



Tickhill and District Local History Society

Tickhill's Toll House



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Picture credits

Page 4: Joshua Bower courtesy of picryl.com public domain (BM1885,1212.148).

Page 5: Stone breakers on the road, from 'The Costume of Yorkshire in 1814'.

Page 6: Two views of the Toll House courtesy of TDLHS picture collection.

Page 7: Bench mark courtesy of Hazel Moffat, modern view of the Toll House courtesy of Patrick Andrews, 1980s view of the west side of the Toll House courtesy of the George Read collection, Whiston Toll House courtesy of Hazel Moffat.

Page 13: The Nicholson family's elder daughter in the garden courtesy of Lesley Nicholson. Rear view of the Toll House courtesy of Patrick Andrews.

Page 14: View of the Toll House: courtesy of TDLHS picture collection.

Cover illustration

Tickhill Toll House photographed in December 2025. Notice the pole to the right and cables providing electricity and telephone connections. See page 6 for how the south facing wall of the Toll House looked up to c. 1980. The original brick work had already been pebbledashed.

Introduction

One of the smallest properties in Tickhill, the Toll House is an important reminder of a time when turnpike trusts were established to improve main roads and charge those who used them. The Toll House is at the north side of the road from Bawtry to Tinsley (at the junction of Sunderland Street and Paper Mill Lane), one of two turnpike roads which passed through Tickhill. The other was the road from Balby to Worksop. The Toll House, sometimes known as the Toll Bar House or Cottage and built 1760-1780, is the only purpose-built structure of its type in Tickhill to survive. Originally, it housed a toll keeper who collected the tolls. This Occasional Paper will consider how the turnpike trust operated from 1760, lasting for more than a century, and why it came to an end. It will describe the Toll House building then outline the work of the toll keeper. It will look at how this property next became home to a succession of local people, before it was used as stables then an office for 37 years.

A section of Jeffrey's map of Yorkshire 1767-1772 shows the route taken by the 17 miles long Bawtry and Tinsley turnpike road. The route was described as follows in an 1825 Act: 'The road leading from the west end of the town of Bawtry aforesaid near the old chapel adjoining or contiguous to the said town of Bawtry, through the lane leading towards Harworth in the County of Nottinghamshire, past a certain wood called Swinnow Wood, over Tickhill Common to Tickhill Cross, where the same joins the turnpike road from Balby to Worksop, from the turn to Worksop at Reds Corner in the said town of Tickhill through the remaining part of the town of Tickhill and part of the Liberty of Stainton through Maltby Wood to Maltby, through the town of Maltby thence by or near Hellaby Hall and over Bramley Lings or Common to Wickersley, through the village of Wickersley to the Brecks, thence past Cantlow Wood in the parish of Whiston, over Brinsworth Common in the parish of Rotherham to the village of Tinsley and through the village of Tinsley to the place where the same joins the road from Rotherham to Sheffield all in the said County of Yorkshire.'

This turnpike trust was one of the early ones in the area, four years before the Doncaster to Tinsley turnpike trust and five years before the Balby to Worksop turnpike trust. Each turnpike trust required a private Act of Parliament to begin operations and at first this legislation had to be renewed every 21 years. Establishing the turnpike trust roads through Tickhill was not met with any active opposition. This was unlike in Leeds just a few years earlier. In the second half of June 1753 anger at the introduction of toll roads led to riots with turnpike gates and toll houses burnt down. An estimated 10 people died and 24 were wounded. To restore order a regiment of foot and a detachment of dragoons were sent from York preventing any further riots. This was reported widely in England and Scotland, as in the *Newcastle Courant*, Saturday 21 July 1753, p. 3.

The Bawtry to Tinsley turnpike road had toll gates at Harworth Bar, Tickhill Bar and side gate, Maltby Bar and side gate, Wickersley Bar, Brinsworth Bar and Whiston Bar, each with a house for the toll collector.

