

# Pilsley – from major crossroads to sleepy village

## The history of Pilsley routeways from 1700 to the present day

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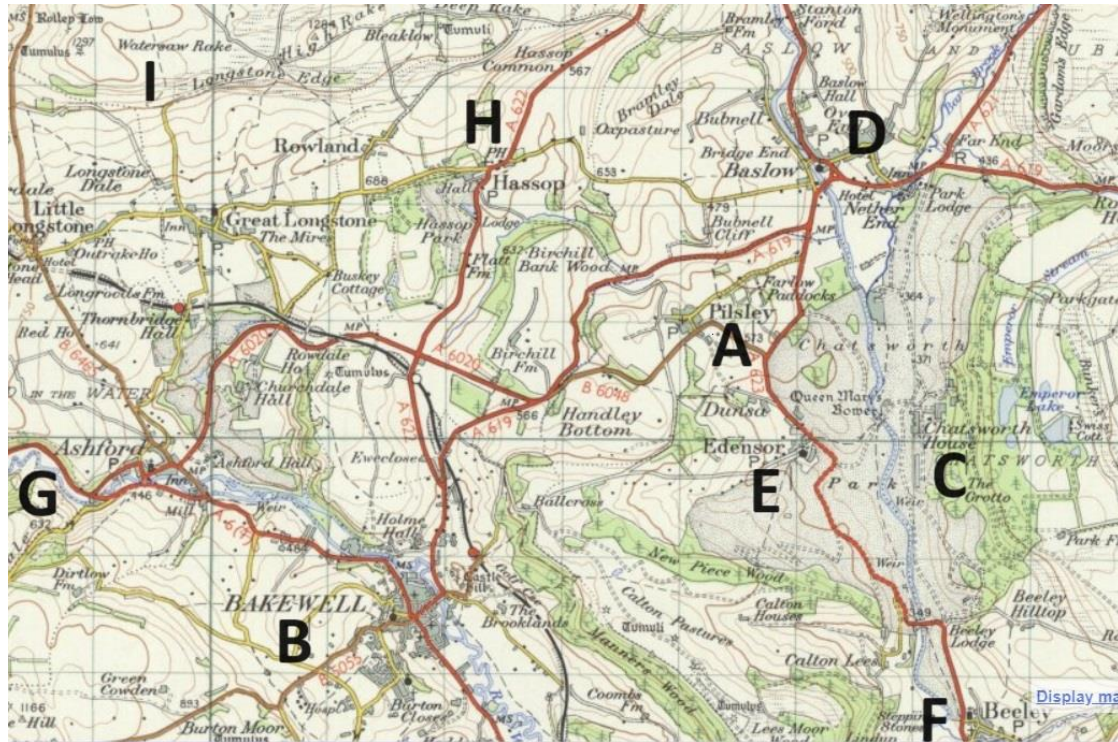
Acknowledgements

## Introduction

A while ago I was researching local routeways for the Bakewell Crosses Project, 2013. I asked Ralph Lord for his advice and he kindly prepared a map with all the old paths and roads in the area which he had recognised in his role as a gamekeeper for the Chatsworth Estate and when working with the local historian, Stephen Penny. Also, he had lived in Pilsley until he married and was particularly well informed about this area from firsthand knowledge. His map was consigned to the back of the project file and other research interests have occupied my time. However, I always knew that I should return to his map to make certain that some of Ralph's routes would not be lost from memory.

I have looked at old maps on the National Library of Scotland website and they are the bases of maps that I have used to illustrate this article. I examined those in the Chatsworth archive and the Derbyshire Record Office. I have asked other local people about their memories and ideas and used books and online resources. This article is a chance to gather information about Pilsley routeways into one place, concentrating on aspects of the topic which are not commonly known and to photograph old features which are still in existence. I found that this research reflected the wider changes that roads made to small communities in Derbyshire over time.

I have not attempted to describe all the paths around Pilsley: there are several minor routes which had shorter lives or were more informal, branching throughout the area.



