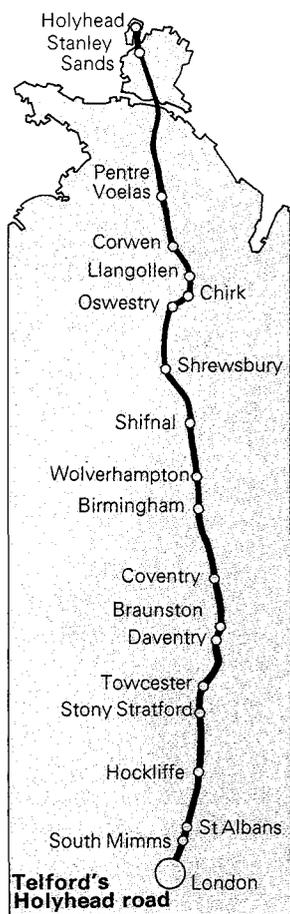
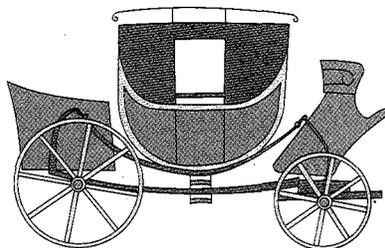


Until the 18th century each parish was responsible for maintaining its roads under the supervision of unpaid local officials. Roads were often ill-kept, poorly surfaced, and virtually impassable in winter. This system was too slow for the growing flow of traffic from the late 17th century and too expensive for heavy goods transport. In response, improving landowners and local merchants and manufacturers obtained private Acts of Parliament to set up Turnpike Trusts, to construct and improve stretches of road paid for out of tolls levied on all users. Though the trusts never really provided a systematic national road system, the quality of the major trunk routes was greatly improved by the use of professional surveyors and road makers, such as John Metcalf (1717–1810), John McAdam (1756–1836), and Thomas Telford (1757–1834). These improvements facilitated the growth of trade and markets which helped to stimulate industrial and agricultural development.

Below The turnpike era led to a sharp fall in road journey times, often halving the length of long journeys. By 1770 1,100 trusts levied tolls on 21,000 miles of road, but

this enabled more rapid passenger coaches to travel between the major towns. These improvements and the invention of the sprung coach laid the basis of the coaching era.

An English stage coach 1787



Left One of the biggest road improvements of the early period was Telford's reconstruction of the road between Shrewsbury and Holyhead, the major port for Ireland. Thomas Telford, a famous engineer who had built roads in Scotland, as well as docks, canals and bridges, was commissioned to do the work with the aid of a government grant. Between 1815 and 1830 he transformed the route, building over 1,000 bridges through difficult mountain terrain, including the famous Menai Suspension Bridge, opened in 1825. In 1834 the journey from London to Holyhead took only 27 hours compared with several days in the 18th century. Telford also built about 1,000 miles of road in Scotland and was made general surveyor of roads to the government in 1827.