The Bawtry to Tinsley Turnpike Trust was managed by a group of trustees among whom were several influential local people such as, in 1825, William Walker of Wilsic Hall, Edmund Laughton, Frederick Lumley, Henry Bower, John Nettleship, Roger Baskitt, George Savile Foljambe and clergymen: the Rev George Rolleston and the Hon and Rev Thomas Erskine (both of whom had served as curates at Tickhill) and Wadworth's vicar, the Rev Arthur Charles Verelst. By 1856 a similar range of local people had become trustees including Tickhill's vicar, the Rev Edward Hawke Brooksbank, Maltby's vicar the Rev Rolleston was still a trustee, Hugh Parker of Sunderland House, Robert John Coulman of Wadworth Hall, and Viscount Galway. Tickhill's clergy continued to help manage this road with the vicar, the Rev Charles Bury, being chair of the trustees during the latter part of his first incumbency 1856-63. The trustees, who received no pay, generally held their quarterly meetings in the Red Lion Inn at Tickhill.

They employed a clerk to manage administration such as keeping a record of meetings and placing any necessary advertisements. This role was filled for many years by three generations of the Cartwright family, all Bawtry solicitors. Their annual pay declined from just over £50 in 1841 to just over £36 in 1871. They also employed a surveyor, in 1841 this work being undertaken by farmer William Turpin who lived on Sunderland Street and who was paid £40 a year. One assessment of using people such as farmers for this task was that 'their skills were barely adequate'. (Albert, p. 79.) They had to direct labour and procure materials while the trustees set the wages and prices for materials. Doncaster banker Thomas Walker acted as treasurer, an honorary role, for over 30 years. However, the trustees did not directly employ toll collectors after the first few years, rather offering the tolls for auction. For many years Leeds Alderman Joshua Bower Senior (1773-1855), shown below, and his



son of the same name (1802-1868) were lessees of the Bawtry to Tinsley turnpike tolls. Joshua Bower Junior (Hunslet-based land owner, owner of a glass bottle works and colliery proprietor) amassed so many contracts for tolls, not only in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire but much further afield too, that he was called the 'toll bar autocrat' and was believed to be 'perhaps the most extensive lessee of turnpike tolls in the country.' (*Halifax Courier*, Saturday 1 August 1868, p. 8.) It would have been the Bowers and their staff who appointed the Tickhill toll keepers.

The toll income for the whole road declined from the mid-19th century, from £995/13/4 in 1841 to £734 in 1871, for example. Some idea of how the money was spent to improve the Bawtry to Tinsley Turnpike road surface follows in this extract from the trust's annual statements of expenses.

| | 1841 | 1851 | 1861 | 1871 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Manual labour | £173/3/6 | £87/19/8 | £147/4/1½ | £148/9/- |
| Team labour & carriage of materials | £106/16/- | £137/-/4 | £146/12/2½ | £128/1/8½ |
| Materials for surface repairs | £214/9/3 | £114/15/8 | £72/12/9 | £74/7/9 |
| Interest of debt | £350/4/- | £339/19/8 | £178/7/3 | £119/2/2 |

From the outset the Turnpike Trustees wanted to have a road whose surface facilitated swift passage of vehicles. In a memorandum dated 11 October 1767 they specified how the road should be repaired: 'The whole of the said portion of road shall be covered with gravel or in default thereof, with the best and properest materials or other cover that can and may be got

to such a thickness as may bind and cement the stone together...' (Wylam, p. 68.) The locally available stone was limestone from several quarries. This stone had to be crushed into smaller pieces as shown in the illustration, right. Most of the labourers who did the work were local men employed on a semi-permanent basis or hired casually in between doing farm work. For example, in 1861 George Ellees, aged 60, born in Ireland, who lived in Sunderland Street, is described as a turnpike road labourer suggesting that the trust had some regular labourers.



It is worth noting that before the establishment of turnpike trusts the repair and maintenance of roads was the responsibility of parishes with very little commitment to facilitating easy travel on smooth-surfaced roads. Arthur Young travelling from Doncaster to Sheffield in 1769, as well as keeping a detailed record of the state of agriculture and manufacturing, noted road conditions. The road from Rotherham to Sheffield was 'excrably bad, very stony and excessively full of holes'. (Young p. 122.) The Doncaster to Tinsley Turnpike Trust formed in 1764 had clearly not yet made much impact on the western end of its road.

Between 1841 and 1871 the money spent on materials for the Bawtry to Tinsley turnpike road reduced. By far the largest amount of expenditure at that time was spent in paying interest on the mortgage to fund all the work which amounted to £7004/10/8 until after 1851 when the debt was reduced. By 1871 the mortgage debt was £2459/18/-, still a significant amount and a sign that the end of the Bawtry and Tinsley Turnpike Trust was approaching. The initial mortgage would have helped to fund obtaining an Act of Parliament, building the toll houses plus additional items like milestones which the turnpike trust was required to install from 1766 and finger posts from 1773.