Map 1 showing settlements and their present-day linking routes which are described in the article

A Pilsley B Bakewell C Chatsworth D Baslow E Edensor F Beeley G Ashford in the Water H Hassop I Longstone Edge.

## Early packhorse routes and trackways used by carts

The medieval to early 19<sup>th</sup> century routes may have developed along paths used by our distant ancestors as there is evidence for extensive trading around the country in much earlier times.

In the Peak District packhorses were often more useful than carts which required larger number of drag animals to transport loads over the hilly terrain. Routes over rivers were another obstacle if fords were not practical, often making the ways focussed onto bridges. This results in steep valley approaches which were difficult for carts and the teams of six or more horses which were often necessary to scale these tracks. These factors increased transport costs for goods passing over land through the Peak District.



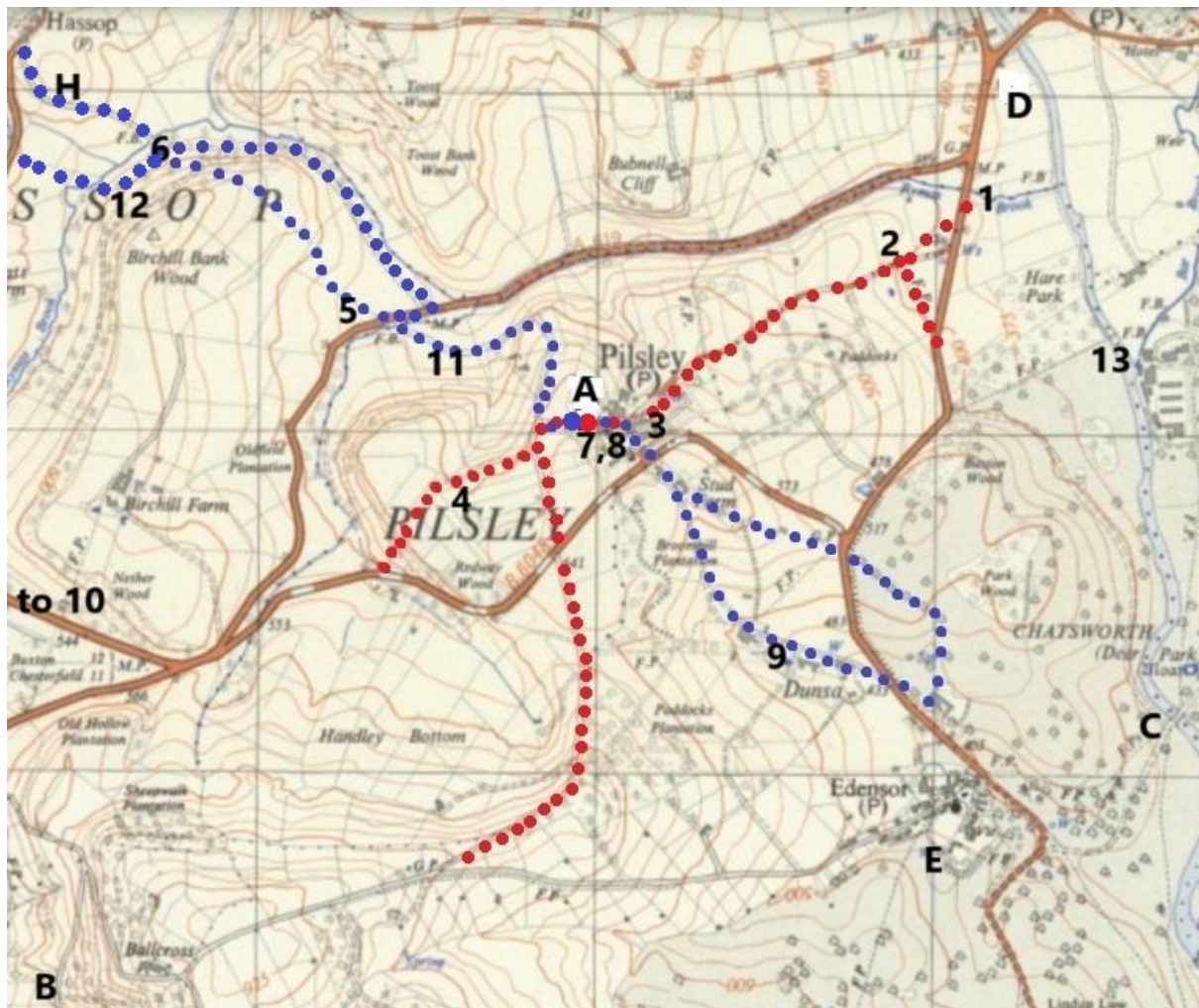
Map 2 Burdett's map of 1767 shows Pilsley A at the cross roads to two major routes. One travelled from Baslow D in the north east to Bakewell B in the south west. The other was from Hassop H in the north west via Bradley Lane and Pilsley to Edensor E and Chatsworth C in the south east.

