The Toll Roads of Scotland
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Introduction

In 1750 Scotland was on the brink of a period of major industrial and agrarian change that would transform the lives of the Scottish people. Key to this was the simultaneous arrival of the turnpike or toll road innovation that would revolutionise Scotland’s road network and play a pivotal role in the coming century. Unlike studies of their English counterparts, this road network has lain in relative obscurity, unmapped (until now), undiscussed, fleetingly referenced, and largely neglected. Despite this, Scotland’s toll roads were dramatically extensive and by the mid 19th century covered Scotland head to toe barring the North-West Highlands.

Methods

ESRI’s ArcGIS 10.5 Geographic Information System software was used to map Toll Roads for three time periods: (1750-1770); (1770- 1790); and (1790-1800) in three stages. The first stage identified the Toll Roads using the historical sources, a Road Atlas, Google Maps, and two free digital datasets of the road network of Scotland: OpenStreetMap (www.openstreetmap.org) and OS OpenData (www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk). The second stage used the Search by Attributes function, sub-setting the map dataset to create a new road map layer, and then adding two new fields to the attribute table: Toll Road (Text: Y/N) and Year (Integer: 1750, 1770, or 1790).

The Toll Road Network - Scotland

Data Reliability

A section of the toll road network overlain with the surviving toll houses. The toll house data helps to verify the accuracy of the historical sources as well as the mapping method. This study sought to map the growth of the network until 1800. The toll road however continued to grow and adapt until their eventual abolition in 1878.

The maps produced helped to form many historical conclusions but ultimately demonstrate the importance of communications and connectivity in the formation of modern Scotland. The aim of this study was to take the first steps towards filling a gap in Scotland’s historiography by charting the chronological and geographical diffusion of Scotland’s turnpikes, answering key questions and identifying areas for further study. Scottish historians have highlighted dramatic speed as the defining characteristic of Scottish agrarian and industrial change during the early modern era. This study has shown how these revolutions were intimately intertwined and mirrored by a road transport revolution as a result of the turnpike innovation.

Conclusions

The Foundations of the Modern Road Network. The toll roads were Scotland’s most important form of transport for over half a century constituting a network that ran for thousands of miles.

While many have been destroyed there are approximately 400 toll houses still standing in Scotland, testament to the sheer size of the toll road network.

References:
This basis of this study is dependent primarily on evidence taken from the Old Statistical Accounts, the New Statistical Accounts, the various volumes and editions of the Statutes at Large/ Public General Statutes, the Journal of the House of Commons minutes of road authorities and a variety of other primary material notably the ‘Improving Literature’ of the late-eighteenth century.