The Bawtry and Tinsley Turnpike Trust trustees met at the Red Lion Inn in Tickhill on 22 February 1878 to discuss paying some of the creditors. The aim was to see who would accept the lowest level of repayment. This was indicative of the financial pressures facing the trustees. Just four days later representatives of the Bawtry and Tinsley Turnpike Trust appeared before a Select Committee of the House of Commons. The purpose of the meeting was to consider an application for the continuance of the existing Trust. Representing the Trust, Bawtry solicitor Mr Frederick Henry Cartwright read out the following resolution adopted by the turnpike trustees on 21 April 1876: 'It was resolved that on the expiration of the term of the Act of Parliament relating to this road, no further application be made to Parliament for the renewal of the same.' Representing some of the Trust's creditors a Mr Rees pointed out that from 1856 maintenance of the road was supposed to cost £340 annually but the parishes through which the road passed had paid nothing and so the Trust had spent £500 annually. Also, in 1856 the tolls were worth £750 annually but the receipts had reduced to £550 annually. This loss of £200 was attributed to the opening of a branch of the North Eastern Railway. All this meant that the Trust's creditors could not be fully reimbursed. The Select Committee decided to give the Trust one year until 1 November 1879 and no longer. No money was to be spent on repairs and no interest allowed. Salaries and incidentals were not to exceed £15. This was reported in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Wednesday 27 February 1878, page 3. By 1879 the turnpike trust had made its contribution to improving travelling for people and their goods between Bawtry and Tinsley.

Toll House Building



Toll house keepers' accommodation was on a par with a farm labourer's home, containing a living room and a bedroom. The building measures 24 feet 6 inches (7.47m) long by 14 feet (4.27m) wide. The eaves are 7 feet 8 inches (2.34m) above the pavement. Some toll houses had bars at the windows for additional security. There were no bathrooms, only an outdoor privy and a pump or well to provide water. The toll houses did have chimneys and so they would have had fireplaces for warmth, heating water and cooking food. The cost of building a small toll house with bricks was c. £25. The 1825 Act specified that the toll houses along the Bawtry and Tinsley turnpike road could have suitable outhouses, conveniences and enclosed garden plots not exceeding $\frac{1}{8}$ of a statute acre (this could mean a plot measuring about 15m by 30m, enough to grow some vegetables).

There have been several adaptations to Tickhill's Toll House since it ceased to be a home for toll keepers and then other local residents.

Originally it had a door on the south wall opening directly on to the pavement, as shown above, enabling the toll keeper to have ready access to the road. This door was still in use in the 1970s. There were



windows either side of the door. The east and west walls also had windows originally, allowing the toll keeper to see traffic approaching from both directions. (Photograph above shows the Toll House's west facing wall.)

A lean-to section was added at the back of the Toll House, probably when it ceased to be a home for toll keepers, but that is no longer there, as shown in the photograph on page 13. A large shed may also be seen in the back garden of the Toll House but that too is no longer there.

Following the Ordnance Survey of the route from Thorne to Stalybridge through Tickhill in 1845-6, a benchmark was carved into the south wall of the Toll House near the south east corner, similar to the one shown right on Westgate, indicating that a height above sea level had been measured there. Once the building was pebbledashed in the 20th century any signs of the location of the benchmark were hidden. Pebbledashing also removed traces of the south facing central door and windows each side.



Among more recent modifications to the building are the provision of electricity and a telephone landline connection. The photographs on the previous page also show the inhabitants had a television with a large aerial fixed to the chimney. When the west facing wall was pebbledashed and the two windows obscured, the wall was used in the 1980s for a large board as shown left. It advertised the Toll Bar Garage of Tickhill (Sales, Service, Parts) on the opposite side of the road.