Pilsley village(A) was at a major crossroads as shown on Burdett's map (map 2). The village was on one of the general trading routes between Chesterfield in the east and Bakewell in the south west (D-A-B). Lead was one of the important goods moved from the mines in the Peak District to the East Coast Ports.



*Photo 1 The old road to Pilsley passed behind the thatched cottage as shown by the earthwork left and centre. The modern road to Chatsworth A623 is on the left and crosses the Rymas brook in the foreground (see map 3 for location)*

Over time the route (shown in red on the map below) has been modified but some vestiges of the older route remain. From Baslow (D) the road passed up Pilsley Lane behind the thatched cottage where an earthwork is still visible (photo 1), rather than by the front of Thatch Meadow as it does today. At the “balks, shown on the Burdett map (map 2) there was a branch beyond the cottage for a direct route to Edensor (E) and Chatsworth (C). A line of lime trees over the field now marks its lost path.



Map 3 to show the routes of earlier packhorse and cart routes through Pilsley. Baslow to Bakewell in red and Hassop to Edensor and Chatsworth and Cromford in blue. Letters show the sites of the accompanying photographs.

1 Carriage /cart bridge over Rymas Brook 2 Clapper bridge over Rymas Brook 3 Holloway behind Thatch Meadow 4 old route from Baslow to Edensor 5 Old route in Pilsley through Duck Row 6 Cross base 7 Rock Cottage and chert boulder 8 Site of chert boulder removed to Chatsworth 9 Holloway on old Hassop to Pilsley route 10 stone trough 11 piers of pedestrian bridge over River Derwent



*Photo 2 The old road from Baslow to Chatsworth marked by a row of lime trees (see map 3).*

As the cross country route entered Pilsley, as Baslow Lane, it passed between two rows of cottages (Duck Row) rather than to the north as it does today. These cottages are believed to be the oldest buildings in the village dating from 1709.



*Photo 3 Duck Row, Pilsley, the old road from Baslow entered the village between the old houses (see map 3).*

There were at least two possible trackways from Pilsley, south and west to Bakewell. The more westerly still to this day passes as a footpath over fields and past an old cross base, down a steep hill

and over a stream at Redway Farm. An alternative route went south along Handley Lane towards a guide stoop at the top of Edensor Lane and onward to Ball Cross.



*Photo 4 The cross base on the route to Bakewell from Pilsley: the top of the High Street is visible in the distance (see map 3).*

The remaining arms of the crossroads are from the north east and south west (H-A-E and blue on the map 3). The Longstone Edge, Hassop, Bradley Lane, Pilsley, Edensor and Chatsworth packhorse route is described by Dodd and Dodd, from first hand observations by Hobbes in 1679.

In the early days there was a packhorse route from Hassop to the northern end of Bradley Lane. It crossed the Rymas Brook (photo 6), south of Hassop and is still traceable climbing in the woods and then lost as it passed over the hill. At the A619 end, the road issued through a distinct holloway directly opposite the little bridge at the lower end of Bradley Lane (photo 5). This holloway has been infilled with tree planting and has been almost lost from view in the 21th century.



