



Warminster Road, early 1900s

Roads Through Westbury

The oldest roads in Westbury are Warminster Road, Edward Street, Church Street, Maristow Street, Market Place, and Alfred Street leading onto Bratton Road.

The two major needs in transport were the driving of cattle to distant markets and for importing wool from abroad. Moving cattle was done via the old drove roads which had been created in history by farmers needing to transport their sheep etc. to pasture over a neighbor's land; the regularity of their passage made the tracks which became the drove roads – hence Wellhead Drove. Wool had to be imported to supplement the native Wiltshire wools for making the finer quality cloths.

Before the advent of turnpike roads, cloth and wool were both carried in panniers on pack horses, sometimes as many as 40-60 horses in a line. They were led by a wise old horse called the Bell Horse – who wore a collar of bells, so that the other ponies could follow the sound. Pack horse bridges were built over streams and rivers, usually little stone bridges; just wide enough to take horses and their loads but not wide enough for carts and carriages.

Travel became more popular in Georgian times, but only for the gentry. There was no need for the average man to leave his town, everything he required was there. There were weekly markets to sell and buy goods and annual fairs to relieve the tedium of the day-to-day toil and buy things not available at the market. In Westbury there were fairs on the first Friday in Lent, Easter Monday (for pedlary), and until 1939 there was still an annual sheep fair on the first Tuesday of September on the downs, on land owned by Lord Ludlow.

Travelling was not easy. The roads were in a dreadful state, pitted with deep ruts and pot-holes which filled with mud and water when it rained. Some areas were so bad that a guide had to be hired at one town to guide you to the next. Having negotiated the perilous conditions underfoot, one still had to

contend with the attentions of the many bandits and highwaymen. Each parish was meant to look after its roads but little was ever done. At last, a scheme to raise money to improve the roads was forwarded. This involved erecting turnpikes and toll gates on busy roads and charging each traveler a toll to pass through.

There were several methods of making better roads, probably the most widely used was that invented by MacAdam. He laid 12 inches of small hard stones, not more than an inch across, tightly packed onto the surface of the road. The iron wheels of the stage coaches would grind the surface into powder which was washed down between the stones cementing them together.

By 1840 there were 22,000 miles of new roads and 8,000 turnpikes. Prior to this a coach horse had a useful life of about 3 years, and after improvement, of about 7 years. In Westbury the first two turnpikes were erected in 1758 and were on the roads to Trowbridge and Market Lavington. Next followed a road over Westbury Hill, via Bowls Barrow to Chittern (now just a track) and last of all, in 1769, was one on Warminster Road. The toll house was at Chalford.

The following tolls were typical of the time:

- 1s.0d Coach with 4 or more horses*
- 6d Coach with 2 horses*
- 3d Coach with 1 horse*
- 0d Wagon or cart with 5 or more horses*
- 8d Wagon or cart with 4 horses*
- 6d Wagon or cart with 3 horses*
- 3d Wagon or cart with 2 horses*
- 1d Horse laden or unladen, not drawing*
- 10d Cattle per score*
- 5d Sheep, pigs etc, per score.*

The only method of public transport was led by stage coaches, so named because they stopped at stages to set down and pick up passengers. The coaches were heavy and needed 4-6 horses to pull them, these had to be changed every ten miles and averaged five miles an hour on level roads. In 1822 six coaches are listed as leaving the Angel Inn:

<i>To London – Wallington & Co.</i>	<i>Monday and Thursday</i>
<i>To Bath – James Phillips</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
<i>To Bristol – William Atkins</i>	<i>Monday and Thursday</i>
<i>To Bristol – Samuel Watson</i>	<i>Monday and Thursday</i>

To Salisbury – James Applegate

Monday

To Salisbury – J. Silcox

Monday

The coming of the trains sounded the death bell of the turnpike system and the great days of coaching, and gradually they both disappeared. The turnpikes were torn down and burnt in 1872.

In the same year gas lighting was provided for the town by public subscription, and continued until 1947 when it was replaced by electricity.