At the western end of the Bawtry Tinsley Turnpike road was another toll house: Whiston Toll House as shown below. Neither of the toll houses had angled windows in bays, two storeys or a decorative design like some toll houses. The Bawtry Tinsley Turnpike Trustees saw no reason to have elaborate toll houses adding to the expense of an initial outlay. The Whiston Toll House was at the junction of two turnpike roads: The Bawtry Tinsley road and the Rotherham Pleasley road. The latter tolls finished in 1874 five years before the end of the Bawtry Tinsley tolls. The Whiston Toll House was possibly then used as a small shop and dwelling house until it was demolished in 1910 for road widening. A plaque installed by Whiston Heritage Society now marks the location of this Toll House.



Toll keepers' work

Toll keepers' work was less arduous than that of a farm labourer but they had to be available to collect tolls at any time of the day or night and open the toll gate or remove the chain across the road. At Tickhill there was also a side gate which could be used by an individual horse rider. The following page shows the somewhat complex range of tolls for the Bawtry and Tinsley turnpike road listed in the 1825 Act. The width of wheels of carriages and wagons was critical since the wider the wheels the less damage they were believed to cause to the road surface. A revised set of tolls for this road was issued in 1858 but there was little variation in charges. These revised tolls did recognise new vehicles, namely those propelled or moved by steam or machinery or otherwise than by animal power. The charge for these vehicles was one shilling for each wheel.

Throughout the years toll keepers could not charge certain categories of travellers who were exempt from the tolls. These travellers included the Royal Family, coaches carrying Royal Mail, soldiers and police officers on duty, prison carts, funeral processions, clergy on parish business, voters going to or from county elections and vehicles carrying agricultural produce to be stored on the owner's land. Particularly in the case of Royal Mail coaches, the toll keeper had to have the gate open in readiness for the coach, having been alerted to its approach by the sound of the coach horn. For example, the Royal Mail coach from Sheffield to Bawtry then on to Gainsborough and Market Rasen passed through Tickhill at 7.30 a.m. the return coach coming through at 5.30 p.m. A fine of 40 shillings could be levied if the toll keeper delayed the coach. Toll keepers also had to issue tickets for people wishing to pass the toll more than once a day, as proof that they had already paid the toll, as well as keeping records of the tolls collected. The toll keepers would have had to be literate at a time when many people were not.

Toll keepers were also at risk from unscrupulous people. The location of toll houses on the edge of communities made them vulnerable. In 1842-43 a gang of 5 robbers targeted toll houses near Rotherham before they were finally apprehended in Sheffield on 15 February 1843. Fear of being robbed led the toll keeper at Wadworth Toll Bar to hide the £8 toll income in a clock, only to lose it when the clock was repaired. William Revill, the clock repairer from Tickhill, was subsequently sentenced to three months hard labour. (*Sheffield Iris*, 8 July 1843, p.2.) On 19 November 1852 the toll keeper at Brinsworth Common was seriously injured by a 2 a.m. caller who stole the toll takings. A £150 reward was offered for the criminal's capture. (*Sheffield Independent*, 27 November 1852, p.6 and 4 December 1852, p.8.) Toll keepers sometimes had to contend with drunken behaviour. William Law, Tickhill farmer and constable (no less), while under the influence of liquor, drove through a Tickhill toll bar in a reckless manner in order to win a bet. He was taken to Doncaster West Riding magistrates' court on 2 January 1869, found guilty and fined 5 shillings and costs. (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 4 January 1869, p.3.) Aggravation about paying tolls led to a violent confrontation for a Tickhill toll keeper, James Kelsey, in 1875. Balby farmer George Elwiss refused to pay the toll on Saturday 26 June and so Kelsey tried to stop him. Elwiss jumped down from his cart and seized Kelsey by the throat. The men were separated by a policeman conveniently on hand and Elwiss paid the toll. He was then summoned for assault and at his trial was found guilty and fined 25 shillings with 18 shillings costs. (*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 July 1875, p. 2.)

Toll keepers would have had to sign an oath when handing over the tolls to confirm that they had handed over all the money they had collected. It might have been tempting not to hand all the money over when their pay was limited to a few shillings a week. However, toll keepers did live rent free and some were also provided with candles and coal by the turnpike trusts.