*Photo 5 Holloway from Hassop which connected with the lower end of Bradley Lane and Pilsley (see map 3)*

Later another route from the brook skirted the hill making it favourable to carts, some of which were likely to have been loaded with heavy chert blocks. These two routes can be seen clearly on the 1864 OS map. The two routes may be an example where a cart track took the shallower way and the packhorses took the more direct hilly way.



*Map 4 1864 OS map showing two routes from Hassop to the 1801 Baslow to Bakewell road (13 bends) in the top left corner. Also visible is the remnants of the 1813 Turnpike road from Edensor to Ashford in the lower right of the map and described below under "The Turnpike Era".*

The cart/carriage route is served by a substantial bridge over the Rymas Brook and leads directly to the lodge with ornamental gates into Hassop Park (see photo 12 below and on map 3) The packhorse route crosses the brook by a clapper bridge and ford (6 on map 3).



*Photo 6 The clapper bridge over the Rymas brook looking north towards Hassop (see map 3).*

Then the route winds up Bradley Lane and into the top of the High Street in Pilsley.

From Pilsley south towards Edensor and Chatsworth the road divided into two routes. One passed south down the valley by Dunsa. The higher route left Pilsley along the ridge now planted with trees and onto the Chatsworth golf course. Then it passed south by the Archway and Lodges (the Ranger's House) or down to the old Chatsworth Bridge.

The packhorses and carts at the Pilsley crossroads made it a very busy village and four inns/pubs were believed to have supported this traffic (Naylor) where packmen, carters and their horses could be refreshed.

There are two local traditions about these times which I investigated in more detail.

### **Transport of chert**

Ralph Lord is certain that Pilsley village had been on an early route of chert transport from Longstone Edge to Cromford canal and onwards to the Potteries.

Cream wear had become very fashionable in the mid-1700s and the Pottery manufacturers experimented with clays to ensure its pure colour, by omitting coloured impurities from its production. Chert, rather than the usual millstones or metal balls, was used to grind calcified flint because chert ground to a white paste during this process. See Note 1. Calcified flint, also white, was for use as an agent to strengthen the clay in the many potteries around Stoke, also being an ingredient of bone china (25%).

Flint mills required regular supplies of the specialised chert which was quarried in Derbyshire. There were chert quarries on the southern side of Longstone Edge at Scratter and records show that the stone was moved from there to Cheadleton (Cheddleton), Leek Wharf and Cromford (Barnatt et al .

2017). Wedgwood financed the building of the Hassop to Leek turnpike (completed between 1765 and 1779, Roberts) to facilitate chert transport. The chert blocks used as pavers were prepared at the quarry to 16 to 18 inches thick whereas the blocks used as runners were transported as large boulders weighing up to 2 tons. (Bowring (sic) 1999 and Stuart 2005) This meant that carts had to be used for transport rather than packhorses.

Pilsley is not on the Hassop to Leek turnpike and two questions arise.

### **Did chert pass through Pilsley?**

There is some tantalising evidence noted by Ralph Lord. A large boulder of chert in Pilsley High Street outside Rock Cottage is believed to have fallen off a cart passing from Bradley Lane at the top of the street and on the route to Edensor and Chatsworth. The boulder was originally near the entrance to the farm shop and is believed to be too heavy to have been lifted back onto the cart and was left by the side of the busy road. Curiously there is another boulder of very similar size and material in a field south of the Rowdale Toll Bar. It is also beside another old route from Hassop to Pilsley and Bakewell. See Note 2.



*Photos 7 and 8 Rock Cottage and chert boulder (see map 3).*

There is another boulder which gives further supporting evidence to the Pilsley via Dunsa chert route to Cromford. It was moved to Dunsa in 1820 (possibly from an inconvenient site nearby) and later moved into Chatsworth gardens in the 1960s to be on view by Flora's temple. When I asked for permission to view it in 2024, the boulder had been moved again and is presently outside public areas. Photographs show a cherty limestone block similar to the Pilsley boulder. Two flattened sides suggest that it may have been quarried although glacial transportation, as documented by others, cannot be ruled out.



