tolls.<sup>95</sup> He must have felt referral to the police unnecessary, as he stated, that if given the authority by the Commission, he would 'suppress the nuisances causes by the assembly of carts and wagons before the Public House.'<sup>96</sup> The Commission granted him the authority.

Most people complained initially to the Commission, perhaps in hope that a referral to the police by the Commission would carry more weight. Certainly, Mr. Allan thought so. In his complaint about the driving of barrows and trucks on the Uxbridge road. He suggested 'the Police men might remedy the evil.'<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

It is clear that the MRC responded quickly to complaints it received and generally tried to find solutions to the problems. Although hampered by debts, the Commission did achieve one of the principle goals of its establishment; the removal of gates from central London. This must have made a huge difference to the traffic conditions there. However, the location of gates and sidebars produced many complaints, which the Commission was unable to do much about. Removal of gates resulted in a decrease in the revenue for that road and as most of the roads had debts, it was generally impossible to remove gates as quickly as the public wished. Parishes also, were not eager to resume responsibility and usually fought any suggestions of roads being returned to their authority. So,

although some gates were removed in the early years of the MRC, it was not able to continue that trend. This was a cause of complaint for many who had initially supported the establishment of the MRC.

In dealing with other areas of complaint, the MRC was quick to deal with toll collectors who abused the public, removing them from office or in more serious cases referring them to the magistrates. Concerning liability for accidents, the Commission considered very carefully, if it was responsible and often referred complainants to others, whom it felt had greater responsibility. As in all the complaints received by the MRC, the situation was reviewed, usually by the General Surveyor and then thoroughly discussed by the Commission, before any decision was made.

### Appendix 1

#### A STATEMENT of ROADS to be given up.<sup>98</sup>

Parishes	Length of road in each parish			Rental of each Parish for the year 1828	Amount required for the repair of the said roads	Amount of increased rate in each Parish
	Miles	feet	yards	£	£	d.
St. Marylebone	1	7	87	717,144	1,902	
St. Pancras	2	—	16	406,023	2,085	
Clarkenwell	2	—	56	190,250	2,124	
Islington	—	—	60	127,872	35	
St. Luke	—	5	219	139,208	392	
Shoreditch	—	7	180	205,176	434	
Paddington	—	4	48	62,565	506	
	8	2	106		7,478	

General Average 1d.



**Appendix 2**

District No.	Name of Road	District No.	Name of Road
1.	Kensington	9.	Highgate & Hampstead
2.	Brentford & Isleworth	10.	City
3.	Upper Uxbridge	11.	Upper Stamford
4.	Lower Uxbridge	12.	Lower Stamford
5.	Shepard's Bush	13.	Green Lanes
6.	Harrow	14.	Seven Sisters
7.	Kilburn	15.	Hackney
8.	Edgware	16.	Lea Bridge

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> MRC 3 9/1/1829 p. 343
- <sup>2</sup> MRC 4 15/11/1833 p. 20
- <sup>3</sup> MRC 3 19/4/1833 p. 420
- <sup>4</sup> MRC 4 3/6/1836 p. 235
- <sup>5</sup> MRC 3 10/9/1830 p. 160
- <sup>6</sup> Albert, William *The Turnpike Road System in England 1663–1840* (Cambridge University Press 1972) p. 158
- <sup>7</sup> MRC 4 30/1/1835 p. 113
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid. 14/11/1834 p. 92
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid. 30/1/1835 p. 113
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. 27/2/1835 p. 128
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid. 30/1/1835 p. 113
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid. 27/2/1825 p. 128
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid. 24/6/1835 p. 161
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid. 16/10/1835 p. 180
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid. 17/10/1834 p. 88
- <sup>16</sup> MRC 3 14/6/1833 p. 437
- <sup>17</sup> MRC 4 20/12/1833 p. 29