Charges levied at Tickhill Toll Bar from 1825

1. For every horse or beast drawing any coach, stage coach, caravan, van, landau, berlin, hearse, chariot, chaise, or other such like carriage, the sum of **sixpence**.
2. For every horse, mule or ass laden or unladen and not drawing, the sum of **one penny half penny**.
3. For every horse or beast drawing any wagon, wain, cart or other such like carriage with wheels of less breadth than 4½ inches and laden with any block or blocks of stone, marble, millstone or millstones or with timber, the sum of **ninepence**.
4. For every horse or beast drawing any wagon, wain, cart or other such like carriage with wheels of the breadth of 4½ inches and less than 6 inches and laden as aforesaid the sum of **seven and halfpence**.
5. For every horse or beast etc. with wheels of the breadth of 6 inches or upwards and laden as aforesaid **sixpence**.
6. For every horse or beast drawing any wagon, wain or cart or other such like carriage with wheels of the breadth of less breadth than 4½ inches the sum of **sixpence**.
7. For every horse or beast drawing any wagon, wain, cart or other such like carriage, less otherwise than as aforesaid with wheels the breadth of 4½ inches and less than 6 inches the sum of **fivepence**.
8. For every horse or beast drawing any wagon, wain, cart or other such like carriage, less otherwise than as aforesaid with wheels the breadth of 6 inches or upwards the sum of **fourpence**.
9. For every drove of oxen or neat cattle, **tenpence** per score and so on in proportion for any greater or lesser quantity.
10. For every drove of calves, swine, sheep or lambs, **fivepence** per score and so in proportion for any greater or less quantity.
11. For every coach, chariot, chaise or other carriage with 4 wheels being empty and fixed to any wagon, wain, cart or other carriage, **one shilling**.
12. For every coach, chair, chaise or any other carriage with four wheels and being laden and fixed as aforesaid the sum of **two shillings**.
13. For every chair, cart or other carriage with two wheels only, being empty and fixed as aforesaid the sum of **sixpence**.
14. For every chair, cart or other carriage with two wheels only and being laden and fixed as aforesaid the sum of **one shilling**.

Toll houses displayed a list of tolls on an outside wall or on a nearby post. A photograph of the toll house at the Weald and Downland Museum with such a list attached to the house wall may be seen on their website. A water colour painting by Luke Crennell (1781-1840) shows a Country Toll House c.1795-1800 with charges displayed on a post and can be seen in Alamy's collection reference 2E450YM.

Examples of toll keepers living in Tickhill's Toll House

The Bawtry to Tinsley Trust account book for 1797 shows that Mary **Brown** collected at Tickhill at two shillings a week. (Wylam, p. 71.) It is likely that Mary Brown lived in the Toll House but it is not known whether she was on her own or had a family with her. It has not been possible to identify this Mary Brown in Parish Registers.

There is only one reference in Tickhill Parish Registers to a 'turnpike collector' up to 1837 and that is for Joseph **Downs** whose son Thomas was baptised at St Mary's Church on 22 October 1819. Joseph had married Martha Roper at Penistone on 24 February 1817. Their first child Sarah was born at Penistone in 1817 followed by a son Joseph baptised the following year at Sturton le Steeple in Nottinghamshire, where Joseph senior was baptised. Joseph and Martha thus had three very young children with them when they lived in Tickhill, believed to be in the Toll House. Their subsequent children, three born between 1822 and 1830, were born at Sturton le Steeple and so it looks as though Joseph's stint as toll keeper at Tickhill was quite brief. He did, however, make toll collecting his career. In 1841 he was the toll collector at Fosdyke, in 1851 while at Quarrington (south west of Gainsborough) he was described as 'agent as toll collector' then in 1861, aged 67, he was toll collector again at Fosdyke living in the Bridge Toll House, a two-storey building, larger than Tickhill's Toll House.

The occupant of the Toll House in 1841 was Thomas **Linley** aged 42 with his wife Mary aged 37 and their seven children aged ten to under one. Thomas and Mary were married in Tickhill on 9 June 1829. In the census and baptismal records Thomas is described as a labourer not a toll collector or keeper. It is possible he collected tolls but in subsequent records when he had moved to Whitwell in Derbyshire he is still described as a labourer, so he did not have toll collecting as a career.

The Parish Register's next reference to 'toll bar keeper Tickhill' is at the baptism of Hannah **Milnes** on 30 April 1843 when her father Thomas is so described. In 1851 Thomas Milnes was recorded living across the road from Tickhill's Toll House, the first house on the south side of Sunderland Street, but Thomas was now called an agricultural labourer.