*Photos 9 and 10 Chert boulders (see map 3) – on the left formerly from Dunsa Lane and now stored on the Chatsworth Estate. On the right a chert boulder in Hassop field on an old route from Longstone Edge southwards.*

### **Why would chert pass through Pilsley rather than use the Hassop to Leek Turnpike?**

There is evidence that chert was transported to Cromford Canal (opened in 1794) in the accounts of Robert Thornhill who worked the Longstone chert quarries from at least 1784 (Thornhill, 1958 and Thornhill, 1785-1821). These show that Leek was a destination of some of his chert, by the Hassop and Leek turnpike, but that the destination of many tons of chert in the 1790s to 1820s was the Cromford basin. The chert was taken from there to the Potteries by canal. It is quite amazing from the view of 21<sup>st</sup> century journeys to contemplate that this very circuitous journey via the Cromford Canal, the Trent River, the Severn Trent canal and Cauldon canal was preferable to a much shorter journey along the Turnpike. Furthermore, another route from Longstone Edge to the Cromford basin via the turnpike road from Bakewell (along the present day A6) also seems much more attractive.

However, the Hassop Leek turnpike was not without its problems. Sometimes ten horses were required to overcome the very steep hills and this makes transport much more expensive (Bowring, sic). Also, bad weather over the moors may have suspended movement. The logistical and economic benefits of the canal route via Pilsley to Cromford may have meant this was a good proposition to help maintain supply. Tolls were absent on the start of the route from Longstone Edge via Pilsley to Rowsley where tolls onwards to Cromford became payable. However, there is one steep hill, up Bradley Lane, which would still require a team of horses to move the chert. It is interesting to note that there is a drinking trough in a meadow at the lower end of the lane which could have accommodated such teams of horses needing refreshment.



*Photo 11 Stone trough at the lower end of Bradley Lane (see map 3).*

### **Lady Georgiana Cavendish and the Eyres of Hassop Hall**

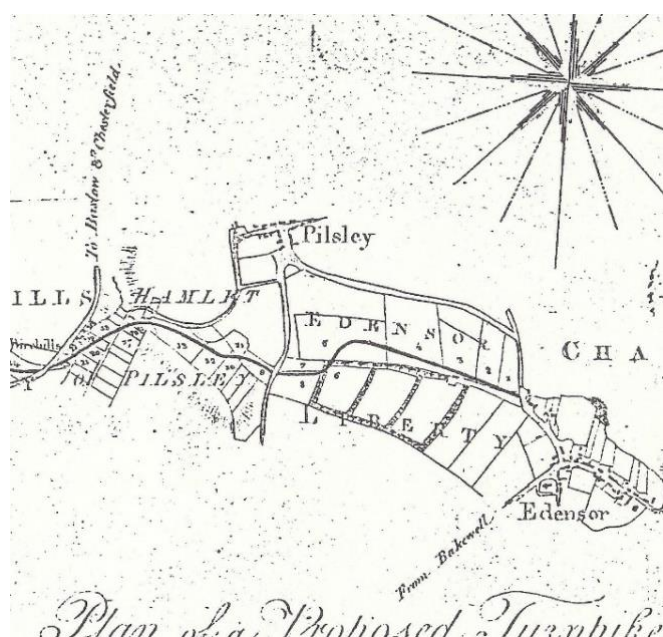
Another local story is that the route between Hassop via Pilsley to Chatsworth was used for visits between Eyres at Hassop Hall and the Cavendishes at Chatsworth House in the times of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (mistress of Chatsworth from 1774 to 1806). The substantial carriage/cart route may have facilitated these communications. There is an entrance into Hassop Hall directly opposite one of the routes emerging from Pilsley (across the future B6001). The very grand lodge and gates were not built until 1853 suggesting that at least some visits may have been made at a later period. Inspection in the Chatsworth Archive has found a family letter which describe one visit by Georgiana to Hassop Hall making this connection not entirely fanciful.