- 18 Ibid. 16/10/1835 p. 177
- 19 Albert, p.81
- 20 MRC 2 5/1/1827 p.9
- 21 MRC 3 22/1/1830 p.81
- 22 MRC 51 First Report of the Commissioners of the Metropolis Turnpike Roads April 9<sup>th</sup> 1827 p.5
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid. Third report of the Commissioners 1829 p. 3
- 25 Searle, Mark *Turnpikes & Toll-bars Vol. II* (Hutchinson & Co. 1930) p.665
- 26 MRC 51 Third Report of the Commissioners 1829 p. 7
- 27 Ibid. Fourth Report of the Commissioners 1930 p.3
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 MRC 3 17/11/1829 p. 48
- 30 Ibid. 18/11/1829 p.50
- 31 MRC 4 17/1/1834 p. 33
- 32 MRC 3 15/4/1831 p.219
- 33 Ibid. 21/5/1830 p.130
- 34 Ibid. 3/2/1832 p.295
- 35 MRC 4 21/3/1835 p. 147
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 MRC 2 29/2/1828 p. 235
- 38 MRC 3 13/8/1830 p. 158
- 39 MRC 4 29/4/1836 p.228
- 40 MRC 2 5/1/1827 p. 11
- 41 Ibid. 2/2/1827 p. 32
- 42 MRC 3 18/11/1829 p. 49
- 43 MRC 4 14/3/1834 p. 48
- 44 Ibid. 19/12/1834 p. 108
- 45 Webb, Sidney & Beatrice *The Story of the King's Highway* (Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1963) p. 139
- 46 MRC 3 17/11/1829 p.47
- 47 MRC 4 12/11/1835 p. 185
- 48 Ibid. 4/11/1836 p. 268
- 49 MRC 51 First Report of the Commissioners 1827 p.6
- 50 MRC 2 20/7/1827 p. 134
- 51 Ibid. 12/9/1828 p. 303
- 52 Ibid. 5/11/1828 p. 318
- 53 MRC 4 14/11/1833 p. 14
- 54 MRC 51 Third Report of the Commissioners 1829 p. 3
- 55 Ibid. Fourth Report of the Commissioners 1830 Appendix No.3 p. 15
- 56 MRC 3 7/1/1831 p. 199
- 57 MRC 4 30/8/1833 p. 3

- 58 Ibid. 21/3/1835 p. 148
- 59 Ibid. 12/6/1835 p. 156
- 60 Ibid. 23/9/1836 p. 253
- 61 Ibid. 3/9/1836 p. 260
- 62 Ibid. 9/12/1836 p. 282
- 63 MRC 2 4/1/1828 p. 212
- 64 Ibid. 29/2/1828 p. 234
- 65 Searle, p. 273
- 66 Webb, p. 138
- 67 Searle, p. 273
- 68 Albert, p. 84
- 69 Ibid. p. 83
- 70 Searle, p. 273
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 MRC 2 2/3/1827 p. 51
- 73 Ibid. 9/3/1827 p. 58
- 74 Ibid. 24/4/1827 p. 92
- 75 Ibid. 11/5/1827 p. 98
- 76 Ibid. 29/2/1828 p. 236
- 77 Ibid. 10/4/1829 p. 372
- 78 MRC 3 25/6/1830 p. 145
- 79 Ibid. 26/5/1831 p. 230
- 80 MRC 4 29/4/1836 p. 232
- 81 MRC 3 13/8/1830 p. 156
- 82 MRC 2 6/8/1827 p. 140
- 83 Ibid. p. 145
- 84 Searle, p. 78
- 85 MRC 3 22/4/1830 p. 121
- 86 MRC 4 14/2/1834 p. 40
- 87 Ibid. 28/8/1835 p. 171
- 88 Ibid. 3/11/1836 p. 260
- 89 Ibid. 6/7/1827 p. 123
- 90 Ibid. 20/7/1827 p. 133
- 91 MRC 4 18/7/1834 p. 73
- 92 MRC 3 23/9/1831 p. 257
- 93 Ibid. 6/1/1832 p. 287
- 94 MRC 4 18/4/1834 p. 56
- 95 Ibid. 25/3/1836 p. 220
- 96 Ibid. 29/4/1836 p. 230
- 97 MRC 3 25/6/1830 p. 144
- 98 MRC 51 Third Report of the Commissioners 1829 Appendix No. 1 p. 7