By 1871 Tickhill once more had a woman as toll collector. This was Hannah **Brown**, sister of Joseph Downs. Hannah married William Brown in Tickhill in 1825, William spending his career as a toll collector. In 1829 he was convicted at Doncaster for demanding a toll from a dissenting minister on his way to his place of worship. William was fined £1 plus 13 shillings costs. (*Chester Chronicle*, 3 July 1829, p.3.) Hannah assisted her husband when they lived near Baslow in Derbyshire, as recorded in censuses for 1851 and 1861. Hannah also fell foul of the law when she insisted a police superintendent pay a toll in 1860 and was then fined 50 shillings and costs plus a 5 shillings fine and costs for refusing to give her name. (*Derbyshire Courier*, 13 October 1860, p. 3.) In 1871, widowed and age 66 she had returned to Tickhill and was helped by her daughter, also called Hannah, who was an assistant toll collector. Living with them was Hannah senior's son Thomas, a road labourer, and a 10 years old grandson. The Toll House must have provided somewhat cramped living accommodation for them by today's standards. After tolls ceased to be collected in 1879 the family moved to a home in Northgate. Hannah died on 11 August 1884 aged 80 and was buried two days later in St Mary's churchyard, but there is no gravestone. It was not unusual to have women as toll collectors. In 1886 at the tail end of turnpikes there were 3,263 male toll collectors and 1,638 female toll collectors in England and Wales. (Wilson, p. 1183.)

Subsequent occupants of the Toll House

When it was no longer needed as a home for a toll keeper, a succession of families made the Toll House their home. Census returns provide evidence for some of these people along with memories of those who knew the later inhabitants.

The family living at the Toll House in 1881 consisted of farm labourer William **Turner** aged 34, his wife Elizabeth also aged 34 and their children Mary (12), Charles (11), Ada (7) and Sam (1). All of them were born in Tickhill. Ten years earlier the family had lived at another cottage in Sunderland Street. By 1891 William had moved to Quarry Hill, Rotherham, now widowed, and had five children living with him aged 21 to 4 years old.

In 1891 the Toll House with its two rooms was home to George **Clayton**, a gardener, and his wife Ann, both aged 80. Ten years earlier they had lived in Northgate, George was born in Adwick le Street and Ann in Bentley. Before moving to Tickhill they had lived in Balby and on York Road. Ann died in 1893 and is buried in St Mary's churchyard. It is not yet known when and where George died but he is not buried at Tickhill.

In 1901 and 1911 the Toll House (listed as having three rooms from 1911) was the home of Alfred George **Wells**, a bricklayer's labourer, his wife Florence and their nephew Edmund Stocks aged three in 1901. Alfred was 34 in 1901 and had lived in Tickhill since at least the age of three after being born in Mansfield. Florence was 32 in 1901 and she had been born in Tickhill. The couple were married at St Mary's on 16 September 1888. (Their first home was on Sunderland Street as recorded in the 1891 census.) By 1921 the family had moved a few houses further west along Sunderland Street from the Toll House, next to Stanley Lane the grocer. However, both Alfred and Edmund, now called general labourers who had been employed by Mr Brooksbank of Sandrock, were out of work. Florence died in 1923 and Alfred in 1936 both are buried at St Mary's churchyard, but Alfred had spent his last days at Springwell House, Doncaster, in other words the workhouse.

In 1921 the Toll House, now owned by the Lane family, was the home of Emily **Lane**, daughter of Isabella and Thomas Lane and sister of Thomas Lane (1854-1934) not only a grocer but one of Tickhill's leading citizens. Emily was aged 56 in 1921. She later moved to Castlegate to live with her widowed sister Thirza and died in 1948. She is buried at the east end of St Mary's churchyard with a sister who died in infancy and in the grave to the left of her parents, both graves marked with headstones.

The 1939 Register shows another retired couple in the Toll House, neither Tickhill born. George **Shreeve** was a retired blacksmith previously employed in Tinsley steelworks. His first wife Sarah, with whom he had two children, died in 1925. He remarried widowed Ann Beddard in Rotherham in 1927. They returned to the Sheffield area before the end of the war.