*Photo 12 The carriage way from Rymas Brook to the Hassop Lodge gates (just visible in the distance), running to the left of the curved hedge from the bridge behind the photographer (see map 3).*

## **The Turnpike Era**

Between 1739 and 1759 the first local turnpike road passed through Edensor on the way from Bakewell via Chatsworth to Chesterfield and Cromford but it avoided Pilsley. However, in 1812 Potter planned the first turnpike passing closer to Pilsley (Ashford to Edensor). It passed from Edensor via Dunsa and south of Pilsley (shown in black on map 6) and can be found on maps from this period (see 1864 OS Map 5). Remnants of this road can still be observed as earthworks which are shown in a Frank Parker video presented by Ralph Lord and Stephen Penny.





The turnpiking of several local roads led to a gradual reduction in the traffic passing through Pilsley with the 13 bends (A619) taking traffic from Baslow to Bakewell from 1801 and the railway connections at Rowsley (from 1849) Hassop and Bakewell (from 1863) were used for the transport of chert from Bakewell. It was noted by Hudson that the large boulders of chert were lined up at the station for inspection by the chert merchants.

## **Modern times**

Pilsley became a quieter backwater in recent times with only one hostelry remaining in 1850 (The Devonshire Inn) and much of the movement around the village was related to the estate workers who lived and worked locally rather than through traffic as in earlier times.

Ralph remembers using a long-lost route when he walked to work from Pilsley to Chatsworth in the 1950s. It was a footpath (yellow, on map 6) down the fields from Pilsley and accessed by a gate and steps, from the B6048, which still remain although the footpath is out of use. It crossed the B6012 and then over the Derwent by a small metal bridge north of the Chatsworth caravan park. Many of the Pilsley folk used the path to go to work in the large kitchen gardens in the grounds of Barbrook House (demolished in the 1960s) or to other estate duties in the House, Gardens and Park. He particularly remembers the long haul back up the path at the end of a working day. The pillars of this bridge remain but it was destroyed by floods in 1965 (Naylor). The water supply to Pilsley was piped from Park Gate Farm over this bridge until mains water was provided in 1966 (Taylor) and a concrete lined channel is still visible at the approach to the bridge.

Ralph also remembers that carts from Pilsley would use a ford over the Derwent south of the Caravan Site into the Park.



*Photo 13 Piers of the pedestrian bridge over the Derwent (see map 3).*

Ralph has memories of gypsies who used to camp on the meadows at the lower end of Bradley Lane in the 1940s when they were on their migration between the farms of Staffordshire to the fields of Lincolnshire for harvesting and farm labouring. They stayed with their horse drawn caravans and

carts for up to a week having a break between seasonal jobs. The old trough would mean they had a ready water supply.

The traffic on the old turnpike route through Pilsley has increased more recently with the development of the Chatsworth Farm Shop in the old Stables south of Pilsley. Few of the visitors who sit in the café, admiring the view looking towards Edensor Church, will know about the many packhorse trains and the carts loaded with chert which passed down the hill in front of them to Dunsa and beyond, in bygone times.

## Notes

1 Chert is described as a siliceous rock often found in association with limestone which may permeate the rock to varying degrees. Chert, in its pure form, is similar to flint and quartz and was used in prehistoric times as it fractures in controllable ways and allows the manufacture of a range of stone tools. This was common practice in the Peak District in the Mesolithic period where there were no natural flint deposits.

When the term “chert” is used for the grinding of flint in the manufacture of cream wear and bone china in the Potteries, it is not usually pure but rather the rock is a composite of limestone with numerous bands of horizontal microcrystalline chert (See Barnatt and Worthington 2017). Different amounts of limestone within the chert make boulders of different hardness i.e. runners within the grinding pan are less hard and pavers are harder so that the pan floor does not need to be replaced as often, a time-consuming task.

2 Boulder dimensions. Pilsley - 94x71x51cms and Rowdale field - 104x70-80x30-50cms and both are made of shiny blue chert.

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Maps from the National Library of Scotland website