Lesley Nicholson writes: 'At the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, Tickhill man Jack (John William) **Nicholson**, a carpenter and joiner employed by Rawsons Builders, Westgate, Tickhill, lived with his paternal aunt in Hesley, his father was killed in World War I and his mother died in childbirth in 1933. On 9 January 1940, he enlisted in the army at Doncaster. In doing so, Jack was able to choose to enlist as a tradesman, specifically with the Royal Engineers, rather than waiting to be called up. At that time the Royal Engineers were raising a number of new units, including Artisan Works, Road and General Construction Companies. These units were to operate behind the frontline on construction projects and needed men with specific skills. Local newspapers advertised for men and local firms were used to find suitable candidates. As a joiner, Jack would have learned about these new companies very quickly. After very brief initial training at Butlins, Clacton, (training related

to his work as a joiner, not military training), Jack was sent to France on 30 January and his wedding planned for May 1940 was cancelled. Three weeks after the fall of Dunkirk, as part of Operation Aerial, Jack was evacuated from St Malo by a tramp collier, (a freight ship carrying a full load of coal) and he arrived in Falmouth on 18 June 1940. The Company moved to Leeds and then to Alnwick and on 7 August Jack was granted seven days leave. The next day at 4 p.m. he married his Rossington sweetheart Clarice May Bennetts at St Michael's Church Rossington by special licence. Jack was always amused by the headline accompanying his wedding photo in the Doncaster Gazette "Army is kind to Sapper Nicholson" referring to his leave. He received an extra 6d a day war pay from 31 August.

Jack returned to his regiment and Clarice continued to live with her parents, cycling daily to her job at Peglers in Balby, making parts for aircraft engines. On 20 March 1941 Jack joined a ship in Glasgow and on 1 April the convoy set sail for Egypt, travelling via South Africa rather than the more direct but dangerous route through the Mediterranean Sea. It arrived off Suez on 6 May. From now on correspondence between them was intermittent, Clarice in particular could go several months without receiving a letter. In spite of being injured in early 1945 and spending some time in hospital in Belgium, Jack did not set foot back in the UK until 23 January 1946. He travelled to Strensall, York to complete the last stage of his demobilization. Having completed the necessary paperwork Jack caught the train home to Doncaster and finally joined his wife, whom he had not seen for five and a half years, at their new home 110 Sunderland Street, Tickhill.

Sometime during 1945 anticipating the end of the war and expecting Jack's return, Clarice had obtained the tenancy of the Toll House, otherwise known as Toll Bar Cottage, and then 110 Sunderland Street, from Stanley Lane, local grocer, parish councillor and businessman. The cottage was a far cry from the home Clarice was used to. Her parents semi-detached house in Rossington was always busy. She lived there with her parents, together with her three youngest siblings and older siblings who came to stay from time when on leave, life there was never dull. The house was modern, three bedrooms and relatively new, with a range, a bathroom and hot and cold running water. It was also very warm thanks to her father's generous coal allowance from the colliery where he worked.

By comparison, the cottage was small, prone to damp, with one bedroom, one sitting room and a lean-to kitchen where Clarice cooked on a two-ring primus gas stove sitting on an old chest of drawers. There was only cold water and a tin bath set up by the fire on bath night. Toilet facilities were provided by an outside chemical "Elsan" toilet in the garden. Nevertheless, she was determined to create a home for herself and Jack. The cottage was isolated, with no near neighbours, the nearest being the Gas House and Sunderland Farm. During winter wartime it was in pitch darkness and rather eerie. Initially Clarice was reluctant to live there alone, she didn't know anyone there and was frightened by noises in the lane, which transpired to be horses in the field next door. However, she was persuaded to do so when Mr Lane hinted he would give the tenancy elsewhere if she didn't. Clarice's nearest neighbour, Lily Herrington, recognised Clarice's loneliness and would often wait at her garden gate in the evening, hoping to catch Clarice on her way home from work, when she would invite her in for a drink of tea or something to eat. Her sisters would visit too and often stay over. Gradually the dismal cottage did become a home. With her savings Clarice purchased utility furniture, furniture produced under a government scheme designed to cope with raw material shortages. This was a suite of bedroom furniture, two fireside chairs, a sideboard together with a dining table and chairs. Her sister-in-law remembers it as being cosy. When Jack returned home he immediately put his skills to good use, repairing and transforming the house and garden with a stream at one of its boundaries.



Their first daughter was born in 1947 in Weston Road Hospital, a home birth wasn't permitted by the authorities as the cottage was deemed to have unsuitable sanitary arrangements and lacked hot running water. Jack made a small bed for his daughter, to squeeze into the already tiny bedroom. It was a happy home for the young couple. Their daughter is shown, left, by the east end of the cottage with the back door in the lean-to at the right-hand side. Following the end of World War II house building was slow to recover. The Nicholson family finally left the Toll House in spring 1952, moving to a brand new three bedroomed semi-detached house, with a kitchen, a bathroom and hot and cold running water!

George and Hilda **Wainwright** were the last people to live in the Toll House. The lean-to section at the rear was used as their bathroom, the main building providing a kitchen/living room and bedroom. George Wainwright suffered from long term health issues. Hilda Wainwright grew vegetables and kept chickens on the Toll Bar field. She sold her produce and eggs to help with the family's income and continued with this work after her husband died. Local residents remember the well-tended cottage garden at the back of the Toll House. Hilda Wainwright remained at the Toll House until her death in 1971 aged 75. She is buried in the churchyard. By 1977 the Toll House was described as derelict. (Magilton, p. 75.)

The Toll House was then bought by Duncan Donald who owned the garage across the road. He converted the Toll House into stables c. 1980 for two horses. Stable doors were fitted to the rear of the building when the lean-to extension was removed. With a business partner, Mr Donald then converted the stables into a two-roomed office for their Sanmet Ltd firm, a surfacing contractors' business, incorporated in 1981. Sanmet Ltd moved into the Toll House four years later and remained there until the firm closed down in 2022. The advertisement below explains the nature of the firm's work. The firm had two office rooms plus an indoor toilet in the Toll House. Underfloor heating was installed in the larger room and a night storage heater in the smaller room, the old fireplaces having been removed. There was little



natural light provided by a small window on the wall facing the car park at the rear and the window on the east facing wall and so the electric lights were kept on all day.

This advertisement appeared in *Tickhill News*, Issue 80, July/August 1997. The text was very similar when an advertisement appeared in *Tickhill Today*, April 2020, p.59.

When Sanmet Ltd first occupied the Toll House there were two sets of stable doors at the rear. This side of the building has also been changed with just one door there now along with the window. There is no sign of the lean-to extension visible in the photograph on page 6.

After Sanmet Ltd left the Toll House an interior design firm with a business on the opposite side of the road, began work to modify the inside of the building to use as a possible show room, however this firm unexpectedly went out of business, appointing a liquidator on 16 October 2023. Mr Donald completed the work and made the Toll House a one-roomed office. The Toll House then remained unoccupied and under new ownership.



Endnote

Tickhill's Toll House has been much altered since it served as the home of a turnpike toll collector. Nevertheless, its dimensions remain as it was when first built, so this at least enables us to appreciate the location and size of a single storey two-room home occupied by families ranging from one or two adults to two adults with seven children and three adults with one child. A rear extension in the form of a lean-to provided an extra room by 1911 but that has since been removed.

Historic England, while it has listed a milestone in Tickhill erected by the Bawtry and Tinsley Turnpike Trust at the corner of Westgate and Castlegate (this is Grade II listed with reference number 1191835), has not listed Tickhill's Toll House. Indeed, this building is not even labelled on a map on Historic England's website <<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/map-search/>> The map does label a mast (Telecommunication) to the east of the Toll House and Toll bar bridge. Historic England's map also incorrectly places the bench mark symbol to the west of the motorway instead of on the south east corner of the Toll House. The correct placement of the bench mark symbol is confirmed on the 1901 Ordnance Survey map of Tickhill.

However, there is local interest in the Toll House. It has been included in the Tickhill Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2035. Written in 2024 the section on the Toll House 1760-1780 concludes: 'Whilst the building in its current form is not attractive,it has a prominent position on what was once the turnpike road.' The Toll House is also included in a list of buildings to be potentially added to the Doncaster Local Heritage List. Among the reasons are: **Rarity** 'The only remaining Toll House on what was the Bawtry to Tinsley turnpike road.' **Archaeological interest** 'The Toll House has significant evidential interest. It serves as a reminder of the turnpike system that was in use between the 1700s and the late 1800s, when those using the roads had to pay a toll for their upkeep.'

So many Toll Houses have been demolished in the region, it would be a loss to the local historic environment if Tickhill Toll House could not be saved. Could a plaque be placed on the building to mark its former significance?



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